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ENHANCING INFORMATION DELIVERY SERVICES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

MAYEN NDARO IGAJAH Dr

UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, mayenigajah00@gmail.com

CHRISTOPHER OKOI OFFEM Mr

UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, Chrisoki@gmail.com

MARY MFON BASSEY Mrs

UNIVERSITY OF UYO, NIGERIA, Marymfon@gmail.com

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**ENHANCING INFORMATION DELIVERY SERVICES FOR DISTANCE
EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

**IGAJAH, MAYEN NDARO (PhD)
LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR**

**OFFEM, CHRISTOPHER OKOI (PhD)
LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR**

**MARY MFON BASSEY (PhD)
DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF UYO, NIGERIA**

ABSTRACT

The paper assessed information delivery services for distance education programmes. The study traces briefly the history of the National Open University and the National Teacher Institute. The e-resources and current issues on services provided by librarians. The study adopted the survey design methods. The questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. From the analysis of the data collected, it was found that the current issues on information services are in support of open and distance education programmes, technologies used in the delivery of information services for distance learners, concepts of distance education in Nigeria, value of social media (networking) information delivery to distance learners. It was recommended that the management and library administrators enhance planning, orientation programs, the renewed focus on developing the flexibility of services offered, and also ensure strategies used by the library.

Keywords: Information, Information Delivery, Information Enhancement, Open and Distance Education, Social media.

Introduction

Libraries are indispensable in every facet of higher education. Library support to distance learners is mandatory for the qualitative delivery of knowledge and learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed all aspects of society, particularly information dissemination. Librarians have obligations to provide information

services to support the educational, recreational and economic endeavours of the members of their respective communities. Information services in libraries take a variety of forms including direct personal assistance, directories, sign exchange of information called from a reference source, reader's advisory service, and dissemination of knowledge in anticipation of their user needs or interest. Open and distance learning (ODL) reflect both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the missions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure.

Open and Distance learning refers to education and training in which resources are used rather than attending classroom sessions as the central feature of the learning experiences. It also refers to situations where learners are physically separated from the educational providers, communicating in writing (using letters, mails, e-mail, fax or computer conferencing) verbally (by telephone, audio conference, video conferencing) or in face to face tutorial/ facilitation sessions.

According to Jegede (2010) distance learning is the provision of education by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face method whose goals are similar to, and just as noble and practical as those of on-campus, fulltime, face-to-face education.

It is a system characterized by physical separation between the teacher and the learner, in which instruction is delivered through a variety of media including print and other information communication technology (ICTs) to learners who may rather have missed the opportunity earlier in life or have hither to been denied the traditional face-to-face formal education due to socio-economic, career, family and other circumstances.

The philosophy of Open Distance Learning aims at the following:

- Marriage
- Loss of job
- Gender
- Age
- Qualification
- Carrying capacity

Allowing students to study

- What they want
- When they want
- Where they want
- How they want

Open distance learning (ODL) Is about increasing educational access and choice. The emphasis in this kind of education is on learning rather than teaching. Course materials are designed to facilitate learning. The onus to learn is on the students.

The open and distance learning in Nigeria started with the practice of correspondence education in preparing for the General Certification in Education (GCE) as a prerequisite for the London Matriculation Examination for the admission into the University of London (Olejede<http://www.wkieducator.org>). The early correspondence colleges include Wolsey Hall, Rapid Result. Exam success etc.

According to Eya, (2011), at the very beginning of handful Nigerians were able to utilize the opportunity. However, with time, few Universities commenced academic

programmes in the name of distance learning. The University of Lagos commenced a correspondence and open studies unit (COSU) in 1974 which has since metamorphosed into a full-fledged distance learning institute in 2004. Having been named correspondence and open studies institute (COSIT) in 1974 - a gap of 30 years Ahmadu Bello University provided an in-service Teacher education programme through the distance learning Mode in 1976. The University of Ibadan in 1988 established the External study. Programme (ESP). The new nomenclature now in Distance Learning Centre (DLC).

