

A Survey of Undergraduate Students' Awareness and Utilization of Serial Materials of Federal University of Technology, Owerri Library

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Abstract

This study surveyed undergraduate students awareness and utilization of serial materials of Federal University of Technology Owerri, library. Survey design was used for the study. Four objectives of the study and research questions guided the study. The population of the study was 500 undergraduate students of the university who visited the serials unit of the library within two weeks. The questionnaire was done using frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The results of the study revealed among other things that most undergraduate students of FUTO visit the library unaware of the serials unit. The following recommendations were made; the library should carry out intensive orientation programme and library tour for new students as to familiarize them with the resources of the library, the effective use of embedded librarians who will bring the services of the library closer to the students and faculty members. The embedded librarians should also create awareness on current serial materials acquired by the library and the library should endeavor to acquire variety of serials materials to cover all the courses offered in the university. The university management should on their part, make adequate fund available for the acquisition of the needed serial materials and faculty members could encourage undergraduate students to make adequate and effective use of serial materials by giving them assignments that will require their consulting serials materials.

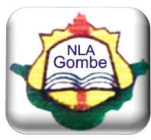
Keywords: Awareness and Utilization, Serials Materials.

Introduction

Academic libraries are established to provide print and non-print materials for the use of its patrons. Serial materials are one of the major resources of any academic library. Serials are publications usually issued daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually and at other regular times. The serials unit is responsible for the housing of the resources called serials with the mark of International Standard Serials Number (ISSN).

According to Szilvassy (1996), serial is a publication in any media issued in successive parts, usually having numerical or chronological designations and intend to be continued with no predetermined ending. It includes reports, yearbooks, journals, memoirs, proceedings, transactions, societies and numbered monographic series.

Serials materials are vital in the achievement of the aims and objectives of the university education as they contain the results of recent research in any field of knowledge and as such are important resources in the university library. Serials are the bedrock of research work at the



undergraduate and post graduate level. It is vital in scholarly communication as researchers use it as medium for the publication of their research findings. It is the best bet for speedy communication of information and results of research to colleagues and the general public. It is the most effective vehicle for global scholarly communication.

For serial materials to serve the ultimate purpose for research and training, two things are necessary. It must be available and also be used. Use by the readers could be seen as the main purpose of serials.

Regrettably, it has been observed that in spite of the efforts made by academic libraries to acquire serial materials and library orientations given to students on the importance and use of library resources, most students are not aware and do not use serial materials for their academic pursuit. It becomes necessary to ascertain if most undergraduate students of FUTO are aware of the availability of serial materials, determine the rate they use these resources and for what purposes. The above is the thrust of this study.

A Brief History of FUTO Library

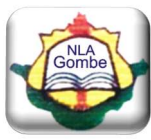
The Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) library was initially sited at Lake Nwaebere campus whilst the permanent campus was under construction. The FUTO library at the fullness of time finally moved to its permanent site.

Preparatory work for the library began in 1981 with Mr. J.C. Anafulu as the pioneer University Librarian. A classroom block was selected and converted into a makeshift library. It was fitted with shelves for ten thousand (10,000) volumes of library materials. Other members of the library professional staff joined in October to prepare for the opening on the 9th of November, 1981. At the time of the opening, approximately two thousand, five hundred (2,500) volumes were on the shelves.

The importance of journals to the science and technology-oriented university community was recognized at an early stage and a list of about 600 titles were ordered for. In the month of May, 1982, the reserved collection was introduced, the total volume of books held by the library reached six thousand, and borrowing privileges were then extended to students. After two years of operating in classroom blocks, the university library, in the first week of September, 1983 moved to a permanent building. The building which was originally designed as a library for the Federal Government Girls' college, Owerri was modified to meet the requirements of a growing university library.

