Utilization of access tools for effective information retrieval in Nigerian universities libraries

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Abstract
This study was designed to find out the utilization of access tools for effective information retrieval in Nigerian universities. The specific objectives of the study were to: find out the types of access tools used for information retrieval in Nigerian universities; ascertain the effectiveness of access tools on information retrieval; determine the challenges faced in using access tools and suggest strategies for enhancing utilisation of access tools. The study was guided by four research questions. To achieve the purpose of the study, a survey design was applied in the study. The sample population for the study was 450 respondents selected through a multi stage sampling technique. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. A total of 450 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. Out of this number, 429 copies were returned and found usable. This gave a return rate of 95%. The data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and percentages to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that, universities libraries in Nigeria employed the catalogue, bibliographies, abstracts and indexes for information retrieval and the access tools were effective for information retrieval. The most constraining factors associated with the use of access tools for information retrieval were found to be inadequate funds to purchase required access tools, complexity of access tools and poor networking as well as resource sharing among cataloguers. The most important strategies for enhancing utilisation of access tools for information retrieval were provision of adequate funds to enable the library purchase required access tools and proper organisation of library resources so that users are easily directed to materials on the shelves. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended provision of adequate funds to purchase access tools, organization of regular user education to enhance users’ skills, create, intensify and sustain the awareness of use and importance of access tools for information retrieval and that international standard of access tools application should be adopted and included in the training of cataloguers among others.

Keywords: Access tools utilization, information retrieval, University libraries, Nigeria

Introduction
The main function of a university library is to provide access to relevant and up-to-date information resources which are crucial to research, teaching and learning. Access tools play an important role in meeting the above function by aiding the retrieval of information resources from the university library.

University libraries are libraries designed to acquire, process and provide recorded knowledge (published or unpublished), print and non-print materials relevant to prescribed academic discipline of tertiary educational institutions. In academic institutions, the library is inseparably necessary because it plays an indispensable role in the dissemination of information and knowledge. Ifijeh (2011) agreed with this view by stressing that the university library exists in an academic context and its role is subsumed in developing a highly visible collection that is well organized and serves as academic support for teaching, learning and research by faculty and students. Indeed, the university library is a centre for research, a ground for intellectual activities and a home for distinguished academics. This is because the main purpose of a university library is to support the objectives of that university in the areas of learning, teaching, research and service.

The main objectives of university libraries include the provision of materials in support of learning process, serving as a storehouse of knowledge, promotion and
dissemination of knowledge, encouraging and developing research and meeting specialized information needs of users. To a large extent therefore, it could be inferred that the quality of a university could be measured by the services provided by the library because of its unique position in the over-all university system. This position is supported by Ajibero (2004) when he argued that if during accreditation exercise, the university library scores less than 70% while scoring 100% in other components, the programme for which the library stock is deficient will not get full accreditation. Consequently, universities usually invest heavily on acquisition of information resources for the library (Aguolu, 2002).

Universities in Nigeria require information to function effectively. Various scholars have adjudged information as a vital tool in any organization. According to Nwalo (2003), worldwide, it is acknowledged that information is power. Nevertheless, it is strongly believed that information on its own does not control power but a possibility of the control of the flow of information affords the opportunity to use information as power. Access tools certainly have a great influence in controlling the flow of information and speak volume why university libraries should make access to information in their domain easier by using access tools.

Access tools could be seen as information location aids that are used to identify what a library has in stock for use. These aids, according to Ezekwe and Muokebe (2012), also create awareness of the total collection of materials in the information system and serve as a key to the store of knowledge.

There are various types of access tools used by libraries. These include the catalogue, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, guides, etc. The most commonly used, especially in libraries in Nigeria, is the catalogue. The library catalogue, according to Ifidon (2007), is a systematic list of a library’s collection which also indicates the logical position of the materials so listed in the library. Bibliographies are another type of access tool used by libraries. A bibliography is a list of books or a critical and historical study of printed books (Ozioko, 2014). There is also the abstract as a type of access tool which, as Ezekwe and Muokebe (2012) submitted, is a summary of publication, article or any other literary composition accompanied by bibliographical details for identification of original document. The index, yet another type of access tool, is a systematic guide to the location of words, concepts or other items in books, periodicals or other publications.

