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# Utilization of Journal Publications by Undergraduate Students of Babcock University, Nigeria

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## **Introduction**

Journal publications serve a very important purpose for learning, teaching and research in any university. According to Ogunniyi, Akerele, and Afolabi (2011), a well stocked and organized library is a pride of any educational institution. Academic journals according to the College at Brockport (2013) are periodicals in which researchers publish articles on their work. Research articles that discuss recent findings are published in journal. Also, journals publication contains theoretical discussions and articles that critically review already published work. Journals are typically peer-reviewed which means that articles published in them were read and critically examined by more than one reviewer to ensure that it is in accordance to acceptable standard for publication.

Journal is one among the serials subscribed by libraries all over the world with authenticated research results and findings in different areas of knowledge. According to Keenan and Johnson (2000), Feather and Sturges (2004), and Reitz (2004), serial is any publication that is published in any medium issued under the same title in a succession of discrete parts usually numbered (or dated) and appearing either regular or irregular intervals with no predetermined conclusion. Serial publications are provided in successive parts to users and is intended to be available and continued indefinitely in the library. Serials publications include periodicals, newspapers, magazines, journals and annuals (reports, yearbooks), continuing directories, proceedings and transactions, and numbered monographic series.

Most libraries subscribe to journal publications on continuous basis. Nonetheless, a specific journal title is identified by a unique international standard serial number (ISSN) and a key title assigned and maintained by the international serials data system (ISDS). Consequently, journal is among the diverse information materials that are available in any library. It is needed especially by faculty and research students to support in accumulating current literature review and findings. Madu and Adeniran (2005) outlines some characteristics of journal which include, the editor might change; the content of each issue is different; the publication interval varies; they are published annually, bi-annually, monthly, quarterly, forth-nightly and weekly; no planned end to the sequence; currency (up-to-date); more expensive than books, and are usually subscribed to.

Before the inception and advancement of ICT use in library services, journals were mainly printed and manually distributed. However with the development of ICT, and its subsequent usage in the library, dissemination of most journals is electronically managed via the Internet and catalogued, accessed and retrieved from databases. Journals that are subscribed by a library form an important and useful collection of the library stock. Also, articles in journals are published more rapidly than books and thus journal constitute vital up-to-date information. This is particularly important in rapidly developing areas of science and technology. In addition, articles in journals frequently discuss in-depth and highly specialized topics and it includes information that may never appear in book form. These attributes and others make journal publications unique, distinct and special among other library collections.

The use of journal by undergraduate students is expected to improve their academic standard and positively affect their final year research (project) work. It is a fact that Babcock University Serials section provides current and up-to-date information resources including journal, newspapers, newsletters that are useful for researchers to support their research findings. Based on the importance of journal publications on research, this study seeks to investigate the information resources mostly utilized by the undergraduate students of Babcock University for their final (project) and research work.

## **Babcock University Serials' Section**

Collection development policy for serials publication at Babcock University Library is a critical one. As at June 2013, the library subscribes to several local and international print journals with a total collection of 4,416. Currently, the university library subscribes to about 15,072 electronic journals that are relevant to the academic programmes of the university which are freely accessible via <http://library.babcock.edu.ng/> on different databases by staff, students and registered library users. The decision for subscription to any journal depends on the library's policy to enhance teaching, learning and research. Again, such journal must have an impact factor and has been published over a period of time. Each year, the University Library allocates a proportionate amount to journal subscription. Also, details of proposed new journals are sent to liaison officers representing each schools and departments of the University. The journal section is managed by professional librarians who from time to time assist, support and guide users on how to access information from both print and electronic journals.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Babcock University library regularly subscribes to print and electronic journals. The library staff also exerts a lot of effort to teach, mentor and encourage library users to utilize journals for their research works. Observation has shown that there was a clear disparity between the annual subscription fee of journals and utilization by the undergraduate students. Despite the huge investment and subscription cost on the university and the effort made by librarians for users to use the resources, observation has shown that users seem not to utilize journal publications for their research work. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the information resources mostly utilized by the undergraduate students of Babcock University for their final (project) and research work.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to ascertain the utilization of journal publications by undergraduate students at Babcock University. Specific objectives were to:

1. Know the information resources utilized mostly by undergraduate students for their final research (project) work.
2. Ascertain the perception of undergraduate students towards the utilization of journal articles for their final research (project) work
3. Suggest ways to improve journal utilization by undergraduate students.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the types of library information resources mostly utilized by undergraduate students for their final research (project) work?
2. What is the perception of undergraduate students towards the utilization of journal articles for their final research (project) work?
3. How can undergraduate students improve their journal utilization

## Literature Review

Ogunniyi, Akerele, and Afolabi (2011) stated that of all the serials subscribed by any library, journals are the most important to researchers because much of the articles therein are products of research and it may never appear in any other publications. No wonder Omekwu and Atimo (1998) emphasized that journals are the most current vehicles of new ideas, knowledge and breakthrough in scientific development.

