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## Availability and Accessibility of Information Sources and the Use of Library Services at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture

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### Introduction

This study looks at availability and accessibility as variables in information seeking and use. *Availability* of information resources must be distinguished from *accessibility*. *Availability* of information sources means ensuring their presence in libraries for immediate use (Aguolu and Aguolu 2002). Learning materials might be *available*, i.e., the library has acquired them, but inaccessible to those who need them for whatever reason (uncataloged, miscataloged, misshelved, etc.). *Accessible* means that users can identify and use the resources. Both variables have a relationship with the use of library resources.

### Michael Okpara University of Agriculture

The University was founded in 1994, and added a postgraduate school in 1997. In addition to teaching, research, and community service, the University has "training" as a mission, so that its products can go from "Lab to Land." The University is committed to producing educated farmers and new and improved agricultural protocols.

### The University Library

The University Library has about 20,000 volumes in agricultural science and related fields, with 5,000 volumes of reference materials, and reports of student research, including theses and dissertations. The library is connected to the Internet, and subscribes to more than 500 print journal titles, local and foreign, as well as national newspapers and magazines.

### Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of availability and accessibility of information sources with the use of library services in the university library.

### Research Questions

1. How readily available are the information source and what are the relationships between the availability of information sources and the use of library services?
2. How easily accessible are the information sources and what are the relationships between the accessibility of information sources and the use of library services?

## Literature Review

### Availability of Information Sources and Library Services

Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) argue that availability should be viewed from both national and instructional levels. They attribute the lack of availability of information sources to the steady proliferation of universities: federal, state, and private, along with increases in students and faculty, and the diversification of courses and academic and research programmes, without adequate information sources to meet the actual and information needs. They identify obstacles to the development of adequate information sources. Dike (1992) conducted research on the scarcity of books in Nigeria and the threat to academic excellence. She was able to establish that non-availability of information sources has led faculty and students not to use library services.

Buckland (1975) analyzes frustrations felt by users who fail to find the information sources they want in the library. He outlines four relationships between the user and availability or resources, which are:

1. The greater the popularity, the lower the immediate availability.
2. The longer the loan period, the lower the immediate availability, the shorter the loan period, the higher the immediate availability.
3. The greater the popularity, the shorter the loan period has to be and the less the popularity, the longer the loan period can be.
4. Increasing the number of copies available, like shortening the length of loan periods, increases the immediate availability.

A study by Marama and Ogunrombi (1996) confirms high unavailability of library and information science (LIS) collections in most Nigerian university libraries, which had a negative effect on the use of information sources in the libraries studied. The librarians cannot conduct quality research and get published, and library students cannot even use library services. The authors recommended that at least 5 percent of the book budget be set aside for LIS information sources. The study, though limited to LIS, can be generalized to other subject areas. Unomah (1987) conducted a study at the former Bendel State University to determine the unavailability rate in the library and to find out its causes. The survey revealed an unavailability rate of 34 percent. One effect on the use of library service was that 300 users (71.4%) gave up and went away frustrated. On acquisition performance, the survey showed that the library acquired only a little more than half the items requested. A similar study by Okiy (2000) showed an unavailability rate of only 7.5%. Iyoro (2004) found that availability of serials at the University of Ibadan was 94 percent, with 242 of 256 respondents agreeing that serial publications are available and readily accessible.

Ajayi and Akinniyi (2004) found frustration among information seekers due to the non-availability of sources. Aina (1985) analyzed the availability of periodical titles used in Nigerian libraries, finding that only 67 (11.5%) of the 578 periodical titles studied were not available in any of the major libraries, and confirming a high availability rate. Oyediran-Tidings (2004) studied information needs of library users at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, and observed low use of the library by the students, which was "attributed to the expressed unavailability of desired information resources." The paper suggests seeking user input for the acquisition process and policy.

## Accessibility of Information Sources and Library Services

Accessibility of information sources is an important recurring theme in the literature. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), resources may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one's subject of interest, but the user may not be able to lay hands on them. One may identify citations in indexes, but may not have access to the sources containing the relevant articles. The more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used. Readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access. These observations have been validated by empirical studies such as Slater (1963), Allen (1968), and Rosenberg (1967). The user may encounter five possible types of inaccessibility. The types are conceptual, linguistic, critical, bibliographic, and physical inaccessibility. Aguolu and Aguolu note that availability of an information source does not necessarily imply its accessibility, because the source may be available but access to it is prevented for one reason or the other. Osundina (1974) studies the relationship between accessibility and library use by undergraduates in Nigeria and notes that the problem of Nigerian students is not the question of wanting to use the college library, but whether or not the university library can provide for their needs, and whether there is access to what is provided.

