

Awareness and Utilization of Agora e-Resources Database by Agricultural Undergraduate Students of Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The problem of proper and maximum use of online resources by undergraduate students of Ebonyi state university Abakaliki as reported by database administrators of such online databases as AGORA, HINARI, e.t.c elicited this research. The study set to ascertain the level of awareness of the existence of AGORA online resources, the frequency of usage, utilization and internet availability. Simple random sampling was used to select 160 and questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. Microsoft Excel was used to perform descriptive statistics on the collected raw data. Tables and pie chart were used in the data analysis processes to compare and contrast variables of research interest. The findings showed that there is low awareness (46%) of the existence of AGORA online resources due to poor awareness of the resources by the concerned stakeholders.*

Keywords: Awareness, Utilization, e-resources, e-library, Barrier

1. Introduction

The primary purpose for establishing Universities is to support and cater for teaching, learning and researches. The provision of print and non-print information resources is the duty of library to facilitate the achievement of the institutional goals. The print information resources like journals, textbooks, newspapers, magazines and reference materials and non-print like CD-ROM, microfilms, databases, audio visual materials and e-resources are meant to help students in writing term papers, seminars, projects and assignments.

Ebonyi State University has four campus structures, as a result it operate decentralized library system. The hitherto Colleges of Agriculture Science and Medicine and surgery of Enugu State University of Science and technology (ESUT) turned into a full fledged multi-disciplinary University in 1999 after the creation of Ebonyi State in 1996. Ebonyi State University like institution in Nigeria has started integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in all its functions in order to render better services. The electronic library was integrated into Ebonyi State University library in 2007 Tertiary Education Fund library intervention in Nigerian Universities. It was aimed at facilitating information delivered by providing direct access to electronic resources via the internet. Due to the availability of e-library, subscriptions were made to some online resources databases like HINARI, AGORA, EBSCOHOST, NUC virtual library, etc. Some of the databases render free subscriptions to the institution.

According to Shuling (2007), electronic information has gradually become a major resources in every university library. The emergence electronic information resources has tremendously transformed information handling and management in academic environment and in university library in particular. According to Tsakonas et al (2006) electronic information resources are information resources

provided in electronic form and these includes resources available in the internet such as e-books, e-journals, and other computer based electronic networks, and among others.

The most effective way to provide access to electronic books/journals in University libraries is through subscriptions to online databases which can be accessed through the internet. Online databases are a collection of electronic information sources by publishers from various fields and disciplines (Afolabi, 2007). For students to utilize the growing range of electronic resources, they must acquire and practice the skills necessary to exploit them (Okello-Obura, 2013).

According to Chima Jonathan et al (2013) factors that challenged electronic library in Nigeria were diverse in nature. They include insufficient computers with internet facilities, incessant power outage, slow internet connectivity, difficulty in finding relevant information and lack of ICT skills.

Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) is a program to provide free or low cost access to major scientific journals in agriculture and related biological, environmental and social sciences to public institutions in developing countries. Launched in October 2003, AGORA will provide access to more than 3000 journals from the world's leading academic publishers.

Led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the goal of AGORA is to improve the quality and effectiveness of agricultural research, education and training in low-income countries, and in turn, to improve food security. Through AGORA, researchers, policy-makers, educators, students, technical workers and extension specialists have access to high-quality, relevant and timely agricultural information via the Internet.

AGORA is one of the programmes that make up Research4Life, a collective name for four public private partnerships which seek to help achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals by providing the developing world with access to critical scientific research: AGORA, HINARI, OARE and ARDI. Since 2002, the four Research4Life programmes have given people at more than 6000 institutions in over 100 countries and territories in the developing world free or low cost access to more than 30,000 peer-reviewed international scientific journals, books, and databases provided by the world's leading science publishers. The partnership's goal is to reduce the gap in scientific knowledge between industrialized countries and the developing world.

With availability of these online resources in Ebonyi State University, this study is targeted to find out the level of awareness and utilization by students.

Objectives

- To ascertain level of awareness of existence of AGORA online database resources
- To determine the frequency of usage of AGORA online database resources
- To find out the availability of internet services at the disposal of the students
- To determine the effectiveness of available information dissemination about AGORA online database resources in faculty of Agriculture of Ebonyi state University students.
- To determine the utilization of AGORA online resources among students of Faculty of Agriculture in Ebonyi state university, Abakaliki.

