ASSESSMENT OF UTILIZATION OF ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES AMONG ARABIC ACADEMICS IN FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ZARIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the utilization of Online Information Resources among Arabic academics of Federal College Education Zaria. To achieve this objective, two (2) research questions were formulated, which are: For what purpose do Arabic academics at Federal College of Education Zaria use online information resources? What challenges do Arabic academics at the Federal College of Education Zaria face while searching for online information resources? A quantitative research methodology was adopted, in the conduct of this study. The population of this study consists of twenty-nine (29) academics in the Department of Arabic at the Federal College of Education, Zaria. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. A total of twenty-nine (29) copies of the questionnaire were administered to Arabic academics at the Federal College of Education, Zaria, with a total response rate of 28 (96.6%). The data collected for the study were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count, simple percentage, and mean. The findings arising from the studies indicated that the majority of Arabic academics utilize online information resources for research purposes, paper publication, teaching, and thesis and dissertation writing. The challenges faced by Arabic academics in accessing and utilizing online information resources are inadequate search strategies, slow Internet connectivity in the college, erratic power supply, insufficient access to needed journals, poor ICT facilities, and a lack of Internet connectivity in the offices. Information overload, technophobia, a lack of printing facilities, and difficulty while browsing were also reported as the major challenges faced in accessing and utilizing online information resources. Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the majority of Arabic academics in FCE Zaria were not accessing and utilizing available information resources because they lacked adequate knowledge of information search skills and search strategies to access the available information resources, Therefore, the study recommended that there is a need for training on how to access and make use of the available resources with different search skills and to address all the challenges faced by Arabic academics in the college.

Keywords: Academics, Arabic, Assessment**,** Challenges, Federal College Education Zaria, Online Information Resources, Utilization

Introduction

In an era marked by exponential growth in online content, efficiently locating and retrieving relevant information has become increasingly crucial across various domains, including research, education, business, and everyday life. Online information retrieval refers to the process of seeking and obtaining specific information from digital sources available on the Internet. Online information retrieval involves using a variety of tools such as computers, online databases, institutional repositories, techniques, and search strategies to locate relevant information based on user queries (Saidu, 2023).

To successfully retrieve information certain processes and procedures must be followed that show information searching is the process of finding or retrieving specific information to meet an information need, usually with the help of a computer system. There are different methods and techniques for information searching, such as keyword searching, hypertext or hypermedia links, logical operators, and semantic indexing. Information searching can be done for various purposes, such as academic research, personal interest, entertainment, or problem-solving. Information searching can also involve different types of information sources, such as databases, websites, books, journals, or multimedia. Information retrieval has many advantages which include efficient access: information retrieval techniques make it possible for users to easily locate and retrieve vast amounts of data or information, personalization of results: user profiling and personalization techniques are used in information retrieval models to tailor search results to individual preferences and behaviours, scalability: information retrieval models are capable of handling increasing data volumes, precision: these can provide highly accurate and relevant search results, reducing the likelihood of irrelevant information appearing in search results (Saidu, 2023).

Information search skills are the driving force behind information retrieval. However, with all the importance of information search skills, few studies investigate how people engage in search tasks or define their decisions and behaviours in their information retrieval process. For example, Ahmad (2022) a perceived lack of time, poor infrastructural facilities, technophobia, equipment, funding, training, and inappropriate software, coupled with a lack of knowledge and skills among staff, insufficient technical support, and the risks associated with implementing innovations in teaching were reported as the most prohibiting barriers to academic staff's use of electronic information resources in their teaching. Further identified limited time and lack of effective information retrieval skills as factors affecting user access to electronic information. Therefore, this study investigates the use of online information resources among Arabic academics in the Federal College of Education, Zaria.

Statement of the Problem

Information Retrieval (IR) is a systematic process that involves searching, locating, and retrieving relevant information from various sources or repositories, typically in digital form. Here are some key points to understand: IR deals with the

organization, storage, retrieval, and evaluation of information from document repositories, particularly textual information. It focuses on obtaining material that is usually unstructured, such as text, from large collections stored on computers

Information search skills are essential for solving problems in the digital age. The digital age is a period in human history characterized by the widespread use of information and communication technologies in various aspects of life. The digital age poses new challenges and opportunities for problem-solving, as information is abundant, diverse, and dynamic. To solve problems effectively in the digital age, individuals need to develop information search skills, which are the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information from various sources and formats
(Chuanfu and Larsen, 2022)

Despite the availability of online resources, many academics fail to fully utilize them for their academic endeavours as observed by the researcher. This underutilization poses a challenge to effective learning and research. Several factors can contribute to this issue, this may include low awareness, lack of search skills, and reliance on general search engines instead of specialized academic databases. However, in the case of Arabic academics of Federal College of Education Zaria, it is still unknown what specifically hinders the effective utilization of online information resources besides understanding these barriers is crucial for improving resource utilization. Therefore, this study set out to investigate the use of online information resources by Arabic academics at the Federal College of Education, Zaria.

