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USER EXPERIENCE OF FRESHMEN IN A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The library as an amenity is crucial in the existence of any academic community which is used by students, faculty members and sometimes the general public. Their use or lack of use of the information resources is a concern. The user experience (Ux) of freshmen (called the FALCON set) in the Igbinedion University Okada (IUO) Library, Nigeria is the focus of this study in which the survey method of research was used. The objectives were to find out the information needs, library services experienced, services expected from the library and elicit from them suggestions for improvement of the services. Questionnaire and observation methods were used in gathering information from four hundred and fifty (450) freshmen who took the Use of Library, Study Skills and Information and Communication Technology (GST 121) course in the 2016/2017 session. Analysis was done using descriptive statistical measures such as frequency counts and percentages and findings were thematically discussed. Results showed that the user experiences differed and most information needs of the freshmen were perceived to be met more by textbooks and journals as information sources over colleagues, University newsletters and the library, computer, photocopying and readers' services were mostly used. The freshmen expected gaming facilities and also a Learning Commons where they could use augmented and virtual reality for their studies. Recommendations were made for the services of the IUO Library to be more improved to meet the new emerging technology needs of the students and faculty.

Keywords

User Experience, Information needs, Academic libraries, Freshmen, Nigeria

Introduction

Students have been observed to have difficulties using their university library, with some experts believing the libraries were "virtually unusable" (Andrews, 1991). This makes it imperative for libraries in carrying out their roles as information providers, to constantly study the

use patterns of their clientele as well as their information seeking behaviour. The various systems and interfaces in place to support library activities have thousands of users each with differing levels of computer experience and library experience. In addition, the physical

library needs to be “a usable space for both experienced and inexperienced users” (Wiles, Roberts and Abdelnour-Nocera, 2013). This study is taking a holistic view and looking at the usability of a private university library in terms of overall user experience of the physical and digital facilities. The study therefore investigated the user experiences of the Igbinedion University, Okada Library, by freshmen in the 2016/2017 session. This was to be able to determine ways to improve and serve users better and if possible impact on improving library User Experience (Ux) Policy.

The Igbinedion University Library is situated in the northern end of the main campus, away from the Central Administration area. It opens from 8am to 6pm daily Monday to Friday. The library system has the main library and departmental libraries located in the seven colleges that the university has, as well as a reading room located in the residential area (Crown Estate) of the university. It is the hub of activities thus, apart from the usual library services; it provides computer services for Computer Based Tests (CBTs) and examinations. In particular, it functions as one of the centres at which the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations are taken. The library has a large collection of books, journals, magazines and electronic resources for the use of students and faculty of the Igbinedion University, Okada. Some staff of the library are involved in the teaching of the GST 121 course. Freshmen (consisting of 100 level students and Direct Entry students in 200 level) take the course compulsorily and have to use the library in the process of taking practicals which are part of the course.

Methodology

The survey research method was used for the study. Questionnaire and observation were used as data collection instruments. The questionnaire consisted generally of closed questions offering alternative answers covering the following: Demographic variables, frequency of library visits, and the use of services and resources provided in the library. The questionnaire also included closed and open ended questions wherein the students were requested to state their expectations of the library services, and also proffer suggestions for improvement of the services based on their experiences while using it.

The sample consisted of 512 freshmen enrolled in the disciplines of Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Management Studies, Engineering, Health Sciences, Law, Natural and Applied Sciences, and Pharmacy who had to take the compulsory GST 121 course taught by the researchers. Of the 450 who completed the questionnaire, 279 were female and 171 were male. Their ages ranged from 15 to 25 years mostly with a mean of 19.8 years; 11 students (2.4% of the sample) only were above 25 years of age.

The highest qualification of most (93.1%) of the freshmen was the West African School Certificate (WASC), National Examinations Council (NECO) or General Certificate of Education (GCE). Eight (1.8%) each had Higher School Certificate (HSC) and other qualifications respectively, while 3.3% had Diploma Certificates as highest qualification.

The questionnaires were administered at the end of the first 9 weeks of the 13 week

course, at the practical class conducted to lead the students through using a software called Phinnyx which was to aid more frequent contacts online with faculty members in the university. The students were encouraged to participate and allowed adequate time to fill in the questionnaire immediately the class commenced. This resulted in an 88% response.

Objectives

The main objective was:

- i.) to find out the user experience of the freshmen of the Igbinedion University, Okada, and more specifically,
- ii.) to find out the information needs and library services experienced by the freshmen, services expected, and;
- iii.) to elicit freshmen's suggestions for improvement of the Igbinedion University Library services.

