

THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEXES AND ABSTRACTS FOR RESEARCH AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

by

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Abstract

This study examines the level of awareness of the importance of indexes and abstracts to research activities among the undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted while the stratified random sampling technique was used to select 200 respondents from the ten faculties offering undergraduate programmes. Findings revealed that the level of awareness of the importance of indexes and abstracts for research among these students is high. While the study also discovered that some students were sceptical of the importance of these retrieval tools to research activities. Recommendations were made on the need to properly introduce indexes and abstracts to undergraduate students and to also include their use into universities' curricula.

Keywords: Information, Research, Indexes, Abstracts, Undergraduate Students, University of Ibadan

Introduction

The relevance of information to the successful implementation of research activities in educational institutions cannot be overemphasized. Information refers to data which have been collated, organized and subjected to some processing functions for the purposes of increasing the knowledge of the users and reducing their uncertainty. As an essential resource, adequate information is required in order to attain optimum performance and desirable outcomes in academic endeavours. The successful implementation of researches in tertiary institutions, depends largely on the level of information available to the lecturers and students of such institutions. To this end, academic libraries serve as channels through which adequate information is disseminated to the members (students, lecturers and researchers) of tertiary institutions. However, university libraries by their very nature are expected to acquire, process into retrievable form, and make available the

much-needed information to the academic community and the public at large who may require them for their various teaching and research activities (Popoola, 2008).

Academic libraries enhance the educational activities of universities by collecting, preserving and making available an array of information resources relevant to needs of their users' communities. They serve as an indispensable instrument for intellectual development, being a store house of information to which user (students as well as lecturers) may turn to for accessing information (Eze and Uzoigwe, 2013). In order to meet the myriad needs of their users, academic libraries acquire and provide access to information resources in different formats most suitable to such needs. Print information resources such as textbooks, journals, reference books, monographs and conference proceedings constitute a large part of academic library collections. However, the conventional method of extracting the required information from the pages of print resources could, sometimes, be stressful and frustrating. Hence, publishers of these print information resources usually affix indexes and abstracts to them in order to ensure their effective usage for research purposes.

Research involves studious inquiry and painstaking investigation into a subject with the aim of generating facts and findings on such subject. In the broadest sense of the word, the definition of research includes any gathering of data, information and facts for the advancement of knowledge (Shuttleworth, 2008). Research activities are invaluable to the human society for the economic, social, cultural and intellectual benefits which they bring. In conducting researches, the use of information retrieval tools such as indexes and abstracts become expedient. Indexes and abstracts are vital tools of information retrieval which increase the usability of information resources by providing users with a detailed insight into such resources. An index is a systematic and organized listing of the essential contents of a publication with sufficient page references. 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). Lancaster (2002) defined an abstract as a brief but accurate representation of a document. An abstract provides a detailed summary of the intellectual content of information resources, thus acquainting readers with the resources.

Indexes act as guides which point to the vital content of information resources while abstracts enable readers to have a quick overview of the essential content of such resources. Indexes and abstracts acquaint users with the intellectual content of information resources without having to read through their innumerable pages. These functions of indexes and abstracts save a lot of time and efforts expended by undergraduate students in tracking down publications which are needed for their research activities. Research activities require an extensive search of the literature in order to extract information that is relevant to the areas of research interest. Indexes act as pointers to the essential information contained in information resources while abstracts are self-contained, concise and powerful statements that describe larger works in detail. The purpose of abstracts is to provide readers with an easy-to-understand summary of the entire focus of a publication (Gerson and Gerson, 2003). Due to these unique features of indexes and abstracts, undergraduate students can navigate through information resources without engaging in any extraneous search which may not be fruitful.

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 intellectual content. This

view was corroborated by Maloney (1974) who stressed 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”. Indexes which were meticulously-composed and carefully-written abstracts are usually far superior to titles when selecting publications to be read. According to the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science (1974),

A good index does more than minimize the research effort; it also assures optimal research results. If the identifiers are apt and discrete, the locators accurate, and control apparatus (cross references) is clear and complete, then the index will yield the greatest number of items (maximum recall) that are relevant to the user’s quest (maximum precision).

The relevance of indexes and abstracts to the research activities of undergraduate students can also be noticed in the aspect of literature review. Indexes and abstracts enhance the search process for literature and also make the review of relevant literature a fruitful task. Taylor (2013) defines literature review as an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers. Literature review serves the purpose of conveying to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. As an integral part of a good research, literature review aims at depicting the previous findings on a particular topic with the aim of elucidating such topics. The importance of literature review in researches was buttressed by Aina (2004) who stated that:

...literature review is the guide that will enable the researcher in accomplishing his/her tasks. Literature review enables a researcher to choose/specify an appropriate research topic, prepare an adequate research plan and formulate reliable objectives, research questions and hypothesis. It also assists researchers in designing appropriate research methodologies and data collection instruments (335-336p).

