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Internet and its Utilization Among the Staff and Students of Federal University Lokoja Library, Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examines the profound influence of internet usage on teaching and learning within higher education institutions, focusing on the case study of Federal University Lokoja. In the contemporary era, the internet has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping communication dynamics and revolutionizing access to information. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, this study explores the implications of internet adoption for academic practices, curriculum delivery, and student engagement. The research investigates the patterns and trends of internet usage among students and faculty members, assessing the extent to which the internet is integrated into teaching and learning processes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data is gathered through surveys, interviews, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Findings reveal a significant increase in internet usage for academic purposes, with students and faculty alike leveraging online resources, communication platforms, and collaborative tools to enhance learning experiences. The study also identifies challenges and barriers associated with internet usage in the academic context, such as digital literacy gaps, infrastructure limitations, and concerns about information overload. Furthermore, the research highlights the role of libraries as vital hubs for internet access and information dissemination, underscoring the importance of investment in digital infrastructure within educational institutions. Recommendations are provided for policymakers, university administrators, and educators to effectively harness the potential of the internet for teaching and learning, ensuring equitable access, digital literacy development, and pedagogical innovation. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the transformative power of the internet in higher education, offering insights and recommendations to support the effective integration of digital technologies into academic practices and pedagogical approaches.

Keywords: *Internet, Utilization, Information, Library, Federal University Lokoja*

Introduction

The significance of the internet in every individual's life cannot be overstated. Its influence permeates every aspect of human existence, leaving no sphere untouched. This impact is palpable and unmistakable. The myriad innovations characterizing this modern era are propelled by Information

and Communication Technology (ICT) and the internet. It's important to distinguish between the two: while the internet refers to a global network of computers and devices facilitating the transmission of data and information, ICT encompasses a broader spectrum of technologies, applications, and services enabling individuals to access and utilize information. Thus, while the internet is a component of ICT, ICT encompasses more than just the internet.

The establishment of Federal University Lokoja on the 16th of February 2011, alongside eight other universities, was a result of the directive issued by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. This initiative aimed not only to enhance equitable access to higher education in Nigeria but also to establish institutions capable of supporting Nigeria's aspirations for accelerated development. This includes fostering the availability of a quality labor force and a knowledge base essential for driving competitiveness on both national and global scales. Federal University Lokoja boasts of two campuses, each serving distinct purposes. The main campus, situated along the Lokoja-Okene expressway, serves as the permanent site of the university. Meanwhile, the College of Health Sciences operates from the Adankolo campus, situated behind the Kogi State Specialist Hospital in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Since its inception, the university has experienced remarkable growth. Initially starting with only two faculties and eleven departments/programs during the 2012/2013 academic session, it has expanded significantly. Presently, Federal University Lokoja comprises six faculties, along with additional colleges, institutes, schools, and several directorates, catering to a diverse range of academic disciplines and interests. This expansion underscores the institution's commitment to providing quality education and fostering holistic development within the community.

The Directorate of ICT operates under the Office of the Vice Chancellor at Federal University Lokoja. Its primary responsibility is to deploy ICT infrastructures and services aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes, as well as teaching and learning activities within the university. Comprising four units, namely the Administrative Unit, Software Unit, Hardware Unit, and Networking Unit, the Directorate works collaboratively to ensure the seamless integration of ICT resources across various functions and departments.

In today's Information Age, the internet plays a pivotal role in opening new frontiers and expanding horizons for humanity. Its integration into education and training has revolutionized the learning landscape, offering innovative opportunities for staff and students to engage in collaborative learning experiences.

The advancements in internet capabilities have paved the way for the emergence of social media platforms, which serve as valuable tools for facilitating interactions and communication within academic communities. These platforms enable staff and students to share their learning experiences, ideas, and research findings, fostering a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. Social media, as internet-based technology, promotes social interaction among users, offering opportunities for engagement and knowledge sharing. Social networking sites, in particular, serve as platforms for connecting individuals and fostering meaningful interactions, thereby enriching the learning experience and promoting academic collaboration. These internet-based tools and technologies offer a range of capabilities, including audio and visual features, as well as functionalities for capturing, storing, connecting, and retrieving information. Here's a breakdown of some key features:

a) Blogs: These platforms allow authors to publish and post their work online, inviting comments and feedback from readers.

b) Wikis: Wikis enable collaborative creation and editing of content, making them ideal for joint academic ventures and collaborative projects.

c) Social Bookmarking: Users can collate, tag, and share websites of interest, facilitating knowledge sharing and information discovery.

d) Media Sharing Spaces: These platforms provide users with spaces to post and share various media formats, including pictures, podcasts, and videos. RSS Feeds offer users access to a variety of information sources in real-time.

e) Collaborative Editing Tools: These tools allow multiple users to collaborate on documents, facilitating sharing and editing in real-time.

f) Micro-blogging Sites: Platforms like Twitter enable users to publish short messages or updates, fostering quick and concise communication.

g) Social Networking Sites (SNSs): Popular SNSs such as Facebook and LinkedIn promote virtual communities, allowing users to interact and communicate synchronously or asynchronously. These platforms offer various features for connecting with peers, sharing updates, and engaging in discussions.

