

Challenges and Prospects on the Accessibility of Periodicals in Selected Academic Libraries in Zaria, Nigeria

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Abstract

The importance of serials in the academia is stressed regularly by librarians. This study investigated the challenges and prospects on the accessibility of serials in two selected prestigious monotechnic libraries in the popular city of Zaria in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to help find solution to the problem of inaccessibility to serial publications by students and lecturers. First, the study seeks to ascertain the types of serials in the study libraries. Secondly, to find out the factors handcuffing the accessibility of the serials and thirdly, the possible ways of restoring easy access to serial publications of the libraries in question. The population of the study was the entire serial librarians in the two case study institutions, which stood at ten (10) from Nigerian Institute of Transport Technology, Zaria and nine (9) from Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria. The study adopted a mixed method approach, using observation, questionnaire (SLQ) and interview to collect data from the serial librarians in the institutions under study. Findings of the study revealed the type of serials available in the two studied centers to include journals, newspapers, magazines, annual reports, memoirs, proceedings, monographic series, bulletin, and government circulars among others. The study found certain challenges obstructing the accessibility of serials which included inadequate funds to subscribe for serial publications, delay in the processing of new issues, mutilation, stealing and disorganization of serial publication by users and epileptic power supply, etc. And last but not the least, a finding indicated vital results on the possible ways to restore easy accessibility of serials in the two studied libraries, and this included the need for academic librarians as purely the serial staff and, the usage of automated security system in serials management of the libraries.

Keywords

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Introduction

Academic libraries are libraries in higher institutions of learning such as the universities, colleges, polytechnics and mono-technics, and their main role is to promote teaching, learning, and extension services; it is the heartbeat of any academic institution (Komolafe, Gbotosho & Odewole (2020). Blackwell (2014) described academic libraries as

valued for professionals which provide recent and up-to-date information resources to support teaching, learning, and research activities. The information resources, serial publications inclusive, contained vital information essential for students, educators, and researchers in different fields of studies. While the serial section of the academic library is the section houses materials that appear

regularly like newspapers, magazines, newsletters, accessions, journals, indexes, abstracts, reports, proceedings, and transactions of societies (Nutsupkui, & Owusu-Ansah 2017), and these materials are called serial publications.

The serial publications earlier mentioned are normally published regularly and at time intervals, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, biannual and or annually. They convey reports on scholarly research and theoretical discussion, as such, serials contained far various disciplines. The serial publications cover current information and constitute the spirit of academic and research libraries and, very importantly, teaching and learning. Libraries acquire, organize, store, retrieve and disseminate information contained in serials for researchers, educators, students and visitors, and this is one reason the academic libraries are seen as research output. Serial publications are important for the students' academic career, it provide them with the most current and vital information needed to support their academic quest and makes reading interesting whether for leisure, educational and research purposes. Ogunniyi, et al. (2013); Komolafe Gbotosho & Odewole (2020), students frequently use serials to get current information in their chosen field of study. Not alone, lecturers and researchers also benefit from the wide range of serial publications, for example, journals (Afolabi & Akerele, 2011). To whatever degree, Lawal (2000) maintains that the accessibility of serials is very essential in reporting current scientific and technological research

findings, as well as social, historical and economic.

However, despite the importance of serials in libraries, like other collections of information material suffer a lot of setbacks, serial publications are not exceptional. In Nigeria, libraries have been faced with several problems regarding accessibility of information, although, it seem problem is a global thing in the opinion of Calhoun (2014) & Akinbode (2011). There are numerous literatures on the management and challenges of serial activities in libraries. An empirical study conducted by Chike, Amaoge & Nnamdi (2015) examined among others the challenges of serials in two university libraries in the North-Central zone of Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 11 serial librarians. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire and observation checklist. Findings obtained revealed that despite the numerous serials in place, the challenges obstructing serials in the libraries included stealing of serial resources, mutilation of serials, disorganization of serials, improper weeding of serials, delay in processing of new issues, delay in the return of removed issues for repairs, illegal lending of serial resources to users, etc. Upon ways to restore effective accessibility of the serials, the study suggested enhancing management strategies of the serial as effective tactics by employing professional librarians, adequate security gadget and library infrastructure. More so, the use of websites and software are required for effective application of serial and other