It is estimated today that one of every three of the existing Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, Operate as dual-mode institutions. In other words, distance learning has become the in-thing in Nigeria. Many operated as satellite campuses. The National Universities Commission (NUC). Recently clamped down on satellite campuses in Nigeria. The establishment and the operations of the National Teachers Institute (NTI) Kaduna were mandated by the Decree N0.7 of 1978 to organize programmes for upgrading practising teachers at all levels. The NTI was responding to section 9 sub-sections 61 of the National Policy on Education which stipulates that the NCE should be the minimum qualification for teachers in the country. In 1976 and 2003. the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as single mode institution with the sole mandate of providing Open distance education was the needed indication of the total commitment and acceptance of Distance Learning by the 166 JOLHFH2), 2017 gajah Boma & Eetpp.164-180 Federal Government of Nigeria. However, while the NTI's programmes are for teachers only, the NOUN programmes cut across many areas such as Education, Management sciences, Arts and Social sciences, Science and Technology and Law. At the non-degree level, NOUN runs Certificate and Diploma programs. It is to be noted that NOUN received accreditation in thirty out of thirty-one open programmes she presented to the NUC. About five months ago the NUC pronounced that all part-time programmes should be suspended in all the Universities. Thousands of Nigerians are studying abroad without going to institutions because the study is mediated through information technology.

Objectives of the study

The study is aimed at achieving the following;

1. To determine the provision of library resources to support the information needs of distance learners.
2. To ascertain the importance of user education to support distance learning.
3. To determine the provision of reference services to support distance learners.
4. To establish the importance of social networks (media) in support of distance learners.

Research questions

To guide this study, the researcher poses the following research questions:

1. How does the provision of library resources support the information needs of distance learners?
2. How does user education support distance learners?
3. Does the provision of reference services support the distance learning programme?
4. To what extent do social networks (media) support distance learning programmes?

Literature Review

The provision of library resources through the virtual library is very pertinent to distance learners as it allows for equal opportunity that is open to the usual day-to-day student otherwise known as regular student.

This process has allowed for adequate knowledge acquisition to distance learners, either by accessing e-books, e-journals and electronic, databases. The provision of e-library resources cannot be assumed to be very functional if attention is not given to students by way of being able to access and operate for simple and adequate usage of the enormous resources embedded in e-library.

It is only noted that e-library resources has made access to library resources possible at any time, location, place or country, this process has allowed for constant and life long learning, which is one of the primary function of the library.

It is important that Distance learning student (DLs) are able to access institution library resources in a timely and convenient way (Heap, 2001). The benefits of the ubiquitous use of technology have been recognized by academic librarians, both in the provision of services and accessing resources, with movement away from print collections towards increased provision of remote access to e-resources within virtual libraries. This has been enabled by the existence of seamless and improved functionality of interfaces, such. as new resources discovery software (Bower & Mee, 2010). This benefits all users, but in particular, DLs who need to access library resources from home or work (Hensley & Miller, 2010). Access to licensed e-journals and e-books has not completely removed the need for physical access via postal loan services, inter-library loans (ILLS), and document delivery services (possibly delivered electronically directed to users) (Bower & Mee,2010).

The way that libraries manage postal loan services to distance learners varies, particularly in relation to charging for postage. When sending out books to DLs, libraries either charge for return postage, postage both ways or levy an additional charge on top of postage costs (Long, 2009; Hitchen, 2005). Issues for libraries in providing postal library services are mainly budgetary decisions relating to the expense of postal loans, the length of delivery times, and problems with the collection of deliveries by users. Some libraries set limits on the minimum and maximum physical distance students must live away from the institution to be eligible for postal loans (Long, 2009), resulting in the service rarely being provided to overseas students (Hitchen, 2005).

Document delivery is especially useful if library resources are available only in print. For example, the British Library document supply service enables documents to be sent directly to the end user (British Library, 2011). The ability to provide electronic versions of documents means that they can be delivered in a timely and straightforward way over the Internet.

However, suppliers often add a copyright clearance fee. It can sometimes be cheaper to simply purchase a hard copy back issue of a journal needed by a distance learner (Krammer, 2010). Students must be made aware of these support services if they are to fully benefit from them (Long, 2009) because there is a real difference between “accessibility and availability” Holloway (2008:289). Similarly, librarians should encourage DLs to request resources early, leaving plenty of time before assignments are due, to prevent them from arriving too late to be useful (Long, 2009).

