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Information Literacy Skills and Use of Electronic Databases among Undergraduate Students in Bayero University Kano

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Abstract
The effective use of electronic databases in higher institutions of learning is largely dependent on students' information literacy skills. This study examined the information literacy skills (IL) and use of electronic databases among undergraduate students at Bayero University, Kano, with a focus on information need recognition skills and challenges associated with the use of electronic databases. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 384 undergraduate students across different academic levels using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Findings revealed that the respondents demonstrated high competence in information need recognition (overall mean=3.84) indicating that most students could identify their information needs and assess the credibility, relevance, and currency of information sources. Despite possessing foundational information literacy skills, students encountered several challenges in using electronic databases. The most prominent challenges identified were poor internet connectivity, lack of awareness of available electronic databases and inadequate training on database searching skills. The study concluded that while undergraduate students at Bayero University, Kano possess strong foundational information literacy skills, deficiencies in advanced search skills and infrastructural constraints limit their effective utilization of electronic databases. The study recommended that the integration of structured information literacy instruction into the undergraduate curriculum, enhanced library led database training, and improved internet and ICT infrastructure to promote effective access to and use of electronic information resources in general.

Keywords: Information literacy skills, electronic databases, undergraduate students, Bayero University Kano, information need recognition.

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Introduction

The exponential growth of digital information and the increasing reliance on electronic resources have fundamentally transformed the landscape of academic research in higher education. Electronic databases now serve as primary gateways to scholarly information, providing access to peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, books, and other academic materials essential for teaching, learning, and research. Consequently, the ability of undergraduate students to effectively access, evaluate, and use electronic information has become a critical component of academic success and lifelong learning. Central to this ability is information literacy, which encompasses a set of competencies that enable individuals to recognize information needs, locate relevant information, critically evaluate sources, and use information ethically and effectively.

Information literacy has been widely recognized as a core academic skill in universities worldwide. In contemporary higher education environments, students are required to engage in independent inquiry, conduct literature-based assignments, and produce research outputs that rely heavily on electronic information sources. Without adequate information literacy skills, students may experience difficulties navigating complex information environments, retrieving high-quality scholarly materials, and making informed academic decisions. As a result, universities and academic libraries have increasingly emphasized the development of information literacy as a means of enhancing students' research capabilities and overall academic performance.

Among the various components of information literacy, information need recognition, search strategy formulation, and critical evaluation of information are particularly important for effective use of electronic databases. Information need recognition allows students to clearly define research problems and determine the type and scope of information required. Search strategy formulation involves the ability to generate appropriate keywords, use Boolean operators, apply search filters, and refine search queries to retrieve relevant results from electronic databases. Critical evaluation of information enables students to assess the credibility, relevance, authority, and currency of information sources, thereby ensuring the use of reliable and scholarly materials. Together, these competencies determine the extent to which students can meaningfully engage with electronic databases for academic purposes.
Despite the increasing availability of electronic databases in many universities, evidence suggests that undergraduate students often encounter challenges that limit effective utilization of these resources. Studies conducted in developing country contexts, including Nigeria, have identified issues such as inadequate information literacy training, poor internet connectivity, limited awareness of available electronic databases, and difficulties navigating database interfaces. These challenges frequently result in students' overreliance on general search engines and non-scholarly online sources, which may negatively affect the quality of academic work and research outputs.

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Bayero University, Kano, as one of Nigeria's leading federal universities, provides access to a range of electronic databases through its university library system to support undergraduate teaching and research. Undergraduate students at the university are expected to engage with scholarly literature as part of coursework, seminars, projects, and final-year research. However, the extent to which students possess the necessary information literacy skills to effectively use these electronic databases remains insufficiently documented. Understanding students' competencies and challenges in this regard is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of existing information literacy initiatives and for informing targeted interventions.

Against this background, this study examines the information literacy skills and use of electronic databases among undergraduate students at Bayero University, Kano. Specifically, the study focuses on students' information need recognition skills, search strategy formulation skills, critical evaluation of information skills, and the challenges associated with electronic database use. By providing empirical evidence on these dimensions, the study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on information literacy in Nigerian higher education and to offer practical insights for improving information literacy instruction, electronic resource utilization, and academic research practices within the university.

