



**INFLUENCE OF USER CHARACTERISTICS ON THE UTILISATION OF
ELECTRONIC RESOURCES IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to identify the influence of user characteristics on utilization of Abia State University E-library by undergraduate students. The survey research design was adopted. The YaroYammene (1969) statistical formula was employed to select a sample of 382 out of 6,500 students that comprised the total study population. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in the library and information science profession, administered by hand and analyzed with statistical charts and tables. The findings of the research include that age, skill, personal attribute and environment has a positive influence on the use of e-library while gender, the sex of the user, has no influence on the use of e-library.

Keywords: Electronic Resources, User Characteristics, Nigerian University Libraries,
Utilisation of Electronic Libraries

Introduction

A couple of years ago, the researchers were at Abia State University Uturu (ABSU) in Nigeria for their postgraduate degree study. As many times as they visited and used the university's electronic library, one thing was consistently observed. They noticed that undergraduate students of the university who constitute over eighty percent of the university's student population were scarcely found using the electronic library. Although the undergraduate students utilise the library's reading halls, consult the shelves, read through

newspapers and periodicals of the library and at best subscribe to airtime in public cyber cafes' outside the campus, there approach to the use of the university's electronic library was cold. Judging by the observation, one could say that the undergraduate students of ABSU underutilise the university's e-library. Yet, no one could account to the reasons for such underutilisation. Although researchers has argued that certain factors influence the use of electronic libraries (Ozoemelem, 2009; Enochsson, 2005; Kember, 1996), it is difficult to understand how ABSU e-library is utilised and the factors that influence its use by the undergraduate students, owing to inadequate or almost non-existent empirical study on ABSU e-library. Consequent to this backdrop, the researchers agreed to study the influence of user characteristics on utilisation of electronic resources in Abia State University e-library by the undergraduate students.

Brief History of Abia State University, Uturu

Abia State University Uturu (ABSU) is one of the state owned universities in Nigeria. The inception of the university was in 1981 in the former Imo State, under the name of Imo State University, Uturu, Okigwe. The university was established by Late Dr. Sam Mbakwe when he was Governor of old Imo State. Later on, following the creation of Abia State in 1991, the Uturu campus of the University was ceded to Abia State and is now known as ABSU. The University is located west of Isuikwuato Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria. The university is organized in faculties, colleges and schools. The institution offers undergraduate, graduate and doctorate degree; programmes and has two campuses; its main campus located in Uturu and the Umuahia campus which houses College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, and is located at Umudike, Umuahia, Abia State.

Background Information on Abia State University E-Library, Uturu

Abia State University library was established with the inception of the university. In late 2004, the ABSU library embarked on transition from analogue to digital librarianship and thus led to the establishment of ABSU e-library in 2005. The e-library is housed in the first floor of the University main library block. It has one hundred and fifty functional computers available for users. The e-library is manned by one graduate ICT professional, one para-professional with diploma certificate, one library assistant with a secondary school certificate and one data processor. The e-library offers hybrid services which combines traditional and electronic services to its users. As regards software's, ABSU e-library runs on E-granary digital library software, Koha library management software and the Greenstone library software. Subject gateways hosted on this software include electronic Encyclopedia Britannica, database of African thesis and dissertation, JSTOR (for online journal), among other resources.

Objectives of the Study

This study is set to:

1. Ascertain the hypothesis, which states that:
 - *There is no significant influence of age on the use of ABSU e-library by undergraduate students.*

- *There is no significant influence of gender on the use of ABSU e-library by undergraduate students.*
 - *There is no significant influence of skill on the use of ABSU e-library by undergraduate students.*
 - *There is no significant influence of personal attributes on the use of ABSU e-library by undergraduate students.*
 - *There is no significant environmental influence on the use of ABSU e-library by undergraduate students.*
2. Find out the user variable that influences undergraduates' utilisation of ABSU e-library more than others.
 3. Give recommendations that will aid the use of e-libraries in Nigerian university libraries.

Literature Review

The undergraduate students are the research populace of this study. The Collins English Dictionary (2002) posits that an undergraduate is a person studying in a university for a first degree. Thus, they are students who are devoted to the acquisition of knowledge not only through teaching but also through their involvement in writing term papers, assignments and research project. These academic demands are what make students to visit their university library. To complement the efforts of the traditional university library in information provision to students and researchers, university libraries in Nigeria are setting up electronic libraries of which ABSU is not left out. Hence, this research is aimed at finding out the influence of user (undergraduate students) characteristics on the utilisation of e-resources in the ABSU e-library.