Information literacy (IL) tutorials should be embedded into courses and form part of their assessment (Black & Blankenship, 2010; Hensley & Miller, 2010). To a degree, these can be used to replace the loss of physical interaction with librarians (Figa et al., 2009), The 'librarian' program, discussed by Hemmig and Montet (2010), is an example of delivering information literacy sessions in a virtual classroom that are personalized and engaging, allowing DLs to benefit from a comparable experience. This can be done through the design and implementation of web-based learning modules (Dieterie, 2007).

However user education is provided, it should be innovatively designed and well thought out (Robertson et al., 2008; Pastula, 2010). Tutorials and guides should use terminology that can be easily understood by inexperienced users (Koury et al, 2010). According to Gruca (2010), online user education can be passive or interactive, using quizzes for example to provide two-way communication. The benefits of using live and interactive tools is seen by Barnhart and Stanfield (2011) as crucial to successful information literacy training. Streamed video tutorials can be created to provide a variety of aspects of library instructions, such as information literacy skills and accessing library resources.

Distance or online learners have the same sort of information enquiries as on-campus students, such as known-item searching, exploratory searching and narrow or indepth enquiries for research. Their inability. To interact directly with librarians must be addressed by the service providers, according to Whitehair (2010). By using technology such as virtual reference tools, libraries have the ability to provide a better service to DLs (Rao, 2007). Virtual reference (VR) enquiry services are "initiated electronically, often in real-time, where patrons employ computer or other information technology to communicate with reference staff, without being physically present" Kern (2009:1). Umoh Effiom and Igajag (2021) are of a view that digital references services is a fast-changing technology era, thus online learners or distance need to find relevant authentic information for their student study and research. These enable librarians to offer the same level of service as has traditionally been provided to on-campus students in "untraditional ways: Cohen and Burkhardt (2010:267). When serving DLs a flexible approach should be taken to the methods used and the times at which they are made available (Whitehair, 2010). It will often be the case that librarians and DLs will need to work cooperatively together over a period of time so that an answer can be found to a particular question. Therefore, it is important that VR services are used to develop relationships between librarians and DLs (Cohen and Burkhardt, 2010).

Skype-based information enquiry services can be used to overcome or compensate for the difficulties academic librarians have with providing a timely and comprehensive service, especially to overseas students both on distance learning courses and exchange programs. By using a technology that students are familiar with, the library can "provide effective, usable and value-driven services" Cohen & Burhardt (2010:266) which are more personalized. It is important to identify needs first before deciding to use technology, so that it can be used in an intentional and deliberate manner (Cohen and Burhardt, 2010).

This is one of the fastest and current services that World class librarians or Distance education librarian can offered to learners of all kinds in the 21st century. A social networking service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, who, for example, share interests and/or activities. A social network service essentially consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web based and provide means for users to interact over the internet, Such as e-mail and instant messaging., Online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service, though in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas activities, events and interests within their individual networks (Aina, 2011).

The term social networking simply refers to a process of relationship building among a group of people who have a common interest. It allows professionals to exchange information, opportunities and ideas Professionals are able to stay informed with new knowledge about their field. Social networks are already using a wide-range of social networking sites, the use of

online social networks by libraries and information organizations is also increasingly prevalent and a growing tool that is being used to communicate with more potential library users as well as extending the service provided to individuals libraries. (Nie, et al, 2011).

The various social networking sites for distance education librarian or world class librarian that can be used to provide services at both international and national level includes Facebook, Myspace, 2go, Saptu Brower, Opera mini, Twitter etc. These websites help people to build up networks and relationships among themselves. In addition to these sites, various web 2.0 techniques may be used to develop better relationships among people.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey approach, as it is only involved in seeking the opinions of the students on information services provided to them by librarians. The study involved two study centres, National University Open Calabar study centre and National Teachers' institute Calabar study centre. With the use of accidental sampling techniques, the instrument was administered only to the students met at the centre. The research instrument was a 24-item structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled “Library support for Distance Learners” (LSDL). It had 4 sections: Section A sought their opinions on library resources to support distance learners; Section B ascertained the user education support to the distance learners, while section C sought their opinions on the reference services support distance programmes; section D sought their opinions on social network (media) support to distance learning. The instrument was face-validated by two experts in library and information science, and one expert in Measurement and Evaluations in University of Calabar. Their inputs were properly reflected in the instrument used for the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach Alpha method to analyze the result from the field test, and it yielded a coefficient of 0.74, which was a pointer that the instrument was reliable for the study. Copies of the instrument were administered personally, by the researchers and also with the help of three lecturers in the two centres used for the study. Three hundred and twenty-eight (328) copies were properly filed out of (400) used for the study; so 82% return was recorded.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the data analysis and discussion of the results of the study.

