

# Information Services in Nigerian University Libraries: Current Means of Library Services as a way out

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** *The paper is to find out the extent of availability of information services in the university library and new library services that help the academics to keep abreast of current development in their field.*

**Design/Methodology:** *The study was based on survey design. Questionnaire was employed to elicit responses from selected 291 lecturers in science and engineering faculties. The study was conducted in southern Nigeria. Southern Nigeria is made up of three geo-political zones of south-east, south-south and south-west. There were 13 federal universities in southern Nigeria when this research was conducted. Through stratified sampling, six universities, two universities from each zone were selected for the study.*

**Findings:** *The study revealed that some library services are not much available in the university libraries. The study also revealed that the academics use computer services, personal communication with colleagues and browsing through current journals to keep abreast of current issues in their area. Finally, the study discussed some new library services like library commons, use of blogs, video conferencing and web 2.0 as means of information delivery.*

**Practical Implications:** *The university libraries should do all it can to achieve information delivery to academics and students in order attain it aim in research and teaching. To achieve this university libraries should have internet connection and training of librarians and library staff on different accept of information technology.*

**Originality/Value:** *Response of academics to library information services were presented in tables, while new library services were discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Information Services, Availability, New Library Services, Academics, Universities.*

**Paper Type:** *Empirical study*

## **Introduction**

The university libraries have been given different names - the heart of the institution, the keystone of the institution or the blood stream of the university. All these are ways to lay emphasis on the role the library has to play for the institution to achieve its broad objectives of teaching and research. In other words, university libraries should be the centre of university education. However university libraries in Nigeria are facing many challenges that they are not able to live up to the required duties. Azubuike (2006) revealed that currently majority of libraries in African continent do not effectively play their role in the information society due to the so called great African Library decline which started in the early 1980s. This decline is characterized by poor funding, inadequate library facilities, rusty professional skills, unavailability of or unreliable resources, demoralized management and near absence

library activism and advocacy. Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2009) opted that the growth of research in all fields of human endeavour is becoming increasingly detailed and sophisticated, the library has the greater roles to play in the provision of information necessary for their day to day research. Maureen Brunsdale (as cited in Frade and Washurn 2006) emphasized that for academic libraries to provide the necessary information required by the academics, it is not solely because of the collections but also due to the services rendered by various departments of the library. Popoola (2008) enumerated information services used in the library as follows: current awareness services, statistical data analysis, selective dissemination of information (SDI), document delivery, loaning, computer word processing, photocopying, referral, internet/e-mail, CD-ROM database searching, indexing and abstracting, translation, bindery, microfilming

and facsimile. In addition these library services are essential at this point in time in building up the information required by the researchers. Apart from the above services there are new library services like blogs, videoconferencing, file transfer protocol and library commons that can help in information delivery. Emojorho and Nwalo (2009) emphasized that collection management is much more than collection building, it entails the use, storage and organization of collection and making it accessible to the users. Adeogun (2006) was of the opinion that the value of information service in the present information dispensation is not possessing information but in providing access to it, more importantly in developing the organizational and technological capabilities for the end-user to be able to identify and access information. The new services according to Poll (2005), is not only restricted to the electronic collections but covers online access and delivery, all reference support, training options that help users in the electronic information world. Some of these services to some extent are not entirely new but help in remote access instead of only physical presence in the library. To investigate the use of these library services, universities in Southern Nigeria were used to ascertain the information services available in their university libraries and the ones that help academics to keep abreast of development in their field.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To find out the extent of availability of library services in the libraries of these universities.
2. To ascertain the use of the information services in the university library that helps the academics to keep abreast of current development in their field.
3. To discuss new library services that can help information delivery in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

Librarianship has gone beyond selection, acquisition and collection development. Emojoroho and Nwalo (2009) in their study using university and special libraries in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria provided an insight to the low availability and use of ICTs for collection management and also availability of ICT facilities does not guarantee their use for collection management in the libraries. The

librarians are now faced with many challenges not only on how to boost their collections but also in working in the new environment of technology. Therefore the librarians require a wide range of new and enhanced skills. These skills as enumerated by Pinfield (2004) include: Technical and IT skills, Flexibility, Ability to work under pressure, Ability to learn quickly, Communication skills, Negotiating skills, Presentation skills, Teaching skills, Team working skills, Customer service skills, Analytical and evaluative skills and Project management skills. This further expressed by Frade and Washburn (2006) that today's campus library is more than just a place to get resources. It's a destination that supports new technology-driven teaching, learning and research patterns, offering everything from books to digital databases to a social space for students together. In their study, they found out that the most important library services were ability to search their online catalogue, electronic databases or index searches spaces/tables to study items brought by students and the items found in the library copy machines, access to periodicals and internet use.