Research Questions

The research was premised on the following research questions:

- i.) What are the information needs of the Igbinedion University Okada (IUO) freshmen?
- ii.) What services do the IUO freshmen currently use in the Igbinedion University Okada Library?
- iii.) What services do they expect the IUO Library to provide?
- iv.) What are suggestions for improvement of the IUO Library services?

Literature Review

In library and information science practice, the utility or effectiveness of library services is determined by periodic surveys

conducted on the users of the library. Salaam and Fatokun (2010) posited that the utility of a library's resources and services to its users could be determined by carrying out a survey on users' needs and the success in meeting them. Chin-Chih and Herson (1982) also while defining information needs, affirmed that information needs arise whenever individuals find themselves in a situation requiring knowledge to deal with particular situations. Ehikhamenor (1990), considered information needs as the extent to which information is required to solve problems, as well as the degree of expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the information.

Information needs of library users are essentially influenced by certain factors. Librarians need to identify and engage these factors in order to adequately assess the information needs of their users. Some of these factors have been identified by Wilson (2000) to include the range of information sources available, the uses to which the information will be put as well as the background, motivation, professional orientation and individual characteristics of the user. Other factors as identified by Nwagwu and Oshiname (2009) include the socio-political, economic, legal and regulatory systems surrounding the users vis-a-vis the consequences of information use. To determine the information needs of different categories of users, therefore, the aforementioned factors need to be considered.

A major factor that is considered to influence the information need of users is the latter's information seeking behavior. Users' information seeking behavior is believed to contribute largely to the type of information that is accessible to them, that they are able to access

and, in some cases, are able to utilize. Emmanuel and Jegede (2011) argue that for academic libraries to adequately address the information needs of their students, they need to know what influences their information seeking, acquisition and use. Olalekan, Igbinovia, and Solanke, (2015) are of the view that an understanding of the way students organize their learning and search for information is crucial to understanding and improving their overall performance.

Studies tend to frequently examine the information seeking behavior of library users, in hopes that it would enable them to identify and understand their information needs. Ajiboye and Tella's (2007) examination of the information seeking behavior of undergraduate students in the University of Botswana found that the Internet was the most consulted source, followed by students' class notes and handouts. Siddiqui (2011) in his study of the information seeking behaviour of B.Tech. and M.B.B.S. students in Lucknow discovered that students give the first priority to seek information through discussion with colleagues while the second priority is discussion with seniors, and consultation with teachers is a third priority. Consultation with a knowledgeable person constitutes the fourth priority, while the fifth priority is to seek information through review of articles.

In a study carried out by Mahajan (2009) on students' information seeking behaviour in Panjab University in India, it was found that most respondents were satisfied with the assistance provided by the library staff while searching information in the manual catalogue, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and reference books. Most respondents also

indicated the helpful behaviour of staff in locating and checking out materials. The study also revealed that undergraduates used emails and face-to-face discussions with their teachers as their most preferred informal sources of seeking information. Similarly, VanScoyoc and Cason (2006), in their study at the University of Georgia, found that students used search engines and web portals at 76% of the time and class websites was used almost as frequently at 71%. The study also found that library OPAC and licensed databases were used at 36% of the time. This is also similar to Thompson (2003), who in his study of college students, found that they preferred to commence their quest for information with search engines. They thereafter preferred to seek help from peers or from faculty and not consult library staff or seek assistance from library web sites.

Although the information needs and information seeking patterns of undergraduate students have been the subject of much research, there is no uniformity in the results of these studies. This is not surprising, when one considers Wilson's (2000) statement that information needs are influenced by a wide variety of factors (such as range of information sources available, the uses to which the information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation and individual characteristics of the user et cetera). The answer to each of these factors will necessarily be different, with each category of students examined. For example, Oladokun and Aina (2009) discovered in their study that the major area of information needs of undergraduates of the University of Botswana are related to course of study, job opportunities, career development and further education. They

also found that the university's library does not adequately cater for the library and information needs of the students.

In more recent studies, with the technosavvy trends, students tend to use mobile phones to search for educational information. Mamudu and Oyewo's (2015) study conducted "to have a clear understanding of students' mobile practices which would encourage the university to implement more student-centered support and services", found that majority of the Law student respondents use their mobile phones to search for academic information. They also use their mobile phones for social networking, chatting and reading the news online. This was similar to findings of Owolabi, Jimoh and Okpoh (2010) in their study of the information-seeking behaviour of students from the Akan Ibiam Federal Polytechnic in Uwana, Nigeria who found that the students use information primarily for academic purposes. In a different study carried out by Fatima and Ahmad (2008), the findings indicated that 50% of the undergraduates sought information on career development while other reasons included seeking information for problem-solving, keeping up-to-date and the need to write an article or research paper (in that order). Kakai, Ikoja and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) found in their study that the main information demands that led undergraduate students, irrespective of gender, to seek information included course work and assignments, preparation for examinations and tests and general reading to enhance lecture notes.