First and foremost, who is a user? The Encyclopedia Britannica (www.encyclopedia Britannica.com) has it that a user is somebody or something that uses something. Uhegbu (2007) writes that a user is one who needs something and would use a certain medium to satisfy his or her need. He further opines that an information user is a person who demands for information, receives it and puts it into use irrespective of the person's age, gender and occupation. He categorised information users in terms of profession, gender, need, education, location and language, where each user category has its own definite and different approach towards information acceptance and utilisation.

Meanwhile, information professionals have long sought to comprehend what factors are relevant in encouraging a person to seek for information. Thus, to encourage students' use of the library, especially its electronic resources, there are factors that influence it. These factors are what are referred to as user characteristics. Researchers posit that demography, age, gender, immediate environment influence, frequency of library use, self-efficacy, skills and experience are some of the user characteristics (Ozoemelem, 2009; Ren, 2000). To find out the influence of users demography on the use of electronic libraries, Mufutao, Afolake and Oluwadamilare's (2012) surveyed the postgraduate experience in Nigeria using Covenant and Babcock Universities as samples. Their research found a relationship between demography and use of digital (electronic) resources. The result is the same with Islam's (2009) findings in a Malaysian university.

Specifically, in relation to age and gender, studies conducted by Laguna and Babcock (1997) found that there were significant age differences on the computer task, as measured by older adults making few correct decisions and taking longer time to make their decision than younger adult, while Laerum (2001) found no correlation in both as regards to use of computer. Tella, Ayeni and Omoba (2007) submit that students' ability to find and retrieve information effectively is a transferable skill. This is why Okello-obura and Magara(2008) are of the view that students must acquire and possess the skills necessary to exploit the growing range of electronic resources. This goes down to explain why Brophy (1993) recommended the acquisition of information skills as one of the key learning objectives for every student entering the university. On the other hand, self-efficacy, which translates to love, desire, passion for use of computer, has been said to influence use of electronic information resources (Bandura, 1997).As a matter of fact, researches by Enochsson (2005) and Kember (1996) show that user characteristics have effect on library use. The characteristics of age, skills, education, et cetera determine how proficient a library user would be in the use of the library.

In the meantime, the word *utilise* means the ability to make practical use of something; to use effectively (Hornby, 2006). Uhegbu (2007, p.28) posits that utilisation is the actual putting into appropriate use of something. It is the process of making use of something available. Utilisation differs from person to person and from one corporate organization to another according to their information needs and other socio-economic imperatives. According to Uhegbu (2007, p.44), utilisation is governed by several principles among which are goal identification. The purpose of seeking information is central to its demand and use. Goal could be particularistic or general in nature. Itoga (1992), on the other hand, categorised information utilisation into three: the perceptual understanding (anchored on users demand), the normative understanding (anchored on users purpose), and contextual understanding (anchored on the satisfaction derived from information). In sum, the electronic library is for student to use. The ability to use it and get result is the meaning of utilisation.

Electronic libraries provide access to scholarly literature that may not be freely available on the web, or may not be online at all. Researchers have used the term "e-library" synonymously with "Digital Library" "Universal Library" "Future Library" "Virtual Library" and "Library without walls" (Issa, Blessing and Daura, 2009). E-library has been defined variously by different scholars and organisation depending on their perception of the concept. Aina (2004) defines e-library as a library that consists of materials and services in electronic formats rather than the print format. In another dimension, Abdulmumin (2010) defines e-library as those electronic information resources and services that users access electronically via a computing network from inside the library or remote to the library. Arms (2005) defines e-library as managed collection of information with association services where the information is stored in digital formats and accessible over a network. Lynch (1994) says that e-library is a replica of a traditional library role but in a digital format. Cleveland and Gibson (1999) agree but add that the e-library is a collection of knowledge electronically and maintained in order to meet the totality of information needs for a given population.

Thus, electronic library resources are invaluable research tools which complement print-based resources in any traditional library. Resources of e-library include contents that are born digital and those that have been digitised. An e-library generally contains books, journals,

Opacs, webliographies (equivalent to printed bibliographies), letters, maps, dictionaries, encyclopedias, still and moving images, sound recordings, indexes, conference/seminar proceedings, theses/dissertations, abstracts and reviews, and handbooks (Issa, Blessing and Daura, 2009). The work of Majid and Abazova (1999) opines that e-libraries are used for research needs, preparation of lectures, obtaining current knowledge, accessing information, amongst others. E-library resources are widely used in universities. And the usage is as a result of certain characteristics on the side of the user. It is on this note therefore, that this study shall look at the influence of user characteristics, particularly age, gender, skill, personal attribute and environment, on the utilization of ABSU e-library by her undergraduate students.

