Perception of Library and Information Science Students on the Use of Virtual Library at the Benue State University Library

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Abstract

The study investigated the perception of library and information science students on the use of virtual library at the Benue state university library. The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey and a population of 843 students of the department of library and information science from 2011-2014 sessions were used for the study. This study reveals among others that, library and information science (LIS) students are aware of the existence of virtual library at the Benue state university library and they use it for the purpose of research and writing project doing assignments, chatting on face book and other social media etc.

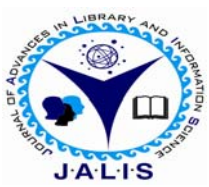
Keywords

Virtual Library; Information and Communication Technology; University Library

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INTRODUCTION

The library plays a very vital role in our society; it is an integral part of most institutions especially the academic institutions like the university. A library is a place or a building where books and other information materials or resources are kept for people or users for the purpose of reading, studying and learning there from. Some libraries have their resources mostly in electronic formats and they are accessed through the use of computers and the internet and the virtual library is one of such libraries. According to (Reitz 2004:760) virtual library is a "library without walls" in which collections do not exist on paper, microform or other tangible form at a physical location but are electronically accessible in a digital format via computer networks. Additional terms for virtual library include the "digital library" the "electronic library" and the "library without walls". Many libraries are a hybrid, providing virtual access to electronic resources and services while maintaining and supporting use of a physical collection housed in a library building (Kay, Honda, and Tony, 2004). Gapen (2007) defined virtual libraries as the concept of remote access to the contents and services of libraries and other information resources. According to (Ape 2011:15) this type of library (that is the virtual library) is one in which a number of different information resources are brought to end users through electronic networks. The virtual library has no wall but the collections have boundaries. The virtual library is telecommunication driven; it is research oriented resources that enables scholars to obtain timely and up to the minute information in any area of study.

21st century libraries have therefore been transformed from traditional status of storehouse of information materials (mostly prints) into information centers where information and communication technologies(ICT) are used to acquire, process, store, retrieve and disseminate information (Shidi and Terna, 2011). As a library that meets the 21st century demands for information, every library especially academic libraries desire, attempts and claims to have one. Most institutions or universities especially in Nigeria and other developing countries that lay claims to it have just a shadow of the virtual library. Benue state university was established in 1992 in response to a genuine need by the state government to provide the essential impetus to economic, cultural, social and vocational development (Benue State University, 2011). It was established alongside the establishment of a library to support learning,

teaching and research. It has used the traditional library resources to achieve these objectives until November 2007 when a virtual library was established to compliment the traditional library system in meeting the information needs of the university community. Whether it has the true features of a virtual library or whether it has been able to satisfy the information needs of the university community is a question that deserves answers. The inability of the virtual library to possess the true features and give students what it ought to give leaves much doubt in the minds of students. This has affected the way they look at or perceive its existence. Perception therefore is an understanding based on what is observed or thought (Encarta dictionary 2009). Utilizing a service or facility is what is referred to as use. According to the (Encarta dictionary 2009), use is to put something into action or service for some purpose. It is important therefore that the utilization of facilities and services offered by the virtual library should meet up the purpose of its existence and needs of the students in Benue state university especially library and information science students.

It has been observed that the virtual library at the Benue state university is lacking in optional operation and ability to meet students information needs as it suffers irregular power supply, absence of access to institutional repositories, poor internet connectivity. This situation, if not well addressed may cause students to lose interest and resort to cybercafés which are capable of exposing them to unfiltered junk information. It is in line with this that the study is out to investigate the perception of library and information science students on the use of virtual library at the Benue state university library.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate the perception of library and information science students on the use of virtual library at the Benue state university library. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives.

1. Determine if library and information science students are aware of the existence of virtual library at the Benue state university library.
2. Determine the purpose of use of the virtual library.
3. Determine the level of satisfaction derived from the use of the virtual library.
4. Determine the challenges encountered in the use of the virtual library.
5. Suggest strategies for solving the problems associated with its use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Virtual library is a library in digital form where information resources are stored in digital form and accessed through electronic devices. Okebukola (2000) describes it as a collection of library resources in electronic form which could be accessed and used with great ease with the aid of computer technologies for the purpose of promoting learning and research. It is a conglomeration of electronic databases, e-books and e-journals etc stored on large memory capacity servers which can be accessed electronically through the internet. It has its roots in the internet as noted by Ape (2011). Also, Musciano and Kennedy in Olise (2014) asserts that, the internet which began in the late 1960's as a worldwide collection of computer networks, a network of networks sharing digital information in a common set of networking and software protocol. It has changed the face of information management especially in librarianship. The virtual library has no physical boundaries and offers its users the advantages of unlimited opening hours, information access, retrieval and dissemination at an alarming speed, time saving for users and also space saving for the library as information is now stored in electronic format and devices etc.