The aforementioned access tools are becoming increasingly necessary in university libraries because of their potentials. Ode and Omokaro (2007) listed their potentials to include the following:

1. Provision of information on what the library has by author, title and subject.
2. Provision of information on where a particular material can be located in the library.
3. Allowing access to the library collection and provision of services to its user.
4. Enabling a library user to know the edition of a work a library has and any other bibliographic details of a material (p.68).

University libraries in Nigeria and the world over are engines of growth and development because they are increasingly recognized to have a broader role to play in the social, economic, technological and manpower development of nations. In fact, the university libraries serve as vital source of supply of developmental materials required to train the skilled manpower needed in the various sectors of a nation. The National Policy on Education (2004) acknowledged that university education shall make optimum contribution to national development by intensifying and diversifying its programme for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation. Access tools are poised to help fulfil the above potentials of the library. Uche (1999) asserted that access tools are retrieval devices for finding documents or information contained in documents in a library or other collection, selectively recalling recorded information. Thus, libraries are progressively less concerned with the accumulation of documents but more focused on providing access to the information that users need,
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regardless of the origin and document format. Choosing the best tool depends greatly on the local context. Clearly, access tools are critically important for the library and its users. Access tools such as the catalogue, bibliographies, indexes and abstracts determine how effectively a patron will search through the existing resources. Intended as the gateway into the library, these tools eventually affect the usage of its resources, which is the ultimate measurement of their usefulness. This accounts for why access tools have been used globally in university libraries to facilitate information retrieval. The western countries have trained and retrained access tools specialists for their libraries and have provided the financial support needed for the purchase of access tools to aid the organization of information resources. Thus, for the survival and relevance of university libraries in Nigeria, access tools should be declared an institutional priority with adequate funding to acquire them as it is the practice globally. Nigerian universities cannot be truly part of the global village without active participation of the higher institutions in the utilization of access tools for information retrieval. In this regard, as pointed out by Ndiaye (2001), access tools must be perceived and considered as a 21st century universal language.

The foregoing notwithstanding, it seems that the use of access tools is very poor in some university libraries in Nigeria. Observations by the researcher seems to indicate that although there are access tools available in university libraries, there is uncertainty as to the extent of their utilization for information retrieval. The implication of this is obvious and numerous. For instance, the generally observed non-use of relevant materials, wrong selection of materials by users which ultimately leads to loitering around the shelves and the library are all due to non-usage of access tools by some university libraries in providing logical order for their materials. Although university libraries in Nigeria engage access tools in organizing information resources like their counterparts in other parts of the world, it is not known whether such engagement has any benefit on information retrieval by users hence the need to undertake this study.

Objectives of the study
The specific objectives of the study are to:
1. Find out the types of access tools utilized for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the extent to which these access tools are effective in facilitating retrieval of information in university libraries in Nigeria.
3. Determine the challenges faced by university libraries in utilization of access tools for effective information retrieval in Nigeria.
4. Proffer strategies that could ameliorate the challenges faced by university libraries in the utilization of access tools for effective information retrieval in Nigeria.

Research questions
The following questions guided the study:
1. What type of access tools are utilized for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria?
2. What is the extent of effectiveness of access tools in facilitating information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria?
3. What are the problems associated with the utilization of access tools for effective information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria?
4. What are the strategies that could be employed to address the problems associated with the utilization of access tools for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria?

Methods
The design of this study was the survey research design. According to Ogundare (2008), a survey research design involves the gathering of required data and information from the observation of samples of the given population devoid of any manipulation of cause and effect relationships. This design is considered appropriate because the study is investigating the utilization of access tools for effective information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria. The population of the study was 4595 comprising only registered users in five university libraries – one from each geo-political zone of Nigeria. The
universities include: Benue State University, Makurdi; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; University of Uyo; University of Lagos and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

The sample size for the study was 450. A multi-stage sampling technique comprising stratified random sampling and proportionate sampling techniques was adopted for the study. The instrument for data collection for this study was a researcher-developed questionnaire entitled: “Questionnaire on Utilization of Access Tools for Effective Information Retrieval (QUATEIR)”.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data that were generated from the instrument. Percentages, weighted mean scores and standard deviation were employed in the analysis of data used to answer the research questions. Because of the use of four point scale for the instrument, decision rule was based on a mid-point mean value of 2.50.