The current era witnesses the internet at its peak, fundamentally altering communication styles and patterns both at macro and micro levels. There is a noticeable upward trend in internet usage, with users increasingly embracing it for communication and academic purposes. However, the pace of internet adoption varies across countries and user communities (Smith, et al., 2019). As described by Bidin, et al. (n.d.), the internet has become a primary source for accessing a wide array of information, earning it the moniker of "gateway of information." Its impact on learning, particularly in higher education institutions, is profound (Edmunds, Thorpe, and Conole, 2015). Universities must keep pace with technological advancements in teaching and learning to remain relevant in today's digital age.

Libraries play a crucial role in enhancing teaching and learning experiences, serving as invaluable tools for accessing resources and information. Many universities have invested in infrastructure to support internet access within library premises. For instance, the installation of wireless hotspots enables students to conveniently access the internet anytime and anywhere within the library. This accessibility empowers students to conduct research, interact with lecturers, access library materials, and download lecture notes from online platforms or virtual libraries (Bidin, Z. & et al., n.d.).

Literature Review

Madhusudhan (2007) investigated the use of the Internet by research scholars of the University of Delhi, India and found that the University provided free Internet services and 70% of respondents used it daily for academic purposes. Google was the most familiar search engine (86%) followed by Sirus (78%). The most common problems related to internet use was the low bandwidth (72%) and retrieval problems. Kaur and Manhas (2008) conducted a survey on the use of Internet services and resources by students and teachers in the engineering colleges of Punjab and Haryana states of India. The findings revealed that all respondents used the internet frequently; access points being either college or at home with over 75 percent using it mainly for educational and research purposes.

Nwagwu et al. (2009) carried out a study to investigate the “use of the internet by students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study also examined the purpose of using the internet; as well as students’ opinions regarding the characteristics of the infrastructure and the problems they encounter in using the internet. The findings of the study showed that the use of the internet by the

students varies significantly with age, gender and level of study. Across gender, educational purpose dominates the use of the internet, but it varies with age, level of study and faculty. Higher educational level is associated with less use of the internet for leisure and entertainment. A study by Sampath Kumar and Kumar (2010) showed that the students and faculty who participated in the survey are aware of e-sources and also the internet. Even though the majority of the academic community use electronic information sources for their academic-related works, most of them prefer print to electronic information sources. Many of the students and faculties learnt about the electronic information sources either by trial and error or through the advice of friends.

Olubanke (2013) shows that the use of Internet use was widespread (100 %) among the scientists with the Majority (43.6 %) using it every day, and mean internet use experience being 6.3 years. The majority of respondents (64.5%) accessed the Internet from a commercial cybercafé followed by homes (49.1%). Most of the respondents (59.2%) acquired Internet use skills through colleagues and friends and 32.7% on their own by trial and error. The respondents used the Internet mostly for communication, research and updating knowledge. Email was the most popular Internet service, while Google, followed by Yahoo and Google Scholar, were the most used search engines. The majority of the scientists (67.3%) preferred information from the internet, while less than one-third (30 %) still preferred the traditional library.

The Digital Divide and Internet Inequality

The notion of a "digital divide" is not a new concept. In fact, terms like "information rich" and "information poor" gained popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the widespread adoption of the Internet, the divide between the educated and uneducated became more pronounced (Cronin, 2002). Disparities in computer ownership, access to information technology, and basic Internet connectivity metrics have highlighted social stratification on both national and international scales. These differences give tangible expression to the idea of the information-rich versus the information-poor, drawing attention to the issue of distributive injustice among those who should be concerned (Cronin, 2002).

When addressing disparities in the utilization of digital technologies, we often refer to the "digital divide." However, discussions surrounding the digital divide have predominantly framed it as a technological problem rather than recognizing it as a reflection of broader socio-economic issues (Light, 2002). Consequently, it becomes imperative to explore the root causes of this digital gap.