Research Questions
1. What are the purposes do Arabic academics at Federal College of Education Zaria use online information resources?
2. What challenges do Arabic academics at the Federal College of Education Zaria face while searching for information resources?

Literature Review
The concept of information Search skills can be defined as organized activities through which a person conducts a literature search on the internet and in online/offline databases. They refer to a set of experience search statements entered into a search system to retrieve desired information resources. Also, information Search skills, employed or used by library users, mean access to information resources that are domiciled on the internet and online/offline databases.

According to Brehm (2019), information search skills can be defined as the application and organization of search keywords and symbols to conduct an effective search in an online environment and to be able to extend or narrow search results accordingly. Finding the right information in the online environment is not a matter of chance. Creating a search strategy is very important for a successful search result. This implies that applying the knowledge and skills to search for relevant information will

lead to successful research outcomes, even when the information user is not familiar with the research titles or topic at hand (Jimi et al. 2020).

While the knowledge includes knowledge on how to create a search statement using keywords, knowledge on how to use the databases appropriate to your research titles, How to use the keywords and control the language How to make use of an advanced search strategy How to make use of different search approaches if necessary and continue to identify applicable keywords and controlled vocabulary to go back.

Musa (2015) conducted a study on access and use the online Arabic information resources the findings of the study revealed that over 70% of the respondents indicated smartphone (GSM) connectivity and personal modems as the means of accessing online Arabic information resources at Bayero University. Due to a lack of Internet connectivity in their respective offices, the respondents access online Arabic information resources through Google search engines and other online mediums instead of searching through available online library databases. Lastly, over 90% of the academics teaching Arabic and Islamic studies in BUK access and utilize online. Arabic information resources for research activities, thesis writing, lecture notes, teaching, and preparing writing for publication.

Studies on academics using online information resources for diverse purposes have been demonstrated in the literature. Obaje and Camble (2019) posit that online information is mostly used for project/dissertation and thesis writing as well as personal research by staff.

However, regarding the challenges affecting the use of online information resources Kefas and Gilbert (2015) report that irrelevant information, power outages, issues of network or slow internet connectivity, the need to filter the results from search information overload, and inadequate search skills were the major challenges faced by postgraduate students at Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola. Abdullahi and Haruna (2020) found that a lack of basic knowledge of ICT is the second major constraint after the problem of erratic power supply to the use of ICT in college libraries in Nigeria. This was corroborated by Abdullahi and Haruna (2020), though the percentage that represents the hypothesis is low as compared to other constraints such as erratic power supply, networking, and availability of equipment, among others. Ali's (2005) study among the users of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Delhi found that the majority of users face difficulty while browsing for e-resources. Lack of printing facilities, terminals, and trained staff are the major reasons that discourage users from accessing electronic information services.

Methodology
A quantitative methodology was adopted for the study because it involves the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. The purpose of using quantitative research methodology is to generate knowledge and create an understanding of the

social world. A quantitative case study research design was employed in the conduct of this study because it is an appropriate method for investigating a specific phenomenon or case in depth and context. A case study is suitable when you want to gain concrete, contextual, in-depth knowledge about a real-world subject and explore its key characteristics, meanings, and implications. The population of the study comprised 29 Arabic academics at the Federal College of Education in Zaria. A total enumerative sampling technique was used; where the entire sample of the study was used for the study. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. A total of 29 copies of the questionnaire were distributed out of this 28 (96.6%) were duly returned completed.

Result and Discussion

Descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count, simple percentage, and mean were used to analyze the data relating to the research questions raised for this study. 50% response and a 1.3 mean score were used as benchmarks for decision-making; anything less than that is considered negative.