It was worthy to note that in the context of Lake Nwaebere campus, it was a permanent block, but a temporary block in the overall context of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

On 12th May, 1993, the library moved along with the university to the permanent site, the school of science was immediately converted to a library. In no time, it was realized that the building was too small to accommodate the ever-increasing stock, staff and library users. As such, the library moved partly to the library phase IV in 1995, thereby making available two library buildings for use; pilot plant and phase IV library building. Library phase IV was originally intended to be a reading room. It is centrally situated at a convenient distance from the hostel and lecture halls/laboratories in a relatively noiseless zone of the campus. The Library subscribes to wide range of journals as well as a selection of local and international newspapers/magazines. Current issues are displayed on the shelves at the library phase II building. The current journal issues on display are grouped into five broad subject's areas: Agriculture, Engineering, Management, Science, Health and General. Current newspapers and



magazines are displayed in newspaper folders. Back issues of journals are showed at the library phase II building accordingly to the library of congress classification scheme (L.C). The back issues of newspapers and magazines are also bound and shelved chronologically according to titles in the serial unit.

Statement of the Problem

Serial materials are known to contain current information, news and research findings with regard to their nature of publication. It is expected that students, especially undergraduates should explore this important value of serial resources in their academic activities. It has been observed that most students are not aware of the existence of serial unit of the library where serial materials are housed. The inability of most students to make effective use of serial resources invariably affects their research output and overall performance in their academic work. The above back drop informed this study.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to survey undergraduate student's awareness and utilization of serial materials of FUTO library. Specifically to:

1. Determine undergraduate students' level of awareness of serials unit of FUTO library
2. Identify extent of availability of serials materials in FUTO library.
3. Ascertain the type of serials materials undergraduate students of FUTO use most.
4. Determine the perceived benefit of serials materials by undergraduate students of FUTO

Research Questions

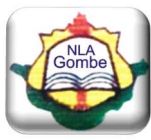
The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is your level of awareness of serials unit of FUTO library?
2. What is the extent of availability of serial materials of FUTO library?
3. Which of the serial materials do you use most?
4. What are the perceived benefits of serial materials?

Literature Review

The university library is meant to provide information resources for the achievement of the visions and missions of university that includes teaching, learning, research and community service (Anunobi, 2006). Serials are the bedrock of research work at the undergraduate and post graduate level. According to Nwalo (2003) serials are publications issued in successive parts, at regular or irregular intervals and intended to be continued indefinitely. According to Aina (2004), serials materials include periodicals, journals, newsletters, newspapers and magazines. Most serials materials are published more frequently such as newspapers and magazines, while some serials materials are published and issued in successive parts. These are non-periodicals such as yearbooks, annuals and monographic series which are published once a year or less frequently.

On the value of serials, Ogunrombi (1997) said that serials publications form the backbone of any academic library due to the vital information required for teaching and research it contains. Academic libraries have high regard for journals because of the fact that they provide the current research findings in any discipline (Olanlokun and Salisu, 1988). In view of the above, academic libraries are expected to acquire current journal titles. Reiterating the value of serial



resources, Sambo and Akpojotor (2016) informed that serial is written and reviewed by experts, and as such serial materials contain intellectual, authoritative and current research findings in any academic issue.

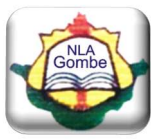
Also, Olorunsola (1997) pointed out that serial helps students, teachers and faculty members to be well informed about current events. Aiyepetu (1988) as cited by Sambo and Akpojotor (2016) said that newspapers and magazines ranked most consulted information materials used by policy-makers in Nigeria. These materials contain government policies, decisions and actions on economic, social and governance for the wellbeing of the society. Omekwu and Alimo (1998) posited that journals are the most current carriers of new ideas, knowledge and breakthrough in scientific development. Most scientific discoveries and findings are published in journal articles and other serial materials for the development of goods and services that enhance the wellbeing of the society.

Periodicals are the most up to date materials in the library and articles in the periodicals are written by experts in the field. Agbaje (2002) reported that periodicals are produced at fixed interval of time, usually not less than 24 hours. According to her, periodicals are organized to impact significance to the passage of time by identifying and ordering information chronologically.