Results and discussion
The results of the study are presented and discussed in line with the research questions that guided the study.

Research question 1: What type of access tools are utilized for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria?

The data in Table 1 are used to answer this research question.

Research question 2: What is the extent of effectiveness of access tools for retrieving information in university libraries in Nigeria?

The data in Table 2 are used to answer this research question.

Research Question 3: What are the problems associated with the utilization of access tools for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria?

The data in Table 3 are used to answer this research question.

Research question 4: What are the strategies that can enhance the utilisation of access tools for information retrieval?

The data in Table 4 are used to answer this research question.

Table 1: Access tools that are utilized for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria N=429

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Tool</th>
<th>Available</th>
<th>Not Available (%)</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalogues</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliographies</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstracts</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indexes</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Extent of effectiveness of access tools for information retrieval N=429

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Tool</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalogues</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliographies</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstracts</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Problems associated with utilisation of access tools for information retrieval N=429

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems associated with utilisation of access tools for information retrieval and utilization</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required access tools are not available in the library</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access tools are inadequately applied to direct users to available resources in the library</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor relationship between access tools and resources placement on the shelves</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of user skills resulting from poor user education programme by the library</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western biased nature of some access tools which make it impossible for some available resources in the library to be captured properly</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick and easy access to resources is hindered by the library’s inability to migrate from manual to digital or electronic operation</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex arrangement of the tools</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate funds to purchase required access tools</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The complexity of access tools usage and dynamic nature of information materials</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of skilled and competent cataloguers to manipulate the tools</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor networking and resource sharing among cataloguers in North Central Nigeria to create uniformity in application</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Strategies that can enhance utilisation of access tools for information retrieval N=429

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies to enhance utilisation of access tools for information retrieval</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased efforts by library management to provide required access tools</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper application of access tools to resources in order to direct users</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper organisation of library resources so that the users are easily directed from access tools to their positions on the shelves</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation of regular user education for users to enhance their user skills</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of alternative access route ease access to resources not adequately catered for by the existing access tools</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of digital technology to library operations to aid quick access to resources</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of adequate funds to enable the library purchase required access tools</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create, intensify and sustain the awareness of uses and importance of access tools on information retrieval and utilization</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking and resource sharing among cataloguers in North Central Nigeria should be encouraged to create uniformity in application of access tools</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International standard of access tools application should be adopted and included in training cataloguers</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of access tools utilized for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria

The results of the findings revealed that all the listed access tools, which included catalogues, bibliographies, abstracts and indexes, were available in the libraries of federal universities in Nigeria. This finding validates an earlier study by Kayoma and Okotie (2010) which indicated that several university libraries in Nigeria make use of various access tools, especially the catalogue, to facilitate information retrieval. This result further strengthens the philosophy of librarianship which is to facilitate the retrieval of information by users as quickly as possible which is exactly what the access tools employed by the libraries do. It is in pursuance of this philosophy that the university libraries in North Central Nigeria have committed resources into the acquisition of different access tools as indicated in the findings.

Effectiveness of access tools for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria

According to the result of the study, respondents accepted that catalogues, bibliographies, abstracts and indexes were moderately effective in information retrieval. The result is in agreement with Edem, Ani and Ocheibi (2009) who discovered in a study on students’ use of access tools, that some library users were not satisfied in their quest for information which, according to them, was due to the cumbersome library organization. This finding is worrisome in view of the importance of information retrieval in the attainment of academic goals especially as it concerns the postgraduate students. Furthermore, the present researcher is disturbed by this finding considering the fact the respondents of this study had earlier indicated that they derived a lot of benefits from using access tools to retrieve information from the library. There is need, therefore, for access tools specialists in university libraries in Nigeria to address the issue of cumbersome library organization in order to raise the extent of effectiveness of their services to users especially the postgraduate students.