As Mitchell (2001) suggests, every social situation is influenced by five overarching categories of forces: society, technology, economics, politics, and the environment. Understanding how these factors intersect and contribute to the digital divide is essential for devising effective strategies to mitigate it. Hence, some attribute the digital divide to factors such as income, education, and geographical location, defining it as "the line that separates those who have access to computers, possess corresponding skills, and use the Internet from those who lack access to computer technology and the Internet" (Gaillard, 2001). The term "digital divide" increasingly encapsulates the social ramifications of unequal access to information and communication technology and the acquisition of essential skills (Cronin, 2002).

In today's society, access to computers and the Internet, along with proficiency in utilizing this technology, is becoming crucial for full participation in economic, political, and social spheres. The ability to access online technologies is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring fairness in accessing the information economy. It enables governments to achieve objectives related to electronic service delivery and empowers individuals to seize opportunities for economic advancement presented by the information age (Cronin, 2002). Inequality stands as one of the primary challenges confronting the world, with significant apprehensions regarding the role of digital technology in exacerbating it (UN, 2020). The prevailing perspective for comprehending the

relationship between digital technology and inequality has traditionally revolved around the concept of the digital divide: the notion of nations, regions, groups, or individuals being either absolutely or relatively excluded from the advantages of digital technology (van Dijk, 2019). This viewpoint has notably shaped the understanding of how digital technology intersects with inequality, particularly in the low- and middle-income countries of the global South. However, this perspective faces challenges in light of the rapid pace of digitalization witnessed in these nations, a trend that has only accelerated amidst the Covid pandemic (Oldekop et al., 2020). A significant portion of the population in these countries is now integrated into various digital systems. While this digital inclusion has undoubtedly brought about developmental benefits, it has also, in certain instances, been linked with a rise in inequality (Gurumurthy, 2019).

The conceptualization of digital inequality in the global South proved invaluable in the early years of the twenty-first century, providing a framework to analyze the situation of the vast majority who lacked access to computers, mobile phones, or the Internet. This approach remains pertinent today, offering insights into the hundreds of millions still devoid of mobile phones, the nearly three billion estimated to be non-users of the Internet (ITU, 2021), and those unable to leverage advanced digital applications such as robotics or artificial intelligence. However, perspectives and analyses centered on exclusion face challenges in a world where a significant majority of the global South's population now own a mobile phone, with a majority having Internet access (ITU, 2021). They are now integrated into, rather than excluded from, digital systems.

Lecturers and Students use Of Internet for Academic Purposes

The Internet serves as a vast repository of information, enriching people's knowledge across various domains. Its primary utility lies in facilitating seamless communication. Familiarity with easy internet access is widespread, catering to socializing, learning, and entertainment needs. The current generation adeptly harnesses the power of the Internet and computers. The rapid advancements in computer technology and the widespread availability of the internet have significantly transformed educational methodologies and environments. Moreover, the internet serves as a vital tool for acquiring updated information, continually enhancing people's knowledge. Many educational institutions now incorporate internet-based learning to bolster students' academic prowess. Internet-based learning encompasses diverse elements such as communication, interactivity, multimedia presentations, electronic archives, digital imagery, exposure to contemporary knowledge, and fostering deeper conceptual understanding.

Students, being avid users of the Internet, primarily utilize it for socialization and entertainment, given its transformative role in connecting people. However, beyond social interaction and leisure, the Internet serves as a rich repository of academic and scientific knowledge. Encouraging students to harness this invaluable resource for their academic pursuits is crucial, as the Internet's development would lose its significance if not utilized effectively in education. Consequently, new digital technologies have been extensively integrated into higher education institutions and other facets of the global education system (Park and Biddix, 2008). Moreover, Internet usage holds the promise of enhancing the quality of education (Ciglaric, 1998; Charp, 2000; Laurillard, 1992). Charp (2000) further asserts that the Internet has brought about several positive transformations for teachers and instructors. According to Dryli & Kinnaman (1996), the Internet empowers students not only to access information but also to develop critical and creative thinking skills, foster collaboration and cooperation, and effectively tackle problems.

In addition to being shaped by the new literacies and pedagogies of our technological era, it's crucial to acknowledge that "the capability to use online and offline databases as well as web search-engines effectively is paramount in cyberspace" (Nentwich, 2003). Today's students, who are the future scholars and knowledge workers, must possess the skills to navigate vast amounts of

information, both online and offline, to locate the correct and pertinent data amidst the sea of available resources. "Finding the right information is only one side of the core business of academics.