On their part, Bamigboye and Agboola (2011) conducted a research to find out how undergraduates' library use changed during each year of their education in three universities in

Nigeria. They found that there are differences in the extent to which sources of information are used by students in different years of their study. The use of library increased for respondents, as they progressed to the next level of their courses, though there was underuse of resources in one of the universities due to lack of adequate infrastructure provision.

Effective use of information resources by undergraduates is however, not without barriers. Akporido (2014), for instance, identifies problems encountered by female sandwich students in Edo and Delta States in Nigeria while accessing information resources, to include lack of time, unsuitable location of respective libraries as well as their opening and closing hours. Nwobasi, Uwa and Ossai-Onah (2013), for two universities in Imo State, Nigeria, identified non-availability of information materials, lack of time to access information resources and inadequate librarians as the major problems associated with the realization of undergraduates' information needs and information-seeking behaviour. Rasaki and Ayandare (2011) in their study of the Federal University of Technology Akure, Nigeria, found that the inhibitors to the use of information resources by undergraduates included lack of time to consult information resources, lack of current information materials and erratic power supply to use electronic information resources. Siddiqui (2011) also showed that the majority of respondents in his study, gave lack of time, and non-availability of materials as barriers. Some other studies contain similar findings (for example, Emmanuel and Jegede (2011) and Olalekan, Igbinovia, and Solanke (2015)).

We have noted that no study has been

conducted on the Igbinedion University Library to assess the information needs of its undergraduate users. Neither has any study been conducted to find out the user experience of the facilities. This paper thus seeks to fill this gap by assessing the user experience of freshmen (the Falcon Set) in the Igbinedion University, Okada Library.

Findings and Discussion

Information needs of IUO freshmen: The frequency of use of the IUO Library, and the preferred information source(s) of the freshmen was investigated to determine their information needs. It was found that every student in the survey visited the library at least once during the semester, with 50.7% visiting one to five times only in the four weeks preceding the survey. Forty percent of the respondents had not visited the library at all in 4 weeks and 6.2% visited 6 to 10 times in that same period while only 1.1% visited the library more than 20 times in that period (See Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of library use in the last 4 weeks.

Within the last 4 weeks, how many times have you used the IUO library?	Frequency	Percent age
None	180	40.0
1-5 times	228	50.7
6-10 times	28	6.2
11-15 times	6	1.3
16-20 times	3	.7
More than 20 times	5	1.1
TOTAL	450	100

With many (40%) not having used the library at all in 4 weeks, it can be surmised that being freshmen, they do not yet feel the need to use much of the library facilities. On the other hand, slightly more than half (50.7%) used the library 1 to 5 times in four weeks averaging twice a week. The remaining 9.3% who used the library more than 6 times to 20 times in 4 weeks is to be

expected since freshmen have different information needs and seek to satisfy the needs differently. On the whole, freshmen have information needs they can possibly satisfy in the library hence they use it. However, it was seen that the library resources most preferred by the freshmen were textbooks and journals (print and online). The University newsletter was the least preferred information source (12%) that freshmen considered useful (See Table 2). Staff in the university library (3.1%) was indicated as the next least preferred source of information. This corroborates Wilson (2000) in his surmising that information needs differ for different reasons depending on many factors for different groups of users.

Which of the following information sources do you consider most useful, and thus preferred?	Frequency	Percent
Journals (Print or online)	167	37.1
Textbooks	233	51.8
Your Colleagues	24	5.3
University newsletter	12	2.7
Staff in the University Library	14	3.1
Total	450	100.0

For the freshmen, textbooks give them more information, then journals, and their colleagues also, though the preference for information from friends is very low. Surprisingly the freshmen do not see the staff in the library as a preferred source of information. This is not too surprising as the lack of heavy use of the library has also been observed by these researchers, hence prompting the study in the first instance. The findings corroborated the researchers' observation on the use behaviour of freshmen in Igbinedion University Library

Okada. They tended to come to the library only when given library related assignments, or to do CBT examinations. In essence, they had information needs, but hardly saw the library or its staff as a source of getting the information they needed. This corroborates Kakai, Ikoja and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) on the types of information sought being that concerning course work and assignments, preparation for examinations and tests.