According to (Gunn 2002) virtual libraries offer opportunities for learning that are not possible in their physical counterparts. Whereas physical libraries operate with designated hours, virtual libraries are available anytime and anywhere there is internet connection to any of the local internet services providers. It is believed that the virtual library will change the way students and researchers do research which will present a new paradigm of library services which on the other hand would solve the paucity of teaching and research materials in the libraries of institutions of higher education in the country. It would also allow for the institution and local researchers to have their own research output with the global community (Ape 2011: 96).

The benefits of virtual library as outlined by (Agada 2012:14-15) include the following:

- ✓ Virtual library helps to provide guidance for libraries by applying appropriate technologies used in the production of the digital library resources.
- ✓ Virtual library assist Nigerian universities to advance the use of globally networked information resources.

- ✓ Virtual library has greatly influenced most operational functions and activities of libraries, these among others include the reference services where it is used for accessing outlined databases and ready reference information.
- ✓ Also the virtual library provides access to bibliographic records of millions of books required in their institutions and order them without going from one bookshop or publisher.
- ✓ Virtual library will enhance scholarship, records and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to share digital archival collections.

The introduction of virtual libraries has no doubt presented numerous benefits to the academic community and the society in general. There are however challenges to grapple with in the course of its application.In every organization, electricity is required for it to be able to function efficiently and effectively. Ojo - Igbinola cited in Ape 2011: 96 said "a serious trait to the virtual library is lack of constant power supply.The information and communications technology and its infrastructures or facilities is one of the vital tools needed for the virtual library to enhance it performance. According to (Ape 2011), ICT infrastructures in Nigeria for instance are poorly developed. This has turned to affect the operation of virtual libraries in many institutions in Nigeria. Another challenge confronting the virtual library is the issue of funding. Cost of connectivity, payment of subscription, alternative power supply and also need for heavy investment in hardware and software. (Ape, 2011). This demands a lot of funds which in many cases are not sufficiently provided to the libraries. Also faced by the virtual library is the problem of lack of skilled personnel or manpower. Most libraries lack professional personnel with proper technical skills and knowledge that is been required to effectively and efficiently operate or run the virtual library. There is near absence of skilled or trained manpower in the virtual library as the technical know-how of most staff is low. Many are not computer literate or competent enough to manage the virtual library adequately and render satisfactory services to users. Poor internet connectivity – unstable network or network failure and others frustrates and discourages students from using the virtual library. Sometimes the network may not be available at all and this can affect the image of the virtual library and it performance negatively. (Ukon, Wogu and Ekwueme 2013) said that students often feel discouraged from returning after their initial visits due to slow network and difficulty in reaching needed e- resources. .

Ukon, Wogu and Ekwueme (2013) carried out a study on undergraduate students' awareness and use of the multimedia facilities in the university of Nigeria Nsukka virtual library. The survey research method was used, questionnaires and interview schedule was used as instrument of data generation from the respondents. A sample size of 390 students was used out of a total population of 15,382 respondents. While all seven (7) staff members of the digital library in UNN were interviewed. The findings indicated that awareness of the existence of the digital library is high, but exposure is low. The respondents did not know the precise meaning of multimedia use, multimedia facilities in the library is limited to browsing assignments. The library is being run as an internet cafe' as against the real purpose of a digital/virtual library which should offer virtual access to other libraries, among other crucial services. The paper recommended that lecturers should direct their students to the library for specific assignments and use it as a way to evaluate the relevance of the electronic library and subsequently arm the university administration with information on ways to position the virtual library to serve students better. The library should also regularly renew subscription and collaborate with other libraries on networked resource sharing. A study was also conducted by Olise (2013) on students' perception on the electronic library in Delta state polytechnic Ogwashi –uku, Delta state. Using the survey research design with the aid of an 18 item questionnaire based on the demographic variables of respondents and 3 research questions posted for the study, out of a population of 15,300 students, the researcher purposively selected 200 students and according to the findings, students saw the electronic library as a storehouse of knowledge for both staff and students. It was also found that students use the electronic library for different purposes ranging from research, chatting to entertainment and recreational purposes. However, certain problems which include power failure, network problems amongst others affected their effective use of the electronic library. It was concluded that students in DSPG (delta state polytechnic Ogwashi- uku) have a positive and right perception of the electronic library.

