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Use of Newspapers by Nigerian University Students: The Case of Delta State University, Anwai Campus

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Introduction

Newspapers provide up-to-date information on local, state/provincial, national, and world issues. They are among the most widely-read periodicals that are available and accessible to the vast majority of people of all ages and walks of life in any community. Every category of reader can find some important, current, and interesting information in newspapers. Today's newspapers use design elements that make information easily accessible to the reader. For example, important stories have large bold headlines, while graphics appear next to related stories.

The most current analysis and criticism of politics, economics, health, religion, sports, psychological and emotional issues, music, theatre, television, the fine arts, and even comics are covered by newspapers. Ola and Ojo (2007) reiterate that, "newspapers are important because they carry current information and they keep the readers informed of events and happenings within and outside their immediate environments. They are useful for education, recreation, entertainment and relaxation." News is written as a way of disseminating information to a large group of people. Reporters and editors are usually conscious of the language they use in news reportage to attract popular readership.

In positioning newspapers within the news environment and establishing their academic and research viability, Cheney, Knapp, Alan, and Czapla (2006) insist that despite the growing presence of news on the Internet, radio, television, etc., a library's current newspaper collection can continue to play a vital role in the academic community. In fact, they advocate that, in order to improve newspaper readership among college-age students, libraries should provide free and unhindered access to newspapers to all library users.

History

The history of the Nigerian press dates back to 1859, when Rev. Henry Tennsend released *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* (*The Newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas*) in Abeokuta. It was bilingual (published in both English and Yoruba). This was followed in 1863 by *The Anglo African*, edited by Robert Campbell. It carried both local and international news.

With the increase in political and social activities in Nigeria, came a bimonthly newspaper used to aggregate public opinion on topical issues, the *Lagos Times*, which emerged on November 10, 1880. The *Lagos Observer* hit the newsstands fifteen months later, followed by *The Eagle* on March 31, 1887. Adolphus March started *The Mirror* at this time. Other newspapers began to emerge afterwards: *The Nigerian Chronicle* in 1908, and *The Nigerian Pioneer*, founded by Kukoyi Ajasa.

In 1926, the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company started the *Nigerian Daily Times*. The *West African Pilot* of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe was established in 1936. This brought an increase in national consciousness. Chief Obafemi Awolowo started the *Nigerian Tribune* in 1946.

Most recently, the newspapers in circulation include: *The Vanguard Newspaper*, *The National Concord*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *This Day*, *Comet Newspaper*, *Daily Sketch*, *The Monitor*, *Alaroye*, *The Post Express*, *The Nigerian Herald*, *The National Compass*, etc.

Delta State University, Asaba, Anwai Campus

Delta State University Asaba, Anwai campus is one of the campuses of the university whose main campus is at Abraka. It offers courses mainly in agriculture and business. It is made up of two faculties, the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Management Science. Presently, the total student population is 2,498, with 1,129 in the Faculty of Agriculture and 1,267 in the Faculty of Management Science. The population of part-time students is 2,384.

Purpose of the Study

This paper explores the impact of newspapers in the life of the students in the university, including the most widely-read newspapers and the reason they are read by students.

The result of this research will allow newspaper publishers to know the impact they have on students. It will help publishers improve their publications in the areas most applicable to students.

The survey research method was used for this study, with a questionnaire and the record of library newspaper requests between 2000 and 2006 studied and analyzed.

Analysis and Discussion

Newspaper consultations between 2000 and 2006 were studied to show the rate of use of newspapers by students of the two faculties at the Anwai campus. The record shows details of daily consultations/requests of newspapers. It establishes that the library subscribes to a number of daily papers and that students actually consult the papers. Their purpose for such consultations is not indicated in the records. The questionnaire was therefore used to elicit from students their reasons for consulting the newspapers. Table I is an overview of the record of student consultation of newspapers between 2000 and 2006.

Table I: Record of Students Newspaper Consultation (*2000 to 2006)

	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL
Guardian	453	488	443	594	505	2,483
Vanguard	337	334	423	548	434	2,076
Punch	-	-	-	166	215	381
Pointer	94	43	51	79	86	353
TOTAL	884	865	917	1387	1240	5,293

*records for = 2001 and 2003 are not available.

This table shows that four daily newspapers were prominently consulted during the period. *The Guardian, The Vanguard, The Punch, and Pointer.*

Preference for Specific Newspapers

Fifty copies of the questionnaire were administered randomly to students of each of the two faculties in. Forty-nine copies were returned from Faculty of Management Science and forty-seven from the Faculty of Agriculture, a 96 percent response rate. Respondents were asked to indicate the specific newspapers they request in the library. A large majority had a preference one or more particular newspapers.

Table II: Student Newspaper Preferences

Newspapers	Management Science	Agriculture	Both faculties	Percentage
Vanguard	17	21	38	46.91
Guardian	16	13	29	35.8
Punch	03	04	07	8.64
Sun	02	01	03	3.7
Pointer	01	02	03	3.7
Standard	01	-	01	1.23
Not indicated	07	08	15	

Of those who indicated a preference, nearly half prefer the *Vanguard*, and more than one third prefer the *Guardian*.

Reasons for Preference

To show the reasons for their preferences, students were given six specific options in the questionnaire and asked to rank them from 1 to 6. Table III shows their responses.

Table III: Reasons for students' preferences.

Reasons	1	2	3	4	5	6	*7	Total
a	144	05	12	22	08	05	29	225
b	66	35	20	21	04	07	15	169
c	54	10	16	09	16	09	20	134
d	96	50	24	12	02	07	24	215
e	96	25	24	09	08	07	28	197
f	78	15	08	12	10	12	33	168
Total	534	140	104	85	48	47	149	1107

*Some respondents merely ticked the options without ranking/scoring them. The options ticked are scored as 1 and added to the relevant options.

In Table III the reasons are represented as follows:

- a – contains information relevant to my discipline.
- b – contains job advertisements.
- c – quite legible with good graphics
- d – very good and balanced editorial commentaries
- e – contains objective news on political issues
- f – good sports news coverage

A majority of the students prefer particular newspapers because they contain information relevant to their disciplines. An almost equal number prefer specific newspapers because of their balanced editorial commentaries, followed closely by those who enjoy objective news on political issues.

Conclusion

This study has shown that newspapers continue to be a useful source for the academic, recreational, and information needs of Nigerian students. This is in accord with the findings of Aina (1987) that newspapers are one of the tools used by researchers in education in Nigeria, and that it is important for libraries to emphasize the collection and organization of newspaper information. In corroborating the research importance of newspapers, Rusbridger (2002) puts it philosophically, saying that, “newspapers have a double life. On the one hand they date more quickly than milk and stale more quickly than bread. On the other hand ... they provide a fascinating dipstick into history.”

The study also establishes students' preferences for particular newspapers and the reasons for such preferences. The *Vanguard* and *Guardian* newspapers, which are preferred by a majority of the students, are preferred for information relevant to academic disciplines and job advertisements, respectively. All options offered for preferring specific newspapers were relevant to the respondents, however, reinforcing the relevance of newspapers to academic and research endeavours in the Nigerian university system.

It is recommended that, given the relevance of newspapers to scholarship in Nigeria, university libraries, and indeed all libraries, should consider the acquisition, organization, and preservation of newspaper information, including making it available electronically. In addition, publishers should take note of students' newspaper information needs in order to enhance their publications.

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