Services patronized by IUO students in the university library: The respondents indicated majorly that they patronized Readers' and Computer Services (See Table 3). Readers' Services of the IUO Library ranked highest as 91.3% indicated 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree'.

Table 3. Services patronized by IUO students

S/N	Library Services Patronized	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	---	222 (49.3%)	192 (42.7%)	25 (5.6%)	11 (2.4%)
2	Computer Services	224 (49.8%)	143 (31.8%)	53 (11.8%)	30 (6.7%)
3	Reference	157 (34.9%)	196 (43.6%)	66 (14.7%)	31 (6.9%)
4	Circulation	167 (37.1%)	176 (39.1%)	71 (15.8%)	36 (8.0%)
5	Photocopying	150 (33%)	169 (37.6%)	83 (18.4%)	48 (10.7%)
6	Bindery	0 (0%)	170 (37.8%)	105 (23.3%)	175 (38.9%)
7	Teleconferencing	101 (22.4%)	160 (35.6%)	117 (26.0%)	72 (16.0%)

Reference (78.5%) and Circulation Services (76.2%) came next in their prioritized user experience. Teleconferencing (58%) and Bindery (37.8%) services were the least used services.

Expectations from the library: From responses to the close-ended questions, it was revealed that the respondents wished they could be provided with a Learning Commons that is well equipped as well (62.7%) as with facilities for gaming (61.8%) in the library (See Table 4).

Table 4: Expectations from the library

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
Close-ended response					
1	Gaming	278 (61.8%)	115 (25.6%)	34 (7.6%)	23 (5.1%)
2	Learning Commons	282 (62.7%)	140 (31.1%)	23 (5.1%)	5 (1.1%)
Open-ended response					
3	Free fast Wi-Fi access	15 (3.3%)	-	-	-
3	Online video tutorials	10 (2.2%)	-	-	-
4	Interactive online classes accessible from the library	7 (1.5%)	-	-	-
5	Borrowing rights from some special collections	5 (1.1%)	-	-	-
6	Library tour/orientation for main and college libraries	2 (0.4%)			
7	Organize conferences or seminars	2 (0.4%)			

From the open-ended responses, it was gathered that what a few of them wished to have in addition to the gaming and learning commons, was free fast connection Wi-Fi access in the library (15, 3.3%), online video tutorials (10, 2.2%), interactive online classes accessible from the library (7, 1.5%), and borrowing rights for some special collections (5, 1.1%), for example in the Law Library. A few others wished to have library tour or orientation for the main library and college libraries, and for the library to organize conferences or seminars (2, 0.4%).

Suggestions for improvement of library services (Open ended)

Thematic analysis of the most featured themes on suggestions for improvement of library services was conducted. The coding style was 'Yes' for a response that is direct or related to the theme and 'No' for those who did not provide answer to the question item at all (See Table 5). The findings showed that freshmen suggested provision of up to date books and journals (70.2%), constant and working Internet facilities and increased bandwidth (63.1%) so they could have access to a wider variety of resources and enjoy improved services. Some of the comments were: "I wish the school will increase the number of computers in the library"; "24/7 use of computer and Internet facilities". They also suggested being allowed extended library hours or even overnight reading facilities (77.3%). One freshman even suggested that "Some students should be elected as librarians, so that the library can be used on Saturdays and Sundays" while another said "There should be a well-equipped library [not a reading room] at the Crown Estate for effective

use". This is similar to the findings of Akporido (2014) and Uwa and Ossai-Onah (2013) in respect of barriers confronting libraries in fulfilling information needs. They claim that the libraries they surveyed do not have adequate materials, do not open for desirable duration of time and do not have adequate librarians (Akporido, 2014; Uwa and Ossai-Onah, 2013). This similar finding from the present study is not surprising as all students need current materials, internet facilities and more time to study and use the resources.

Most freshmen (90.2%) indicated that provision of comfortable furniture that aids reading would be an improvement on library services. They felt the furniture was not comfortable enough, and not enough for the number of students who needed it. In the College Libraries, the researchers also observed that not all colleges had enough seats for students, and there was no air conditioning system in more than half of the libraries. The main library however had air-conditioning facilities in the reading areas and computer rooms.