continuing resources. In a similar study conducted by Adio (2005), he investigated on the management problem of serial in selected Nigerian academic libraries. An exploratory descriptive methodology was used and the subject of the research was library staff and students randomly selected from the University of Ilorin. The study used questionnaire and interviews as instruments for data collection and analysed by observation and descriptive statistics. The finding revealed that most of the problems are dissatisfaction and distrust among library staff and users, followed by funding, human resources and acquisition. The author recommended for adequate funding, user education, regular evaluation of stock and retraining of human resources etc. Consequently, Komolafe, Gbotosho, & Odewole (2020) study was undertaken to find out the availability and use of serials among postgraduate students in Osun state university and how this affects their academic performance. The population of the study consisted of 140 postgraduate students. The findings showed the existence of serials materials but at the same time, the study identified obstacles in the effective use of these serials needed to be tackled to ensure that patrons are satisfied. The recommendations given were, among others, provision of necessary infrastructural facilities, information literacy skills and advance searching skills for appropriate functionality. Susanah & Ayobami (2018) conducted another empirical study on students' access to serial publications in three selected universities in Ogun state, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research

design was used with the study population made up of students from one federal, one state and one private university selected. A self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect data, and the data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) format. The result indicated that serial publication is likewise available to students for access and used for academic purpose, but limit undergraduates to part of serial publication. Another major challenge is that serial librarian attitude affects students' use of the serial section. Chinwe, Obinna, & Victoria (2010) in their study of serials acquisition problems in southern Nigerian federal university libraries surveyed serial librarians. Adequate staff were purposively sampled across thirteen institutions and questionnaires were used to collect data, and the data analysed in quantitative method. The outcome revealed well-defined activities in the universities for easy accessibility to serials, such as selection of good titles. For improved accessibility of serial materials, the study further noted on the importance of consortium to have a shared responsibility, and government aid to the universities by making low exchange rate for acquisition purposes.

To this juncture, preliminary observation showed that, lack of awareness, inadequate funds coupled with high subscription rates, and the digital transformation of scholarly communication process immensely affect the development of serial collections in Nigerian libraries. However, in every human endeavour,

there is always the need to make assessment to know whether one is making progress or not (Abdullahi & Pisagih, 2009). Therefore, this study is put forward to assess the challenges and prospects in the accessibility of serials in academic libraries in Zaria, Nigeria. The study is delimited to surveying two academic libraries in the city of Zaria, Nigeria. Zaria happens to be a very prestigious learning centre for the nation.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of serial control has been stressed upon by various scholars. Serials are important segment of the higher institution of learning because it provides recent and current information. By and large, the accessibility of serials has improved academic performances immensely. With all the importance of serials in the academia, academic libraries in Zaria seem to operate in analogue (traditional) form. And the analogue way of doing things has been taken by digital transformation, and why all library routine management processes, serials inclusive, are bound with one problem or the other. Umar & Hamisu (2020) have presented a major challenge associated with serial control in Federal College of Education Zaria, that is, the poor patronage of serial materials. This is a very serious problem. The essence for which serial materials are available is for continuous patronage by the public concern. Could this problem of none patronage of serials a universal challenge faced by academic libraries in Zaria? Therefore, this study is particular to investigating on the challenges and prospects of

accessing serial publications in selected academic libraries in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the availability of serials in selected academic libraries in Zaria, Nigeria.
2. To find out the factors shackling the accessibility of serials in selected academic libraries in Zaria, Nigeria.
3. To find out the possible ways of restoring access to serial publications in academic libraries in Nigeria.

Methodology

A survey research design was employed in the conduct of this study. Mustapha & Labaran (2021) opined survey research as a marshal of fact for unfolding and understanding existing conditions, prevailing practices, beliefs, attitudes and ongoing processes. A quantitative research method was deemed adequate for the study, and however, a mixed method was used to study the serial librarians in Nigerian Institute of Transport Technology, Zaria (NITT) and Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria (NBP) libraries respectively. The populations of the two institutions serial librarians were found ten (10) at NITT and nine (9) at NBP. The total population was retained as a sample of the study, and this was justifiable using the Yamane (1967) sample size method given as follows, $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$. The formula provided that, 'n' signifies the sample size, 'N' signifies the population in question and 'e' is the margin of error (0.05). Observation, interview, and a questionnaire titled SLQ (Serial Librarian

Questionnaire) were employed for data collection. The questionnaire undergone validation by associates in the library profession and data collected was analysed in descriptive statistics using frequency and Mean score (4.500), and on another hand, reporting analysis.