Serial resources as one of the resources the library acquire for teaching, learning and research appears to have not been optimally utilized by the undergraduate students. Students, especially undergraduates nowadays pay more attention to electronic gadgets in their information search than the print materials. The undergraduate student's habit of information search for study and research is most likely to affect their visit to serials unit of the library and their use of serial materials. The above observation is in line with Hammed and Osurinade (2010) finding in their study that students prefer textbooks and online search engines. This trend of search is a welcome development and calls for a look at the acquisition policies of libraries as regards to acquisition of serial materials. Libraries should move with the trend by acquiring e-resources in the serials unit. Ideally, acquisition of library materials depends mostly on use, and as such, library materials should be provided based on the needs of users.

Methodology

A survey design was used for this study. The population of the study was made up of 500 undergraduate students who visited the serials unit in two weeks. A well-structured questionnaire was administered in the serials unit within the period. The questionnaire was structured to elicit answers from the respondents on such variables as: level of awareness of the serial unit of the library, extent of availability of serial materials, serial materials mostly used and perceived benefits of serial materials. They were asked to fill the questionnaire and return to the researchers. All was filled and returned. The analysis was done using frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation.



Data Analysis and Discussion

Research question one: Level of awareness of serial Unit of FUTO Library.

Table 1: Awareness of serials unit of FUTO Library

Items	Yes	No
Do you visit the FUTO Library	500 (100) %	0(0%)
Do you know the Serial Unit of FUTO Library	248 (49.6%)	252 (50.4%)

From the table above, all the 500 (100) % students agreed that they visit the library, but out of this number, 248 (49.6) % said that they are aware of the serials unit while 252 (50.4%) said they are not aware of the serials unit. It could mean that the 252 (50.4%) only came to the serials unit at this time may be to prepare for examination as the questionnaire was administered two weeks before the examination period. It could also mean that those respondents that are not aware of serials unit did not participate in the library orientation programme organized for fresh students aimed at creating awareness on the facilities and resources of the library.

Research question two: Extent of availability of serial materials.

Table 2: Extent of availability of serial materials

Items	Readily available	Not available
Journals	425(85%)	75(15%)
Magazines	400(80%)	100(20%)
Newspapers	410(82%)	90(18%)
Transactions	281(56%)	219(44%)
Memos of leaned societies	300(60%)	200(40%)
Conference proceedings	350(70%)	150(30%)

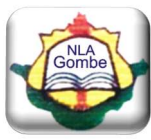
Findings on table 2 shows that of all serial materials listed on the table above, journals are the most available materials with 425(85%), followed by newspapers with 410(82%). The least available serial material was transaction. It could be based on the rate of usage as findings on the rate of undergraduate students' use of serial materials shows that transactions were not highly used.

Research Question 3: The serial materials mostly used by undergraduate students of FUTO.

Table 3: Serial materials mostly used

Items	Frequency
Journals	96(19.2%)
Magazines	88(17.6%)
Newspapers	75(15%)
Project works	99(19.8%)
Transactions	20(4%)
Memos of learned societies	63(12.6%)
Conference proceedings	59(11.8%)

The result of the findings on table 3 indicate that of all the serial materials, projects are mostly used with 99(19.8%) followed by journals 96(19.2%). The least used was transactions with 20(4%). The use of projects and journals mostly by undergraduates shows that these resources are products of current research findings and very important to these categories of students, especially the final year students for their final year degree projects.



Research Question 4: Perceived benefits of serial materials

Table 4: Perceived benefit of serial materials

What are the perceived benefits of the serial materials	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD
Serial materials carry current information on various fields of study	229(45.8%)	208(41.6%)	52(10%)	11(2%)	3.31	0.74
Serial materials represent different ideas from various authors on variety of topics	182(36.45%)	287(57.3%)	21(4.17%)	10(2%)	3.02	0.71
The present report of findings of current research quickly than any other publication	120(23.96%)	281(56.25%)	89(17.7%)	11(2%)	3.02	0.71
They are vital to researchers and students who are carrying out research and personal studies	276(55.2%)	219(43.75%)	5(1%)	0(0%)	3.14	0.65
Serials contains facts and figures required for research work and general information	234(46.88%)	234(46.88%)	32(6.2%)	0(0%)	3.40	0.69

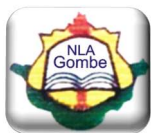
Findings on table 4 show that students strongly agreed that the most perceived benefits of serial material was that serial materials are vital to researchers and students who are carrying out research and personal studies with 276(55.2%) followed by serials contain facts and figures required for research work and general information with 234(46.88%). The least perceived benefit of serial material is that it presents report of findings of current research quickly than any other publications with mean score of 3.02. From the result of these findings, it could be seen that most undergraduate students who use serial materials gave positive perceptions of serial materials.