Methodology

The survey research method was adopted for this research. The population of this study was six thousand, five hundred (6,500) undergraduate students of ABSU comprising various disciplines (E-library Registry). This population did not however indicate the gender characteristics of the undergraduate students as obtained from the E-library user's register. The sample size of this study was three hundred and eighty two (382) undergraduate students derived from the application of YaroYammane (1969) statistical formula for deriving sample size from finite population. The statistical formula is thus expressed:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

- n = the sample size required
N = total known population of the study
e = level of significance (or limit of tolerable error)= 0.05
1 = constant

$$\text{Therefore: } \frac{6,500}{1 + 6,500 (0.05)^2}$$

$$\text{Thus, } n = \frac{6,500}{17}$$

$$n = 382 \text{ sample size}$$

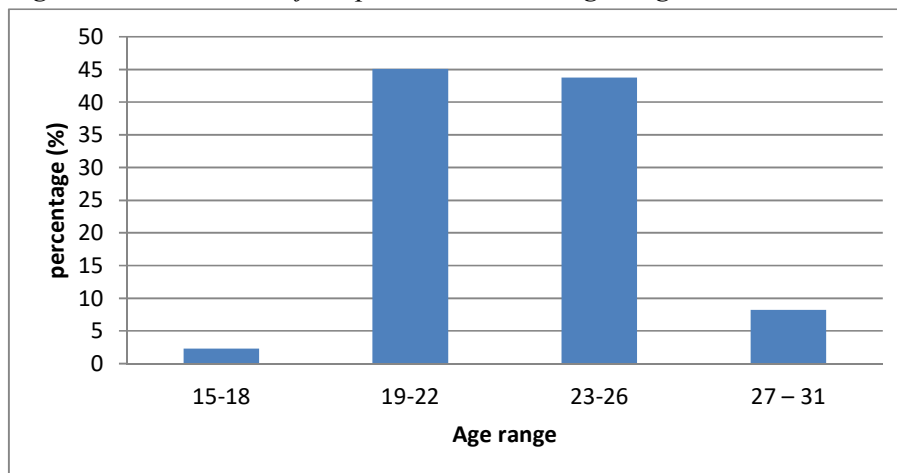
Furthermore, to select each respondent from the sample of 382 undergraduate students, simple random sampling technique was adopted. This sampling technique gave each element in the sample equal chance of being represented in the study. Thus, in a three day consecutive visit to the ABSU E-library, the researchers included undergraduate users found in the E-library in the sample, but were observant to ensure that users chosen before were not selected again. Data was collated with a structured questionnaire titled *influence of user characteristics on utilisation of ABSU e-library by undergraduate students*. Each copy of the instrument was constructed to show respondents demography and variables that influence utilisation of ABSU E-library. All the variables contain five variable items each except one that contain only four.

The instrument passed through a face content validation by two colleagues and all the completed copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot. The instruments were weighed on a four point Likert scale with the scales of 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), and 1 (strongly disagree) and the $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$ summation result was adopted to separate positive responses from negative responses. Afterwards, statistical charts and tables were used to analyse data. All the variables were tested with the T-test statistical tool. The T-test decision was that variables calculated at 2.5 mean score and above are accepted while variables that score below 2.5 are rejected. Clearly therefore, the mean score was used to select the positive responses in the completed questionnaires while the t-Test calculation was used to accept or reject variables.

Data Analysis

A total of 382 copies of the instrument were distributed. Out of the 382 copies, 304 representing 80% were properly completed, returned and found valid for this research. Hence, data presentation and analysis is based on 304 instruments.

Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Age



The Figure 1 above shows that only 9 users representing 2.96% and 25 or 8.22% of the respondents had age ranges of 15 - 18 and 27 - 31 years respectively. 137 or 45.07% of the respondent had age range of 19 - 22 years while 133 or 43.75% had age range of 23 – 26 years. This implies that use of the ABSU e-library is dominated largely by users who are relatively young.

Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

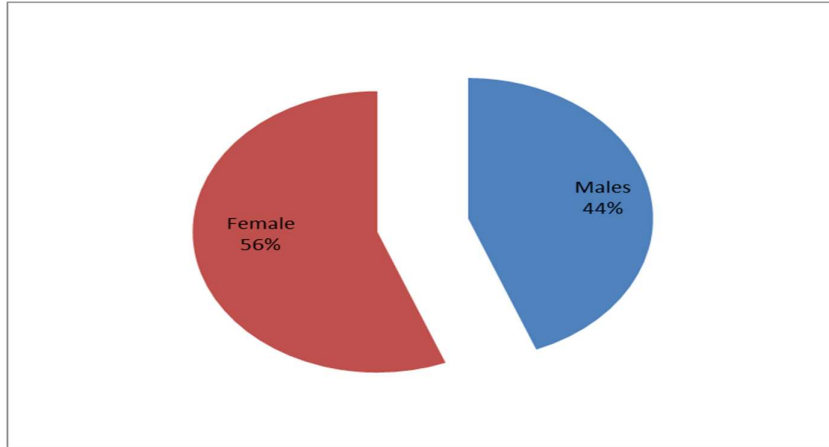
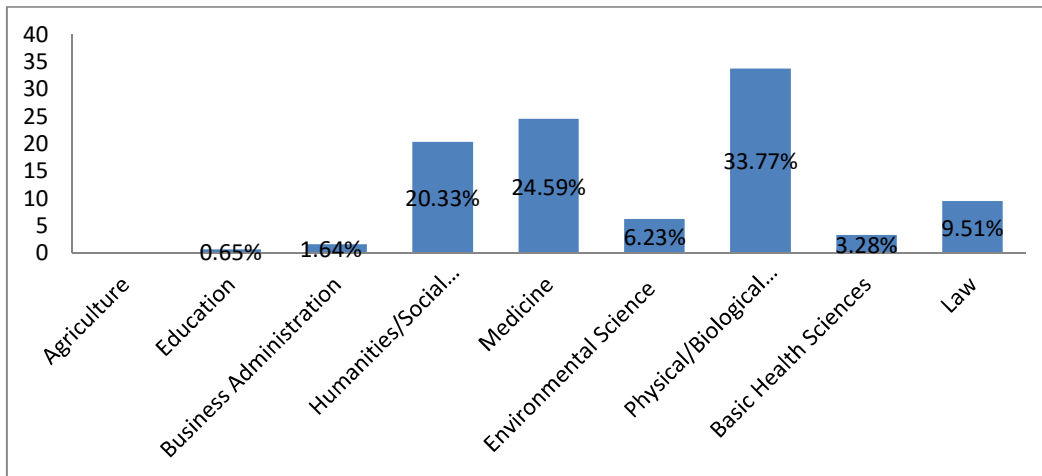


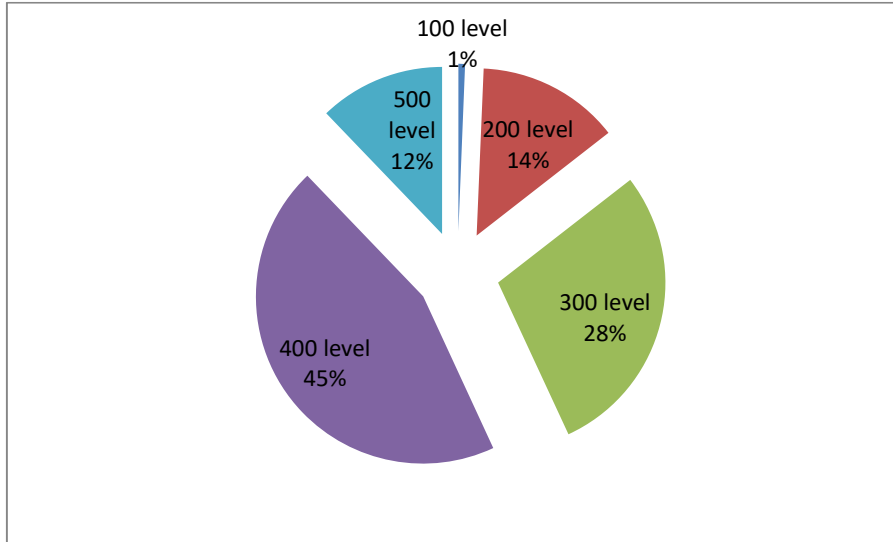
Figure 2 above shows that female registered user, as respondents are more than the male users. The former is 56% while the later constituted 44% of the respondents.

Figure 3: Distribution of Respondents According to Faculty of Study



In Figure 3 above, the faculties in ABSU are presented vis-à-vis the number of respondents from each. Faculty of Agriculture has none while the faculty of physical/Biological Sciences has the highest number of registered users as respondents.

