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## ACCESSIBILITY AND USE OF SERIAL PUBLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AMONG ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA: AN OPINION

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### ABSTRACT

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*This paper examined the accessibility and use of serial publications for academic activities among academic librarians in Nigeria. The paper explored the current state of serial publications in academic libraries in Nigeria and the extent to which academic librarians utilise them for their academic activities. The paper highlighted the importance of adequate access to serial publications, addressing challenges and promoting effective utilisation to enhance academic librarians' productivity and the overall quality of academic activities in Nigerian academic libraries. The paper concluded by revealing the significance of serial publications such as newspaper, magazines, newsletters, accessions, journals, indexes, abstract, reports and proceedings in supporting research, teaching and learning. The paper recommended among others, the management of academic libraries in Nigeria, the regular training through organising workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia on effective use of serial publications including searching, siting and referencing. This paper contributes to the understanding of the current state of serial publications in academic libraries in Nigeria and provides valuable insights for improving the use of these publications by academic librarians.*

**Keywords:** Academic activities, Academic librarians, Academic libraries, Accessibility, Serial publications, Use

## Introduction

Academic libraries are libraries located in Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education and other institutions of higher learning. The academic library is an important academic unit in higher education because it provides information in various formats to support the teaching, learning and research objectives of the parent institution. Omeluzor et al. (2017) posited that the academic library is an established and organised arm of an institution with a clear mandate of providing relevant and up-to-date library collections that meet the information need of users. The aim of an academic library is to acquire information resources in different formats, in various fields of human knowledge and to process, organise, disseminate and provide access to them.

According to Ashikuzzaman (2018), every educational institution requires a library containing various information resources that include several kinds of serial publications. This is because, an academic library is the resource bank of its parent institution and its goal is to provide effective services for users to enhance their knowledge with up-to-date information which is important for teaching, learning and other academic activities. Academic libraries are established to support the attainment of the overall objectives of their parent institutions. The objectives include; provision of information resources for undergraduates, postgraduates, lecturers, researchers as well as supporting their academic activities.

According to Saka and Mahmud (2020), one singular objective of establishing academic libraries is to provide information resources to support teaching and research (academic activities) of faculty members and for these objectives to be achieved, academic libraries provide a variety of information resources (both print and non-print). Academic activities of academic librarians include research, teaching, attending seminars, conferences and community services. According to Wada *et al.* (2022), academic activities provide a good platform for research and teaching by library and information science educators to become successful academics. This is because academic activities develops academic knowledge and reinforces the skills needed for effective knowledge transfer. Academic activities among Library and Information Science Educators (LISE) include: research works, teaching and community development.

Academic activities inspire academic librarians to work hard, fill the gaps of previous researches and create an opportunity for future research. Most of the academic activities of academic librarians and other academicians are disseminated via publications. Academic activities through research publications enable academic librarians to earn recognition in academic circles locally and internationally. For academic activities to be effectively carried out by academic librarians, they need to access

and use serial publications which include: journals, newspapers, magazines, and conference proceedings to mention but few that are in both print and non-print formats.

Serials are publications issued in successive parts normally at regular intervals, and intended to be continued indefinitely. It could be published weekly, fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annually and so on (Tomomowo-Ayodele, 2018). Serial publications include: newspapers, magazines, newsletters, accessions, journals, indexes, abstract, reports, proceedings and transactions of societies to mention but a few. According to Bajracharya (2015), serials are publications with a distinctive title, which appears at stated or regular intervals, without a prior decision as to when the last issue will appear. Serials convey current trends in all walks of life. This has made access to their contents more direct, convenient and timely which make academic librarians cling to them to unravel their greatest source of anxiety and uncertainty. Serial publications constitute an important source of information in academic libraries in Nigeria. Their usefulness is found in the current information they carry. The information these vital sources carry, educate and entertain the readers and keep them abreast or informed about what happens in the society around them (Bala, 2023). The accessibility and use of serial publications provide vital information which makes them one of the most important and crucial sources of information among academic librarians and other faculty members.

Accessibility according to Azonobi (2021), is the ability to access and benefit from periodicals acquired by universities through the library. Accessibility to serial publications is an important variable and they can be accessed through a number of tools in the academic libraries such as catalogue, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), bibliographies, indexes and abstracts both manually and electronic formats. Accessibility and use of serials are key factors to effective research among academic librarians. It is for this reason that the usefulness of serials is very essential for librarians to communicate with their counterparts at large.

The use of resources especially serials, according to Bala (2023), could be a result of information seeking, browsing or discovery of new or existing phenomena. Azonobi (2021) highlighted some of the reasons lecturers select and use serial sources which include: the quality and characteristics of the content of a source, the characteristics of the source itself; the trustworthiness of the source; the usability of the source; the similarity of the source and the scope of the source.