Discussion of Findings

From the findings, almost all the respondent agreed that they visit the library but greater number of the undergraduate students 252 (50.4%) agreed that they are not aware of the existence of the serials unit of university library. Availability and awareness of resources of the library could determine usage. Low usage of library resources does not encourage high and adequate acquisition of resources by the library. Among serial resources of the FUTO library, journals are the most available resources as shown in table 2 with 425 (85%). Journal availability goes with its rate of usage by the undergraduate students who make use of journals for their degree projects.

The result of findings in table 3 reveals that newspapers ranked the third often used by undergraduate students of FUTO. This finding is in line with Aiyepetu (1988) as cited by Sambo and Akpojoter (2016) who said that newspapers and magazines ranked the most consulted serial materials for information on policy issues. Information on government policies and actions are contained in newspapers and magazines. They are published daily, weekly, etc. they carry current news about the society and governance, and are such are highly used.

From the result of the study, it was shown that journal is the most available and the second highly used serial material by undergraduate students in FUTO library. This reveals the value of journal as posited by Omekwu and Atimo (1998) that journals are the most current carriers of new ideas, knowledge and breakthrough in scientific development. The finding also revealed that project works are the most used serial materials by undergraduate students of FUTO with



99(19.8%). This is understandable considering the nature of project works. Final year students use it to have idea of the content, format and design of research work. Hardly can a student carryout a project work without having a look at the existing and previous research work done by others as a guide.

Findings in table 4 revealed that the most perceived benefits of serial materials was that serial materials are vital to researchers and students who are carrying out research and personal studies. The above finding is in line with Ogunrombi (1997) who said that serials publications is the backbone of any academic library due to the vital information required for teaching and research it contains.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Serial materials as one of the resources of the library contain current information reviewed by experts in various fields of study. Serial materials are vital to students and researchers who carryout research and personal studies.

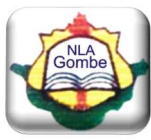
Acquisition of serial materials is based on the acquisition policy of the library. The library acquire these materials with available fund hoping that maximum use will be made of them. Ideally, undergraduate students should constitute greater number of users in any academic library in view of their numbers.

However, the result of this study indicates that most undergraduate students of the university studied are not aware of the serial unit of the library. The above discovery is suggestive of the fact that this group of respondents lack good reading habit and could not avail themselves of the opportunity offered by the university through the library orientation programme. The library orientation programme is usually organized for fresh students to create awareness of the facilities and resources.

The findings of this study also revealed that journals are the most available serial materials and that project works are the most used serial materials in FUTO library. It should be noted that all serial materials that are meant to be acquired by the library are vital for high academic performance of students. And as such, all these materials should be made available. Also, undergraduate students should strike a balance in their use of serial materials for their study and research.

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The library should carryout intensive orientation programme and library tour for new students as to familiarize them with the units/sections and resources of the library.
- ii. Undergraduate students should improve their reading habit and make themselves available for the orientation programme on library tour as to be aware of the facilities and resources of the library.
- iii. The use of embedded librarians who will bring the services of the library closer to the students and faculty members is vital. The embedded librarians will also create awareness on current materials acquired by the library.
- iv. The library should endeavor to acquire variety of serial materials to cover all the courses taught in the university.
- v. The university management should on their part, make adequate funds available for the acquisition of the needed serial materials.



- vi. Faculty members should encourage undergraduate students to make high and effective use of serial materials by given them assignments that will require their consulting serial materials.

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