Figure 4: *Distribution of Respondents According to level of study*



The 400 level students constituted 45% (136 students) of the respondents' population while 100 level students are the least with 1% (2 students only).

Hypothesis 1: *there is no significant influence of age on the use of e-library by users.*

Table 1: Test of significant influence of age on use of ABSU e-library

My age	Number of Respondents	Total	Test hypothesis (Mean)	Decision
a Makes me understand the use for e-library	278	824	2.96	Accept
b Makes me to appreciate the usefulness for e-library	277	850	3.06	Accept
c Makes to me to know how to make use of the e-library	263	729	2.77	Accept
d Gives me courage on how use facilities e-library	277	814	2.93	Accept
e Gives me confidence to use the e-library	276	806	2.92	Accept

T-test was used to test this hypothesis at 0.5 level of significance as shown on Table 1 above. The result shows that age had significant influence on the use of e-library by ABSU students. This is so because when the table value of 2.5 was compared with the t-test calculated values of each of the units of responses, they were found to have higher mean value above 2.5. The implication therefore, is that age of a user is a determinant of how to use the ABSU e-library when this finding is viewed against the back drop that young ones of the age of 15 – 26 as shown in table 4.1 made more use of the e-library, it is evident therefore that the patrons of ABSU e-library are age influenced.

Hypothesis 2: *There is no Significant Influence of Gender on the Use of E-Library by Users*

Table 2: Test of Significant Influence of Gender on Use of ABSU E-library

My gender	Number of Respondents	Total	Test hypothesis (Mean)	of Decision
a Makes me appreciate the use for e-library	280	694	2.47	Reject
b Gives me courage to use to use the e-library	276	673	2.43	Reject
c Gives me opportunity to seek resources in the e-library	272	660	2.42	Reject
d Contains information relevant to my gender needs	275	804	2.92	Accept
e Gives me opportunity to secure space in the e-library	266	601	2.25	Reject

The result on Table 2 above shows the analysis of responses related to gender. Again t-test was used to test this hypothesis. The outcome of this test is that gender does not influence the users of e-library to patronize it. Even though females according to Figure 2 were more in number (56%) as against the males who were less (44%), the findings here show that none of the gender groups accepted that their patronage of ABSU e-library is because of their sex.

Hypothesis 3: *There is no Significant Influence of Skill on the Use of E-Library by Users*

Table 3: Test of Significant Influence of skill on use of ABSU E-library

My computer skill.....	Number of Respondents	Total	Test hypothesis (Mean)	of Decision
A Skill enables me to manipulate the e-library	278	921	3.31	Accept
B Equips me with the knowledge on how to access the e-library	283	966	3.41	Accept
C Makes me to understand search strategies of the e-library	273	907	3.32	Accept
D Gives me confidence to locate whatever I want	274	904	3.29	Accept

e	Makes it easy for me to indicate what I want	262	844	3.22	Accept
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he result o Table 3 above shows that all the five response items had mean values greater than the t-test table values of 2.5. This implies that skill has significant influence on the use of e-library at ABSU by the users. The implication of this is that the more skilled a person is in use of electronic facilities, the better for the use of electronic resources of an e-library.

Hypothesis 4: *There is no Significant Influence of Personal Attributes on the Use of E-Library by Users*

Table 4: Test of Influence of Personal Attribute on use of ABSU E-Library

	My personal attributes	Number of Respondents	Total	Test hypothesis (Mean)	of Decision
a	I have personal love for electronic resources	285	987	3.46	Accept
b	Have competence to use the e-library resource	275	887	3.22	Accept
c	Can always manipulate any electronic facility	267	772	2.89	Accept
d	Know how to locate materials in the e-library	275	879	3.19	Accept

The result as shown on Table 4 above also show that all the response items had mean values greater than the table mean value of 2.5. This implies that personal attributes as shown below significantly influenced utilization of ABSU e-library.

Hypothesis 5: *There is no Significant Environmental Influence on the use of ABSU E-Library*

Table 5: Test of Environmental Influence on use of ABSU E-library

	My environment	Number of Respondents	Total	Test hypothesis (Mean)	of Decision
a	I live in an urban centre	257	876	3.40	Accept
b	Used to e-resources where I live	262	840	3.20	Accept
c	Developed interest on e-resources through my family	270	810	3.0	Accept
d	Many public cyber café in my area of residence	273	917	3.35	Accept
e	Got used to electronic facilities during my	266	756	2.84	Accept

primary and post-primary
school days

As shown on Table 4.9 again all the five response items had mean values greater than 2.5 of the t-table value. Analysis indicates that environmental factors significantly influenced the use of e-library at ABSU.