2. Reviews of Literatures

Evans and Zarnosky (2000) described electronic resources in libraries as mixed blessing. Electronic resources are popular because they provide more flexibility in searching than their paper-based counterpart, and they can be accessed remotely anytime. However, electronic resources do not reduce library operating cost and present new challenges for staff. Moreover, electronic system can fail as a result of inadequate power supplies. Waiting for files to download, waiting to have a server to accept your query or being abruptly cut off in midsession are sources of frustration that do not exist with paper-based resources. On the other hand, torn-out articles, miss-shelved or missing volumes, or library holiday gaps are not issues with electronic resources, provided offline access to the required system is available.

Madhusudhan while studying use of electronic resources by research scholars of Kurukshetra University concluded that electronic resources had become an integral part of the information needs of research scholars there. Further he found that e-resources can be good substitute for conventional resources, if the access is fast and more computer terminals are installed to provide fast access to e-resources (Madhusudhan, M., 2010).

In a study regarding the use of e-sources and internet by engineering, medical and management students and faculty members of in India, Kumar found that the students and

faculty who participated in this survey were aware of electronic information sources and also the internet. Most of them used these sources in support of their study and teaching and they are adept at using these sources (Kumar, B.T. Sampath, 2008). It has been found that usage of e-journals is increasing; this is due to awareness among the users about the library e-resources and services.

The level of availability and utilization of e-resources in any university library may influence the information services provision to students in that library. Adedeji (2000) noted that the level of e-resources available to any university library and the degree of use to which they are put determine the information services delivery of the library. However, e-resources when available and skillfully used, influence information services provision by making them more meaningful. Efforts have been geared toward the provision of e-resources such as e-journals, e-book, CD ROM databases and online databases in Nigerian private university libraries. These resources are provided in other to improve the information services in private universities; hence the quality of education depends on the level of availability and utilization of the e-resources (Adedeji, 2000).

A study conducted by Marama and Ogunrombi (2000) confirmed high unavailability of Library and Information Science (LIS) collections in most Nigerian university libraries, which had a negative effect on the use of information sources in the libraries studied. The librarians cannot conduct quality research and get published and library students cannot even use library services. The authors recommended that at least 5% of the book budget be set aside for LIS information sources. The study, though limited to LIS can be generalized to other subject areas.

Ojo and Akande (2005) in a survey of 350 respondents examined undergraduates' access, usage and awareness of e-resources at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, Nigeria. The study shows that the level of usage of the e-resources by undergraduates is not high. According to them, major problem however identified is lack of information retrieval skills for exploiting e-resources, thus making the level of usage of resources by medical students very low.

Gakibayo et al (2013) opined that the merits of electronic resources over printed ones includes the following: speedy access, ease of use, ability to search multiple files at a time and ability to access documents from outside the University library to mention but few. The authors further lamented that for students to utilize the growing range of electronic resources, they must acquire and practice the information technology (IT) skills necessary to exploits them.

Mostofa, S.M. (2013) posited that progress in computer applications during the past few decades have brought radical changes in the way information is gathered, store, organized, accessed, retrieved and consumed. The application of computers in information processing has brought several products and services to the scene. The internet and the web are constantly influencing the development of new modes of scholarly communication; their potential for delivering goods is quite vast, as they overcome successfully the geographical limitations

associated with the print media. The author further observed that the availability of e-resources on the campus is almost sufficient for all the existing disciplines but the infrastructure to use these resources is not adequate and can hinder the ability to meet the requirements of users.

Levy (2001) further asserts that although the internet and related resources are marvelous tools, they cannot replace teachers, libraries or librarians. Because that they are very few in African, many African University administrator have misconception about their place on campuses. He concludes that these resources cannot replace libraries, although he had heard Vice-Chancellors postulates that libraries were becoming superfluous, we cannot do without the print media.

According to Jensen's report (2007), 54 countries in Africa had Internet connectivity. By the year 2009 however, Internet penetration as a percentage of the total population of Africa was still 1.4% compared to the world average penetration of 12.7% (Internet worldstats.com2009). Gakibayo (2001) carried out a study on Internet usage by students and staff at Mbarara University of Science and Technology and the results of the study indicated low usage. Though the internet has provided a wider access to global information resources such as online databases, e-journals, e-prints and other sources of digital information, these resources are not effectively utilized due to varying factors. According to Missen et al (2005), the internet poses African Universities to gain equal footings with their sister institutions in the more developed countries. It is imperative that African Universities be connected if they are not to be rendered irrelevant in the modern academic world. The internet is very useful as a communication's tools in the universities among librarians and library clientele. It is the most efficient means of electronic document delivery (Al Fadhli and Johnson, 2006).