The implementation of quality researches depends on accessibility to relevant literatures which tell the researchers something new and place it in the context of what they already know. Researchers demand access to information resources to examine what others have discovered and thought; to use and reuse evidence and scientific conclusions; and to publish results of their own research based on these resources (Kotso, 2010).

In writing a literature review, the use of indexes and abstracts is germane. Borko and Bernier (1975) affirmed this by stating that without surrogates, such as abstracts, search through accumulated literature would be impossible. Indexes also act as key finding aids for identifying pertinent information resources for literature review in this information age which is characterised by exponential increase of information in all disciplines. Furthermore, information resources which could be of utmost importance to literature review could be published in a foreign language which undergraduate students may not understand. Thus, these undergraduate students face the daunting challenges of interpreting and, subsequently, using these information resources. In order to ameliorate the plight of the poor students, abstracts of such documents are usually made available in the

common languages for their consumption. This, therefore, enables them to implement expansive and well-detailed research activities which are not restricted to any geographical location. With all the significance attached to the use of indexes and abstracts, could it be said that undergraduate students of Nigerian universities are aware of their importance to their research activities? Do they derive satisfaction from using these information retrieval tools? This study provides answers to these questions.

Statement of the problem

It has been established that indexes and abstracts are indispensable tools used in retrieving information contained in publications. Indexes and abstracts assist their users in obtaining their desired information with minimal efforts within a short period of time. The importance of these information retrieval tools to undergraduate students in this modern era which is characterized by huge amount of publications cannot be underrated. The question on whether undergraduate students of Nigerian universities are aware of the importance of indexes and abstracts to their research activities needs to be answered. There is also the need to know whether these students are satisfied by using these retrieval tools. It is quite disheartening that most undergraduate students of Nigerian universities do not know the importance of indexes and abstracts. The few ones that understand their relevance are too lazy to make effective use of them. They, therefore, deprive themselves of the benefits which these vital retrieval tools offer. This ugly development could be attributed to the fact that these students were not properly introduced to what indexes and abstracts are and their relevance to their research activities. This hinders the quality of their research activities.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To find out the level of awareness of the importance of indexes for research among the undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan;
- ii. To ascertain the level of awareness of the importance of abstracts for research among the undergraduate students of the university of Ibadan;
- iii. To evaluate the measure of satisfaction the undergraduate students derived in using indexes and abstracts for research and;

Research questions

This study will provide answers to the following questions.

- i. What is the level of awareness of the undergraduate students on the importance of indexes for research?
- ii. What is the level of awareness of the undergraduate students on the importance of abstracts for research?
- iii. What measure of satisfaction do undergraduate students derive from using indexes for research?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consists of ten (10) faculties offering undergraduate programmes in the University of Ibadan. The University of Ibadan is the premier university of Nigeria founded in 1948 as a college under the University of London. The faculties include Agriculture and Forestry, Arts, Education, Law, Pharmacy, Science, Social Sciences, Technology, Veterinary Medicine and College of Medicine. The accidental sampling technique was used to select 20 students from each of the 10 faculties. This technique was found suitable as the sampling was carried out during the end of session holiday. Which happened to affect the two universities. Therefore, only the first 20 students found suitable in each of the universities from the selected faculties were sampled. Hence, the sample size for this study consists of 200 undergraduate students from ten faculties in the university. The selection of this population is based on a systematic process aimed at ensuring accuracy and equal chances of representation. The data collection instrument for this study is questionnaire which was administered to the respondents. The analysis of data collected was based on simple descriptive statistical analysis of frequency counts and percentages.

Analysis of data

Research Question 1:

What is the level of awareness of the undergraduate students on the importance of indexes for research?

Table 1: Level of awareness of the undergraduate students on the importance of indexes for research

S/N	Items	Yes		Neutral		No		Total	
		f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
1	Indexes are important tools of information retrieval for research	149	74.5	42	21	9	4.5	200	100
2	Indexes enable me to obtain the information I require for research with minimal effort	98	49	73	36.5	29	14.5	200	100
3	Indexes are important to my research activities	117	58.5	68	34	15	7.5	200	100
4	Indexes are irrelevant to my research activities and as such I do not bother to use them	25	12.5	59	29.5	116	58	200	100
5	I have never heard of indexes before	28	14	27	13.5	145	72.5	200	100

The figures from the table 1 show that a total of 149 respondents (74.5%) perceived indexes as important tools of information retrieval for research while 9 respondents (4.5%) did not agree with this. Also, 49% of the respondents stated that indexes enabled them to obtain the information they needed for research with minimal effort while 29 respondents (14.5%) disagreed with this. More than half of the respondents' population (58.5%) admitted that indexes are important to their research activities while 25 respondents (12.5%) opposed this view. Lastly, a total of 28 respondents (14%) had never heard of indexes before, while 145 respondents (72.5%) disagreed with this.

Research Question 2:

What is the level of awareness of the undergraduate students on the importance of abstracts for research?