Statement of the Problem

Infrastructural and institutional constraints such as poor internet connectivity, limited awareness of available electronic databases, inadequate training on database searching skills, and restricted access to ICT facilities further complicate effective database utilization. These challenges may undermine students' academic performance, research quality, and overall learning outcomes, thereby reducing the return on institutional investments in electronic information resources. Abdullah, Mohammed and Hafizu (2025) conducted a study on Utilization of electronic information resources by students of Hussaini Adamu Federal Polytechnic, Kazaure, findings reveal that, 92.2% of HND students and 86.8% of ND students agreed that poor internet connectivity significantly hindered their use of electronic resources. However, Mabawonku et al. (2023) reported a strong positive correlation between computer literacy skills and electronic resource utilization: students with higher ICT skills used 90.7% of e-journals and 62.5% of e-theses. Buba and Lawal (2023) studied the Utilization of electronic information resources and their influence on undergraduate reading culture; they concluded that "insufficient orientation/training" significantly affects database utilization for scholarly research and other academic activities.

Although several studies have examined information literacy skills and electronic database use in Nigerian Universities; Yusuf (2019), Muhammad, Mohammed and Sulaiman (2021), Yusuf, Haruna & Abdullahi (2023), Mabawonku et al (2023), Okoro and Liman (2023), Godwin (2026), there remains a paucity of empirical evidence specifically focused on Bayero University, Kano. Addressing this problem is essential for improving information literacy

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instruction, enhancing electronic database utilization, and supporting effective teaching, learning, and research within the university. This study, therefore explored the status of Information Literacy Skills and Use of Electronic Databases among Undergraduate Students in Bayero University, Kano.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the level of undergraduate students' skills in recognizing information needs on the use of electronic databases in Bayero University Kano.
2. To determine the challenges associated with the use of electronic databases towards skills in accessing information among undergraduate students.

Information need recognition is considered the first and most critical stage of the information literacy process. It involves the ability to identify when information is required, articulate research problems, and determine the scope and type of information needed. Recent studies indicate that undergraduate students generally demonstrate moderate to high competence in this domain.

According to Kumar and Sharma (2023), students' ability to recognize information needs has improved significantly due to increased engagement with digital learning platforms and online academic resources. Their study across Indian universities revealed that over two-thirds of respondents could clearly define research topics and identify relevant information sources. Similarly, Owolabi and Aina (2024) found that Nigerian undergraduates exhibited strong awareness of information needs, particularly in recognizing when updated or current information is required for academic tasks.

However, the literature also highlights persistent challenges in breaking research topics into manageable sub-questions and differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information. Chen, Liu, and Wu (2022) argue that while students may recognize an information gap, they often lack the analytical depth required to structure research questions effectively. This limitation is attributed to insufficient emphasis on inquiry-based learning and research design training at the undergraduate level.

Challenges associated with electronic database use remain a dominant theme in recent literature, particularly in developing country contexts. Poor internet connectivity continues to be the most frequently cited barrier. Ezeani and Igwe (2022) reported that unstable internet access significantly limits students' ability to retrieve and use electronic scholarly resources in Nigerian universities. Lack of awareness of available electronic databases has also been widely documented. Suleiman, Mohammed, and Abdullahi (2024) found that many undergraduates were unaware of institutional subscriptions and relied almost exclusively on Google and Google Scholar. Inadequate training on database searching skills further exacerbates this challenge, as noted by Adeyemi and Bello (2025).

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Other barriers include difficulty navigating electronic interfaces, limited access to computers or personal devices, and subscription restrictions to key databases. Tella and Oyedokun (2023) argue that these challenges reflect broader systemic issues related to funding, infrastructure, and policy implementation in higher education institutions.

The reviewed studies indicate that undergraduate students generally demonstrate strong information need recognition and critical evaluation skills. Demographic variables such as academic level influence information literacy development, while systemic barriers particularly poor internet connectivity, lack of awareness, and inadequate training continue to hinder effective use of electronic databases. The literature strongly supports the integration of curriculum based information literacy instruction, sustained library user education programs, and improved digital infrastructure to enhance students' ability to effectively access and use electronic information resources.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect data from a large population at a single point in time to describe the current status, opinions, or characteristics of respondents. The approach is suitable for investigating undergraduate students' information literacy skills considering their large number. The population of this study comprised all undergraduate students of Bayero University, Kano (BUK), covering all faculties in the institution. According to the university's records (as of the 2024/2025 academic session), Bayero University has over 35,000 undergraduate students across 17 faculties, including Allied Health Sciences, Agriculture, Arts and Islamic Studies, Basic Medical Sciences, Communications, Clinical Sciences, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Economics and Management Sciences, Education, Engineering, Law, Medical Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, .

