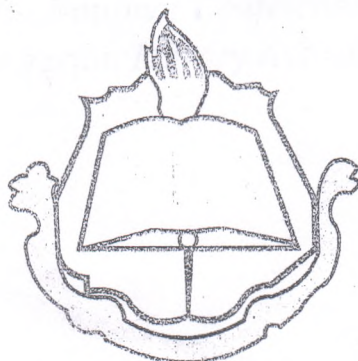# NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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# Nigerian Libraries for the Future: Progress, Development and Partnerships

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# Availability, Accessibility and Use of Information and Communication Technologies by Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities: What Role for University Libraries?

A. E. Adetimirin

## Abstract

*Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) facilitate access to electronic information which has become invaluable in complementing traditional library resources. The objective of this study was to determine location, accessibility and use of ICTs by undergraduates. Three universities were purposively selected and undergraduates from four faculties were randomly selected. Questionnaire, interview and observation were the data collection methods used. A total of 700 respondents were used for the study while cross tabulation and percentages were the data analysis methods. ICTs were used in university libraries, computer laboratories and cybercafés on the campuses and it was found that not all the ICTs available were accessible to undergraduates in the university libraries. The academic tasks for which ICTs were used were assignments, class work, projects, seminar and term papers. University libraries still need to provide more ICTs for students' use. This could be achieved through encouraging the intervention of private initiatives as this could in turn promote more use of ICTs.*

## Introduction

Information is vital to the overall academic development of university students. Libraries are established in each university to cater for the information needs of students, staff and other people in the community. Academic libraries acquire' and organise both printed and electronic information for accessibility and use by its clientele. Many university libraries in Nigeria are under- funded and therefore unable to acquire sufficient information materials for their students and other library users. To alleviate this problem, students and staff of universities often use

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to access current information from CD-ROMs, electronic journals and other online sources.

Students' use of technology in education is expected to improve educational outcomes, increase skills in the use of technology and decrease inequalities between groups (Corbett and Williams, 2002). The adoption and use of ICTs could facilitate access to unlimited and current information irrespective of geographical location and time. ICT use could provide university students, lecturers and researchers in developing countries the opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap between them and their counterparts in developed countries.

With the concept of the global village, graduates are increasingly expected to compete for jobs globally, and universities are expected to prepare them for gainful employment (Agbonlahor, 2005). It therefore follows that to remain relevant in the current information age, university lecturers and students have to adopt ICT to enhance their teaching, learning and research activities. The use of such technologies by the students is however, dependent on availability and accessibility.

ICTs facilitate communication between teachers and students. It also provides students with additional opportunities to write, edit, and undertake multi-media project. However, the adoption of any learning tool in higher education is dependent on awareness, availability and ability to use it. Barraket and Scott (2001) in their study on students' experiences of ICT use in University of Technology, Sydney, Australia highlighted ready access to infrastructure, availability of facilities, maintaining and upgrading equipment as factors that affect the effective use of ICT. McMahon *et al.* (1999) in their study on the factors that influence the way undergraduate students in UK universities use computers listed access, training and time as some factors.

Presently, there is a dearth of empirical studies on access to and use of ICTs by Nigerian undergraduates. It therefore, becomes imperative to carry out a study to investigate the scenario in some Nigerian universities and determine how accessible they are to undergraduates in these universities. This will be related to the expected role of the university libraries.

## Research Methodology
The descriptive survey research was adopted to collect data on the availability of ICT to undergraduates in Nigerian universities. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study to select

universities based on ownership of the universities. Thus, three universities were randomly selected. The selected universities are Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, owned by the Federal government, Babcock University (BU), Illisan- Remo, a private university, and Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri, a state owned university. Also, these universities are located in three of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria.

The systems librarians in the selected universities were interviewed to collect data on ICTs available and the accessibility to undergraduates. The observation method was used to find out the available and accessible ICTs in the university libraries, computer laboratories and cyber cafes on the campuses. Data on the use of ICTs, undergraduates were randomly selected from four faculties: Arts, Education, Science and Social Science. These faculties were considered to be representative because they were found in most universities in Nigeria.

A department each was selected from each of the four faculties. Students were proportionately selected from the universities to make for representation of the strata taking into consideration the various factors like the age, sex and level of study. The sample size for the three universities was: ABU- 302, BU- 93 and IMSU- 305 giving a total of 700 respondents. Questionnaire and observations were the data collection instruments used. Questionnaire was administered to collect data on the academic tasks the ICT were used for.