In line with this, Adeogun (2006) was of the opinion that the value of information services in the present information dispensation is not possessing information but in providing access to it and more importantly in developing the organizational and technological capabilities in the end-user to be able to identify, access, sift and determine the validity of information. This means that these services involve library staff taking on new roles. The librarian is now according to Pinfield (2004):

- Multi-media user – comfortable with a wide range of formats
- Intermediary – with a good knowledge of sources and user requirements
- Enabler – proactively connecting users with information they require
- Metadata producer – creating records of information sources in a variety of schemas
- Communicator – formally and informally liaising with users
- Team player – working with colleagues in library, IT services and academics

- Trainer / educator – taking on a formal role to teach information skills and information literacy
- Evaluator – sifting free and paid for resources on behalf of users
- Negotiator – dealing with publishers and suppliers
- Project manager – leading on development projects to enhance the service
- Innovator – not just following the routine but also looking at improved ways to deliver the service

When librarians assume some of these roles then accessibility of information in the library could be improved. It also entails that applying these roles will entail using other library services. Shafiqe (2009) in his own study found out the library services that can enhance access to library resources were open access to the library collections, SDI in relevant research areas, effective reference services/personalized reference services, current awareness services, library orientation, help in online searching, document delivery, blog development, email alerts, photocopying and interlibrary loan.

Frade and Washburn (2006) reported that new services are available online and technological developments have made remote access easier and more convenient. This technology could be applied obtaining of request forms, electronic submission of theses and dissertations, desktop delivery of interlibrary loan articles. Apart from these, librarians should scan their environment for new services to keep the library at the heart of the university. One of these is that administrators meet regularly with the students' advisory council to discuss needs and/or services

that students are requesting for. According to him, there are two new services in their library, extended hours and information commons – which entail area of the library with computers, scanners, extra chairs were arranged to allow multiple students to gather around a computer workstation for purpose of collaborating assignments and research presentations.

### Methodology

Descriptive survey method was used for the study. The study was conducted in Southern Nigeria. Southern Nigeria is made up of three geo-political zones of south-east, south-south and south-west. There are 13 federal universities in southern Nigeria in southern Nigeria at the time this study was conducted. Through stratified sampling six universities were selected for the study, two universities from each zone. The population of the study was made of academics in science and engineering. The total of 435 academics in the rank of professors, readers, senior lecturers, lecturers I and II were used for the study. There was a response rate of 67% with 291 questionnaire returned. These six universities had faculties of science and engineering in University of Ibadan (UI), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), University of Benin (UNIBEN), Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU), University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (UNAAB) and University of Uyo (UNIUYO). Data collected were analysed using percentages and bar charts.

### Data Presentation

Responses from the questionnaire were analysed to ascertain the library services that are available in the six university libraries under study. The data in the tables below showed the percentage of extent of availability of the information services in the university libraries under study.

Table 1: Extent of Availability of Computer Information Services

Universities	Always available	Often available	Sometimes	Rarely	Never available
UI	36.7	46.9	10.2	-	6.1
UNN	11.9	16.7	20.2	19.0	32.2
UNIBEN	20.8	28.3	18.9	9.4	22.6
NAU	48.3	24.1	6.9	13.8	6.9
UNAAB	42.9	32.1	21.4	3.6	-
UNIUYO	12.5	31.3	18.8	6.3	31.3
Total	24.4	28.5	16.8	10.0	20.3

This table is from Okafor (2011) from article Access to research information in cybercafés:

the challenge to academic libraries. In case of availability of computer services in the library, the respondent from different universities

indicated as follows: NAU (48.3%), UNAAB (42.9%) and UI (37.6%), UNIBEN (20.8%), UNIUYO (12.5%) and UNN (11.9%) and the average total of the six universities was 24.4% as

shown the Table 1 above. However UI often has computer services in their university library while UNN has the least availability.

Table 2: Extent of Availability of Current Awareness Services

Universities	Always available	Often available	Sometimes	Rarely	Never available
UNIBADAN	16.3	30.6	34.7	8.2	10.2
UNN	6.0	15.5	16.7	26.2	35.7
UNIBEN	7.5	28.3	22.6	22.6	18.8
NAU	10.3	44.8	10.3	13.8	20.6
UNAAB	10.7	39.3	42.9	3.6	3.6
UNIUYO	8.3	47.9	8.3	14.6	20.9
Total	9.3	30.9	21.3	17.2	21.4

Table 2 above shows that all the universities do not always have current awareness services in their libraries with the mean percentage of 9.3 for the six universities. However, UNIUYO,

NAU, UNAAB and UI indicated that they often have it as follows: 47.9%, 44.8%, 39.3% and 30.6% respectively.

