

Undergraduates' Access to Computer Services for their Academic Work in Two Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to examine undergraduates' access to computer services for their academic work in university of Nigeria and Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Descriptive survey research design was used and the population of the study comprised all the registered undergraduates of both universities under study. The sample was six hundred and forty (640) undergraduate students from the two campuses. Questionnaire was used to extract data from the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using means and frequencies.

Findings: This research paper found out that undergraduates do not access computer services in the library but in cybercafés and business centers, however, libraries ranked highest in their preferred sources of access.

Practical Implication: from the findings it was noted that deprivation of access to computer services for academic work implies deprivation of wide access and use of abundant and current learning resources globally in this electronic and information age. This libraries have to pursue vigorously or requite their responsibilities to other sources which students are already finding useful.

Originality/Value: the value of this paper lies in its identification of student's access to computer series, their preferred sources of access problem of access and strategies to enhance students access to computer services for their cadmic work.

Keywords: Access to computer, Academic libraries, computer services, undergraduates.

Paper type: Empirical

Introduction

According to Straubhaar (1992), computer services refer to computer application and the delivery of computerized information for end users. These services among others include Internet services, on-line databases, Information networks, CD-Rom information retrieval and e-mail services. Dike (2000) posited that this has led to the widening of choice of available information sources and services: thus, rather than relying only on the print and non-print holdings of the library, the user can equally have access to remote stores of information elsewhere using these computer services.

Computer services can be used by students to increase the time they devote to learning, enhance the speed of availability of data information, provide immediate feedback and enhance their ability to identify areas of learning

strength and weakness and improve their academic progress and reporting (Abimbade, 1996). Generally, students' use of computer services can reduce the stress they go through while searching for materials to carry out various academic assignments that face them every day. These computer services enable them identify germane articles and research studies. Ogunyade (2003), and equally make them more self-reliant in their search for information (Fecko, 1997).

All over the world many universities are moving ahead doggedly using computer propelled educational systems in order to effectively break the barriers and boundaries of research and learning. It is very sad that in many universities in Nigeria students have poor access to computer services (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). This no doubt would have a negative effect on their academic performance. It is sad that in developed countries, computer technology is felt

at every level of academic work, while universities in most developing nations like Nigeria are just at the threshold in the provision of computer services for students use (Okiy, 1998). It is pertinent to re-emphasize that access to computer services by undergraduate students for their academic and research work has become a salient and strategic aspect of library services in many developed and developing countries of the world today. This is as a result of the role of computers in widening of choice of available academic information sources and services. However, in Nigeria, readers sometimes are heard complaining to one another about the non-provision and lack of access to computer services in the library for academic purposes. This is a serious problem considering the adverse effect it has on the academic work and performance of these students such as poor academic reports and results. Fecko (1997) observed that deprivation of access to computer services implies deprivation of wide access and use of abundant and current learning resources globally in this electronic and information age. Thus libraries have to pursue vigorously or relinquish their responsibilities to other sources which students are already finding useful.

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that there is growing relevance of computer services to students' academic work and performance. Thus this study intends to examine undergraduates' access to computer services for their academic work in two Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised for this study; they are:

1. What access do undergraduate students have to computer services for their academic work?
2. What are the students' preferred sources of access?
3. Which places do students go to obtain computer services for their academic work?

Review of related Literature

There is no doubt that Computer services contribute much to students' academic development. Indeed, access to these services has become a vital issue. This is said because we live in a rapidly changing world, where information is power and access to it is a basic

human right (Dike, 2000). However, the question remains, what access do students have to information for their academic work using computer services? In an attempt to answer this question, Web and Zhang (1997) stated that the creation of local on-line databases made it possible for libraries to make accessible to students the rich stock of otherwise hidden information and knowledge that lies beyond the range of conventional publishers. This assertion is made bearing in mind that libraries have vital roles to play in ensuring that students use computer services, considering their knowledge of information gathering, processing, storage and dissemination (Uzoigwe, 2004). The business-inclined computer services managers have little understanding of electronic information services ethics (White, 1998) and lack the zeal and experience to handle students' study requests and requirements.

There are millions of pages of information on the Internet and gaining access to them is technically easy, thanks to computer services. However, software and computer accessories are not easily available because of the prevailing economic condition in the country. Oyedeji (1996) opined that Nigeria has depended heavily on developed countries for its computer accessory needs for a long time now and this has hindered use of computer services.