The concept of serial publications

Serials play important roles in the life of every meaningful research. This is because, the information contained in

serials are the product of research findings carried out by ardent scholars in different areas of specialisation. The information contained in serials is factual, current and up-to-date which are relevant for research. Adeola and Monisola (2017) defined serial as a publication in any medium issued in successive parts, bearing numeric or chronological designations and intended to be continued indefinitely. Serial publications are categorised into periodicals and non-periodicals based on intended frequency of publication. A periodical is intended to appear more regularly and more often than once in a year which includes: journal, newspapers and magazines. According to Sambo and Akpojotor (2016), periodicals are publications published either regularly or irregularly and are not usually paid for in advance of publications which include: annual conference proceeding, monographic, newsletters, indexes, abstracts, reports and transaction of societies.

Owusu-Ansah and Nutsupkui (2017) defined serials as a publication in any medium issued in successive parts bearing numerical or chronological designations and intended to be continued indefinitely. Serials are very unique and contain very current information which is very useful for study, learning, teaching and research purpose(s). Tamomowo-Ayodele and Ayobami (2018) posited that there are many kinds of serials which include: newspaper, magazines, newsletters, accessions, journals, indexes, abstract, reports, proceedings and transactions of businesses in societies. Serial publications form the backbone of research and a crux to the success of any academic library.

Serials resources are usually in print formats but with the advent of information technology, serials are now computerised appearing in electronic formats. Serials resources have historically and presently focused on the provision of current and up-to-date information in general or specific field of study. This is one of the reasons why Upev *et al.* (2016) opined that serials constitute a major part of the collection of academic libraries and also accounts for a large sum of the library expenditure.

According to Rahmon *et al.* (2016) serials resources are very useful because they are the most up to date materials in the library and that articles in serial resources are written by experts in the field, making them reliable and precise. As such, the academic libraries should make provision for current and up-to-date serial publications to meet the information needs of their diverse group of users. Cabonero *et al.* (2017) argued that serial publications in academic libraries should be given serious consideration towards greater utilisation among researchers particularly towards enhancing their academic activities. Serials are essential tool for teaching and research in academic endeavor and remain a potent tool for dissemination of knowledge. Effective academic activities therefore presupposes effective provision of

serials by academic library and ensuring effective access and use among users.

### **Concept of academic activities**

Academic activities outline a pattern of commitment and create avenue for individual lecturer, student and teachers to engage in teaching and learning for knowledge acquisition. Academic activities involve a classified routine within a timeframe for the achievement of educational goals. In academic activities, every action and interaction is based on teaching or learning for which rewards are given. The rewards for academic activities are measured in grades and award of certificate. Every academic activity is associated with grade for every level of performance. In order words, every failure or success associated with academic activities is dully rewarded as specified in curriculum of education or as outlined in educational code of conduct or academic rules and regulations.

According to University of Southern Queensland (USQ) (2021), academic activity usually results in the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. Law Insider (2021) described academic activities as a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalisable knowledge. This includes, but not limited to, designing research, directing research, performing experiments, enrolling research subjects, making decisions regarding eligibility to participate in research, participating in observational registry programmes, analysing or reporting research data, or submitting manuscripts concerning research for publication.

Academic activity is a multivariate activity because the result of research can lead to the production of many types of papers. The most commonplace of papers among academic librarians and other scholars include: chapters in a book, seminar papers, conference papers and workshop papers. The beauty of academic activities is that it is a process that enable and support researchers' efforts with findings deposited in published and unpublished documents. This could be the reason why academic libraries are established to harness and harmonise reputable serials publications and other information resources to reduce information seeking stress that might be faced by users.

Academic activities make it possible and easy for library and information science educators to access and utilise serials publications that are difficult to find or locate within the period of researches. For a research to be successful within academic hemisphere, Law Insider (2021) has reiterated that researchers have to solidly depend on organised information resources, usually disseminated by

academic libraries. Failure to use serials publication which contain current and up-to-date information on diverse fields of study may expose the results of researches to worthless end. That is why writing of conference papers, chapters in books, theses, dissertations, to mention but a few require academic librarians to consult journals, and other theses or dissertations for their knowledge expansion, empirical supports and reliance on theoretical foundations.

### **Utilisation of Serial Publications among Academic Librarians**

The primary function of tertiary institutions is to provide full range of information resources which constitutes serials publications and other services necessary to carry out the goals and duties of the institution which the library was established to serve. Doraswamy (2018) posited that users approach the library with needs which they hope to satisfy. Doraswamy (2018) further categorised library users into four groups namely: general readers, creative readers, adult students and researchers with special interests. All these people utilise library resources for one purpose or the other which also informs the choice of resources to be consulted.

Doraswamy (2018) further observed that the last category, that is researchers; concentrate on the utilisation of textbooks, journals and other relevant resources for research as demanded by their different professions. Similarly, Ugbagir (2016) is of the view that the motives and purpose of the users for approaching the library determine the serial publications that users are likely to consult. The researcher claimed that most faculty staffs need information for the purpose of research and teaching and as such, they are desirous of serial publications such as: journals, theses and dissertations, government publications, conference proceedings and reference materials, online and electronic journals.