According to Salaam and Opeke (2009) academic journals have long formed the back-bone of research in academic and university libraries because of the currency of the information they contain. The level of utilization of journals in universities differs despite the huge investments in journal subscription.

Cason and Scoyoc (2006) studied the undergraduate students' research habits in a strictly electronic library environment at a large public university and found out that the undergraduate students in the electronic library relied primarily on Internet sites and online instruction modules (for example Blackboard or WebCT) for their research needs rather than university-funded research sources.

Ogunniyi, Akerele and Afolabi (2011) investigated the use of serial publications by the academic staff of School of Arts and Social Sciences in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo State, Nigeria. The researchers found out that 66.7% of the respondents used the serial section while 33.3% did not. Majority of the respondents, 21 (70%) used serials section for research purpose while 1(3.3%) used it for relaxation and be acquainted with current information. The research concluded that, there were some academic staff in the College who do not use the serials section of the library because of their notion that the journals were old, scanty, improperly arranged and lack of professionals to assist them.

As electronic journals are fast becoming more acceptable and usage is increasing, it is pertinent for library users to attain high level of expertise or possibly learn to utilize them effectively. Ironically, a study by Agba, Kigongo-Bukenya and Nyumba (2004) on utilization of electronic information resources by academic staff at Makerere University reveals lack of access to the services, lack of knowledge on how to use e-journals, lack of facilities, lack of time and awareness as hindrances.

Research has shown that the use of journals is drastically reducing among undergraduate students in some higher institution of learning. Hampton-Reeves, Mashiter, Westaway, Lumsden, Day, Hewertson, and Hart (2009) identified students' consistency on the use of Google to save themselves the trouble of going to the library. They also noted that students identify undergraduate or postgraduate dissertations as research content. To buttress the point further,

Hammed and Osunrinade (2010) also found out that 64.8% of undergraduate students who responded in their study prefer to use text books against 22.1% who used journal. This implies that students perceive textbook and online search engines as the best options to access information for their research work.

Hampton-Reeves, et al. (2009) argued that research content is seen primarily as a source for assignments and students' perception of research is very much led by the context of their assignments. Furthermore, they argued that there is a growing diversity in the kinds of content identified as research but journal articles and books still dominate students' perceptions of what research is. Perhaps this accounts to the reasons why patronage to journal usage was minimal.

Salaam and Opeke (2009) asserts that the more available and accessible resources are, the more they would be utilized. This may not be very true since not every available resource is

utilized in the library by users. However, the perception and use of a certain resource in the library depends on the users awareness, packaging, presentation, ease of use, result oriented and of course the role of the tutor remains fundamental to setting the environment for the use and discovery of research content (Hampton-Reeves, et al., 2009).

### **Print Journal**

Print journals are collections of articles in a printed format, especially in book format. Agboola (2009) identifies library as one the information providers that provides relevant print and non-print resources for undergraduate students, postgraduate students, lecturers, non-academic staff and members of the public for their course work, essays, term papers and personal self development. She opines that students constitute the major category of users of services provided by university libraries. Findings from her study showed that only 192 (21.1%) of the respondents used print journal regularly against 320 (35.1%) that used it occasionally and 190 (20.8%) that never used it. The contrast in the usage of print journal against textbook confirms the findings of Rowland and Rubbert (2001) and Agboola (2009) that textbooks were mostly used by the students in their research and this demonstrate students' preferences in the use of library resources. Schloman (2001) cited by Sathe, Grady and Guise (2002) profiled the perceptions and use of both print and electronic journals among nursing faculty and found that roughly 75% of respondents utilized print journals frequently, but only about 25% used electronic journals to the same extent.