As Nentwich (2003) pointed out, the other aspect involves organizing, structuring, and evaluating the information space. It is pertinent to mention the three essential Internet literacies outlined by Burgess (2006):

(i) Critical Literacy – entails a profound, socially contextualized, and well-informed comprehension of the Internet.
(ii) Creative Literacy – involves the capacity to experiment with the Internet to both generate and assimilate information.
(iii) Network Literacy – encompasses the ability and inclination to proficiently and ethically utilize various Internet technologies to communicate, collaborate, and collectively generate and disseminate knowledge.

Types and Uses of Internet Resources Available to Lecturers and Students at the Library

The landscape of library and information services in the 21st century is undergoing rapid transformation. With the swift advancement of electronic publishing, libraries are not only procuring traditional reading materials like printed books and journals but also facilitating access to a wide array of learning resources in electronic format. The utilization of web resources and the adoption of the web as a tool are reshaping how users live and learn. In the earlier stages, the World Wide Web primarily served as a platform for push-type applications aimed at delivering information and resources to users. However, with the emergence of Web 2.0 and the proliferation of open-source and collaborative concepts, the focus has shifted towards user-generated content and applications designed for sharing and collaboration.

The rapid growth and widespread adoption of electronic resources have significantly transformed the landscape of global literature. E-resources encompass various information sources available in electronic format. These include:

E-books
E-journals
Databases
CDs/DVDs
E-conference proceedings
E-reports
E-maps
E-pictures/photographs
E-manuscripts
E-theses
E-newspapers
Internet/websites, including listservs, newsgroups, subject gateways, USENET, FAQs, etc.

According to the Library and Information Technology Glossary, electronic resources are defined as "all of the information products that a library provides through a computer network." Wikipedia defines electronic resources as "information (usually a file) which can be stored in the form of electrical signals, usually on a computer; information available on the Internet."

According to the Gradman glossary, electronic resources are described as "publications in digital format that must be stored and read on a computer device." They are categorized into two types: direct access resources, such as CD-ROMs, diskettes, computer tapes, and computer cards, which contain text, images, software, etc.

E-resources facilitate librarians in offering enhanced services to the user community. Several notable points include:
a. Facilitating access to information sources by multiple users simultaneously.
b. Quick and efficient search capabilities inherent to e-resources.
c. Easy discoverability for users, enhancing accessibility.
d. Ability to store vast amounts of information efficiently.
e. Reduction in time spent on accessing and utilizing e-resources.
f. Analysis of users' purposes for utilizing e-resources.
g. Identification of the various types of e-resources commonly utilized by respondents.
h. Collection, storage, and organization of information in digital format, streamlining management processes.

Conclusion

The Internet serves myriad purposes, particularly benefiting students and lecturers in higher education institutions. A significant majority of students express satisfaction with Internet services, noting substantial impacts on both their academic and social lives. Students highlight various advantages of utilizing the Internet effectively, including its role as a research tool, facilitator of information retrieval, means of connecting with family and friends, enhancer of knowledge, and disseminator of educational, political, and social information. It is crucial to encourage staff members to participate in regular workshops and seminars to stay updated on utilizing Internet resources effectively for academic purposes. Additionally, governmental intervention is imperative to develop an information policy addressing freedom of information concerning social aspects of Internet usage. Adequate funding allocation by institutional authorities is essential for the operation and maintenance of Internet facilities. The prevailing issue of institutions installing Internet infrastructure without ensuring proper maintenance or timely payment to service providers should be addressed promptly.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. Policy Interventions: Advocate for policies that prioritize digital inclusion, ensuring equitable access to digital technologies and infrastructure. This could involve government initiatives to subsidize or provide affordable access to mobile phones and the Internet, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
ii. Education and Training: Promote initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy and skills development, especially among underserved populations. This could include educational programs in schools, community centers, and vocational training institutions focused on building digital skills relevant to employment opportunities and participation in the digital economy.
iii. Infrastructure Development: Support efforts to expand and improve digital infrastructure, including broadband connectivity and mobile network coverage in remote areas. This could involve partnerships between governments, private sector entities, and international organizations to invest in infrastructure projects that prioritize underserved regions.
iv. Community Empowerment: Encourage grassroots initiatives that empower communities to leverage digital technologies for socio-economic development. This could involve supporting community-led projects focused on using digital tools for healthcare, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement.

v. Research and Evaluation: Advocate for continued research and evaluation of digital inclusion initiatives to assess their impact and effectiveness. This could involve conducting studies to identify barriers to digital access and usage, as well as evaluating the outcomes of interventions aimed at bridging the digital divide.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards reducing digital inequality and fostering a more inclusive digital community in Federal University Lokoja.

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