3. Methodology

The survey design was adopted for this study and the target population was the students of Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The faculty consists of five departments of which their total population is 1150 students. Simple random sampling technique was used to administer questionnaire to 160 students. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and majority of them fill and returned it immediately. The data were organized in such a way that it was edited, classified, tabulated and as well checked for accuracy, completeness and usefulness. Microsoft Excel was used to perform descriptive statistics on the collected raw data. Tables and pie chart were used in the data analysis processes to compare and contrast variables of research interest. .

4. Results and Discussions

The survey administered questionnaires to 160 students of Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources of Ebonyi State University Abakaliki through random sampling and the total of 126 students successfully filled and returned the questionnaire giving us 78.8% return rate.

4.1 Awareness of existence

One of the objectives the study seeks is to find out the awareness of the existence of AGORA online resources. The findings in Table 1 revealed that out of the five departments in the faculty, department of fisheries (75%) are more aware of the existence of AGORA online resources and Soil science department (20%) is least aware. The overall awareness of the students of the faculty is low (46%). This poor awareness will definitely affect the level of usage of the resources by the student corroborating with the findings of (Kumar, B.T. Sampath, 2008) that the high usage of e-journals is as a result of increase in awareness among the users about the library e-resources and services.

Table 1: Awareness of existence of AGORA online

Department	No of respondents	Awareness of existence of AGORA	Percentage (%)
Food Sci & Tech	75	32	42.2
Crop Science	20	7	35
Animal Science	22	8	36.4
Agric Econs	14	8	57.1
Fisheries Dept	4	3	75
Soil Science	5	1	20

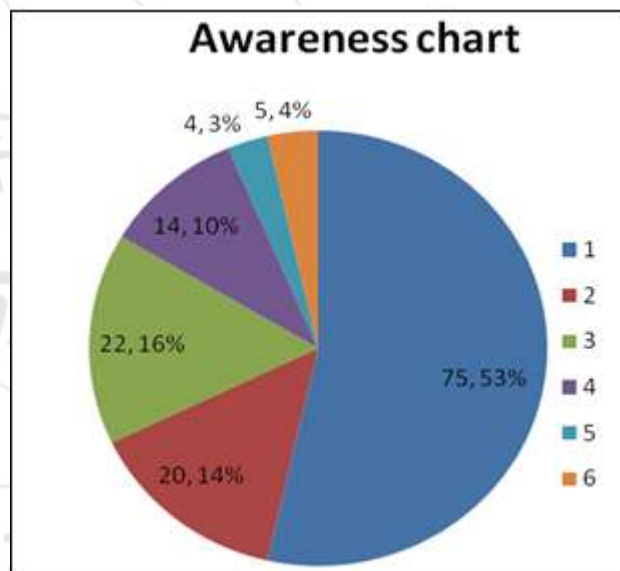


Figure 1: Awareness of existence of AGORA online

4.2 Frequency of utilization of AGORA online resources

Table 2 and Figure 2 showed that out of the few numbers of students that are aware of the availability of this online resources, the utilization is still very low as the number of students that uses it occasionally is the highest (34.7%) compared to the numbers that uses it daily (24.5%) and weekly (24.5%). This finding was in line with the research carried out by Gakibayo et al (2013) who lamented that for students to utilize the growing range of electronic resources, they must acquire and practice the information technology (IT) skills necessary to exploits them.

Table 2: Frequency of usage of AGORA online

Frequency variables	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Daily	12	24.5
Weekly	12	24.5
Monthly	8	16.3
Occasionally	17	34.7

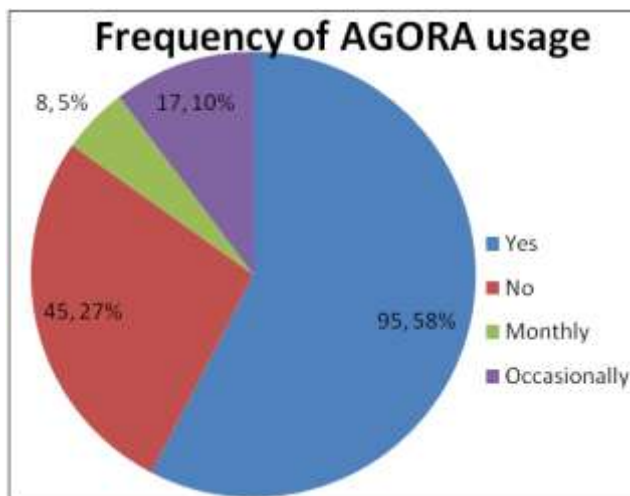


Figure 2: Frequency of usage of AGORA online

4.3 Sources of awareness

Table 3 and Figure 3 showed that the major sources awareness of the existence of AGORA online resources are through friends (40.7%), workshops and seminars (30.5%), internet (20.3%), notice board (6.8%). This suggests that there is poor awareness creation by the librarians and other stakeholders that ought to create such awareness.