### **Importance of Journal articles**

Serial publications in the library including journals stand out among other information resources. It is identified as a major resource with current and up-to-date information. The dynamism in journal publication especially as it comes serially, in volumes and consistently without any date of ending in sight makes it relevant and a choice for library users. Screekumar (2005) cited by Oyedapo and Ojo (2013) affirms that e-journal offer a range of potential advantages to libraries and end users. Thyer (2008) highlighted the importance of journal articles;

*Published journal articles typically have gone through a rigorous screening process known as blind peer review, whereby independent experts provide the author with critical commentary and suggestions to improve their final paper, prior to publication. Most print journals are now widely accessible over the internet and are relatively easy for others to access. Articles submitted to journals usually appear in print sooner than books or book chapters, and continue to be accorded greater influence in promotion and tenure decisions within academia than alternative means of distributing information. Articles published in peer reviewed journals are likely to remain a very important means of distributing research findings for the foreseeable future.*

Research results published in journals are considered accurate because it was scrutinized, read, critiqued and reviewed by peer reviewers. According to Thyer (2008) and McGuffin (2013) peer-reviewed articles are an important part of keeping up with current trends and research in any academic field. Scholarly journals mainly publish articles that have been reviewed by a group of peers in whichever field the journal or article topic is written on.

### **Journal utilization by students in academic library**

The provision of relevant information materials and make them accessible in support of academic curriculum of a university is the ultimate goal of an academic library. The effort of a library towards the achievement of this ultimate goal may differ from the users' perception, which of course discloses users' seeking behaviour.

A study by Hammed and Osunrinade (2010) reveal that only 48 (9.8%) of the students who responded used journal regularly, 227 (46.5%) used journal occasionally while 213 (43.7%) never used journal. According to Henry (2004) cited by Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun and Ogundipe (2011) also noted that 40 percent of adult Nigerians never read a non-fiction book from cover to cover after they finish school. The average Nigerian read less than one book per year, and only one percent of successful men and women in Nigeria read one non-fiction book per month. The same study showed that 30 million Nigerians have graduated from high school with poor reading skills. This may be the case with undergraduate students who never see journal publication as research materials but rather utilize quick and unstructured information on the internet. While lamenting the attitude of the undergraduate students, it is also important to recall that some libraries play a 'lukewarm' role in fulfilling their mandate.

This was justified by Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun and Ogundipe (2011) who lamented that in spite of the fact that libraries play an important role in the promotion of reading habits among citizens of any country, libraries (school and public) are either non-existent or not playing their expected role. Libraries are bewildered by lack of fund among other challenges. Therefore, to encourage the library users to utilize library resources, librarians must ensure to have adequate and relevant collections in the library stock.

### **Preferred Information resources by students**

Library resources preferred and accessed by library users especially undergraduate students greatly depend on their information needs. Lee, Paik and Joo (2012) confirms that a variety of factors influence the selection of information sources. This includes the characteristics of the sources, search purposes, user preferences, user knowledge, information literacy and others. Information seeking is usually stimulated by time frame to accomplish an assignment and it is propelled by availability of the information, credibility of the source and ease of use of the resources.

Lee, et.al. (2012) affirms that university students preferred online sources in their academic searches. A research on making choices: factors in the selection of information resources among science faculty at the University of Michigan and published in 2002 by Quigley, Peck, Rutter and Williams shows that 67.3% of the respondents asserts that print journal was one among the four most frequently selected resources. In preparation for final examination, Blaho, Fodrek, Farkas and Foltin (2013) opines that books are more preferred while online materials are less used by students. They however noted that the benefit of these materials is that answers can be found in a few second.

A research by Sathe, Grady and Guise (2002) indicates that fellows, students, and residents preferred electronic journals, and faculty preferred print journals. Patrons used print journals for reading articles and scanning contents; they employed electronic journals for printing articles and checking references. Result also shows that users considered electronic journals easier to access and search than print journals; however, they reported that print journals had higher quality text and figures.

## Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design. The study population comprised 400 level students of 2012/2013 academic session in Babcock University which consist of 1359 students. All 400 level students were selected because they had completed their final year research (project) work for the award of Bachelors' degrees in different areas of study. Simple random sampling was used to select 815 respondents which was 60% from the total population. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers which was administered a week after their project defense. A total number of 815 questionnaires were administered to the respondents during the graduating class chapel seminar organized for the graduating students which held every Wednesday of the week. The researchers were supported by five research assistants to administer the questionnaire. All 815 questionnaires were retrieved given a return rate of 100% which were found useful. The data generated for the study was analyzed using frequency tables and percentage.