Aina (1983) writes on access to scientific and technological information in Nigeria, revealing that of the 7,014 scientific papers published between 1900 and 1975, 5,607 (79%) are journal articles and 1,116 or (20%) of these journal articles were not indexed or abstracted, making them inaccessible. Further analysis shows that 77% of the papers not covered by any indexing or abstracting services were published in Nigeria. He recommends the establishment of a National Science Information Center to acquire, organize, and disseminate scientific information sources in Nigeria and other places.

Olowu (2004) identifies natural and artificial barriers to free access to information. The library's poor reputation was attributed to lack of accessibility of information sources. Iyoro (2004) examines the impact of serial publications in the promotion of educational excellence among information professionals receiving further training at the University of Ibadan. The study looks at the perception of how serial accessibility has contributed to students' learning process. Serials were found to play a significant role in the acquisition of knowledge, because the serial collection was easily and conveniently accessible.

In a similar study by Oyediran–Tidings (2004) at Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, low use of the library by students was observed. This was attributed to expressed accessibility problems. Neelamegham (1981) has identified accessibility as one of the prerequisites of information use while Kuhlthau (1991) argues that the action of information seeking depends on the needs, the perceived accessibility, sources, and information seeking habits.

Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) reveal that efforts are being made worldwide to promote access to information in all formats. They lament the attendant features of underdevelopment such as power failure, machine breakdowns, and lack of spare parts and technicians, which intermittently stall the performance of the modern gadgets of information storage and transfer in developing countries.

## Results

Of 200 questionnaires distributed, 168 were returned and all found useful for analysis.

**Table 1. Responses by College**

College	Frequency	Percent
College of Animal Science and Health (CASAH)	8	4.8
College of Food Processing Storage and Technology (CFPST)	34	20.2
College of Agric Economics Rural Sociology & Extension (CAERSE)	14	8.3
College of Engineering and Engineering Technology (CEET)	8	4.8
College of Biological and Physical Sciences (CBPS)	62	36.9
College of Agric Business and Financial Mgt (CABFM)	16	9.5
College of Natural Resources and Environmental Mgt (CNREM)	4	2.4
College of Crop and Soil Sciences (CCSS)	16	9.5
College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM)	6	3.8
Total	168	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by Colleges. Most responses came from CBPS with 62 (36.9%), followed by CFPST with 34 (20.2%). The smallest response came from CNREM with 4 (2.4%).

**Table 2. Response by Status**

Employment	Frequency	Percent
Staff	8	4.8
Student	160	95.2
Total	168	100

The overwhelming number of respondents were students.

**Table 3. Response by Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	90	53.6
Female	78	46.4
Total	168	100.0

The respondents were divided nearly equally by gender.

**Table 4. Response by Age**

Age Range	Number	Percentage
20-29	146	86.9
30-39	14	8.3
40-49	8	4.8
Total	168	100

Most respondents were between 20 and 29 (146, 86.9%)

**Table 5. Response by Highest Qualification**

Highest Qualification	Number	Percentage
SSCE	114	67.9
Diploma	8	4.8
Bachelor	32	19.0
Master	14	8.3
Total	168	100

A majority of the respondents have Senior Secondary Certificate (SSCE), followed by first-degree holders (32, 19%) and masters degree. The smallest number of respondents were diploma holders, while none had a doctorate.

**Table 6. Frequency of Use of Library Services**

Frequency of use	No. of Respondents	%
Daily	38	22.6
4—5 times a week	47	28.0
1—3 times a week	48	28.6
1—3 times a month	22	13.1
Less than once a month	13	7.7
Total	168	100

Slightly more than one fifth of the respondents use the library daily, while 47 (28%) use it 4-5 times a week, and a nearly equal number (48, 28.6%) 1-3 times a week. The respondents who use the library 1-3 times a month are equal to those who use it daily, and only 13 (7.7%) used the library once a month.

**Research Question One**

1. How readily available are the information sources and what are the relationships between availability of information sources and the use of library services?

**Table 7. Availability of Information Sources**

Availability of information sources constructs		No. of Respondents	Agreement Score and Percentage		Disagreement Score and Percentage	
			F	%	F	%
a	Not readily available	168	82	48.8	86	51.2
b	Not readily available in my discipline	168	122	72.6	46	27.4
c	Does depend on availability	168	138	82.1	30	17.9
d	Does satisfy my use library services	168	58	34.5	110	65.5
e	Does influence my use of library services	168	130	77.3	38	22.6

Table 7 shows that a small majority of respondents find information sources to be readily available. Nearly three quarters, however (122, 72.6%), stated that information sources were not readily available in their various disciplines. More than 80 percent agreed that their use of library services depends on the availability of information sources, and slightly fewer than that found availability to be an influence on their use. Analysis of the five indices shows that information sources are readily available but not in specific disciplines, and that there is relationship between the availability of information sources and the use of library services. The analysis established that the use of library services depends of the availability of information sources and the availability of information sources influences the use of library services.