## Results and Discussion

### Availability of ICTs in the Libraries
The federal and private universities were found to possess more ICTs for the use of undergraduates than the state university. Based on the responses of the librarians at the time this study was carried out in 2005, all the universities had computers in their libraries except IMSU (Table 1). Two universities (ABU and BU) had both scanners and LCD multimedia projector in their libraries, while only ABU had fax machines. ABU and BU had CDROM facilities in their libraries while two university libraries (ABU and BU) had photocopying machines. Two universities (ABU and BU) were observed to have computer laboratories established by the universities and the facilities were available for the use of undergraduates.

*Table 1: Availability of ICT in the libraries and cybercafés on campuses of the universities*

| ICTs | ABU | | BU | | IMSU |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number Available Cybercafé | Library | Cybercafé on campus | Library | Cybercafé on campus | Library on campus |
| Internet computers | 10 | 42 | 7 | 11 | None 14 |
| Scanners | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | None 1 |
| Fax machine | 1 None | None | None | None | None |
| CDROM facilities | 1 None | None | 1 | None | None |
| LCD Projector | 1 None | 1 | 1 | 1 | None |
| Photocopiers | 1 3 | 35 | 2 | 7 | None |

| | ABU | BU | IMSU |
|---|---|---|---|
| Univ. Computer Lab | 1 | 1 | None |
| Cybercafés on campus | 4 | 1 | 1 |

*ABU = Ahmadu Bello University, BU = Babcock University, IMSU = Imo State University*

## Availability of ICTs in the cybercafés

All the three universities studies had commercial cybercafes on their campuses. The number of these cybercafés varied from one in IMSU to four which was found to be the highest and available in ABU (Table 1). ICTs were more available to the undergraduates in these cybercafes on the various campuses as they were established by private initiatives to make profit. Computers, scanners and photocopiers were available to the undergraduates in all the cybercafes in the selected universities, while LCD Multimedia projectors were available in cybercafes in only two universities (ABU and BU). None of the campus cybercafés in the selected universities had fax machines (Table 1).

## Accessibility of ICTs in the libraries

The students in the three universities had access to computers in their libraries except those in IMSU (Table 2). Undergraduates in all the universities did not have access to scanners, fax machines and LCD multimedia projector but had access to CDROM facilities and photocopying machines in the libraries of ABU and BU. The two universities (ABU and BU) that had computer laboratories made the facilities accessible to the undergraduates.

## Accessibility of ICTs in the cybercafés

Computers were accessible to the undergraduates in the cybercafés in all the three university campuses. Scanners, LCD projectors were accessible to undergraduates in the commercial business centres on the campuses of ABU and BU, while fax machines were not accessible to the undergraduates in all the cybercafés in the three university campuses. However, photocopiers were accessible to undergraduates in the commercial business centres on the three campuses (Table 2). IMSU had the poorest ICT facilities in the cybercafés among the three universities studied.

The cybercafés were opened for longer periods than the university libraries and this made the students to have access to the ICTs for a longer period than in the university libraries. Fees charged for the use of the Internet in the cybercafés on the various campuses, ranged between N60 - N80 ($0.50). The cost of printing was N20 which was the same in all the universities, while cost of photocopying per page was N3.00 and usually affordable to the students.

Although availability of ICTs may not necessarily translate to accessibility, the ICTs available in the universities studied were considered to be accessible. However, the resources were inadequate. The present study found that the current cost charged per hour for Internet access in the cybercafés ranged from N60 –N70 ($0.50) Free Internet access may therefore be possible in the near future on campuses of Nigerian universities, especially as the technology becomes cheaper and more accessible for people to use the facility.

*Table 2 Accessibility of ICTs to undergraduates in the libraries and cybercafés on the campuses of the universities*

| ICTs | ABU Library | Cybercafer on campus | BU Library | Cybercafer on campus | IMSU Library | Cybercafer on campus |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet computers | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Scanners | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| Fax machine | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| CDROM facilities | Yes | No | Yes | No | No | No |
| LCD Projector | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | No |
| Photocopiers | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

*ABU = Ahmadu Bello University, BU = Babcock University, IMSU = Imo State University*

## Use of ICTs by undergraduates for academic tasks

The various academic tasks that the undergraduates in this study used ICTs were assignment, class work, project, seminar and term paper. A cross tabulation analysis presented in Table 3 showed that respondents in ABU were found to be highest users of all the ICTs for assignments, and they were also found to be the highest users of CDROM and the Internet for class work. In terms of the use of ICTs for projects, respondents in IMSU were the highest users of computer and the Internet while those in ABU were found to be highest users of CDROM.

