

An Appraisal of E-Reference Resources: Availability and Utilization in Federal University Libraries, Lokoja, Nigeria.

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Research Domains

Digital University and new learning technologies (DU)

Abstract

This study evaluates the availability and use of Electronic Reference Resources (ERRs) in federal university libraries in Lokoja, Nigeria. ERRs including databases, e-books, and e-journals are vital for modern academic research. While Nigerian university libraries are increasingly adopting digital resources, their effective utilization remains limited. Using an opinion-based approach, data were collected from students and library staff to assess current usage patterns and challenges. Findings reveal that although 70% of respondents acknowledged ERR availability, only 45% reported frequent use. Major barriers include poor internet connectivity, limited computer access, low digital literacy, and inadequate user training. Furthermore, only 35% expressed satisfaction with library support, even though 60% recognized ERRs as beneficial for academic work. The study concludes that infrastructural and user-related challenges hinder optimal use of ERRs. To improve the advantages E-Reference Service, user training, and increased awareness are recommended to fully integrate ERRs into academic library services in Nigeria.

Full paper

Introduction

Electronic Reference Resources refer to a broad spectrum of digital materials including databases, e-books, e-journals, and other web-based services that can be accessed through electronic devices and digital networks. These resources are stored in centralized databases and accessed via various platforms using computers and specialized software. As such, ERRs represent an essential shift from Manual, print-based resources to digitally

formatted content, enhancing the speed, accessibility, and interactivity of academic research and learning.

Federal university libraries in Nigeria, particularly those in Lokoja, have increasingly adopted these resources to support teaching, learning, and research. This digital shift aligns with the global trend toward electronic library services, offering students and academic staff unprecedented access to scholarly materials across disciplines.

Literature Analysis

The integration of electronic reference resources (ERRs) in academic libraries has revolutionized access to information, improving the efficiency and scope of research, teaching, and learning activities. According to Ani and Ahiauzu (2008), electronic resources provide users with timely, flexible, and remote access to vast academic content, thereby complementing traditional library holdings. Similarly, Adeniran (2013) emphasized that ERRs enhance the quality of academic work by providing access to a wide range of current and authoritative sources.

User-related factors also play a crucial role in the utilization of electronic reference resources. According to Afolabi (2017), students and academic staff often lack the necessary digital literacy skills to navigate and use electronic databases effectively. Training and user education programs are often underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented in many Nigerian federal university libraries.

Statement Of the Problem

The efficient availability and use of electronic resources at federal university libraries in Lokoja continue to be major concerns, despite the obvious benefits and growing desire for these resources among academic users. Although electronic information resources (EIRs) are essential to the modernization and development of academic library services, there are still a number of enduring obstacles to their adoption.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the availability and utilization of e-reference resources, focusing on their distribution and application by students in federal university library Lokoja, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

Identify the types of e-reference resources available in federal university libraries in Nigeria's North-Central zone.

Examine the major challenges faced by users in accessing e-reference resources in these libraries.

Assess the extent to which e-reference resources meet users' informational and academic needs in support of teaching, learning, and research.

Utilization of Electronic Reference Resources Service (ERRs).

For students, faculty, and researchers, the use of Electronic Reference Resources (ERRs) in federal university libraries is essential to improving access to timely, trustworthy, and varied intellectual material. With the benefits of remote accessibility, speed, and interactivity, these resources which include e-books, e-journals, online encyclopedias, directories, databases, and digital reference services are essential tools in contemporary academic settings (Adetimirin, 2012). Effective utilization is further hampered by infrastructure problems including inadequate internet connectivity, erratic power supplies, and restricted computer access.

Results

The study gathered opinions from students and library staff across selected federal university libraries in Lokoja, Nigeria. The key findings include:

1. Availability of E-Reference Resources:

A majority of respondents (about 70%) confirmed the presence of electronic reference resources in their university libraries, including e-journals, e-books, online databases, and digital encyclopedias.

2. Utilization Patterns:

Only 45% of respondents indicated regular use of e-reference resources. Most students reported limited knowledge of how to access or use these resources effectively.

3. Challenges Identified:

The most significant barriers to effective utilization included poor internet connectivity (reported by 78% of participants), inadequate computer access, lack of user training, and low awareness of available electronic resources.

4. Satisfaction with E-Resources:

While 60% of users acknowledged the importance of e-reference resources for academic work, only 35% expressed satisfaction with the current support and access provided by their libraries.

Conclusion

The study concludes that while federal university libraries in Lokoja, Nigeria, have made notable efforts to provide e-reference resources, their utilization remains suboptimal due to infrastructural limitations, poor user orientation, and low digital literacy. Strengthening these areas will not only enhance students' academic experience but also align library services with global standards in digital learning support.

Recommendation:

1. Improve Internet access by providing reliable, high speed connectivity in libraries.
2. Increase ICT facilities through more computers and digital devices for users.
3. Promote awareness of ERRs via orientations, social media and posters.
4. Build staff capacity through ongoing professional development.
5. Establish user support services like help desk for ERR assistance.