Research question 1

How does the provision of library resources support information needs of distance learners?

The results showed that, the information materials in the library are not helpful 28(9%); information resources available are relevant 98(30%), alternative information resources are available elsewhere 73(22%). information resources in the library are not current 77(22%), the resources did not contain information needed 37(11%), the information resources cannot access at convenient time 55 (17%) the information resources is hard to follow 118(36%).

Table 1: Provision of library resources and information needs of distance learners

	Item description	No of students	Percentage %
1	the information materials in the library are not helpful	28	9
2	Information resources available are relevant	98	30

3	Alternative information resources are available elsewhere	73	22
4	Information resources in the library are not Current	73	22
5	The resources did not contain information needed	37	11
6	The information resources cannot be accessed at convenience time	55	17
7	The information resources are hard to retrieved	118	36

The findings of this study shows that most of the items in table recorded low number of students less than half who benefited in library resources support needs for distance learners. The information materials in the library are not helpful which only had 28(9%) students; information resources available are relevant recorded 98(30%) students; alternative information resources are available elsewhere had 73(22%); information resources in the library are not current, the resources did not contain information needed, the information resources cannot access at convenient time, the information resources is hard to follow had only (22%) (36%) (17%) (11%) students respectively. These findings are in line with Long (2009); Hitchen (2005) discoveries that information support services to distance education learners were not adequate especially in terms of availability of the resources needed.

Research question 2

How does user education support the distance learners? The data answering research question 2 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 presents user education support to distance learner, the availability of user education has not had any positive impact on library services 39(12%), the user education interactive video has made me to be aware of these resources available 217 (66%), the user education through lecture method help me to familiar with layout of the library. 172(52%), user education through online tutorials has led to the exposure of online resources 138(42%), user education through discussion forums has increase my level of confidence on the use of resources 156 48%.

Table 2: User education and distance learning

	Item description	No of students	Percentage %
1	The availability of user education has not Students had any positive impact on library services	39	12
2	The user education interactive vide of has made me to be aware of these resources available	217	66
3	The user education through lecturer method help me to familiar with library layout	172	52
4	User education through online tutorials has led to the exposure of online resources	138	42

5	User education through discussion forums has increase my level of confidence on the use of library resources	152	48
6	User education facilitate access to information resources at convenient time	55	17
7	User education creates awareness on information resources	118	36

The findings of this study affirmed that user education has positive impact on library services. There was a significant improvement on the number of students who benefited from it, user education interactive video recorded 217(66%) also user education through lecture 172 and 138 (42%) 152(48%) showing significant improvement. These findings are in line with Heap (2001), Secker, (2008), Virkus (2008) Kramner (2010) maintained that students can meets their specific needs through well taught user education and overcome complexities rather than having them removed from them.

Research question 3

Does the provision of reference services support distance learning programme?

The data answering research question 3 is presented in table 3. Table 3 shows the responses of the students on provision of reference Services how it helped them, the process of providing reference service is Smooth and without hurdles only 50(15%) of them, receiving digital resources by email is helpful 132 (40%) respondents. The librarians being skilled in the art of returning books by post which recorded 131 (40%) significant figure students in agreement, is based on librarians being rained how to peruse and surf the internet to assist students, which only 79 (24%) affirmed to. Books not given the correct call numbers which makes it difficult to access resources which recorded 120(37%) respondents. To ascertain if the library doors are opened to users even on weekends and public holidays, which had a significant number of students 123(38%). Helpful of receiving photocopied articles by post with the assistant of the library staff of which a large number of students 115 (35%) affirmed to.