## Results

**Table 1 showing sex of the respondents  
n=815**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	373	45.8
Female	442	54.2
Total	815	100

Table 1 shows that from the 815 respondents, 373 (45.8%) were male while 442 (54.2%) were female. This result indicates that there were more female respondents in this study than their male counterpart.

**Table 2** What are the types of library information resources mostly utilized by undergraduate students for their final research (project) work?

**n=815**

Information resources	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Textbooks	47 (5.8)	63 (7.7)	281 (34.5)	158 (19.4)	266 (32.6)
Journals	236 (29)	250 (30.7)	31 (3.8)	189 (23.2)	109 (13.4)
Magazines	109 (13.4)	251 (30.8)	157 (19.3)	158 (19.4)	140 (17.2)
Reference sources	93 (11.4)	93 (11.4)	269 (32.7)	202 (24.8)	158 (19.4)
Past students' thesis	94 (11.5)	63 (7.7)	141 (17.3)	187(23.1)	330 (40.2)

Table 2 reveals the types of information resources mostly utilized by the students. It shows that 266 (32.6%) and 330(40.2%) of the respondents used textbooks and past students' thesis always while 109 (13.4%) and 251 (30.8) never or rarely used magazine. It also shows that 269 (32.7%) sometimes used reference sources. However, the result further shows that 236 (29%) and 250 (30.7%) never and rarely used journals for their final research (project) writing. This indicates that the respondents' used textbooks and past students' thesis (final project) than journal

publications. The none use of journals by the respondents may be connected to time constrain in searching through the print journal titles and articles contained in them while lack of skill to search through the electronic journal may also be another hindrance.

**Table 3** What is the perception of undergraduate students towards the utilization of journal articles for their final research (project) work?

**n=815**

<b>Perception of students towards the use of journals</b>	<b>Strongly agreed</b>	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Disagreed</b>	<b>Strongly disagreed</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
I do not know how to use journal for research	283 (34.4)	361 (44.3)	108 (13.3)	31(3.8)	32 (3.9)
It is difficult to access information on journals	125 (15.3)	2 (7.6)	221 (27.1)	329 (40.4)	78 (9.6)
Articles in journals did not meet my information needs	173 (21.2)	170 (20.9)	190 (23.3)	220 (27)	62 (7.6)
I need to learn how to utilize journal	77 (9.4)	222 (27.2)	158 (19.3)	220 (27)	139 (17.1)
There are no current journals in my study area	63 (7.7)	140 (17.2)	346 (42.5)	266 (32.6)	0 (0)
Lack of training to use journal for research (project work)	252 (30.9)	407 (49.9)	0 (0)	93 (11.4)	63(7.7)
Journals are not easily accessible	62 (7.6)	125 (15.3)	221 (27.1)	281 (34.5)	126 (15.5)
Lack of time to search for journal articles	63 (7.7)	189 (23.2)	158 (19.4)	342 (42)	63 (7.7)

Table 3 sought to know the perception of students towards journal utilization. It shows that 343 (42.1%) strongly agreed and agreed that articles in journals did not meet their information needs while 222 (27.2%) of the respondents agreed they need to learn how to use journals. The result further reveal that 659 (80.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they need training to use journal for their research work while 644 (78.7%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they did not know how to use journal for their research. This result shows that the high use of textbooks and past students' project by the respondents as shown on table 2 could be attributed to respondents' lack of training and knowledge to use journal publications. This result disagrees with Schloman (2001) cited by Sathe, Grady and Guise (2002) who profiled the perceptions and use of both print and electronic journals among nursing faculty and found out that roughly 75% of respondents used print journals frequently.

**Table 4** How can undergraduate students improve their journal utilization

**n=815**

<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>Strongly agreed</b>	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Disagreed</b>	<b>Strongly disagreed</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
Practical lectures on how to use journal articles by students should be made compulsory	283 (34.4)	346 (42.5)	158 (19.4)	140 (17.2)	32 (3.9)
Lecturers should mandate the students to use journals from 100 to 400 levels	125 (15.3)	2 (7.6)	221 (27.1)	329 (40.4)	78 (9.6)



