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Internet Access and Use by Students of Private Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Private university students are a unique population in Nigeria. The organization and administration of these institutions, the mode of admission, and facilities in place account for the uniqueness of their students compared with their counterparts in government institutions. Students in private institutions are provided with facilities that will enhance their academic performance, which includes hostel accommodation, sporting activities, a well-equipped library, information and communication technology (Internet access), and others. Payments for such facilities are always included in tuition fees. It is the aim of this research to determine the level of accessibility and use of Internet services in these universities.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. to determine if there are Internet facilities for students of private universities in Ogun State
2. to determine the level of accessibility of Internet facilities by students of private universities in Ogun State.
3. to identify for the purposes for which Internet facilities are used by students of private universities in Ogun State.

Literature Review

Gatenby (2003) states that the greatest phenomenon of recent years has been the explosion of the Internet. Salaam (2003), in a survey of the use of Internet services in Nigerian university libraries, found that access to Internet services in the libraries surveyed was restricted to staff only. The survey further identifies a poor telecommunication system, unreliable electrical supply, lack of Internet service providers in some parts of the country, and poor funding of the university system as major problems militating against access and use of Internet facilities.

Akporido (2005) in research carried out on Internet use in a Nigerian suburban setting- Abraka, Delta State, observes that in order to enable students at Delta State University, Abraka to use the Internet, users must pay for access in cybercafés. They are usually given a ticket password that is keyed into the system before getting access. As soon as the access time paid for expires, the system automatically logs the user off.

Jones (2002), in research carried out on the Internet and American life, found that college students use the Internet more to communicate socially than they do for academic work.

Nwokedi (2007) posits that lack of searching skills is still hindering good use of Internet. He asserts that acquisition of Internet skills can lead to discovery of valuable research and teaching resources, which would in turn cause the users to use the Internet to enhance their research and learning capabilities. Internet access ability would be expected to stimulate regular use of the Internet and minimize the perceived barriers to its use.

Methodology

A survey research design was adopted for this study. The research instrument is a questionnaire. The study population includes 120 undergraduate students of 4 private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. A systematic random sampling method was also used. The readers service librarian of each of the universities was solicited to administer the questionnaire to the undergraduate students. There were 113 respondents, giving a response rate of 94.2 percent.

Data Analysis and Discussion

About half the respondents (58, 51.32%) were female, and about half (55, 48.67%) were males. A majority (70, 61.94%) were age 15-20, with 36 (31.85%) between 21 and 25, and 7 (6.19%) 31-35. More than one-third (44, 38.93%) are in their second year in the university and 51 (38%) spend more than one hour on the Internet each day. About one-third access the Internet in the university library (30.13%), and about one-third (34%) have been using Internet facilities provided by their institutions since being admitted to the university.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by university

University	Sample size	Number of Respondents
Bells University of Technology, Ota.	30	30
Covenant University , Ota.	30	29
Crawford University , Igbesa.	30	24
Crescent University , Abeokuta .	30	30
Total:	120	113

Table 2: Availability of Internet facilities

Yes	103	91.15%
No	10	8.85%
Total	113	100%

All the universities studied make Internet facilities available for their students. A large majority of respondents (103, 91.15%) responded affirmatively.

Table 3: Accessibility of Internet facilities

Yes	89	78.76%
No	24	21.24%
Total	113	100%

The results reveal that Internet facilities are accessible to students as shown in Table 3.

At Crescent University, Abeokuta, students pay for Internet access as part of their school fees. They pay ten thousand naira (N 10,000.00) per session. Bells University of Technology charges N30,000.00, while Covenant University, Ota, charges N 20,000.00. It is only at Crawford University Igbesa, Ogun State, that students pay one hundred naira (N100) per hour for Internet access, and do not pay a lump sum as part of their school fees like the other universities under study.

Some of the universities have of wireless Internet connections. This facility is available at Covenant University Ota, while Crawford University, Igbesa, will implement wireless access very soon. Aside from Crawford University, Igbesa, where students pay for their access time, the other three universities do not restrain their students from using the facilities as much as space is available.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by access point to Internet facilities

(a) University Library	67	(59.29%)
(b) Lecturers' Offices	6	(5.31%)
(c) University's ICT centre	40	(35.4%)
Total:	113	(100%)

Most students access the Internet through the university library as indicated in Table 4 above.

Table 5: usage of Internet tools

Internet tools	Number of respondents	Very frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely
Email	112	27 (24.11%)	36 (32.14%)	28 (25%)	21 (18.75%)
Search engines	111	51 (45.95%)	32 (28.83%)	18 (16.22%)	10 (9.01%)
Instant messaging	110	18 (16.36%)	28 (25.45%)	25 (22.72%)	39 (35.45%)
Newsgroup	105	10 (9.52%)	18 (17.14%)	31 (29.52%)	46 (43.81%)
Web boards	103	8 (7.77%)	11 (10.68%)	28 (27.18%)	56 (54.37%)
Chat rooms	109	8 (7.34%)	16 (14.68%)	27 (24.77%)	58 (53.21%)

Search engines and email are used frequently, while instant messaging, newsgroups, web boards and chat rooms are rarely used.

Table 6: Use of Internet tools for academics, business, or leisure

Internet tools	For academic purpose	For leisure/business
Email	26 (23.21%)	24 (22.23%)
Search engines	63 (56.25%)	28 (25.69%)
Instant messaging	13 (11.61%)	19 (17.43%)
Newsgroup	6 (5.61%)	12 (11.01%)
Web boards	8 (7.47%)	7 (6.42%)
Chat rooms	5 (4.59%)	14 (12.84%)

Among the six Internet tools highlighted in this research, students use search engines more (56.25%) for academic purposes than for business/leisure (25.69%). It is also found that they send email more for academic purposes than for business or leisure. Tools like instant messaging, newsgroups, discussion boards, and chat rooms are generally rarely used for either academic or business/leisure purposes.

Findings

The study revealed that Internet facilities are available in all the private universities studied. Access to the Internet facilities in these institutions is not free. Students pay amounts ranging from N10,000.00 to N30,000.00 per annum or N100.00 per hour. No restriction is put on student Internet access and use by the university administration. Use of the Internet is still hindered by an irregular power supply. Search engines remain the most used Internet tool. Obviously, this is because students are able to find information for their assignments and further readings through them. This study found out that students send email for academic purposes more than for business or leisure, while other Internet tools are rarely used.

Recommendations

The study advises lecturers to encourage submission of assignments through email. This may awaken the students to academic uses for email. Librarians should find more and more effective search engines for students. In addition, they should teach the students the use of "advanced search," which is more specific and sophisticated. Other Internet tools (chat rooms, discussion boards, and newsgroups) mentioned in the study are information sharing tools. Librarian should learn how they work and are used. They could then educate students and their teachers on how to use them for things like submission of assignments, tutorials, group discussions, online assessments, among others. This research strongly recommends that librarians and lecturers form a consortium to focus on how they can use the Internet to communicate with students, since a majority spend more than an hour online each day. This research further recommends that the universities should take the proactive measure of providing an alternative power supply. The menace of an unreliable power supply is a serious problem that needs urgent attention, for students to get their money's worth for the fees they pay. Finally, libraries should regulate students' use of non-academic sites when they access the Internet through the library, because the main objective of computerizing the library is to facilitate academic advancements.

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