POTENTIALS OF THE INTERNET AND ITS RESOURCES TO ACADEMIC STAFF: THE CASE OF TWO FACULTIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

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ABSTRACT
This study assessed the potentials of internet to the academic staff in two faculties, in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It sought to find out the available e-resources, frequency of internet usage and perceived benefits of internet literacy skills. A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 354 academic staff. Sample size of 212 (60%) of the population was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaires. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data. The findings revealed that CD-ROM databases, On-line catalogue, É-journal, Internet/web, E-mail, E-books, On-line databases, E-thesis, and Digital archives among others are available e-resources for teaching and research. It also discovered that majority make use of the internet on weeklybases. The study also showed that provision of current information, ability to access global information, collaboration amongst colleagues, avenue for researchers’ exposure among others are some of the perceived potentials of internet. The
study recommended that adequate governmental and institutional funding for training and ICT facilities, stable internet connectivity, provision of stable power supply, use of train-the-trainers techniques and training and re-training of academic staff on internet usage for easy and effective utilization of the internet services are some of the strategies for enhancing the internet usage.

**Keywords:** Internet, Internet Literacy, Academic Staff.

**INTRODUCTION**

Along with rapid technological advancement entered the “internet”, which has today created a borderless surge for information. The internet is a complex network of networked computers that can convey all kinds of messages – including sounds, images and data. Within the global communication networks provided by the Internet, the World Wide Web provides a flexible network of networks ‘where institutions, businesses, associations and individuals create their own “sites” on the basis of which everybody with access can produce their own “home page” made of a variable collage of text and images’ (Castells, 1996). Connectivism and networked learning emerged as new learning paradigms that reflect the ability of today’s teacher and learner to access endless sources of information, build relationships with others, and collaborate and develop knowledge, all often done outside the formal education environment, on a scale not seen before (Siemens, 2005).

The internet has revolutionized how information is being disseminated holistically and the universities are not exception. Within universities in Nigeria, there is evidence of changes brought by internet which has become a point of first resort for information on practically anything and has implication far beyond teaching learning and research. With the use of the internet, information could be accessed in any subject field of interest through the help of the World Wide Web, electronic mails, news groups, electronic journals, electronic databases, video conferences and lately Web 2.0, thereby bridging the communication lacuna and global divide. The internet is arguably one of the most significant technological developments of 20th century. It is a live, constantly moving, theoretically borderless, potentially infinite space for the production and circulation of information. In the words of Singh (2002) ‘while printed materials have a certain fixity and finitude, texts published via the internet have a much more fluid character’. Internet has an impact on the day-to-day life of education planners, yet knowing how to look for information, how to analyze it, how to represent it, how to evaluate it, and how to use it will certainly be competencies necessary for anybody who wants to compete in the new knowledge economy.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The broad aim of the study is to examine the potentials of internet literacy skills to the academic staff. The specific objectives are:

i. To determine the e-resources available for use by the academic staff of University of Nigeria Nsukka.
ii. To ascertain the frequency of internet usage by the academic staff of University of Nigeria Nsukka.
iii. To examine the perceived benefits of internet by the academic staff of University of Nigeria Nsukka.
SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of the study encompasses the potentials of internet to the academic staff in two faculties in university of Nigeria Nsukka. However the study has following limitations.

(a) The study is limited to university of Nigeria Nsukka.

(b) The study includes only the academic staff of the faculties of education and social sciences.

(c) The study covers only academic staff of these faculties and the study is limited to internet and its resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no doubt that internet has invaded all the strata of human endeavours and it has impacted on it greatly. Lending credit to this submission, Ukodie (2004) writes that it has been commonly accepted and proven that internet is the engine of the 21st century and beyond because it helps the individuals, institutions and societies to achieve greater access to information on countless topics and charts the educational, economic, political, religious, cultural and social life of nations. Kumar and Kaur (2006) posit that internet has come to play a prominent role in the teaching, learning and research in academic institutions. It is a mechanism for information dissemination and a medium for collaborative interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic limitation of space. Collaborating with the above statements, Elaturoti (2007) writes that development of internet has revolutionized the concept of learning resources and the learning environment. The internet is now being used as a powerful supplement to the traditional ways that students study and learn in lecture halls, tutorials, laboratories and in preparation of assignments and examination. Content created on the internet ranges from simple e-mail messages to sophisticated documents sites, incorporating sounds, images and words (Evans, 1996).

Writing on the importance of internet to a researcher, Jagboro (2003) described internet as a rich, multifaceted complex, ever-changing textual environment accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days per week and 365 days per annum that provides several information and opportunities for the researcher.

Corbett and Williams (2002) state that the use of technology in teaching and learning is expected to improve educational outcomes, increase skills and decrease inequality among groups. The use of internet in universities has changed the instructor-student relationship. Students now feel freer to e-mail their professor to clarify assignment instruction. Instructors have also found it as an effective way to communicate course information and announcement (Kuswara and Cram, 2006). In line with the above statement, Adetimirin (2007) submits that internet facilitates communication between lecturers and students and that the adoption and use of internet facilitates access to unlimited and current information. Internet has been found to be very useful because of its ability to integrate text with charts, graphs, photographs and other forms of multimedia resources. Mac-Ikemenjima (2005) equally points to viability, flexibility and all round access as essential qualities of the internet that have to be harnessed for efficient teaching and learning. There is thus a general belief that in order to improve and globalize the educational sector, a high premium should be placed on improving quality and
usage of internet in teaching and learning environment. Nazim (2008:7) sums up these point in the following way.