The curriculum should include a course on Advanced literature review using journal articles.	173 (21.2)	220 (27)	190 (23.3)	170 (20.9)	62 (7.6)
Seminar on the use of journal articles should be organized to improve students' knowledge/skill	220 (27)	222 (27.2)	158 (19.3)	77 (9.4)	139 (17.1)
Librarians should device other means of educating library users	266 (32.6)	252 (30.9)	93 (11.4)	63(7.7)	0 (0)

Table 4 shows suggestions by the respondents on how to improve the use of journal publications. 629 (76.9%), strongly agreed and agreed that practical lectures on how to use journal articles by students should be made compulsory, while 442 (54.2%) agreed that seminar on the use of journal articles should be organized to improve students' knowledge/skill. However, another 550 (67.5%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that Lecturers should mandate the students to use journals from 100 to 400 levels. The response is an indication that the respondents expected the lecturers and librarians to organize practical lectures, seminar and other means to educate undergraduate students to utilize journal publications effectively.

## Discussion of Findings

### Demographic information of respondents

The distribution of the respondents who participated in the study was shown on table 1. Findings show that there were more female respondents in this study than their male counterpart.

### Research Question 1: What are the types of library information resources mostly utilized by undergraduate students for their final research (project) work?

The findings on table 2 show information resources mostly utilized by the students. It reveal that the respondents utilized information textbooks and past students' project than journal publications hence 266 (32.6%) and 330 (40.2%) attested to that fact. This implies that the respondents' use of journals was minimal compared to the use of other information resources in the library especially textbooks and past students' thesis. This finding agrees with the findings of Agboola (2009), Rowland and Rubbert (2001) and Blaho, Fodrek, Farkas and Foltin (2013) that textbooks were mostly used and preferred by the students in their research and in preparation for examination. The finding also supports Hammed and Osunrinade (2010) findings which shows that only 48 (9.8%) of a total respondents of 488 regularly used journal, 227 (46.5%) occasionally used journal while and 213 (43.7%) never used the resource. Therefore, inadequate utilization of journals by the undergraduate students require a radical approach by the academic standard board, librarians and lecturers because it could drastically affect their intellectual ability and the contents of their final year project.

### **Research question 2: What is the perception of undergraduate students towards the utilization of journal articles for their final research (project) work?**

Findings on table 3 show the perception of students towards journal utilization. It indicates that 343 (42.1%) strongly agreed and agreed that articles in journals did not meet their information needs while 222 (27.2%) of the respondents identified the need to learn how to use journals. Result further reveals that 659 (80.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they lack training to use journal for their research work while 644 (78.7%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they did not know how to use journal for their research. The result shows that majority of the respondents were not aware of the importance of journal contents and they also lack knowledge and skill to utilize the contents.

### **Research question 3: How can undergraduate students improve their journal utilization?**

Findings on table 4 reveal suggestions by the respondents on how journal usage could be improved. 629 (76.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that practical lectures on how to use journal articles by students should be made compulsory, while 442 (54.2%) also agreed that seminar on the use of journal articles should be organized to improve students' knowledge/skill. However, another 550 (67.5%) strongly disagreed and disagreed that Lecturers should make use of journals mandatory for students from 100 to 400 levels. The response is an indication that the respondents expected the lecturers and librarians to organize practical lectures, seminar and devise other means to educate undergraduate students to utilize journal publications effectively.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research demonstrates the level of journal utilization among the undergraduate students of Babcock University. It portrays the excuses why undergraduate students were reluctant to utilize journal publications. The result also justifies why it is important for students to be taught how to utilize journal publications. Journals have continued to be the best resource for publishing of current research findings and to identify gap in knowledge in various fields of study. Each journal article holds the best findings that can be replicated anywhere under normal circumstance. This therefore makes journal one of the resources frequently sought for among other library information resources. However, the use of journal by undergraduate students may continue to dwindle and that underpins the reason to educate the students to utilize the resource for improved research work and quality project writing. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend as follows:

- Lecturers in all the departments at Babcock University should emphasize the use of journal sources and encourage students through assignments that would require high use of journal publications and other information resources in the library to boost their research work.
- Lecturers involved in educating students about research methodology should ensure to practicalize how to derive information from journal findings and apply it to develop their current literature review.
- Librarians should endeavor to organize workshops and seminars to train the students on the importance of journal publications.

- Librarians should aggressively encourage students during orientation programs to use journal findings to support their research work.
- The academic departments should as a matter of urgency enact a policy mandating final year undergraduate students to cite not less than 50% journal publications in their literature review.
- Students should visit the library for any reference question in relation to their research work.

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