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AVAILABILITY AND STUDENTS' UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This was an investigation into the availability and students' ratings of their use of internet facilities for their academic pursuit in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. It employed the survey research methodology which was conducted using questionnaire. To elicit responses for the study, four research questions were formulated. The survey instrument which was a four-item structured questionnaire were administered to one hundred and eight (108) students, randomly selected from the final year class of the three tertiary institutions studied. Analyses of findings revealed that students find the internet to be a very useful tool in their academic pursuit, which internet facilities available to students were found on the campuses, scattered about in cyber cafes rather than in the institutional libraries. Notably, it was also discovered that some of the students could not utilize the indispensable facilities of the internet due to lack of skill; and most respondents were limited to using only two search engines. It was therefore recommended that facilities for internet utilization be increased in the University libraries and internet study introduced in all students programmes to accord them the needed skills for navigating the net as these will influence their study patterns.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Internet, collaborative interaction, Search engines

INTRODUCTION

Internet according to Song and Khong (2001) is a worldwide collection of networks, gateways, servers and computers using a common set of telecommunication protocols to linkup. The internet has become the symbol of the information age and a means of accessing and sharing of information around the globe with networks that link educational, commercial, non-profit and military establishments as well as individuals. In support of this concept, Ayo (2001) described the internet as a prowling collection of computer networks that span the globe connecting government, military, educational and commercial institutions as well as private citizens to a wide range of computer services, resources and information, thus reducing the whole world to a global village. To Finch (1997), the internet is a global collection of independently operating, but interconnected computers. Viewed from any angle, the internet is more than computer networks. It is a network of computer networks spanning thousands of millions of miles around the globe. Indeed, internet has a wide array of tools designed for information search, location and retrieval. These which are called search engines search web-page contents

simultaneously, thus making the internet an indispensable tool for students, thus serving diverse purposes in their various careers. Some of them are Yahoo, Google, Ask, Microsoft Network (MSN), Gig blast, A.9 among others.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tertiary institutions are established to train and deepen academic knowledge which will in turn develop the human being for national development. The internet which is at the centre of learning and research today becomes a tool which skill must be acquired for effectiveness. In view of this crucial role which internet plays in learning, it becomes imperative to determine whether this is the case with students of Akwa Ibom State in tertiary institutions, which is what this paper attempts to address.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were:

(a) To determine students opinion on the usefulness of internet in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

(b) To examine the availability of internet services to students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

(c) To ascertain the search engines that students in tertiary institution are familiar with.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(a) Do students of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State find the internet significantly useful to their academic pursuit?

(b) Are internet services available to students of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State?

(c) What search engines are students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State familiar with?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Accessibility and utilization of internet by students in tertiary institutions depend heavily on its provision. Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) set up by Decree 75 of 1992 was to regulate the telecommunications industry and to ensure the provision of adequate efficient and effective telecommunication services nationwide at an affordable price. It has so far licensed 38 internet service providers (ISP) although only twelve are currently active, some of which include link serve cyberspace, Hyperia, Microcosm systems and Novo (Omotayo, 2006).

The National Universities commission (NUC) has also launched the National Universities Network (NUNET) programme to connect all the universities in a national academic network. Omatoyo (2006) in his study on internet access and image among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria revealed that all the eleven faculties of the University and the library are hooked to the internet by NUC initiative, although there is no internet facility provided by the University authority for students' use. He found that they patronize the commercial cyber cafes.

Similarly, Ojokoh (2005) in his study on internet access and usage by students of the federal University of Technology, Akure reveals the provision of internet services at the school gate and on campus. He also pointed out the high rate of patronage of that of the school gate than the cyber café on campus, attributing it to inconsistency in the discharge of services to users and inadequate computer with internet facilities. In another study, Anunobi (2005) revealed the provision of internet services in the first and second generation university libraries in particular.

The internet according to Jagboro (2003) provides several opportunities for the academia especially as a mechanism for information dissemination and a medium for collaborative interactions between individuals and their computer, without regards for geographical limitation of space. Ojedokun (2002) studied use of the internet by students of the University of Botswana and discovered that 23% (340 students) of the respondents were not using the internet. Ajuwon (2003) studied internet use by first year clinical and nursing students of the university college hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria. Her study revealed that 60% of the respondents had used the internet. Odusanya and Bambala in their own study (2002) found that the 58% of medical and dental students in their final year at the university of Lagos,

Nigeria whom they studied had used the internet.

Internationally, studies on the use of internet by undergraduates have also been done. Benneth (2001) found that 75% of Americans ages 18-29 and 65% of those ages 30-49 regularly go online to find information. Bao (1998) surveyed internet use of Seton Hall University. The finding reported that 40.2% of respondents used the web on daily basis, 38.3% weekly, and 10.7% on monthly basis. It was also revealed that students use the internet for information related to both their academic and non-academic studies.

On the factors that hinder internet use, Udofia (2006) highlighted inadequate technological infrastructure, lack of skills in navigating the internet and epileptic nature of power supply. Others were lack of national ICT policy and low implementation to support integration of ICT in the curricula.

METHODOLOGY

Research design that was adopted for this study is the survey method. The population of the study consisted of all the 673 final year students of the faculty of social sciences, University of Uyo, 203 final year students of Education, College of Education, Afaha Nsit and 142 final year students of School of Arts, Akwa Ibom State polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, making the population of 1018 (one thousand and eighteen) subjects. One hundred and ten (110) respondents representing about 10% of the said population were randomly selected for the study.