Discussion of the Findings

The study found that users of ABSU e-library were mainly female registered users who constitute 56% of the respondents as presented on table Figure 2. This finding corroborates Ozoemelem's (2009) submission that males seem to enjoy browsing on the Internet for enjoyment while females tend to only use it for work related purpose. Yet, Ford, Miller and Moss (2001) found that females tend to experience more difficulty in finding information online.

It has also been shown in this study that age has significant influence on the use of e-library as shown in Table 1. This result shows that the age of a user is a determinant of how to use an e-library. When this finding is viewed against the backdrop that young ones of the age of 19 – 26 as shown on Figure 1 made more use of the library, it is evident therefore that the patrons of ABSU e-library are age influenced. This is in line with the work of Laguna and Babcock (1997) which showed that there were significant age differences on the computer task as measured by older adults making few correct decisions and taking longer time to make their decision than younger adult. This concurs to the findings of this research.

Furthermore, the study found out that possession of ICT skill greatly influenced the utilization of ABSU e-library. This is supported by Tella, Ayeni and Omoba(2007) who argue that students' ability to find and retrieve information effectively is a transferable skill useful for their future life as well as enabling the positive and successful use of the electronic resource whilst in school. To make use of the growing range of electronic resources, students must acquire and possess the skills necessary to exploit them (Okello-obura and Magara, 2008). Thus, libraries must reach a position where the acquisition of information skills is acknowledged as one of the key learning objectives for every student entering the university, so that no student leaves without being equipped to cope with the information intensive world (Brophy, 1993).

Self-efficacy which translates to love of e-resources, ability to manipulate ICT and the like has significant influence on the use of ABSU e-library. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is part of an individual's belief in ones capability to organize and execute the causes of action required to manage prospective situations. Bandura (1997) however argues that self-efficacy are beliefs, they are not related to actual skill level, but are relevant in determining how long an individual perseveres in a task, and whether the task will be engaged in at all.

Environmental factors such as availability of cyber cafés in users' area of residence significantly influenced use of ABSU e-library. For instance, a student that is brought up in an enlightened environment like the urban area, academic community, civil service environment and the like is most likely to be at home with the use of computer than the student that hails

from a typical rural setting. Peer group influence is also a factor; somebody that mingles with friends who play around with personal laptops and even desktop computers at their homes will in less than no time become computer literate automatically without going for any formal computer training. This finding is welcome development to literature on this subject matter.

However, in the general, existing literature on the subject of this research, carried out in different environments, concurs with the findings of this research. The findings of this research therefore are in line with the findings of Mufutao, Afolake and Oluwadamilare (2012); Islam (2011); Issa, Blessing and Daura (2009); Ozoemelem (2009); Tella, Ayeni and Omoba (2007); Enochsson (2005); Ford, Miller and Moss (2001); Laerum (2001); Majid and Abazova (1999); Laguna and Babcock (1997).

Conclusion

The research concludes that youths make more use of the e-library than their older counterparts based on the premise that age has a positive influence on the use of e-library. Female students dominate the use of the e-library while patronage to e-library depends on academic demands. The latter is shown in final year students (four hundred level students) utilizing ABSU e-library more than students of other levels. Meanwhile, gender has no influence on the use of e-library, but skill personal attribute, the environment has a positive influence on the use of e-library.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study the researchers recommend:

- i. That a kind of reserved space should be kept for the older students in e-libraries so that they can be encouraged to be going to the e-library for studies.
- ii. Lecturers should give students term papers to write on every course they study such that they can prompt their use of the e-library. This will enable them develop the skill of ICT.
- iii. The ABSU Administration must comply strictly to the National University Commission's (NUC) call for introduction and students' undertaking of courses on ICT up to its practicum. This will in no small measure make the students become more ICT friendly.
- iv. Since final year students consult the e-library more, the university authorities should as a matter of priority make good budgetary allocation to the ICT department such that they can be able to equip the e-library with enough e-resources so that the final year students in particular and generality of other students will be able to access enough information materials to execute their research work and semester assignments.
- v. Finally, since ICT has come to stay in Nigeria Universities, more especially now that we are in a digital age, automation and good internet connectivity in Nigerian university libraries should be the concern of relevant stakeholders while the corresponding training and re-training of librarians and information scientists by the university authorities is indispensable.



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