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The Impact of the Internet on Research: the Experience of Delta State University, Nigeria

Oghenevwogaga Benson Adogbeji
University Library

Oghenevwogaga David Toyo
Department Of Library And Information Science

Delta State University
Abraka , Nigeria

Introduction

The explosive growth of mobile computing and wireless networks has helped educational institutions stay at the forefront of this changing world (Khalil, 2004). For research to be reliable, it must be based on reliable information. Scholars need quick and easy access to this information. The Internet has been useful to higher education institutions both in the developed and the developing nations of the world.

The Internet has become an invaluable tool for teaching, learning, and research (Yumba 1997, Ojedokun and Owolabi 2003, and Adomi, Omodeko and Otolo 2004). The benefits are so great that there is no sphere of life without an Internet application. This is certainly true for higher education institutions. The Delta State University has embarked on numerous postgraduate programmes at the master's and PhD levels, and faculty have been given a limited time to acquire advanced degrees before losing their positions. Internet access is crucial for these faculty. This study addresses the lack of computer lab or other Internet center for faculty. The study assesses the level of Internet usage among the academic staff of the Delta State University, Abraka, to determine the impact of the Internet on research.

Methodology

A questionnaire was used to gather data for this study. A questionnaire enables researchers to collect data (Obasi, 1992) while providing more response than an interview (Ndagi, 1999). Delta State University has 485 faculty (Adomi, Omodeko, and Otolo, 2004). A total of 100 respondents

were selected, representing a 20% sample. Random sampling was used to select the respondents across the five faculties: The faculty of Arts, Science, education, social sciences, medical science, and the University library. A total of 70 questionnaires were used for the analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Section A : BIODATA

Table I : Distribution of the academic staff by gender

Gender	Number	**%**
Male	62	88.6
Female	8	11.4
Total	70	100

The study respondents were primarily males. Table I shows that 62 (88.6%) of the respondents are male while 8 (11.4%) are female.

Table II : Distribution of staff by Department

Department	**Number**	**%**
Accounting	2	2.9
Anatomy	1	1.4
Botany & Microbiology	2	2.9
Business administration	1	1.4
Chemistry	1	1.4
Economics	1	1.4
Educational Administration	4	5.7
Fine and applied arts	1	1.4
Geography and Regional Planning	2	2.9
Guidance & counseling	2	2.9
History	1	1.4
Institute of Education	2	2.9
Language & Linguistic	6	8.6
Library (The University Library)	10	14.3
Library & Information science	2	2.9
Mathematics	2	2.9
Music	1	1.4
Performing Arts	4	5.7
Physics	3	4.3
Physical & Health Education	1	1.4
Political science	4	5.7

Religion study	1	1.4
Science education	1	1.4
Social science education	1	1.4
Sociology & psychology	3	4.3
Vocational Education	3	4.3
	Total70	**100**

There were more responses from the library as a department than any other department in the University. This could be as result of the accessibility of the staff at the time of the study.

Table III : Distribution of staff by faculty organization

Faculty	Number	**%**
Arts	14	20
Education	14	20
Science	11	15.7
Social Science	20	28.6
Medical Science	1	1.4
University Library	10	14.3
Total	70	100

It was found out from the study that social science faculty recorded the highest academic staff while the faculties of arts and education recorded 14 (20%) each and science 11 (15.7%). Similarly, medical science recorded 1 (1.4%) academic staff while the library, which is a department as well as a faculty, recorded 10 (14.3 %) .

Table IV: Staff distribution by status / designation

Status / Designation	Number	**%**
Graduate Assistant	7	10.0
Assistant Lecturer	15	21.4
Lecturer II	16	22.9
Lecturer I	15	21.4
Senior Lecturer	10	14.3
Reader	3	4.3
Professor	4	5.7
Total	70	100

Lecturer II is the predominant rank among the respondents. There were 7 (10%) graduate assistant, 15 (21.4%) assistant lecturer, 16 (22.9%) lecturer II while 15 (21.4%) lecturer I. Similarly, there were 10 (14.3%)

senior lecturer, and 3 (4.3%) and 4 (5.7%) readers and professors respectively.

Table V : Staff distribution by Qualifications

Qualification	Number	%
B.Sc / B.A	4	5.7
M.Sc / M.A / MLS	46	65.7
Ph.D	20	28.6
Total	70	100

The study revealed more academic staff with masters' degree than any other category. Four (5.7%) of the academic staff were first-degree holders (these are the graduate assistant that are still in a master's programme). There were 46 (65.7%) master's degree holders and 20 (28.6%) with the PhD

Section B: Access to the Internet

Table VI : Staff access to the Internet

Question	**Yes**	**%**	**NO**	**%**
Do you have access to the Internet?	70	100	0	0

The study revealed that all the staff used for the study have access to the Internet.

Table VII : location of access to the Internet

Access to the Internet	Number	**%**
Computer laboratory	0	0.0
Office	3	4.3
University laboratory	0	0.0
At Home	3	4.3
Cybercafe	62	88.6
Office and cybercafe	2	2.8
Total	70	100

As shown in the Table VII above, the academic staff access to the Internet is mainly through cybercafe. No staff have access through the computer laboratory and university laboratory. There are no computer laboratories in the University with Internet service. Three of the staff each have access in their offices and at home but 62 (88.6%) have access

through the cybercafe. Finally, only two academic staff have access to the Internet via their office and cybercafe.