Academic libraries by providing serial publications alongside other resources adequately would go a long way in satisfying the information needs of their users and promoting academic activity among academic librarians and other researchers. It is only when users are aware of serial publications in academic libraries that they can develop positive attitude towards their use. Olanlokun (2015) confirmed that journal articles, textbooks, theses and dissertation, monographs, treatises and government documents were considered very important to the job performance of the Nigerian academics.

### **Constraints on the Utilisation of Serial Publications**

The utilisation of serial publications especially in developing countries like Nigeria has not been without some problems. Kisiedu (2018) identified some of the problems of the use of serial publications to include:

information literacy, information overload, poor library organisation, lack of user skills; poor funding of libraries, lack of current information resources; lack of adequate/relevant materials; poor Information Technology (IT) infrastructure; unconducive reading environment; poor power supply; lack of technical support; and lack of user education.

The above problems no doubt will be more pronounced in Nigeria where issues concerning education are many a time relegated to the background in policy implementations. Komolafe *et al.* (2020) in their studies commented on the declining budgetary allocations in most tertiary institutions in Africa which have great negative impact on the availability and adequacy of serial publications in libraries. Consequently, African scholars depend heavily on gifts and donated materials from foreign countries for information for their research even on local issues. This scenario seriously affects academic activities of academic librarians in developing countries, including Nigeria, as much time, fund and energy are wasted trying to track down foreign information resources.

On the other hand, Adeoye *et al.* (2019) observed that irregular power supplies as well as lack of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) pose serious challenges to provision and currency of serial publications. Similarly, Eiriemiokhale and Ibeun (2017) also maintained that poor power supply and information overload have become a major hindrance to influence of serial publications on research output of lecturers and researchers in Nigeria. Other problems affecting effective use of serial publications as identified by Ndanwu (2016) include: lack of awareness on the availability of certain library resources, bibliographic obstacles and inadequate user education.

Some of the problems affecting the utilisation of electronic database, as identified by Ibrahim (2016) include lack of user skills, lack of technical support and insufficient spare parts are some of the major constraints to effective use and adequacy of electronic database in many institutions in the developing countries including Nigeria. As a result, many of the e-resources in these institutions are under-utilised or not utilised at all.

### **Accessibility and Utilisation of Serial Publications for Academic Activities among Academic Librarians**

In view of the problems confronting accessibility and utilisation of serial publications for academic activities among academic librarians and other researchers, the following strategies are suggested to be employed. Yushau and Fadip (2018) observed that there is lack of ICT facilities in Nigerian educational institutions. This according to them is a major hindrance to adequacy of serial publications. The researchers suggested a general improvement in infrastructural facilities especially ICT



infrastructure to ensure enhanced currency of serial publications.

Similarly, Baro *et al.* (2018) considered equipping the nation's academic libraries with ICT facilities as a major step for improving effective utilisation of library resources. Other measures include: the provision of alternative power supply for libraries attached to academic institutions and inclusion of user education in the educational curriculum. On the other hand, Afebende and Ebanye (2018) considered lack of user skills as one of the major constraints to effective utilisation of serial publications for quality research output. They were of the view that improved user skills through user education, current awareness services and public enlightenment on the resources available in the institution will go a long way in enhancing effective use of adequate and current serial publications available for academic activities in the institution. As a result of rapid changes that occur in the information environment today, academic librarians and other academic staff prefer online resources and the Internet as sources of information.

Kinengyere (2017) pointed out the importance of serials publication to lecturers and postgraduate students and suggested the provision of electronic resources, Internet facilities and ICT network in institutions as ways of attracting users to the use of serial publications. Baro *et al.* (2018) supported this view and further called for the creation of conducive reading environment in academic libraries through regular supply of electricity.

### Conclusion

The study on the accessibility and use of serial publications for academic activities among academic librarians in Nigeria reveals the significance of serial publications such as newspaper, magazines, newsletters, accessions, journals, indexes, abstract, reports and proceedings in supporting research, teaching and learning. The paper highlighted the importance of adequate access to serial publications, addressing challenges and promoting effective utilisation to enhance academic librarians' productivity and the overall quality of academic activities in Nigerian academic libraries.

### Recommendations

1. The management of academic libraries in Nigeria should ensure the provision of online subscriptions to relevant serial publications and ensure that academic librarians have access to these resources.
2. The management of academic libraries in Nigeria should ensure the regular training through organising workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia on effective use of serial

publications including searching, siting and referencing.

3. The management of academic libraries in Nigeria should ensure the upgrade of library infrastructure including Internet connectivity, computers and software to support access to serial publications.
4. The management of academic libraries in Nigeria should ensure or foster collaboration among academic libraries to share resources, including serial publications and reduce duplication of efforts.

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