## Research Question Two

2. How easily accessible are the information sources and what are the relationship between accessibility of information sources and the use of library services?

**Table 8. Accessibility of Information Sources**

Accessibility of information sources constructs	No of respondents	Agreement Score and Percentage		Disagreement Score and Percentage.	
		F	%	F	%
a Not easily accessible	168	86	51.2	82	48.8
b Not easily accessible in my discipline	168	100	59.3	68	40.5
c Does depend on accessibility	168	134	79.8	34	20.2
d Does satisfy my use of library services.	168	78	46.4	90	53.6
e Does influence my use of library services.	168	136	81.0	32	19.1

As shown in table 8, the respondents are nearly evenly split on the question of accessibility, with a slim majority (86, 51.2%) having the view that information sources are not easily available. One the question of accessibility by subject discipline, a more decisive majority (100 59.3%) found information not easily accessible. Nearly 80 percent agree that the use of library services depends on the accessibility of information sources, and a roughly equal number find that accessibility influences their use of the library. Fewer than half (78, 46.4%) were satisfied with information accessibility. Analysis of the five indices shows that information sources were not easily accessible and that there is relationship between the accessibility of information sources and the use of library services.

## Discussion

The findings confirmed that the information sources were not readily available and that there is a relationship between the availability of information sources and the use of library services. The use of library services has an approximately 80 percent dependence on each variable.

The findings agree with similar findings in studies conducted by Dike (1992), who established the lack of availability of information sources in Nigerian university libraries, which led to an unfortunate situation in which faculty and their did not use the library. A similar study by Marama and Ogunrombi (1996) confirmed a high rate of unavailability for library and information science collections in most university libraries, which affected the use of library services. The findings confirm Unomah (1987), who revealed an unavailability rate of 34%, with the effect that 71.4% of library users gave up the search and went away in frustration. However, studies by Okiy (2000) and Iyoro (2004) found high availability (92.5% and 94% respectively) in their studies, which encouraged the use of library services.

The findings confirm that information sources are not easily accessible and that there is significant relationship between the accessibility and use of library services. The use of library services has an 79.8% dependence on the accessibility of information sources and an 81.0 % dependence on the availability of resources. A majority of the respondents agree that information sources are not easily accessible, leading to a lack of satisfaction with library services, as shown in table 8.

This finding has been validated by empirical studies such as Slater (1963), Allen (1968), Rosenberg (1967), and Neelameghan (1981). They further note that in seeking information, the user is usually confronted with five possible types of inaccessibility which could prevent the information sources from being useful, even if available. This inevitably leads to low use of library services. Neelameghan identified accessibility as one of the prerequisites for use of information sources. Kuhlthau (1991) argues that the choice to seek information depends on its perceived accessibility. Osudina (1974) investigated the relationship accessibility and the use of the library. Iyoro (2004) examined the contribution of accessibility to learning processes and reported that respondents made use of the library when information was easily and conveniently accessible to them.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study finds that information sources were not readily available and accessible in the university library. The findings also reveal significant relationships between the variables and the use of library services, and that these variables to a large extent influence the use of library services. It is concluded from these results that library services are not being fully used because of the perceived shortcomings in availability and accessibility.

The study found that information sources are not available in to users because either they have not been acquired, or are waiting in the processing unit of the library. The researcher recommends that efforts should be made to acquire specific information sources that the users need but not available in the library and has been brought to the attention of the university librarian. Such sources when acquired should be processed without delay and made available to the users. Again such information sources could be acquired through inter-library cooperation, photocopying and through other various means, with the librarians using their initiatives and within the available.

When information sources are available, the study reveals that they are not easily accessible to the users. This was due to poor indexing and cataloguing, inefficient loan and circulation system, poor shelving, and lack of adequate guides to library arrangements, as well as administrative and physical barriers. The library lacks adequate hardware to access the information sources in non-print media and in electronic forms. The researcher recommends improvements in the cataloguing and indexing systems. Loan and circulation policies and systems must encourage access to the information sources. Proper guides to the library system, especially to the indexing, the cataloguing, and shelving arrangements should be provided. Computers, overhead projectors, and other hardware should be provided to access non-print media.

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