Table 3: Extent of Availability of Referral Services

Universities	Always available	Often available	Sometimes	Rarely	Never available
UI	8.2	20.4	40.8	14.3	16.3
UNN	14.3	21.4	17.9	19.6	27.4
UNIBEN	7.5	34.0	22.6	13.2	22.7
NAU	13.8	27.6	17.2	13.8	27.6
UNAAB	14.3	28.6	32.1	17.9	7.1
UNIUYO	6.3	33.3	29.2	10.4	20.8
Total	10.7	26.8	25.8	15.1	21.7

From Table 3 above, it could be seen that referral services was not always and often available in the university libraries under study

total mean percentage of 10.7 and 26.8 respectively.

Table 4: Extent of Availability of User Education Services

Universities	Always available	Often available	Sometimes	Rarely	Never available
UI	6.1	36.7	30.6	12.2	14.3
UNN	3.6	13.1	15.5	27.4	40.5
UNIBEN	3.8	15.1	28.3	20.8	32.1
NAU	3.4	31.0	24.1	20.7	20.6
UNAAB	10.7	28.6	53.6	7.1	-
UNIUYO	8.3	29.2	29.2	12.5	20.9
Total	5.5	23.4	27.1	18.6	25.4

Analysis of Table 4 showed that user services education was not always available in the six university libraries with percentage mean of 5.5.

However UI and NAU indicated that user service education was often available with these 36.7% and 31.0% respectively.

Table 5: Extent of Translation Services

Universities	Always available	Often available	Sometimes	Rarely	Never available
UNIBADAN	-	8.2	24.5	26.5	40.8
UNN	1.2	3.6	7.1	22.6	65.5
UNIBEN	1.9	1.9	7.5	30.2	58.4
NAU	-	10.3	17.2	27.6	44.8
UNAAB	3.6	7.1	25.0	28.6	35.7
UNIUYO	4.2	22.9	16.7	22.9	33.3
Total	1.7	8.2	14.4	25.8	49.8

Also analysis on Table 5 of translation services showed that the six university libraries do not always give translation services with total percentage mean of 1.7. How then do the

academics keep abreast of current development in their fields? The tables below show the extent the services below help the academics in keeping abreast of the new development in the field.

Table 6: Extent of use of Personal Information

Universities	Very Much	Much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all
UNIBADAN	49.0	24.5	20.4	4.1	2.0
UNN	44.0	29.8	17.9	4.8	3.6
UNIBEN	54.7	32.1	3.8	5.7	3.8
NAU	41.4	31.0	10.3	17.2	-
UNAAB	57.1	14.3	14.3	14.3	-
UNIUYO	33.3	27.1	35.4	2.1	2.1
Total	46.0	27.5	17.5	65.0	2.4

Table 6 above shows that the respondents use personal communication much to keep abreast on current issue in their area as follows: UNAAB (57.1%), UNIBEN (54.7%), UI

(49.0%), UNN (44.0%), NAU (41.4%) and UNIUYO (33.3). This shows that UNAAB and UNIBEN use personal communication more than others.

Table 7: Extent of use of Browsing through Current Issues of Journals

Universities	Very Much	Much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all
UNIBADAN	67.3	28.6	4.1	-	-
UNN	57.1	26.2	10.7	4.8	1.2
UNIBEN	58.5	37.7	1.9	-	1.9
NAU	48.3	31.0	13.8	6.9	-
UNAAB	64.3	28.6	7.1	-	-
UNIUYO	35.4	56.3	8.3	-	-
Total	55.3	34.4	7.6	2.1	0.7

Another method which helps academics keep abreast of recent work in their area is browsing through current journal issues. Table 7 shows that academics from different universities made use of this method very much except UNIUYO

which indicated using much as follows: UI (67.3%), UNAAB (64.3%), UNIBEN (58.5%), UNN (57.1%), NAU (48.3%) and UNIUYO (35.4%).