Table 3: Sources of awareness of existence of AGORA online

Sources parameter	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Friends	24	40.7
Internet	12	20.3
Workshops and Seminars	18	30.5
Notice board	4	6.8
Others	1	1.7

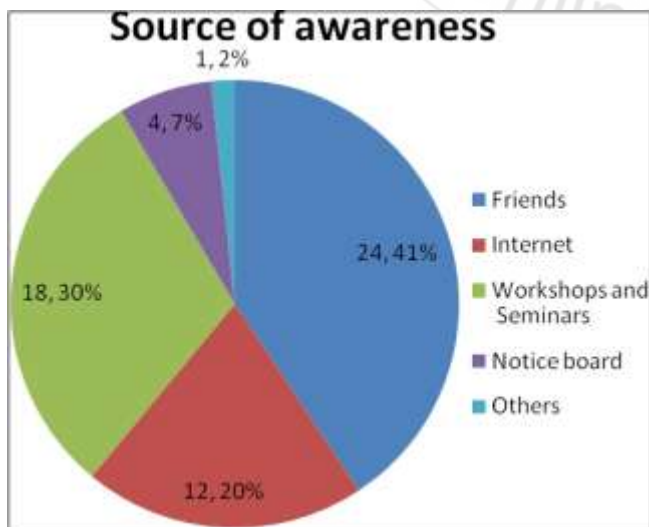


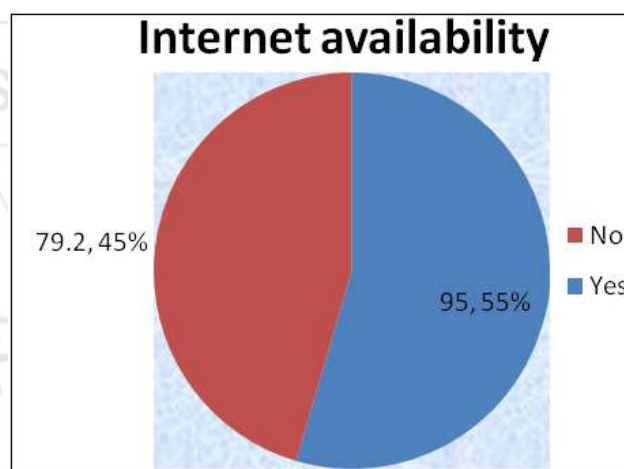
Figure 3: Sources of awareness of existence of AGORA online

4.4 Internet availability in faculty of Agriculture of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

The study established that there is internet availability in the faculty of agriculture of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki as the question of the availability of internet in the faculty yielded 95 Yes (79.2%) and 45 No (37.5%) as illustrated in Table 4 and Figure 4. This would have being a booster to utilization of AGORA online database as the internet is the foundation for access and utilization of online resources but this was not the case by the findings of this research thereby bringing out opportunity for further research to ascertain the reason.

Table 4: Internet availability in Faculty of Agric EBSU

Variables	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	95	79.2
No	45	37.5



Graph 4: Internet availability in Faculty of Agric EBSU

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research showed that the students of faculty of agriculture of Ebonyi State University do not properly utilize the rich resources aggregated by AGORA online resources full paid for by international donor (Food and Agriculture Organization) basically because of poor awareness and sensitization by the concerned stakeholders (library staff, ICT staff and faculty staff). The AGORA online resources is a veritable database that hold in stock the latest publications in the field of agriculture and related disciplines. These resources are available to students to any part of the world unlike before that research materials available to students in developing countries are almost obsolete compared to the same material available to students in developed countries.

Recommendations

The findings of this research prompted the following recommendations:

- 1) The level of awareness of the existence of AGORA online resources to the students in their faculty should be intensified through workshops and seminars and other medium of information dissemination.

- 2) They should be training on the use of AGORA online resources portal to beef up the utilization of the resources.
- 3) The library should have constant electricity to ensure that internet is available to students.
- 4) The lecturers should encourage the use of AGORA by giving assignments to students that will require them to visit the portal.

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