*Table 3 Use of ICTs for academic tasks by undergraduates in the selected universities*

| Academic Tasks | ICTs | N | ABU | BU | IMSU |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | % | |
| Assignment | CDROM | 84 | 64.3 | 15.5 | 20.2 |
| | Computer | 126 | 51.6 | 4.8 | 43.6 |
| | Internet | 46 | 71.7 | 21.7 | 6.5 |
| | Telephone | 1 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Class work | CDROM | 338 | 49.4 | 10.9 | 39.6 |
| | Computer | 135 | 37.8 | 15.6 | 46.7 |
| | Internet | 19 | 52.6 | 42.1 | 5.3 |
| Project | CDROM | 327 | 57.8 | 8.9 | 33.3 |
| | Computer | 96 | 36.5 | 10.4 | 53.1 |
| | Internet | 69 | 11.6 | 27.5 | 60.9 |
| Seminar | CDROM | 412 | 60.4 | 11.2 | 28.4 |
| | Computer | 61 | 16.4 | 19.7 | 63.9 |
| | Internet | 48 | 2.1 | 6.2 | 91.7 |
| | Telephone | 2 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 |
| Term paper | CDROM | 372 | 69.9 | 6.7 | 23.4 |
| | Computer | 75 | 10.7 | 9.3 | 80.0 |
| | Internet | 12 | 8.3 | 91.7 | 0.0 |

The study found that respondents in ABU were the highest users of CDROM to retrieve information for their seminars. Respondents in IMSU were found to be the highest users of both computers and the Internet, while only the respondents in BU indicated the use of telephones. Usage varied for the use of ICTs for term paper. The accessibility to ICTs will facilitate communication as the world is a global village. It would also lead to the access to large amount of information that a library cannot provide. The global trend is more on access than ownership and access to ICTs will make more information available to undergraduates for their various academic tasks. It would improve learning. expand knowledge through access to various online databases. Internet access. email. group discussions and other activities.

## Expected Role of the University Libraries

University libraries have a major role to play in this respect, but they are handicapped by lack of funds. They were not able to acquire much ICTs from the fiscal allocations because such huge capital investments have to be specially provided for. Ideally about 30% of budgets should be devoted to technology development in the libraries. Besides, some five to ten percent should be set apart annually for maintenance of equipment and infrastructure in the university libraries. The libraries would also need to subscribe and provide access to more online journals, electronic databases, procure CDROMs and other electronic materials.

The intervention of the private sector organisations, philanthropists, alumnae and other donors could be solicited for this task. However, quality should not be compromised in accepting donations. Support could also be obtained from some international organisations. When libraries have the electronic resources, they would be able to form consortium with other academic libraries, cooperate on acquisition, cataloguing and also share resources. Virtual libraries would be more viable as databases could be developed. Library resources could be shared and accessed by clients of all the libraries in Nigerian university and globally.

## Conclusion

The study has proved that students use ICTs and would use them more often if they were more available, accessible and affordable. The management of Nigerian universities needs to increase their ICTs resources and improve access in libraries, laboratories and all the information resource centres on the campuses. The university libraries should devote about 30% of their budget to providing more ICTs. Similarly, the authorities need to encourage private initiatives in the establishment of more commercial cybercafés on their campuses as the universities may not be able to provide all the ICT resources. Prices of the ICTs should remain affordable to promote increased use by undergraduates, which in turn could promote scholarly communication between staff and students. These in turn would make it possible that in the near future, other ICTs not presently being commonly used would become more available and frequently used. University libraries also need to provide more ICTs while increasing access to networks on information locally and globally.

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3. AHMED, Sumayya *Developing Readers: The Crisis of Reading in Morocco and Recent Initiatives to Promote Reading*
4. MCHOMBU, Kingo Jotham and MCHOMBU, Chiku Mnubi *The Role of Information and Knowledge in Poverty Eradication in Africa: a case study of Namibia*
5. PARKER, Kimberly J. and MORSIER, Selva de and NETO, Geraldo *Empowerment through marketing and training: HINARI in non-English-speaking African countries*
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