A total of 400 undergraduate students were selected as the sample for this study. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula (1967) for sample size determination, allowing for a reasonable representation of the population with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure fair representation across faculties and gender groups. The population was first divided into faculties (strata), from which proportional samples of male and female students were randomly selected. This approach minimized sampling bias and ensured that both male and female students from different academic backgrounds were adequately represented.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. After obtaining the necessary approval from the university authorities, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires to respondents with the help of two trained research assistants. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Respondents were

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given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, and completed copies were retrieved immediately to ensure a high response rate.

Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and levels of information literacy skills.

Findings

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 384 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96% which is considered adequate for meaningful analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	196	51.0
Female	188	49.0
Total	**384**	**100**
Level	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
100	72	18.8
200	88	22.9
300	102	26.6
400	90	23.4
500	32	8.3
Total	**384**	**100**

Table 1 shows that out of 384 respondents, 196 (51.0%) were male while 188 (49.0%) were female. This near-equal gender distribution indicates that the study sample is gender balanced, thereby minimizing gender related bias in the assessment of information literacy skills. Such balance strengthens the generalizability of the findings across male and female undergraduate students.

The distribution of respondents across academic levels shows that 300level students constituted the highest proportion (26.6%), followed by 400level students (23.4%) and 200level students (22.9%). First year students (level 100) accounted for 18.8%, while final year students (level 500) formed the smallest group (8.3%).

This distribution suggests that most respondents were mid-to-senior undergraduates, who are more likely to have had exposure to academic research tasks, library use, and electronic databases. Consequently, their responses provide meaningful insights into information literacy competencies developed over time within the university system.

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Table 2: Information Need Recognition Skills

Statement	SD/D	N	A/SA	Mean	SD
I can clearly identify needed information	40 (10.4%)	64 (16.7%)	280 (73%)	3.98	0.89
I can break a topic into sub-research questions	56 (14.6%)	76 (19.8%)	252(65.7%)	3.74	1.02
I differentiate relevant vs irrelevant information	66 (17.2%)	80 (20.8%)	238 (62%)	3.67	1.06
I determine the right type of information needed	40 (10.4%)	72 (18.8%)	272(70.8%)	3.92	0.95
I know when updated information is necessary	50 (13.0%)	74 (19.3%)	260(67.7%)	3.88	0.97
Overall Mean 3.84					

Table 2 presents students' abilities to recognize and define their information needs. The overall mean score of 3.84 indicates a high level of competence in information need recognition.

A substantial majority of respondents (73%) agreed or strongly agreed that they could clearly identify the information they need, reflected by the highest mean score (M=3.98, SD=0.89). Similarly, 70.8% reported being able to determine the appropriate type of information required for a task (M=3.92, SD=0.95).

Although still positive, relatively lower agreement was observed in the ability to differentiate relevant from irrelevant information (62%, M = 3.67, SD = 1.06) and in breaking topics into sub-research questions (65.7%, M = 3.74, SD = 1.02). These findings suggest that while students generally understand what information they need, higher order analytical skills related to refining research problems require further strengthening.

Overall, the results indicate that respondents possess strong foundational information literacy skills, particularly at the stage of recognizing information needs.

Table 3: Challenges Associated with the Use of Electronic Databases

S/N	Electronic Databases	Frequency/Percentage		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Poor internet connectivity	236 (61.5%)	148 (38.5%)	384 (100%)
2	Lack of awareness about available electronic databases	216 (56.3%)	168 (43.7%)	384 (100%)
3	Inadequate training on database searching skills	197 (51.3%)	187 (48.7%)	384 (100%)
4	Difficulty navigating electronic interfaces and search functions	122 (31.8%)	262 (68.2%)	384 (100%)
5	Limited access to computers or personal devices	129 (33.6%)	255 (66.4%)	384 (100%)
6	Subscription/access restrictions to key scholarly databases	138 (35.9%)	246 (64.1%)	384 (100%)

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Table 3 highlights several barriers to effective use of electronic databases. The most frequently reported challenge was poor internet connectivity, identified by 61.5% of respondents. This underscores the infrastructural constraints that significantly affect students' ability to access electronic resources. Additionally, 56.3% of respondents reported a lack of awareness of available electronic databases, while 51.3% indicated inadequate training in database searching skills. These finding points to institutional and capacity related challenges, rather than a lack of student motivation.