In an article, Weiskel (1997) stated that he had reservations about students' access to electronic resources in Nigeria. He emphasized that the increasing use of computer services could have adverse effect on users who require access to hardcopy resources, as more funds are channeled to electronic resources. More and more libraries are considering the question of whether to offer public access to computer services and design a library policy governing their use (Watson, 1997). According to Truett (1997) libraries and librarians need to develop multifaceted plans for ensuring that students' rights and freedom of information are respected and protected, while both legal and technical safeguards provide some assurance to educators that university computer use is responsible and educationally sound.

While reviewing the technicalities involved in undergraduates' use of computer services, Notes (1997) observed that the World Wide Web search engines are not comprehensive in their search. For instance, they do not search all formatted files, registration files and data sets,

and this affects students' effective use of computer services. However, basic search strategies can give students access to some of the hidden contents. Eaton (1997) concluded that the World Wide Web has resolved many of its technical problems. Difficulties of authentication remain with sites and service providers that offer data which is commercially valuable or subject to licensing restriction. Confusion and anxiety cannot be ruled out when discussing students' use of computer services. In reaction to this, Poynder (1998) observed that while the presence of a multiplicity of electronic services on the Internet and World Wide Web and the wide spread availability of access tools may be a boom to research, the sheer number of options can be confusing to students. In a related study, Serotkin, Fitzgerald and Balough (2005) believe students, particularly undergraduates, prefer e-journals to print journals, but the ease with which these journals are accessed is a problem. This is because of variations in vendor search engine formats and capabilities. All these issues constitute a paramount question concerning students' easy access and use of computer services.

In a bid to throw more light on students' use of computer services, Borasky (1997) evaluated the impact and reliability of the World Wide Web, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the sites. This he believes should be taken into account when students embark on web search. However, Jobe (1997) thinks subject-organized on-line indexes or resources have improved access to relevant materials. These indexes take some of the chaos out of locating relevant materials. In reiteration of Jobes' assertion, Casey (1997) revealed that students' anticipation of finding information on the World Wide Web is not a straightforward matter. He pointed out that students without the knowledge of specific protocols, such as absolute precision when entering search terms and password will be faced with frustration in accessing information.

In the course of the review, it was discovered that not much is known about undergraduates' access to computer services for their academic work in Nigerian universities. It is hoped that this research will help fill this gap.

Research Design

The design of this study is descriptive survey. Ezeji (1996) noted that descriptive survey involves the collection and analysis of data about people or materials with the intention to compare

existing and required standards and to identify information which is likely to be used to improve the existing conditions of people or things. Therefore a descriptive survey is appropriate for this study because it will enable the researcher to find out what use undergraduates make of computer services for their academic work in Nigerian universities and how these services can be improved.

Sample and sampling Technique

The sample size consisted of a total of 640 respondents. This was made up of 400 respondents from University of Nigeria, Nsukka and 240 respondents from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The Stratified random sampling technique was adopted for data collection; this is to avoid bias in the distribution of the questionnaires to the respondents. The researcher made a list of courses that are common to both universities and divided the questionnaire amongst them according to the sample size of students in each of the universities. There were forty programmes each common to both universities.

University of Nigeria, Nsukka got 400 copies of questionnaire. (10 questionnaire for each course) Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka got 240 copies of questionnaire. (6 questionnaire for each course) The questionnaire was allocated to each university based on its population sample.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection is questionnaire titled the Students' access to Computer Services Questionnaire (SACSQ) which is formed in accordance with the research questions. The questionnaire consists of 25 items. Questions 1 to 25 required respondents to fill in the correct answers. Respondents were also given free option to express their views. The questionnaire was designed in line with the Likert scale and requires respondents to tick any of the options to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements on a four point scaled response format.

Findings

The data collected for this study are presented in a table and analyzed using mean.

Research Question 1

What access do students have to computer services for their academic work?

Table 1: Students' access to computer services

ITEMS	NAU (\bar{x})	UNN (\bar{x})	Overall (\bar{x})	Remarks
I access computer services in the library	1.66	1.36	1.51	Negative
I know how to access the computer for my academic work	2.97	2.95	2.96	Positive
Personnel of the organization where I use the computer services assist me in accessing the services where necessary.	2.36	2.07	2.21	Negative
The access period provided for the services is adequate.	2.51	2.63	2.57	Positive
Erratic power failure does not affect my access to computer services	2.25	2.34	2.29	Negative
The location of the computers is convenient for easy access.	2.02	1.71	1.86	Negative
The cost of access to the services is affordable.	2.18	2.25	2.21	Negative

The results presented in table 1 shows two positive responses, that students know how to access computer services for their academic work (2.96) and that the access period provided for the services is adequate (2.57). They do not access computer services in the library (1.51). They access computer services in inconvenient locations (1.86) with the attendant high cost of

access resulting in limited access (2.21). They also complained about the hostile attitude of the personnel where they obtain these services (2.21) and erratic power failure (2.29).