Table 2: Level of awareness of the undergraduate students on the importance of abstracts for research

S/N	Items	Yes		Neutral		No		Total	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
1	Abstracts are important tools of information retrieval for research	149	74.5	42	21	9	4.5	200	100
2	Abstracts enable me to obtain the information I require for research with minimal effort	98	49	73	36.5	29	14.5	200	100
3	Abstracts are important to my research activities	117	58.5	68	34	15	7.5	200	100
4	Abstracts are irrelevant to my research activities and as such I do not bother to use them	25	12.5	59	29.5	116	58	200	100
5	I have never heard of abstracts before	28	14	27	13.5	145	72.5	200	100

Table 2 revealed that 149 respondents (74.5%) acknowledged that abstracts are important tools of information retrieval for research. In addition, nearly half of the respondents' population (49%) agreed that abstracts enabled them to get their needed information for research with minimal effort while 29 respondents (14.5%) disagreed with this. More than half of the undergraduate students' population (58.5%) admitted that abstracts are important to their research activities, while 25 respondents (12.5%) held a view that contrast with this. A total of 28 respondents (14%) admitted that they had never heard of abstracts before, while 145 respondents (72.5%) disagreed with this.

Research Question 3:

What measure of satisfaction do undergraduate students derive from using indexes for research?

Table 3: Measure of satisfaction derived by undergraduate students in using indexes for research

Hint: *f* = frequency, % = percentage.

S/N	Items	Satisfied		Undecided		Not Satisfied		Total	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1	Indexes are useful in meeting my information needs for research	153	76.5	34	17	13	6.5	200	100
2	By using indexes, I obtain the information I require for research on time with minimal stress	144	72	30	15	26	13	200	100
3	I was satisfied by using indexes for research	139	69.5	39	19.5	22	11	200	100
4	I got frustrated by using indexes for research	61	30.5	76	38	63	31.5	200	100

5	Due to the satisfaction which I derive from using indexes for research, I would like to use them again	130	65	53	26.5	17	8.5	200	100
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The first item from the table above indicated that a total of 153 respondents (76.5%) agreed that indexes are useful in meeting their information needs for research. It would also be noted from the table that majority of the respondents (72%) affirmed that by using indexes, they obtained the information they require for research on time with minimal stress. A total of 139 respondents (69.5%) were satisfied by using indexes for research while 61 respondents (30.5%) were frustrated by using them. Due to the satisfaction which they derived from using indexes for research, 130 respondents (65%) said they would like to use them again.

Research Question 4:

What measure of satisfaction do undergraduate students derive from using abstracts for research?

Table 4: Measure of satisfaction derived by undergraduate students in using indexes for research

Hint: f = frequency, % = percentage.

S/N	Items	Satisfied		Undecided		Not Satisfied		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Abstracts are useful in meeting my information needs for research	153	76.5	34	17	13	6.5	200	100
2	By using abstracts, I obtain the information I require for research on time with minimal stress	144	72	30	15	26	13	200	100
3	I was satisfied by using abstracts for research	139	69.5	39	19.5	22	11	200	100
4	I got frustrated by using abstracts for research	61	30.5	76	38	63	31.5	200	100
5	Due to the satisfaction which I derive from using abstracts for research, I would like to use them again	130	65	53	26.5	17	8.5	200	100

Table 4 shows that a total of 153 respondents (76.5%) admitted that abstracts are useful in meeting their information needs for research. Also, most of the respondents (72%) affirmed that by using abstracts, they retrieved the information they require for research on time with minimal stress. A total of 139 respondents (69.5%) were satisfied by utilizing abstracts for research. Conversely, sixty-one respondents (30.5%) were frustrated by using abstracts for research. Due to the satisfaction which they derived from using abstracts for research, 130 respondents (65%) said they would like to use them again.

Conclusion

The value of indexes and abstracts to information retrieval for research activities has been established in this study. They enable undergraduate students to have adequate information for research at their disposal with minimal effort. Most of the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan are fully aware that indexes and abstracts are important to their research activities. Hence, the level of awareness of the importance of indexes and abstracts for research among these students is high. In addition, most of them derived maximum satisfaction from the use of these information retrieval tools for research activities. They, therefore, consult these retrieval tools in order to extract information pertinent for research needs. However, some of these undergraduate students are skeptical of the importance of indexes and abstracts to research. They consider them as being irrelevant to their research activities hence they do not use them. This is due to the fact that these students were not properly introduced to indexes and abstracts and how to use them effectively.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that undergraduate students in tertiary institutions are properly introduced to indexes and abstracts at orientation programmes and interactive sessions.
2. The management of tertiary institutions should further enlighten undergraduate students on the importance of indexes and abstracts to research activities as this will increase their level of awareness on the importance of these retrieval tools.
3. Training on the use of indexes and abstracts should be incorporated into the curricula of tertiary institutions so that its techniques will be applied by the undergraduate students in the use of these retrieval tools. This will enable these students to use them very well for research and subsequently, derive maximum level of satisfaction from their use.

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