Table VIII : Length of time using Internet

Duration	Number	**%**
Less than 1 Year	6	8.6
1 - 2 Years	29	41.4
3 - 4 Years	25	35.7
5 Years and above	10	14.3
Total	70	100

Most academic staff had been using the Internet for about one to two years, with 29 (41.4%) respondents. Six (8.6%) have been using it for less than one year, while 25 (35.7%) have been using it for about three to four years. Finally, 10 (14.3%) have been using the Internet for five years or more for research purpose.

Section C : Use of the Internet

Table IX: Categories of Use

Purpose	Number	**%**
Sending and receiving email, communication with colleagues and relations	2	2.9
Search for research and academic materials	15	21.4
Reading of Newspapers / entertainment and sport	0	0.0
Sending and receiving email, searching for research and academic materials, and communication with friends and relations	53	75.7
Total	70	100

Most staff use the Internet for sending and receiving emai, searching for research and academic materials, and also for communication with friends and relations in regard to research activities and other personal issues. While 53 (75.7%) attested to that, while 2 (2.9%) use the Internet for sending and receiving email, communication with colleagues and relations. Also, 15 (21.4%) staff use the Internet in searching for research and academic materials, while no academic staff use it for reading newspaper and entertainment or sport.

Table X: Duration of access to the Internet per week

Duration of access to the Internet per week (hours)	Numbers	**%**

Less than 10 Hours	57	81.4
10 - 20 Hours	8	11.4
20 - 30 Hours	2	2.9
30 - 40 Hours	3	4.3
Over 40 Hours	0	0.0
Total	70	100

The study shows that most staff (57, 81.4%) spend less than 10 hours per week on the Internet. Eight (11.4%) use the Internet for 10 to 20 hours per week while 2 (2.9%) use it for about 20 to 30 hours per week. Three (4.3%) use the Internet for about 30 to 40 hours per week, but no one reported using it for more than 40 hours per week. This could be attributed to the fact that staff pay per service at the Internet center and there are often people waiting to use the computers. Hence, more staff prefer to spend fewer hours to reduce cost and to give others access. Furthermore, most staff are afraid to visit the cybercafes at night (after working hours) due to fear of crime.

Table XI : Ease of research due to the use (application) of the Internet

Question	YES	%	NO	%
Does the application of Internet make research easier for you?	68	97.1	2	2.9

The Internet has contributed significantly to the ease of research of the academic staff of the University. 68 (97.1%) out of the 70 academic staff used for this study strongly attested to the fact that the Internet has make research work easier for them.

Table XII : Benefits of the Internet browsing to the academic staff on research

Ways in which the Internet is beneficial to the academic staff	Number	**%**
Making choice of research topic easier, ease the sending and receiving of mails	5	7.1
Downloading of related information materials for research, ease the sending and receiving of research materials, ease communication of filled questionnaires / Articles, ease access to study materials, ease in obtaining peer review thereby strengthening research and journal publications, Helped in having access to database not feasible in our library, Helped in having up-to-date information materials	65	92.9

in research and ease the exchange of study materials / ideas with colleagues.		
Total	70	100

More staff 65 (92.9%) have benefited from the use of the Internet through downloading of related information materials for research, etc. Five (7.1%) have benefited through making choice of research topic easier, ease the sending and receiving of mails.

Table XIII : The three most important use of the Internet to research as applicable to users.

Three Most Important usage	Number	**%**
Quick access to academic materials, ease of communication, access to relevant information and up-to-date information	53	77.9
Ease communication, ease choice of research topic	15	22.1
Total	68	100

Most staff, 53 (77.9%), rated quick access to academic materials, ease of communication, and access to relevant and up-to-date information as the most important use of the Internet to them, while 15 (22.1%) rated the ease of communication and ease of choice of research work as the most important use of the Internet to them in regards to research work.

Table XIV: Impact of the Internet on research as applicable to the academic staff.

Impact	Number	%
Very Much	58	82.9
Minimally	10	14.3
Not at all	2	2.8
Total	70	100

The study focus, which is the assessing of the impact of the Internet on research as applicable to the academic staff of the university, the study showed that the impact is quite significant. 58 (82.9%) attested to the fact that the use of the Internet has created great impact on their research work. The impact was considered minimal to 10 (14.3%) of the staff, and 2 (2.8%) have not seen any impact of the Internet on their own research work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the impact of the Internet and the benefits to the academic staff and the fact that so many staff have no access to the Internet either at home nor in their offices, we therefore have the following recommendations:

• The university should set up an Internet center for staff. This is a natural prerequisite for effective research work as equally recommended by the National University Commission of Nigeria that lecturers should have access to the Internet even in their offices. This recommendation is still in line with the Delta State University, Abraka Information and Communication Technology Policy (2005) as recorded in policy summary section 1.3.3. That it is the university policy to promote office computing in all offices. This entails office software and access to the Internet and the university local network (Intranet) etc.

• The university should organize formal training for the staff

• Academic staff should change their orientation and attitude toward new technology. Staff should educate themselves on the use of the new technology such as the Internet so that they will not be left behind in the scheme of development.

• The university should increase Internet access points rather than having only one point in the head of department's office so that other staff can freely access the net.

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