Research Question 2

What are the students' preferred sources of access?

Table 2: Students' preferred sources of access to computer services.

Items	NAU (\bar{x})	UNN (\bar{x})	Overall (\bar{x})	Remarks
Cybercafés.	2.75	2.71	2.73	Positive
Business centers.	2.5	2.54	2.52	Positive
University libraries.	3.33	3.14	3.23	Positive
Private Enterprise.	2.58	2.65	2.61	Positive
G.S.M Sources	2.31	2.03	2.17	Negative
Department Labs.	2.55	2.53	2.54	Positive
Home/Hostel	1.87	1.89	1.88	Negative

The result presented in table 2 shows that students would prefer access to computer services in the university libraries with an overall mean of 3.23. The students who would prefer access to computer services in the library above any other source said that their reason was that libraries are their first port of call for research and they are nonprofit organizations. Next in their preference are the cybercafés with an overall mean of 2.73 for both universities studied. Students rated cybercafés second in their preference because cybercafés have always been in existence and they are used to them. Private enterprises were rated with an overall mean of 2.61. Students who chose private enterprises claimed it was because of its privacy.

Departmental Labs were also rated high with an overall mean of 2.54. The students claimed that they chose it because it will enable them to stay in touch with their Lectures. Business centers were rated with an overall mean of 2.52. Students who chose Business centers claimed that it was because they provide other services like Book binding, Lamination and refreshments apart from Computer services. Homes and hostels were least in their scale of preference because of distractions associated with these areas. The mean score was 1.88.

Research Question 3

Which places do students go to obtain computer services for their academic work?

Table 3: Places where students go to obtain computer services.

Items	NAU (\bar{x})	UNN (\bar{x})	Overall (\bar{x})	Remarks
Cyber cafes	3.61	3.47	3.54	Positive
Business centers	2.80	2.58	2.69	Positive
University libraries	1.24	1.42	1.33	Negative
Private enterprises	1.94	1.64	1.79	Negative
G.S.M Sources	2.14	2.37	2.25	Negative
Department Lab.	1.06	1.42	1.24	Negative
Home/Hostel	1.17	1.45	1.31	Negative

The result presented in Table 3 shows that students go to cybercafés very often to obtain computer services with 3.61 and 3.47 for NAU and UNN and an overall mean of 3.54. The students said they use the cybercafés because computer services are readily available there and they have no other alternative. Students equally use Business centers (2.69) because they provide other services apart from computer services. The results also show that students do not go to university libraries to obtain computers services with 1.24 and 1.42 for NAU and UNN with an overall mean of 1.33. The students said the reason was that university libraries do not provide computer services for students' use. The other options like G.S.M (2.25) Departmental Lab (1.24) Home/Hostel (1.31) attracted negative responses because of very high cost of access, non availability respectively.

Conclusion

The major findings of the study are as follows:

1. Students do not access computer services in the library; rather they do in cybercafés and business centers. However, they would prefer to have access to computer services in the library if possible.
2. Students encounter problems such as erratic power supply, hostile assisting personnel, and high cost of access, unconducive environment faulty computer systems and time constraints due to pressure from school academic work.
3. The remedies to the problems includes provision of alternative power sources, reduction in the cost of access, regular maintenance of the computer systems to make them effective, provision of enough computers for the student population and the provision of well

trained personnel in the Computer services Stations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Computer services should be provided for students in the libraries to help ease the problems students encounter in the use of computer services for their academic work.
2. Qualified computer operators, engineers and analysts should be employed in the university libraries and departments to help in installation and provision of computer services.
3. Alternative power source such as standby generating sets should be provided to checkmate erratic power supply.
4. Regular maintenance and up-grade should be carried out on computer systems for the enhancement of computer services use by students.
5. The government should make direct and effective policies to ease the import of computer services accessories into the country, such as the removal of import duties, as this will go a long way in reducing the high cost associated with computer services provision and use.

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