Result

A total of Nineteen (19) questionnaires were distributed and all

returned from across the institutions. The data collected was used for analysis. In a result, the serial librarians were interviewed from across the institutions. However, the results of the study were discussed next:

1. An observational checklist indicated availability of the following serials in NITT and NBP libraries, as presented in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Types of serial publications in NITT and NBP libraries

S/No	Serials	NITT	GBP
1	Journal	Available	Available
2	Newspaper	Available	Available
3	Magazine	Available	Available
4	Annuals Report	Available	Available
5	Memoirs	Available	Available
6	Proceedings	Available	Available
7	Transactions of Societies	Not- Available	Available
8	Monographic Series	Available	Not Available
9	Bulletin	Available	Available
10	Government Circulars	Available	Available

In table 1.1 above, the researchers personally observed the availability of serials in the two study centres as follows: journals, newspapers, magazines, annual reports, memoirs, proceedings, monograph series, bulletins and government circulars. In addition, serial publication in the nature of ‘transactions of societies’ were

available in NBP library but not available in NITT library. Similarly, ‘monographic series were available at NITT library and not available at NBP library.

2. Factors shackling the accessibility of serials in NITT and NBP libraries.

Table 2 Challenges obstructing the accessibility of serials in NITT and NBP libraries.

S/No	Challenges	Agreed	Disagreed	Mean	Remark
1	Inadequate funds to subscribe to serial publication	17	2	4.897	Agreed
2	Limited staff with ICT skill on serial publication	18	1	4.947	Agreed
3	Delay in the processing of new issues	16	3	4.842	Agreed
4	Mutilation, stealing, and disorganization of serial publication by users	17	2	4.897	Agreed
5	Lack of automation of serial publication	15	4	4.789	Agreed
6	Illegal loan of serial publication	16	3	4.842	Agreed
7	Epileptic power supply	17	2	4.897	Agreed
Mean Score				4.873	Agreed
Average Mean = 4.500					

Table 2 above indicated that certain challenges affect the accessibility of serial publications in NITT and NBP libraries. These included inadequate funds to subscribe for serial publications, limited staff with ICT skill on serial publication, delay in the processing of new issues, mutilation, stealing, and disorganization of serial publication by users, lack of automation of serial publication, illegal loan of serials to users, and epileptic power supply. Their Mean scores stood at 4.897, 4.947, 4.842, 4.897, 4.789, 4.842 and 4.897 respectively. However, the Average Mean is 4.873 thereby having a Mean score above the cuff-off mark of 4.500.

3. A finding indicated the possible ways of restoring access to serial publications in NITT and NBP libraries. In this vein, the researchers successfully interviewed the nineteen (19) serial librarians out of which fifteen (15) had a matching answer with their submission as follows: (1) the need

for professional librarians as the right serial staff, and (2) usage of automated security system in the accessibility of serials.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study about cost of serials subscription, mutilation, and stealing of serial materials, and the disorganization of serial publication by users directly correspond with the findings of Chike, Amaoge, & Nnamdi (2015) and Chinwe, Obinna and Victoria (2010), where they both lamented seriously on these same activities affecting academic libraries in Nigeria. While in respect to the study finding on the need for inclusion of purely professional librarians as the rightful staff to aid accessibility of serials, this is most welcoming. Ideally, a professional librarian is an academic library staff with a qualification of at least a Bachelor's degree in library and information science. In addition, the study claim by the interviewees for the usage of automated security system in the accessibility of serials was yet an

indication that accessibility of serials in academic libraries in Nigeria are affected by security matters.

Conclusion

The study investigated about serial control in two Nigerian Monotechnic in Zaria, Northwestern Nigeria. The objective of the study was to find a solution to the problem of inaccessibility of serial publications by students and lecturers in the studied libraries.

The study found that some particular serial collections such as 'transaction of societies' and 'monographic series' were not present, which the researchers concluded that this could be a problem to inaccessibility of serials in libraries. Nonetheless, the study uncovered specific challenges obstructing the accessibility of serials and these included inadequate funds to subscribe for serial publications, limited staff with ICT skill on serial publication, delay in the processing of new issues, mutilation, stealing, and disorganization of serial publication by users, lack of automation of serial publication, illegal loan of serials to users, and epileptic power supply. On a last note, the study found that professional librarians were the best serial managers, and the usage of automated security system in serial control will promote effective accessibility of serials.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were provided:

1. The need for inclusion of 'transaction of societies' and 'monographic series'

as essential addition to serial collections of the libraries.

2. An automated security system will address the problem of delay in the processing of new issues, mutilation, stealing, and disorganization and illegal loan of serial publications by users.
3. The management of the institutions should provide constant power supply through generator and solar-light for effective lightening where serials are kept.

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