The instrument for data collected in this study was a questionnaire. The researcher designed "Availability and Students Utilization of Information and Communication Technology Questionnaire (ASUICTQ) meant for this purpose. This was a structured questionnaire that asked relevant questions in the study corresponding to the four research questions.

ANALYSES OF FINDINGS

Data collected from the 108 respondents revealed the following:

Research Question 1

Do students of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State find internet significantly useful to their academic pursuit?

ITEM	YES	%
The internet helps undergraduate student's access information which enhances their academic performance.	108	100%
The internet is luring students from their school library.	65	60.2%
Search for specific questions and factual information helps increase one's capacity for problem solving	94	87%
Using the internet has reduced the time spent on using printed materials	82	75.9%
The internet is fast in providing reliable and accurate information.	100	92.6%

Data from table 1 above represents responses on the usefulness or purposes in which students in tertiary institutions use the internet. Data showed that one hundred and eight (100%) students agreed that the internet helps undergraduate's access information which enhances their academic performance. Sixty-five (60.2%) agreed that the internet is luring students from their school library perhaps due to its adequate content of information resources. Ninety-four (87%) agreed that search for specific questions and factual information help increase one's capacity for problem solving. The

internet was also agreed by eighty-two (75.9%) of the printed materials. One hundred (92.6%) agreed that the internet is fast in providing reliable and accurate information. The cost of access to internet was agreed to be affordable by eight-six (79.6%) of the students.

Research Question 2

Which internet services are available to students of tertiary institution in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2

Internet Facilities and Services that are Available to Students of Tertiary Institutions in Akwa Ibom State

S/N		Yes	%
1.	Electronic Mail (e-mail)	92	85%
2.	World Wide Web (www)	106	98.1%
3.	Internet Chat facilities	76	70.4
4.	Internet Discussion Group	72	66.7%
5.	Internet news group	59	59.6%
6.	File transfer protocol (FTP)	101	93.5%
7.	Internet phone	40	37%
8.	Internet Fax	10	9.3%

The above table shows the predominant availability of internet services such as the e-mail which 85% of the respondents indicated its availability, worldwide web (www) 98.1%, internet chat facilities 70.4%, internet discussion group 66.7% internet newsgroup 54.6% and file transfer protocol 93.5%. Other services such as internet phone and fax received scanty acceptance of 37% and 9.3% respectively as respondents clearly indicated. Due to the prevailing availability and usage of mobile phones, attention is not adequately paid by tertiary institutions in providing internet phone service as respondents will rather make use of their mobile phones.

Research Question 3

What search engines are students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State familiar with?

Table 3

Students' Familiarity with Internet Search Engines

S/N	Search Engine	No	% of student utilization
1.	Google	68	63%
2.	Yahoo	37	34.3%
3.	ASK	1	0.9%
4.	MSN	2	1.9%

Data from the above table revealed that students are very familiar with goggle search engines having 68 being 63% and yahoo, 37 being 34.3% while ASK and MSN are not commonly used by students. This may be due to the popularity of goggle and yahoo in Nigeria and the difficulties encountered by students when trying to use Ask and MSN.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study investigated various variables related to the utilization of ICT by undergraduate students of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Many previous studies such as those of Udofia (2006) and Omotayo (2006) support the findings of this investigation that undergraduate students of Akwa Ibom State find the internet very useful in enhancing their academic performance as they can answer questions with information got from there, thus increasing their capacity for problem solving. This is due to its information packaging, handling, storage and retrieval and has great implications for many meaningful academic enterprises.

ICT facilities are also found to be increasingly available both in the institutional libraries and in the commercial cyber cafes on these campuses. Adetirini (2007) in his studies revealed this availability in Federal Universities more than the state of which the University under study is one. Omotayo's (2006) study on the contrary showed that it is the faculties that rather, provide the services as an NUC initiative. This is in contrast with the institutions studied where only the libraries and commercial cyber cafes provide the services. These cyber cafes litter everywhere within the campuses for their teeming populations with more facilities thus, luring students out of the library. This agrees with Udofia's (2006) earlier study that which reported the sidelining of universities/ institutional libraries where internet facilities were inadequate.

Skill possession is very important in the utilization of any technology. As a matter of fact, Udofia's (2006) study maintained that lack of skill has always been a hindrance to the adoption of new technology. In this study, it was discovered that most students use only two search engines, Google and Yahoo while they are handicapped in using others. This gap needs to be bridged as the internet is an indispensable tool to the students as the calculator is to the mathematicians.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The demand for Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is the sine qua non for qualitative and quantitative academic researches in tertiary institutions. These benefits of ICT have however not been widely and fully utilized by students in tertiary institutions. The operational use and applications of ICTs in tertiary institutions are hampered by varied problems associated with its availability and familiarity with internet search engines in a developing country like Nigeria. To brace up with emerging trends in the modern world, the following recommendations were made:

i.   Institutions of higher learning performing similar ICT functions must collaborate amongst themselves. Libraries in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State should collaborate with each other as well as with other institutions such as Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission, to share information and resources.

ii.   Internet information utilization should be introduced as a course to teach the students' population who are ICT illiterate since internet use is indispensable to students' success today.

iii.   Libraries in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State should also make their books and journals available and accessible online to cater for the conspicuously absent local content.

iv.   On-the-job training of all library staff of the institutions under study on the technical-know-how of modern ICT is advocated as this will greatly save ICT illiterate users from frustration. This is to say that the contemporary technological scenario predominated by knowledge and information, emphasizes the need for education and training towards a sustainable professional competence.

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