In addition to providing access to available information resources, the internet also enables individual users to reach other people and institutions all over the world and exchange or obtain information. Anyone who has access to the internet can make use of this network to search for information or to communicate via electronic mail (e-mail), mailing listserve, news groups, chat boxes, Wide Area Information Server (WAIS) and the World Wide Web (WWW). The amount of scientific information and the number of electronic journals on the internet continues to increase and researchers are making their work available online. Thus access to large amount of information could stimulate changes in university learning environment and thus open a window of opportunities to researchers.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 354 academic staff. Sample size of 212 (60%) of the population was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Distribution and return rate of the questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>NO OF RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>NO DISTRIBUTED</th>
<th>NO RETURNED</th>
<th>% RETURNED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Education &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the population of 354 academic staff in faculties of Education and Social Sciences, a sample of 212 respondents which represent 60% of the population was chosen using stratified sampling technique. From the table 1 above, a total number of 204 (96%) out of 212 questionnaires distributed were returned and correctly filled; this is because some of the respondents had a tight schedule that it was difficult getting them to fill the questionnaire while some were on leave. Percentage score of 50% was used as a bench mark.

Table 2: Academic Staff response on E-resources available for teaching and research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>CD-ROM databases</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>On-line Catalogue</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>E-journal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Internet/Web</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>E-books</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>On-line databases</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>E-thesis</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Digital archives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 above shows the number of e-resources available for teaching and research. They are as follows: CD-ROM databases, On-line Catalogue, E-journal, Internet/Web, E-mail, E-books, On-line databases, E-thesis and Digital archives. The table revealed that they are all available as the whole respondents answered in affirmation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>2 – 4 times a month</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>2 – 3 times a week</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>204</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 5 above, it reveals that (28.4%) of the respondents make use of the internet 2 to 4 times a month while (46.1%) make use of it 2 to 3 times a week. (19.1%) of the respondents make use of the internet on daily bases while (6.4%) of the respondents rarely make use of it. None of the respondents indicated not having made use of the internet. It could be clearly observed from the table that majority of the academic staff make use of the internet on weekly bases.

Table 4: Academic Staff response on the perceived benefits of internet literacy skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Provides current information for teaching &amp; research in ones topic of interest</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Ability to access global information for teaching and research quickly</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Makes collaboration amongst colleagues easier</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Very convenient for sourcing academic materials</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>It is an avenue for researchers’ exposure</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>The resources are highly available for teaching &amp; research</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Time saving in giving assignments and managing academic instructions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data analyzed in table 6 above shows that the following are some of the perceived benefit of internet literacy skills. Provides current information for teaching & research in ones topic of interest (3.62), Ability to access global information for teaching and research quickly (3.58), Makes collaboration amongst colleagues easier (3.55), Very convenient for sourcing academic materials (3.50), It is an avenue for researchers’ exposure (3.48), The resources are highly available for teaching & research (3.26), Time saving in giving assignments and managing academic instructions (3.22).

From the table, it was discovered that the academic staff accepted all the suggested benefits of internet literacy skills as their mean scores rated from 3.62 to 3.22.
FINDINGS

Finding reveals that there are available e-resources for teaching and research ranging from CD-ROM databases, Online catalogue, E-journal, Internet/web, E-mail, E-books, Online databases, E-thesis, and Digital archives among others and this corresponds with Barry (2002) who posited that there are many databases on recent publications and on-going researches available on the internet. Findings also indicated that provision of current information for teaching and research, ability to access global information for teaching and research quickly, easier collaboration among colleagues, convenience in academic materialsourcing, among others are the potentials of internet literacy skills. This finding is in agreement with Palvia (2009) who pointed out that internet has broken down barrier of communication and information access from anywhere in the world. According to him, internet access allows researcher to have access to information on the net and the opportunity to access up-to-date research results. The research also evidenced that majority of the academic staff make use of internet on weekly bases as they rated highest amongst others with percentages of 46.1. The implication of this is that effort should be made to get the academic staff trained and internet facilities are being made available and accessible so that they will be able to harness these resources not only on daily bases but twenty four hours a day.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on findings of this study to improve the situation.

i. Government and other authorities should demonstrate political will towards internet culture by ensuring adequate funding of ICT projects in universities nationwide in order to actualize effective internet connectivity.

ii. The academic staff should be more conscious of the technological revolution around the world and try catching up with it so as to follow the trend and enhance their ease of using the internet in their academic activities.

iii. The university should pursue aggressively the acquisition and provision of ICT and its resources for use. The training and re-training of the academic staff in internet literacy skills for teaching and research should be approached with greater zeal and commitment.

CONCLUSION

Information is the pivot on which the survival of any society rests and it is vital to the overall efficiency of the academic staff. The internet is a major source of sharing knowledge and information and their availability and adoption in teaching and research have increasingly improved academic staff information seeking and sourcing. This study on the potentials of internet to the academic staff in two faculties in the university of Nigeria Nsukka has revealed that. Effort should therefore be made to get the academic staff equitably trained in order to enable them make maximum use of these resources.
REFERENCES