No study was therefore carried out on the perception of Library and Information Science Students on the Use of Virtual Library at the Benue State University Library thus the need for this study.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey and a population of 843 students of the department of library and information science from 2011-2014 sessions were used for the study.

Data Analysis

Random sampling was used to select a sample size of 84 respondents representing 10% of the population was used as recommended by Fraenkel and Norman (2000) that, the larger the population, the more likely it is to represent the population. Questionnaire was used to collect data and 70 Questionnaire (83%) were returned and found useful while descriptive statistics (frequency tables, mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze the data.

Research question 1: Are you aware of the existence of virtual library at the Benue state university library?

Table 1: Awareness of Virtual Library

S/N	Awareness of Virtual Library	$\overline{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Am aware of it because there is a virtual library at the Benue state university library	3.07	0.30	Agreed
2	Am aware of it through library orientation and my visit to the library	3.5	0.36	Agreed
3	I am aware because I do use it	2.64	0.27	Agreed
4	Am aware of it because it is not operating effectively	1.86	0.04	Disagreed

Key: $\overline{X}$ - Mean; SD- Strongly Agree; S/N: Serial Number Source: Field survey 2014

The table 1 above shows that there is a virtual library at the Benue state university library with a significant mean score of 3.07. Respondents are aware of it through library orientation and their visit to the library with a mean score of 3.5 and others are aware of it because they do use it with a mean score of 2.64, all on the same significant level. On the other hand some disagreed that they are not aware of the existence of a virtual library at the university's library because it is not operating effectively (mean score of 1.86) which is considered insignificant. This implies that there is a virtual library at the Benue state university library but it is not operating effectively as shown with 1.86 mean score.

Research question two: What is the purpose of use of the virtual library?

Table 2: Purpose of Use

S/N	Purpose of Use	$\overline{X}$	SD	Decision
1.	For doing my research and writing my project	3.57	0.37	Agreed
2.	For doing my assignment	3.35	0.34	Agreed
3.	To chat on facebook and other social media	3.43	0.35	Agreed
4.	For checking and sending mails	3.29	0.33	Agreed
5.	To entertain myself	3.07	0.30	Agreed
6.	To commit internet fraud	1.37	0.38	Disagreed

Key: $\overline{X}$ - Mean; SD- Strongly Agree; S/N: Serial Number Source: Field survey 2014

Table 2 above shows the purpose of use of the virtual library. The most significant use of the virtual library is for doing research and writing of project with a mean score of 3.57; for doing assignment with a mean score of 3.35; for chatting on face book and other social media with 3.43 mean score; for checking and sending mails with 3.29 mean score and for entertainment 3.07 mean score, all on the significant level, while to commit internet fraud has an insignificant mean score of 1.37. This implies that they students or respondents use the virtual library for academic purpose and to entertain themselves and not to commit internet fraud as represented with an insignificant score of 1.37.

Research question 3: What is the level of satisfaction derived from the use of the virtual library?

Table 3: Level of Satisfaction derived from use of virtual library

S/N	Level of Satisfaction	$\overline{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Am not satisfied	3.43	0.35	Agreed
2	Am partially satisfied	2.79	0.28	Agreed
3	Am satisfied	2.57	0.27	Agreed
4	Am fully satisfied	1.79	0.32	Disagreed

Key: $\overline{X}$ - Mean; SD- Strongly Agree; S/N: Serial Number- Source: Field survey 2014

Table 4.3.3 above indicates the level of satisfaction of the students with services rendered by the library with the following responses: not satisfied (3.43); partially satisfied (2.79); satisfied (2.57). Those that are fully satisfied are insignificant as shown by 1.79 mean scores.

Research question 4: what are the challenges encountered in the use of the virtual library?

Table 4: Challenges encountered in the use oirtual library

S/N	Challenges Encountered	$\overline{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Poor internet connection or poor bandwidth	3.43	0.35	Agreed
2	Lack of qualified manpower or staff	3.37	0.34	Agreed
3	Lack of subscription	3.14	0.30	Agreed
4	Constant power failure	3.07	0.30	Agreed
5	Inadequate funding or finance	2.86	0.28	Agreed
6	Inadequate ICT infrastructures or facilities	2.57	0.27	Agreed

Key: $\overline{X}$ - Mean; SD- Strongly Agree; S/N: Serial Number

Table 4.3.4 above presents the challenges encountered in the use of the virtual library. Mean scores range from 2.57-3.43 and standard deviation from 0.27-0.35 which shows that, the respondents agree that all the challenges listed are encountered in the use of virtual library in the university.