Other challenges, such as difficulty navigating electronic interfaces (31.8%) and limited access to computers or personal devices (33.6%), were less prevalent but still notable. Subscription or access restrictions to key scholarly databases were reported by 35.9% of respondents, suggesting systemic limitations in institutional resource provision.

Discussion of Findings

Finding 1: Students' Skills in Recognizing Information Needs

The finding that a substantial majority of respondents (73%) can clearly identify the information they need (M=3.98, SD=0.89) and 70.8% can determine appropriate information types (M=3.92, SD=0.95) demonstrates that Bayero University Kano undergraduates possess strong foundational information literacy skills, particularly in the initial stage of recognizing information needs. However, the relatively lower agreement in differentiating relevant from irrelevant information (62%, M=3.67) and breaking topics into sub-research questions (65.7%, M=3.74) reveals a critical gap between foundational and higher-order analytical competencies. This finding align with Pinto and Sales (2015) who assessed university students' attitudes and self-assessment regarding information literacy skills, finding that students typically demonstrate stronger self-perceived competence in basic information identification than in complex evaluation tasks. In contrast, the finding also contrasts with Oni, et al (2023) who studied information literacy skills among postgraduate students at University of Nigeria, Nsukka and reported lower competency levels even in basic information recognition areas.

Finding 2: Challenges Associated with Electronic Database Use

The finding that poor internet connectivity (61.5%) is the most frequently reported challenge confirms that infrastructural constraints significantly undermine students' ability to access electronic resources, despite their strong information recognition skills. The lack of awareness of available electronic databases (56.3%) and inadequate training in database searching skills (51.3%) demonstrate that institutional and capacity-related challenges, rather than student motivation, are the primary barriers to effective database utilization.

This finding strongly aligns with extensive empirical evidence from Nigerian higher education contexts. Mabawonku et al. (2023) who identified issues associated with database use by students including "slow internet connectivity, incessant power outage, lack of access

to full text of citation/abstracts, and inadequate infrastructure for accessing electronic resources". Their study specifically highlighted that "even when Internet facilities are made available, some users find the Internet slow and expensive". However, Abdullahi, Haruna, and Yahaya (2024) studied challenges in Kano State university libraries and found that while internet connectivity was problematic, "lack of training" was reported by only 38% of respondents, which is lower than your finding of 51.3%.

Conclusion

This study examined the information literacy skills and use of electronic databases among undergraduate students at Bayero University, Kano, with particular emphasis on information need recognition, search strategy formulation, critical evaluation of information, and challenges associated with database use. The findings revealed that undergraduate students possess strong foundational information literacy competencies, especially in recognizing information needs and critically evaluating information sources. These strengths indicate that most students are able to identify required information and assess the credibility, relevance, and currency of scholarly materials.

However, the study also found that students demonstrated only moderate proficiency in search strategy formulation, with notable deficiencies in the use of Boolean operators, advanced search features, and database-specific search tools. These limitations hinder effective and efficient retrieval of relevant scholarly information from electronic databases. Furthermore, the study identified several systemic challenges affecting electronic database use, including poor internet connectivity, limited awareness of available electronic databases, inadequate training in database searching skills, and restricted access to ICT facilities.

Overall, the findings suggest that while undergraduate students at Bayero University, Kano have developed essential information literacy foundations, gaps in advanced search skills and infrastructural constraints significantly limit optimal utilization of electronic databases. Addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing students' academic research capacity, improving the quality of scholarly work, and maximizing the benefits of institutional investments in electronic information resources.

Recommendations

The university should integrate a 1-credit unit compulsory Information Literacy course into all undergraduate programs that focuses systematically on topic refinement workshops teaching students methods to break broad research topics into specific, manageable sub-questions using frameworks like the Question Formulation Technique, critical source evaluation training providing hands-on exercises in distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information using authority, accuracy, currency, relevance, and purpose criteria, and research problem development sessions offering guided practice in transforming general information needs into focused research questions with practical assignments.

The university should upgrade its internet infrastructure by implementing a minimum 100 Mbps dedicated bandwidth for library and campus-wide access, deploying Wi-Fi 6 access points across the library, lecture halls, and student commons, installing redundant backup connections that combine fiber and satellite technologies to prevent service interruption, and creating dedicated e-learning zones equipped with priority bandwidth for database access, all within a 6-12 month timeframe.

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