Problems associated with the utilization of access tools for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria

Result of the study indicated that apart from three items, all other items were accepted as problems associated with utilization of access tools for information retrieval. Those items rejected included poor relationship between access tools and resources placement on the shelves, access tools are inadequately applied to direct users to available resources in the library and required access tools are not available in the library. All other items which included lack of user skills resulting from poor user education programme by the library, complex arrangement of access tools, lack of skilled and competent cataloguers to manipulate access tools, poor networking and resource sharing among cataloguers in Nigeria, among others, were accepted.

This finding agrees with Aina (2004) and Tahir, Mohmood and Shafique (2008) who, in their studies, identified the biased nature of some of the access tools; lack of user skills, and lack of specialist personnel with technical knowhow on the utilization of access tools as challenges facing the use of access tools for information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria. Three items that were rejected further reiterates the earlier acceptance by respondents that access tools were available and also moderately effective in aiding retrieval of information as earlier alluded to. A closer look at the accepted problems, however, reveals that they are mostly institutional based and, thus, require the attention of the various universities management to address.

Strategies that can enhance the utilization of access tools for information retrieval

Results of the findings revealed that all the strategies were accepted with varying mean ratings ranging from proper organization of library resources; provision of adequate funds to purchase access tools; organization of regular user education to enhance users skills; create, intensify and sustain the awareness of uses and importance of access tools for information resources retrieval and utilization to the fact that international standard of access tools application should be adopted and
included in the training of cataloguers among others.

These findings are in agreement with Anyanwu and Akanwa (2001) who, in their study, made the point that university libraries have to be adequately funded for optimal services provision. The findings also support the view of Aje cited in Ogundare (2008) who stressed the importance of proper organization of information resources for easy retrieval. The present researcher is of the opinion that the various universities management should take up the challenge thrown up by the results and take the necessary steps to put in place the strategies as suggested by the study.

Conclusion
The results of this study have shown that university libraries in Nigeria employed access tools including catalogues, bibliographies, abstracts and indexes for information retrieval. Again, these access tools were moderately effective as they were beneficial to users’ information retrieval in university libraries in Nigeria. It is further concluded from the findings that certain problems were associated with the use of access tools for information retrieval including poor networking and resource sharing among cataloguers, complexity of access tool usage and dynamic nature of information materials, inadequate funds to purchase required access tools among others. This work has equally exposed some grey areas to be given attention if access tools utilization for information retrieval is to be made robust and achieving. These grey areas would include provision of adequate funds to enable the library purchase required access tools, increased efforts by library managements to provide required access tools and proper application of access tools to information resources among others. It is, therefore, the opinion of the researcher that adequate organization of information resources can be achieved via proper application of access tools which is capable of enhancing information retrieval and in university libraries in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The universities should increase the acquisition of those access tools namely the catalogue, bibliographies, abstracts and indexes which have significant benefits in information retrieval efforts of postgraduate students. This will enable them to provide better organized library services to meet the demands of users.

2. The university libraries should initiate regular training and retraining programmes for their cataloguers as well as regular user orientation programme for users. This will sharpen the skills of the cataloguers on access tools application and the orientation will create awareness on the availability and importance of these access tools in the university libraries.

3. University libraries in Nigeria should be adequately funded. This is because library resources, which include access tools, are capital intensive that most times overwhelm the capacity of individual institution. Government at the federal level should increase her annual budgets to higher education and cause a reasonable percentage of such allocation to be spent on library development. This will enable these libraries to acquire relevant access tools and sponsor specialists (cataloguers) on seminars to gain more skills on access tools application.

4. University libraries in Nigeria should engage in the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure necessary to have them connected to the Internet. This will enable access tools specialists to create a network among
themselves and other specialists in other parts of the world for the purpose of sharing ideas and experiences which would lead to uniformity and consistency in access tool application.

5. Moreover, university libraries in Nigeria should establish helpdesk and a very dynamic and competent librarian should man this, to collate the needs of the users so that solutions could be proffered at the point of organizing information resources. By so doing, the users will see the library as a hub for their research activities.

6. University libraries in Nigeria should consider the development and use of online catalogue. This would enable users to have wider access to more and current information resources from other libraries around the world without the restriction of time and space and, thus, boost their information retrieval activities.

References


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*Information for the Sustenance of a Democratic Culture*. A Compendium of Papers Presented at the 1999 NLA Annual Conference and AGM held in Port Harcourt Between May 8th -14th.