Table 8: Extent of use of Computer Information Services

Universities	Very Much	Much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all
UNIBADAN	59.2	26.5	4.1	6.1	4.0
UNN	40.5	26.2	22.6	6.0	4.5
UNIBEN	41.5	34.0	15.1	1.9	7.6
NAU	55.2	31.0	6.9	6.9	-
UNAAB	46.4	39.3	10.7	3.6	-
UNIUYO	25.0	43.0	20.8	8.4	-
Total	43.0	32.3	15.1	5.2	4.1

Another important source that helps the academics to keep abreast of current issue in their field is computer information services. Table 8 above shows that all the six universities

used these services much as follows: NAU (86.2%), UI (85.7%), UNAAB (85.7%), UNIBEN (75.5%), UNIUYO (68.0%) and UNN (66.7%).

Table 9: Extent of use of Current Awareness Services

Universities	Very Much	Much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all
UNIBADAN	12.2	30.6	32.7	12.2	12.3
UNN	9.5	21.4	23.8	16.7	28.6
UNIBEN	18.9	28.3	20.8	7.5	24.5
NAU	10.3	34.5	20.7	13.8	20.6
UNAAB	25.0	39.3	25.0	3.6	7.1
UNIUYO	14.6	31.3	41.7	2.1	16.5

However these respondents did not indicate much access to enough information through current awareness services. Table 9 shows that

highest percentage average of the six universities in much use was 31.1.

Table10: Extent of use of Referral Services

Universities	Very Much	Much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all
UNIBADAN	6.1	20.4	34.7	18.4	20.4
UNN	6.0	13.1	26.2	23.8	30.9
UNIBEN	11.3	24.5	18.9	18.9	26.5
NAU	6.9	20.7	31.0	17.2	24.1
UNAAB	14.3	32.1	35.7	7.1	10.7
UNIUYO	14.6	16.7	41.7	12.5	14.6
Total	9.3	19.6	30.2	17.9	23.0

Table 11: Extent of use of Transition

Universities	Very Much	Much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all
UNIBADAN	2.0	4.1	8.2	20.4	67.3
UNN	1.2	-	3.6	17.8	77.4
UNIBEN	-	-	18.9	18.9	62.2
NAU	-	6.9	20.7	13.8	58.6
UNAAB	7.1	3.6	17.9	25.0	42.9
UNIUYO	2.1	16.7	35.4	10.4	35.5

The respondents do not use referral and translation services much to keep abreast of current issues in their fields as shown in tables 10 and 11 above. However new information services that can help the librarians to carry out their duty of providing the needed information services to the academics are as follows:

**New Information Services**

Some of the respondents do not use the library, that is why the low percentage of availability of some of the library services. The new library activities if introduced in our academic libraries will enable them use the library often and contribute to its improvement through discussions with librarians. Some of the new services are as follows:

**File Transfer Protocol**

Initially, library services involve the physical presence of the user before he makes his demand to the librarian in charge. With the introduction of internet facilities in our university libraries, the mode of service should change. One can access the library through online library catalog, telnet or web browser. If the information is in electronic format the delivery is instant using file transfer Protocol. The process requires that one can download file with information from one computer which is the host to another. The librarian can use this type of service to transfer appropriate requested information to actual user for their study and research.

**Mail List**

This is another new method of information service using internet. The main objective of mail list is for group to discuss electronically. It involves researchers, students or library users with common interest to subscribe and send mail to their list administrator. A researcher can get material and information necessary for his research through this discussion group to enhance the quality of his research. A librarian can take the advantage of mail list to answer some questions for the users.

**Blogs**

Blogs provide opportunity for commentary or news on a particular subject or issue or can function as mere personal online diaries. Blogs suppose to combine text, images links to other blogs, webpages or media that is related to the subject. The most important of many blogs is the ability of the readers to have comments in an interactive format. Librarians can use blogs as a means of engaging the users by publishing fresh content or place for news or event for discussion with the users.

**Library Commons**

Library commons or information commons is a new library services which the university libraries should provide to their users in this information age. ALA (2003) explained that information commons involves the library providing physical and communication

infrastructure resources. It means that the library should provide large tables with seats, where students can sit comfortably with their laptops with wireless access and in addition they can have hardwire internet connections and can discuss as a group efficiently. The work of the library is also to provide essential tools, skills and spaces necessary for the group with common problem to solve, to participate in the discussion. Library commons therefore creates an environment that nurtures the activities the researchers get from classrooms and from reading by providing technologies there to encourage collaboration and interaction. It can be an opportunity for users or researches to practice presentation with friends who can critique the presentation. It means the library has to provide the facilities for this kind of forum.