Table 3: Provision of reference services and distance learning programme

	Item description	No of students	Percentage %
1	The process of providing reference service is smooth and without hurdles	50	15
2	Receiving digital resources by e-mail is helpful	132	40
3	Librarians are very skilled in the art of returning books by post	131	40
4	It is a fact that librarians are trained how to per use and surf the internet to assist students.	79	24
5	Books are not given the correct call numbers which makes it difficult to access resources	120	37
6	Library doors are opened to users even on weekends and public holidays	123	38

7	Receiving photocopied articles by post is helpful because the library staff is always assisting	115	35
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The research question 3 tried to elicit responses from the students on. reference service delivery. Item (13-19) guided their response. Item reference service is smooth and without hurdles (50)(15%), digital resources by e-mail 132(40%), librarians are skilled in art 131 (40%), while internet surfing, proper call numbers by librarians are still not effective with 79(24%), 120(31) 123(38%), 115(35%). Opening of library doors on weekends and public holidays and receiving photocopies articles by post somewhat helpful.

These findings are in consonance with the view of Whitehair (2010), Ra0, (2007) that by using technology such as virtual reference tools, libraries can provide a better references services to distance learners, just as the on campus students.

Research question 4

To what extent do social network (media) support distance learning programme?

Data answering research question 4 is presented in table4. Table 4 presents the responses of the students on how they prefer receiving library information through telephone 67(20%), item 21 based on access to the use of e-mail being restricted to categories of students 89(27%), ascertain librarian willingness to assist students through instant messenger 16(35%), the collection of library material for use at home through post 107(33%) which recorded a high number of students. The students' opinion online information instruction service encouragement to utilize the library regularly, of which 88(27%) of them agreed to

Table 4: Social network and distance learning programme

	Item description	No of students	Percentage %
1	I prefer receiving library information through telephone	67	20
2	Access to the use of e-mail is restricted to some categories of students	89	27
3	Librarians are always willing to assist students through instant messenger	116	35
4	I collect library resources for use at home through post	107	33
5	Online information instruction services encourage me to utilize the library regularly	88	27

The findings of this study shows that the responses of students on how they prefer receiving library information librarians willingness to assist students, Library resources use at home through post, access to the use of e-mail, online information instruction encourages utilization of library. On the other hand the respondents disagreed with library information through telephone. The finding are consistent with what Nie, M., et al (2011) which states that the use of online social networks by libraries and information organization is increasingly prevalent and a growing tools that is being used to communicate with more potential library

users as well as extending the service provided to individuals libraries. These findings point to the fact that the librarians messages and encouraging students online instruction services. The findings buttressed the move of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria Calling for "Mandatory National Workshop on e-library services in an Era of Change" to sensitize and equip librarians with basic skills for the deployment of e-library as a tool.

Conclusion

The essence of library is to empower patron to acquire knowledge. On the basis of these findings, it was concluded that students' in academic libraries on/off campus have positive perception of library resources. The user education is significantly high, that is the students of National Open University and National Teachers' Institute Calabar study centres make adequate use of user education to increase their level of confidence on the use of resources. The reference service and the social network (media) support for distance learning programme in the library indicated that the services are fair.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Institutions' management and library administrators should take conscious effort towards planning, equipping and up-dating resources in libraries. This will contribute to the growing literature in libraries aimed at promoting and improving perceptions and use of resources in academic libraries.
2. Orientation programs on the use of computer for information retrieval should be conducted and make compulsory for new entrants into the profession so as to cope with the current trends or the new technological revolution.
3. A renewed focus on developing the flexibility of services offered, as well as investigating ways of personalizing them on a mass scale, such as the use of web 2.0 tools and recommendations within the library catalogue.
4. Ensure strategies are used by the library service to support distance learners balance studying with other commitment by:
 - Increasing the number of e-books that can be downloaded on to personal e-readers
 - Enabling postal loan requests to be made directly from library catalogue.
5. Academic library management should constantly provide current high quality collection to meet student learning and research need.
6. Libraries should use the opportunities of social media facilities to provide information service to students especially the distance learners

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