

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

An Assessment of the Level of Accessibility and Use of Indexes and Abstracts among the Undergraduate Students of the University of Ibadan

Osarobu Emmanuel Igudia

Lecturer, Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Onalapo Sodiq

Student, Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract:

Experience has shown that many undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan consult information materials such as books and journals for their daily educational activities and research purposes. However, the process of searching and retrieving the much-needed information is strenuous and sometime may be futile. This could be either that undergraduate students have no access to information retrieval materials such as indexes and abstracts or they are not aware of their usefulness. The advent of the Internet further made the use of indexes and abstracts unpopular among students. Therefore, this work is set to find out the level of accessibility and use of indexes and abstracts by undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan. From the study, it was found that most of the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan are fully aware that indexes and abstracts are important to their academic progress. However, some of them did not know what information retrieval tools are and their importance. It was therefore recommended, among others, that undergraduate students should be properly introduced to indexes and abstracts as well as how to use them through the orientation programmes of university libraries, faculties and departments. The use of indexes and abstracts should be incorporated into the curricula of universities so that its techniques will be applied by the undergraduate students in the use of these retrieval tools.

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, the human race has depended heavily on information. Throughout the phases of human existence, the germane roles played by information have been accorded proper recognition hence appreciated by various human societies. This is evident in the different media used in obtaining, preserving and transmitting information in different human societies from the ancient times to the modern day. Even in this digital age, the world economic, political and social order is increasingly being piloted by information and the rapid exchange of information. Everywhere in the world, people have to cope with more and more information on their jobs and as part of their routine daily activities. Therefore, information is not only crucial to the progress of human beings but also to their survival.

However, the exponential increase in the rate of information generated on daily basis as a result of the enormous growth in research findings and development in different disciplines nowadays, has necessitated the need for retrieval tools used in searching and organizing this myriad information. Prominent among these retrieval tools are indexes and abstracts which most people, including undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, are familiar with. Reitz (2004) defined an index as alphabetically arranged list of headings consisting of the personal names, places and subjects treated in a written work, with page numbers to refer the reader to the point in the text in which information pertaining to the heading is found. An index gives an alphabetical list of topics, names and other noteworthy terms contained in a book, indicating their exact position in the work, usually by page numbers (Edoka, 2000). In the same vein, Lancaster (2002) defined an abstract as a brief but accurate representation of a document. An abstract is also a concise and accurate representation of the content of a document (Rowley, 1992).

Indexes provide a methodical listing of the essential contents of publications. With the aid of indexes, users will be able to navigate through the numerous pages of publications and retrieve the information relevant to their needs with ease. Abstract, on the other hand, refers to the summary of the intellectual content of a document as well as its bibliographic details in an abridged form. Abstracts serve as surrogates of publications. A user who needs information from a particular publication does not necessarily have to read the whole publication before knowing whether such publication is relevant to his needs or not but by reading the abstract attached to the publication, he will know whether the publication is relevant to his needs or not. Indexes and abstracts therefore play vital roles in enabling users to locate their desired information, scrutinize such information to know their relevance and retrieve them easily within the shortest period of time.

Experiences have shown that many undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan consult information materials such as books and journals for their daily educational activities and research purposes. However, the process of searching and retrieving the much-needed information from the pages of these information materials by the undergraduate students is strenuous and sometime may be futile. Hence, they resort to the use of indexes and abstracts of such information materials.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Indexes and abstracts are vital tools of information retrieval which contribute immensely to the academic progress of undergraduate students. They enable undergraduate students to have adequate information at their disposal with minimal stress. Despite the relevance of indexes and abstracts to the academic pursuit of these students, it is quite disheartening that some of them do not have access to these retrieval tools. Those that have access to these tools do not know how to use them. This ugly development could be attributed to the fact that these undergraduate students are not properly introduced to what indexes and abstracts are and their relevance to their study. Many undergraduate students in Nigerian universities were not given the necessary orientation on the use of library and their information resources.

Experience has shown that most undergraduate students often make use of the library for reading alone without making effective use of the information materials such as indexes and abstracts contained in them. This ugly trend is compounded with the advent of the Internet. Most of these undergraduate students see the Internet as a fast and more effective means of retrieving their desired information. This has made them to perceive indexes and abstracts as crude means of retrieving information hence, unpopular to them. Therefore, this work is set to find out the level of accessibility and use of indexes and abstracts by undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan so as to proffer solution to how this problem can be solved.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the level of accessibility and use of indexes and abstracts among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the level of accessibility to indexes by undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan;
- ii. find out the level of accessibility to abstracts by undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan;
- iii. assess the extent of use of indexes by undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan; and
- iv. Evaluate the extent of use of abstracts by undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan.