The first objective of this study was to find out the purpose of utilizing online information resources among Arabic Academics in the Federal College of Education Zaria. To achieve this objective, diverse purposes were itemized for the respondents to choose the option that best suited their opinion in Table 1

Table 1 Purpose of utilizing online information resources among Arabic academics

Purpose of Utilizing Online Information Resources	Freq	%	Mean
For literature search	24	85.7%	2.7
For Research purposes	25	89.3%	2.8
For Paper writing & publication	26	92.9%	2.9
For Teaching	23	82.2%	2.6
For Self-development	24	85.8%	2.8
For conveniences	5	17.9%	0.5
For Community development	6	21.5%	0.7
For Thesis/ Dissertation writing	19	67.86%	2.1

The findings in Table 1 revealed the reasons for utilizing online information resources for the retrieval of information resources among Arabic academics, as it can be seen that research activities, paper writing, and publication were the major reasons for utilizing online information resources, with the highest percentage of 92.9% and a mean value of 2.9, followed by research purposes with 89.3% and a mean score of 2.8,

respectively. Furthermore, literature searches, self-development, and teaching were also indicated as reasons for utilizing online speciality information resources by Arabic academics.

However, this finding showed that the majority of the Arabic academics in FCE Zaria were using online information resources purposefully for paper writing publication and research purposes. This finding corroborates the finding of Talhami (2015), who reports that Arabic databases are used for research purposes; about one-quarter to one-third use them to prepare lectures and gain subject knowledge. In another finding by Obaje and Camble (2019), they reported that library databases are mostly used for literature searches during project/dissertation and thesis writing as well as personal research by staff. About one-quarter (89.4%) use it to prepare lectures and 24.8% use it to gain subject knowledge. Similarly, Abdullahi and Haruna (2020) reported that about one-third of respondents use electronic resources for research.

The second objective of the study sought to identify the challenges faced by Arabic academics in the Federal College of Education, Zaria in accessing and utilizing online information resources. To achieve this objective, a list of options was provided in Table 2 for the respondents to select the challenges they faced while retrieving online information resources.

Table 2 Challenges Faced by Arabic Academics of Federal College Education Zaria in Accessing and Utilizing the Online Information Resource

Challenges encountered in accessing and utilizing the online information resource by Arabic academics	Freq	%	Mean
Inadequate search skills	27	96.5%	2.7
Slow Internet connectivity	25	89.3%	2.5
Erratic power supply	26	92.9%	2.6
Poor ICTs facilities	24	85.8%	2.4
Lack of access to Internet connectivity	23	82.2%	2.3
Insufficient access to needed journals	26	92.9%	2.6
information overload	25	89.3%	2.5
Technophobia	22	78.6%	2.2
lack of printing facilities	21	75.0%	2.1
difficulty while browsing	26	92.9%	2.6

From Table 2, the findings show that inadequate search skills were the challenges faced by Arab academics when accessing and utilizing information resources, with a percentage of 96.5% and a mean value of 2.7, while erratic power supply, insufficient access to needed journals, and difficulty while browsing obtained a the same response rate of 92.9% and a mean value of 2.6. Slow Internet connectivity and information overload were also among the challenges faced in accessing and utilizing information resources, with a percentage of 89.3% and a mean score of 2.5 responses, respectively. Similarly, poor ICT facilities were also part of the challenges faced by respondents, with a percentage of 85.8% and a mean value of (2.4), while lack of access to Internet connectivity in the offices was 82.2% and a mean value of (2.3).

The prevalence of these challenges was also reported in similar studies by Kefas and Gilbert (2015), who indicated that irrelevant information, power outages, issues of network or slow internet connectivity, the need to filter the search due to information overload, and inadequate search skills were the major challenges. This finding was

corroborated further by Saidu (2023), who reported similar constraints such as erratic power supply, networking, and availability of equipment, among others.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the majority of Arabic academics in FCE Zaria were not accessing and utilizing available information resources due to a lack of Search skills and search strategies. This could be necessitated due to the lack of information literacy skills and problems associated with the current trend in ICT gadgets.

Given these challenges, there is a need for training on how to access and make use of the available online information resources by using different search skills and search strategies. To compete in the 21st-century library market, the college should adopt global best practices and immediately create the college library website. This will enhance the college's teaching and research operations. When the aforementioned challenges are addressed perhaps there would be a high level of online access and usage, higher quality teaching and research activities, and above all, high levels of satisfaction with the information resources among Arabic academics at FCE Zaria. The study recommended that more awareness should be created about accessing and utilizing information resources for Arabic academics and other researchers at the Federal College of Education in Zaria. The college should make provision to provide a regular power generation plant to complement the erratic power supply bedevilling the college. Furthermore, the college management should provide enough ICT fertile ground with the supply of information resources.

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