Research question five: What are the suggested strategies to overcome or solve the challenges associated with it?

Table 5: Suggested strategies to overcome or solve the challenges

S/N	Suggested Strategies	$\overline{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Increased bandwidth or improved internet connectivity	3.86	0.42	Agreed
2	Provide adequate funding or finance	3.71	0.39	Agreed
3	Subscribe regularly	3.57	0.37	Agreed
4	Provide adequate ICT infrastructure or facilities	3.64	0.38	Agreed
5	Employment of qualified manpower or staff	3.5	0.36	Agreed
6	Provide functional generators to supplement the public power supply	3.5	0.36	Agreed

Key: $\overline{X}$ - Mean; SD- Strongly Agree; S/N: Serial Number Source: Field survey 2014

Table 5 above shows that all the strategies: increased bandwidth or improved internet connectivity (3.86); provision of adequate funding (3.71); regular subscription (3.57) adequate ICT infrastructure or facilities (3.64); Employment of qualified manpower or staff (3.5); provision of functional generators to supplement the public power supply (3.5) can be adopted to overcome the challenges.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to investigate perception of library and information science students on the use of virtual library at the Benue state university library. Findings of the study are discussed based on the data that was collected, presented and analyzed.

This study reveals that library and information science (LIS) students are aware of the existence of virtual library at the Benue state university library. This affirms Ukon, Wogu and Ekwueme (2013) who found that majority of the respondents were aware of the existence of a digital library. On the contrary, Olise (2014) however found that, e- library in Delta state polytechnic Ogwashi – uku (DSPG) is operating effectively. It was also revealed that the purpose of use of the virtual library by LIS students is for research and writing project; doing assignments; chatting on face book and other social media;

checking and sending mails; for entertainment and not to commit internet fraud. This again affirms Olise (2014) who found that DSPG students use the e-library for research, term paper writing, games, entertainment and other recreational purposes (e.g. facebook chat, e-mail and for instant messaging) and finally to improve on the information literacy skills and not to commit internet fraud.From the findings on the level of satisfaction derived from the use of the virtual library by LIS students, it was revealed that they are not fully satisfied with the virtual library. They do not derive full satisfaction from it. Some are partially satisfied with it while others are not satisfied and others just satisfied. Jones (2002) disagree with this findings, asserting however that nearly three quarters (73%) of college students in Washington DC use the Internet for information searching more than the library. This call for improvement and proper development of the virtual library in Benue state university library so as to enable LIS students and other users to derive full satisfaction from its use.

The study went further to reveal that there are challenges confronting the students in the course of using the virtual library in the school. These challenges include – constant power failure, lack of subscription, poor internet connection or low bandwidth, lack of qualified manpower or staff, inadequate funding or finance and inadequate ICT infrastructures or facilities. Olise (2014) supports this by affirming that certain problems like power failure, network problems amongst other affect the effective use of the e-library.On strategies to be adopted to overcome to associated challenges in the use of the virtual library the study suggested the following strategies – increased bandwidth or improved internet connectivity, provide functional generators to supplement the public power supply, regular subscription, provide adequate funding or finances, employment of qualified manpower or staff and provide adequate ICT infrastructures or facilities. Ukon, Wogu and Ekwueme (2013) recommended that the library should also regularly renew subscription and collaborate with other libraries on network resource sharing.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that there are a number of challenges confronting the virtual library which library and information science students do encounter when using it. The challenges include poor internet connectivity or bandwidth, lack of subscription, lack of qualified manpower or staff, inadequate funding or finances, inadequate ICT infrastructures or facilities and constant power failure. It is obvious that these factors do affect the effective operation of the virtual library and it performance which has resulted to the inability of library and information science students to derive full satisfaction from it and adequately satisfy or meet their information needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that:

1. The university and the library's management should ensure the proper development of the virtual library by providing increased bandwidth or improved internet connection to the virtual library as to enable steady access to information from other libraries and sources which is provided through the internet.
2. Qualified personnel or skilled manpower (staff) should be employed to work in the virtual library.
3. Lecturers of library and information science as well as library staff should create awareness of the existence of virtual library in the institution. This could be done through library orientation and lectures. Also, if made functional, students will need less publicity. It should therefore be made functional and iffective.
4. The virtual library should be adequately funded and financed and the issue of constant power failure should be properly addressed in the virtual library. using it be addressed.
5. The virtual library should be properly developed, transformed and equipped to the modern standard of a 21st century virtual library to adequately satisfy the information needs and demands of it users, library and information science students in particular so as to make them derive full satisfaction from using it.

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