1.3. Research Questions

This research is designed to seek answers to the following questions.

- i. What is the level of accessibility to indexes among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?
- ii. What is the level of accessibility to abstracts among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?
- iii. What is the extent of use of indexes among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?
- iv. What is the extent of use of abstracts among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?

1.4. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study examines the level of accessibility to indexes and abstracts and their use by undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan. University of Ibadan is the premier university of Nigeria; it was founded in 1948 as a college under the University of London. This study is expected to cover a period of one year and it will be limited to the undergraduate students in the university.

2. Literature Review

Information can be seen as a vital element in the development of human societies and nations. It is needed in all facets of human life for optimum performance and effective results. Ifidon (1999) stressed that information could be regarded as the driving force behind the development of different sectors in any nation. Indexes and abstracts, unarguably, serve as essential information retrieval tools in this modern age which is characterized by enormous amount of information. The need for adequate access and effective use of these retrieval tools cannot be overemphasized.

According to Ugah (2008) accessibility means that users can identify and use the available resources in a library. Accessibility of these information materials implies that users have unhindered approach to them and the information contained in them. Indexes and abstracts may be available in a library but inaccessible to those who needed them for some reasons which are explained below.

Some undergraduate students are oblivious of the existence of indexes and abstracts and the important roles which they play in retrieval of information. This is due to the fact that most of them only use the library for reading in order to prepare for their respective examinations. Hence, they do not bother to exploit the resources of the libraries optimally. This was established by Prabhavathi (2011) who posited that "most students visit libraries everyday and their main purpose of visiting the library is to prepare for examination." This ugly trend can be reversed through user orientation. Edoke (2000) emphasized that user orientation is designed to give new library users a general awareness of the library resources and to emphasize that, in addition to the materials; there are also library staff that are there to help them with their needs. With an effective user orientation in place, these set of students will be fully aware of indexes and abstracts as well as their importance to their academic pursuits. This will eventually enhance access to these retrieval tools by the undergraduate students.

Another reason why indexes and abstracts may not be accessible to undergraduate students is the inability of these students to locate them. Most of the undergraduate students do not know how to locate the information materials that are relevant to their needs in the library collection. Due to this, they are usually confused and subsequently, they will not be able to have access to these information materials. This problem can be solved through user education. User education is the process whereby library users are equipped with adequate knowledge on the use of the library and its resources. Through user education, undergraduate students will be properly guided on the use of library resources and services. This will also contribute to undergraduate students' access to indexes and abstracts.

It has been established that indexes and abstracts are indispensable tools used in retrieving information. Indexes and abstracts assist their users to retrieve desired information with minimal efforts within a short period of time. Abiola (2010) affirmed this by stating that:

“The work of indexes (electronic or paper) to information seekers is always beneficial and helpful. Indexes guide information seekers from taking a wrong path in the search of information. Therefore, they are essential for quick access to information and prevention of excessive search stress.”

Like indexes, abstracts also provide immediate access to documents and they also go further by providing a detailed summary of the essential content of such documents. This view was supported by Ojedokun (2007) who maintained that abstracts are very useful to determine whether an article is likely to contain the kinds of information one needs, without having to go through the process of locating the complete article. Aina (2004) also pointed out that “as a true surrogate, a user might not need to see the original document. It might serve as a substitute for the document, thereby saving valuable time for the user.”

In addition to that, undergraduate students use indexes and abstracts in determining those publications which will be suitable for their academic needs. Experience has shown that the title of publications is not a good indicator of the intellectual content of such publications. At times, the title of a publication may not be in accordance with its content. This view was corroborated by Maloney (1974) who said that “titles also tend to be very general because of the necessity for brevity; they often suggest possibilities far beyond what the author actually reports. Thus, titles may be poor guides to the selection of reading.” As a result of this, indexes which were meticulously composed and carefully written abstracts are usually far superior to titles when selecting publications to be read.

Indexes and abstracts are needed by undergraduate students to sieve the information relevant to their needs out of the enormous information materials available in academic libraries. This is evident in the findings of Ikem and Ajala (2000) which state that “information on virtually all subjects and disciplines are available in vast quantities from a wide variety of sources in university libraries. The production of this information increases astronomically every year. This is as a result of developmental activities and researches generating more and more information.”

3. Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprises ten (10) faculties in the University of Ibadan. They include faculties of Agriculture and Forestry, Arts, Education, Law, Pharmacy, Science, Social Sciences, Technology, Veterinary Medicine and College of Medicine. The simple random sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) students from each of the ten faculties. Hence, the sample size for this study consists of 200 respondents (undergraduate students) which were chosen randomly from ten faculties that offer undergraduate programmes in the university.

The selection of this population is based on a systematic process aimed at ensuring accuracy and equal chances of representation. The research instrument used for this study is questionnaire which was administered to the respondents. The questionnaire was designed in accordance with the objectives of the study and the research questions. After the completion of data collection, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis of the data collected. The analysis of data collected was based on the use of simple descriptive statistical analysis of frequency counts and percentages. Figures and tables were also used to present findings. Conclusion would be made, based on the interpretation of the responses to the items of the questionnaire.

4. Discussion of Results

4.1. Research Question 1:

What is the level of accessibility to indexes among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?

S/N	Item	SA		A		U		D		SD		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I have access to indexes	29	14.5	97	48.5	40	20	19	9.5	15	7.5	200	100
2	I do not have access to indexes	23	11.5	33	16.5	33	16.5	60	30	51	25.5	200	100
3	As an undergraduate student, indexes are always made accessible to me when I needed them	24	12	67	33.5	61	30.5	25	12.5	23	11.5	200	100
4	I have optimum access to indexes	19	9.5	62	31	56	28	37	18.5	26	13	200	100

Table 1

Hint: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, f = frequency, % = percentage

The first item of the table above indicated that majority of the undergraduate students of University of Ibadan (63%) had access to indexes while item 2 shows that 56 respondents (28%) did not have access to them. Most of the respondents (45.5%) agreed that

indexes and abstracts were always accessible to them when they needed them, while 48 respondents (24%) disagreed with this. Some of the undergraduate students (40.5%) had optimum access to indexes and abstracts while 63 respondents (31.5%) did not have optimum access to them.

4.2. Research Question 2:

What is the level of accessibility to abstracts among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?

S/N	Item	SA		A		U		D		SD		Total	
		f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
1	I have access to abstracts	29	14.5	97	48.5	40	20	19	9.5	15	7.5	200	100
2	I do not have access to abstracts	23	11.5	33	16.5	33	16.5	60	30	51	25.5	200	100
3	As an undergraduate student, abstracts are always made accessible to me when I needed them	24	12	67	33.5	61	30.5	25	12.5	23	11.5	200	100
4	I have optimum access to abstracts	19	9.5	62	31	56	28	37	18.5	26	13	200	100

Table 2

Hint: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, f = frequency, % = percentage

Table 2 shows that first item of the table above indicated that majority of the undergraduate students of University of Ibadan (63%) had access to abstracts. Item 2 of the table depicted that (11.5%) and (16.5%) of the respondents' population did not have access to abstracts. Most of the respondents (45.5%) agreed that abstracts were always accessible to them when they needed them, while 48 respondents (24%) disagreed with this assertion. A large number of the undergraduate students (40.5%) had optimum access to abstracts while 63 respondents (31.5%) did not have optimum access to them.

4.3. Research Question 3:

What is the extent of use of indexes among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?

S/N	Item	True		Undecided		False		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I know how to use indexes	119	59.5	46	23	35	17.5	200	100
2	I have never used indexes before	53	26.5	17	8.5	130	65	200	100
3	Indexes are useful to my study	138	69	47	23.5	15	7.5	200	100
4	Indexes are ineffective means of information retrieval and as such I do not use them	18	9	64	32	118	59	200	100
5	I do not know how to use indexes. I only use search engines	78	39	23	11.5	99	49.5	200	100

Table 3

More than half of the respondents' population (59.5%) knew how to use indexes while few of them (17.5%) did not know how to use them. Fifty-three respondents (26.5%) had never used indexes before while a larger section of the students (65%) claimed to have used indexes before. Majority of the respondents (69%) acknowledged that indexes are useful to their study. Eighteen respondents (9%) saw indexes as ineffective means of information retrieval while 59% of the respondents disagreed with this. Also, a total of 78 respondents (39%) did not know how to use indexes and abstracts; hence they use search engines.