Table 5: Suggestions for improvement of library services

Items	Yes	No	Frequency	%
Provision of new books and journals	124	316	29.8	70.2
Provision of internet facilities and increased internet bandwidth	166	284	36.9	63.1
Provision of comfortable furniture that aids reading	44	406	9.8	90.2
Cross ventilation and conducive environment (e.g. constant power supply & provision of air conditioners)	70	380	15.6	84.4
Provision for eatery (cafeteria) and relaxation centres	51	399	11.3	88.7
Extended Library Hours/Overnight Reading	102	348	22.7	77.3
Librarians should be friendly	58	392	12.9	87.1

Interestingly, the next highly ranked suggestion (88.7%) was that of being provided with eatery and relaxation spots by the library. Some of these demands were as specific as suggesting provision of “free refreshments (snacks) and drink (water dispensers) for after-extended-reading to refresh our brains”. This suggestion could be as a result of the fact that places where students could find items of refreshment are a bit far from the library. Expecting the library to provide such services free though could be as a result of being a private-initiative university and expecting privileges because they pay high fees!

Very many (84.4%) respondents suggested that the library should provide proper cross ventilation and conducive reading environment (such as constant power supply and provision of air conditioners in all reading areas). Another suggestion for improvement was that IUO librarians should be friendly (87.1%). The freshmen expressed the fact that they did not feel very welcome most times in the library, but were met with “*faces that held no smiles*” and also were “*interrogated a lot when seeking to enter the library*”. Being interrogated from observation by these researchers, stemmed from the fact that many freshmen do not carry their library cards with them all the time and

often tried to gain access to the library without cards. The freshmen suggested though, that the library cards should be laminated like their university identity cards for durability.

The freshmen's remark about unfriendly library staff is a cause for concern because librarians being information providers need to relate well with their users to encourage them to ask questions and get what they came for. Some particular remarks in this regard ranged from “There should be well educated librarians that can give us quality reference to books and other services”, “The library attendants and librarians should be nicer and remember that life does not end in IUO”, “Improvement in the way librarians attend to students need”; to outright calling for entire change of staff thus - “Recruiting friendlier staff for the library”, “Fire all the staff and employ new ones”, “A smiling librarian with an empty library is better than a full library with a broody and arrogant librarian!”

For some freshmen, their suggestion was for the library to provide “*noise areas*” where students could hold discussions and have tutorials to discuss grey areas in their studies after reading up. They also called for more interaction on a personal basis with library users

to help them understand many things. For one freshman, *"I would like a tutor in the library that when you come in, someone will ask you if you have a problem in your department because, I am always behind and shy of asking for help but I need help please!"* In other words, the freshmen suggest that the library should connect more with students, to help improve the library services. Librarians may need to hone in their social skills, or borrow skills from social workers to help freshmen. For 8 freshmen (1.7%), however, the IUO Library was just adequate. They suggested that the library was doing well and did not need any improvement at the time they took the survey and nothing more needed to be done to improve it.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Igbinedion University Okada Library needs to improve on the types of services offered to its users. It would be preferable if the IUO Library could:

- i) increase in-person communication with freshmen about how to use the library facilities to more advantage for example include basic information about the library, policies (loaning, recall, course reserve), off campus access to online research materials, printing, and stacks navigation in a library guide (Libguide) which will be given freshmen when they arrive as fresh students. The Libguide could also be put online on the library's website;
- ii) create workshops to engage all students and faculty in library services and research resources;
- iii) provide short online video tutorials for services and processes, as well as conduct full Freshmen Orientation which includes taking

freshmen on tours round the main library and the college libraries too. This could actually be done almost virtually by creating virtual or augmented reality tours which the students who missed the face-to-face version of the orientation exercise could experience;

iv) engage well trained staff who will work under friendly conditions and offer user friendly services in a friendly and professional manner to meet user needs adequately;

v) consider revising collection policy to favour giving students more access to some special collections in the main library and in college libraries. Efforts should also be increased to convey information about critical systems, services and policies to students, especially freshmen and;

vi) further conduct research to gather more comprehensive data on how the library should communicate with graduate students and also research on what the staff experience is with the users.

Conclusion

User experience (Ux) studies reveal a lot that could ordinarily be overlooked. Academic libraries in particular evaluating their services see themselves through the eyes of their users and are able to make positive changes to their service delivery and policies as well. The user experience (Ux) of the Igbinedion University Okada Library is a cry for help for regarding improved services majorly. The institution being a private one, expectations are high on the part of the students, and skilled empathic staff are required to meet the needs of the users especially freshmen. The Falcon Set have made their needs known and hopefully, the Library

Management will look into the varied issues raised and set new and higher standards, develop new and better policies as well as train staff or employ staff that will raise the standards, to make user experience a much more benefitting one for incoming freshmen and other users alike.

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