Library common encourage people to learn, think and participate in discussions. This ensures open access to knowledge, equity of access to information, and bridging gaps in opportunity to participate in the digital age. It has attracted users to the library or to use library facilities unlike before. Library commons can be a place where you can access, use and create information. It can provide transparent user services, enhance learning, provide an environment for users in both academic and social life and a sense of community in the campus. It can be an avenue for librarians to provide the available information resources,

### **Library 2.0**

Information has shown the way to change in library services, therefore the need for new technology models to access resources and services for users. One of the new technological models is library 2.0. Casey and Savastinuk (2006) emphasized that library 2.0 is a user-centre inviting user participation in the creation of both the physical and virtual services they want. However Funchs et al (2010) explain that web 2.0 which is synonymous to library 2.0 does not focus on information provision but either combine several traditional internet functions (information, data up load and sharing, email, discussion board multimedia etc) as in the case of social networking platform or employing relative novel forms of information and communication such as in case of wikis, blogging etc. Many advance countries have already started using these services in their libraries. Brian (2009) emphasized that many

academic libraries in the United States are beginning to leverage the power of these services to their patrons. They are doing so by integrating web 2.0 services into their presence, like library instruction programs and reference services. These technology have enable librarians to create new services that before were not possible such as virtual reference, personalized OPAC interface or downloadable media that library customers can use in the comfort of their own homes. This involves instant blogging where registered users can write blogs and share with others. It can be a combination of web 2.0 content to registered users such as facebook where users have a public profile blog send messages. It can offer ways to link your blogs written in facebook to other social sites.

### **Discussion**

The study reveals that some of the universities do not always have computer information services available in their library. Yet many respondents from different universities indicated much use of computer information for their research. Hence their indication that the university libraries sometimes do not meet their information needs. This shows that university libraries are not acting like the heart of the university as they should. The librarians are now faced with challenges not only on how to boost their collections but also on how to acquire and work in the new environment of technology in order to be at the heart of the universities. It is in view of this that Frade and Washburn (2006) stressed that libraries now should offer to the academics new technology driven teaching-learning research and everything from books to digital databases. These should include ability to search their online catalogue, electronic databases or index search, copy machines, access to periodicals, and internal information resources. For the library to be at the centre of providing the necessary information to the users, the librarians must use some of these new library services like blogs, mail list, library common etc.

The study also found out that not meeting up with the required academics information needs could also be seen in non availability of some library services like current awareness services, referral services, user education services and translation. This shows that these library services should not be neglected, if the library has to be

at the centre of university education. All these services will help the library to enhance information provision to the researchers. To support this, Shafique (2009) found that library services that can enhance access to library resources, include SDI in relevant research areas, effective reference services\ personalized reference services, current awareness, library orientation, document delivery, blog development, e-mail alerts and interlibrary loan. In other words, most library services are to ensure access to information for the researchers. Teaching the use of the library by librarians working in the library as it is done in some university is a form of user education that can create awareness among the students.

The study also revealed that the academics use personal communication, computer services and browsing through current issues of journals much in other to keep abreast of current events in their field of studies. Since the libraries do not have adequate availability of computer services and current journals are not within the library, they could not satisfy the information needs of the researchers. This is coupled with the fact that due to economic melt down many libraries cannot afford to subscribe to core journals in different academic disciplines. Therefore, the library has to work hard for it to be at the centre of the university learning. To achieve this, Frade and Washburn (2006) stated that service should be available online, like request form, electronic submission of theses, desktop delivery of interlibrary loan articles and meeting regularly with the users to learn their needs. The library should create area for information commons or conferences. This area should have computers, scanners, extra chairs for the purpose of collaborative work and research presentation and for the researchers or users to interact at personal level with colleagues in the same field.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study has shown that academics use personal communication and computer services much to keep abreast with issues in their field. Also some library services like SDI, current awareness services, referral and translation were not available. Not much availability of computer services and other library services will result to less access to the required information needed for research hence the indication by the respondents that the libraries do not adequately satisfy their information needs. The use of some of the new library services discussed in the paper

could improve information services to the users. Library could also get involved in information literacy skills as part of research of collaboration with the academics to get maximum access to information needed for research. In addition, the library should provide readily accessible online resources for conducting research. The following recommendations are made to facilitate library services to the client.

- University libraries should have internet connectivity.
- User education should include having computer lab for practice.
- Training of librarians and library staff on different aspect of information technology.
- Employing staff in different language areas for translation of documents in different languages.
- Staff development through workshop, conferences and in-service training that should help the librarians and library staff to develop library services like SDI and current awareness services.
- Establishment of information commons in the library.
- Open access to library resources and services including online services and OPAC

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