4.4. Research Question 4:

What is the extent of use of abstracts among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan?

S/N	Item	True		Undecided		False		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I know how to use abstracts	119	59.5	46	23	35	17.5	200	100
2	I have never used abstracts before	53	26.5	17	8.5	130	65	200	100
3	Abstracts are useful to my study	138	69	47	23.5	15	7.5	200	100
4	Abstracts are ineffective means of information retrieval and as such I do not use them	18	9	64	32	118	59	200	100
5	I do not know how to use abstracts. I only use search engines	78	39	23	11.5	99	49.5	200	100

Table 4

The results of table 4 above expressed that most of the respondents (59.5%) knew how to use abstracts. Item 2 of the table shows that fifty-three respondents (26.5%) had never used abstracts before. Also, majority of the respondents (69%) admitted that abstracts are useful to their study. Eighteen respondents (9%) perceived indexes and abstracts as ineffective means of information retrieval while

59% of the respondents disagreed with this. Also, a total of 78 respondents (39%) did not know how to use indexes and abstracts; hence they use search engines.

5. Conclusion

It has been established earlier in the study that most of the books and journals used by undergraduate students are accompanied by indexes and abstracts. This implies that indexes and abstracts are readily available to these students. However, it is worrisome that some of the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan did not even know what these information retrieval tools are and their importance. This, therefore, affects the level of accessibility to indexes and abstracts among the undergraduate students. Though most undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan use indexes and abstracts, some students, due to laziness, did not deem it fit to use these information retrieval tools and this hinders the use of indexes and abstracts among the undergraduate students. Most of the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan are fully aware that indexes and abstracts are important to their academic progress.

6. Findings

Based on the conclusion, the following findings were established:

1. Indexes are not adequately available in the libraries in the University of Ibadan..
2. Many undergraduate students did not have adequate information about the usefulness of indexes and abstracts in academic research.
3. Many undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan do not use indexes and abstracts in the libraries.
4. Undergraduate students were not taught how to use indexes and abstract in retrieving information.

7. Recommendations

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

1. The university, faculty and departmental libraries should endeavour to acquire more quality books which are accompanied by indexes and abstracts in order to further increase the level of accessibility of indexes and abstracts among the undergraduate students.
2. Undergraduate students should be properly introduced to indexes and abstracts as well as how to use them through the orientation programmes of libraries, faculties and departments in order to combat those factors that hinder the effective use of these retrieval tools.
3. There should be concerted efforts by scholars, researchers and other concerned authorities to further enlighten undergraduate students on the importance of indexes and abstracts to their academic progress as this will increase the level of awareness of the students on the importance of these retrieval tools.
4. The utilization of indexes and abstracts should be incorporated into the curricula of universities so that its techniques will be applied by the undergraduate students in the use of these retrieval tools. This will eliminate the frustration encountered by the students in using indexes and abstracts.

8. References

- i. Abiola, M. A. (2010). Assessment of the Utilization of Online Index among the Undergraduate Students of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. A Project Submitted to the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- ii. Aina, L.O (2004). Library and Information Science text for Africa. Ibadan: Third World Information Services Limited.
- iii. Edoke, B.E (2000) Introduction to Library Science. Onitsha: Palma publishing and links company.
- iv. Ifidon, S. E. (1999).Essentials of African university Library Management, 2nd ed. Lagos: The National Library Press Ltd.
- v. Ikem, J. E and Ajala, E. B (2000) Some Developments in Information Technology at the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan. National Association of Library and Information Science Educators, Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of Ibadan.
- vi. Maloney, R.K., (1974) "Title versus title/ abstract text searching in SDI systems" Journal of the American Society for Information Science, Vol. 25, No 6, 1974, pp. 370-373.
- vii. Ojedokun, A. A. (2007). Information Literacy for Tertiary Education Students in Africa; National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing in Publication Data. Pp. 191.
- viii. Prabhavathi, D. (2011) Information seeking behavior of post graduate students of SPMW, Tirupati (A.P): a study. International Journal of Digital Library Service.
- ix. Reitz. J. M (2004) Dictionary for Library and Information Science. Littleton: libraries Unlimited.
- x. Rowley, J. E. (1992) Abstracting and Indexing. Third Edition. Clive Bingley, 181p.
- xi. Ugah, A.D. (2008) Availability and Accessibility of Information Sources and the Use of Library Services at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture," Library Philosophy and Practice 2008 (May)