FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACQUISITION OF INTERNET LITERACY SKILLS OF FACULTY

: ACADEMIC STAFF MEMBERS IN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA

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Abstract

This study assessed internet literacy skills of academic staff in two faculties, in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It sought to find out the level of internet literacy skills, hindrances to the acquisition of internet literacy skill and strategies for enhancing acquisition of internet literacy skills of the academic staff. A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 354 academic staff. Sample size of 212 (60%) of the population was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data. The findings revealed that the academic staff of the faculties under study have internet literacy skills on booting of the computer, logging in and logging out of the internet, using www to find out information for academic purposes, saving files from a web page, use of various search engines in sourcing for academic materials, connecting to the internet, sending and receiving e-mail messages, downloading files from the internet and sending attachments with e-mail messages but are found to be illiterate in such areas like use of e-resources in teaching and research, uploading file on the internet, use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and research and taking part on on-line discussion and chat with colleagues. It was found that lack of governmental and institutional support for training, unstable power supply, unstable internet connectivity, and system breakdown are some of the problems affecting the acquisition of internet literacy skills. The study recommends that adequate governmental and institutional funding for training and ICT facilities, stable internet connectivity, provision of stable power supply, use of train-the-trainers techniques and training and re-training of academic staff on internet usage for easy and effective utilization of the internet services are some of the strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills.

Key Words: Internet, Internet Literacy Skills, Academic Staff

Introduction

Internet literacy is a new aspect of literacy that is being recognized as technology expands the way people communicate and write. Historically, the concept of Literacy emerged as a measure of the ability to read and write. The arrival of print technology, centuries past, heralded the need for skills in reading, writing, and comprehension. As pointed out by Richardson (1997), the very definition of what it means to be literate is evolving due to the explosion of information and technology. For more than a century, literacy has simply been defined as the ability to read and write. While those abilities are still necessary components of literacy, they have become recognized by education professionals as insufficient.

However, as society's needs evolve, literacy becomes a dynamic concept. Virkus (2003) confirm this ideal through their reasoned belief that literacy is in an evolving state that mirrors the expanding information needs of society. Because literacy depends on information, and because information is expanding at exponential rates, the mere ability to read and to write is being translated into the ability to read, write, and to develop the capacities to understand, absorb, assimilate, and digest the images being transmitted electronically with the added capacity to communicate these images electrographically

Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to examine the potentials of internet literacy skills to the academic staff. The specific objectives are:

i. To examine the Level of internet literacy skills of academic staff of university of Nigeria Nsukka
ii. To investigate hindrances to acquisition of internet literacy skills of academic staff.
iii. To proffer strategies for enhancing the internet literacy skills of academic staff of University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study encompasses the Internet literacy skills of academic staff in two faculties in university of Nigeria nsukka. However the study has following limitations.

a) The study is limited to university of Nigeria Nsukka.
b) The study includes only the academic staff of the faculties of education and social sciences.
c) The study covers only academic staff of these faculties and the study is limited to internet literacy skills.

Literature Review

Academic staff of the universities depend on different sources of information resources and services to enable them excel in their academic activities of which internet resource is one of the major sources. The internet and the academic staff are inseparable issues in today's e-print dissemination and preservation of research results Igun (2005). However, a number of factors affect their internet literacy acquisition. According to Martins (2006), lack of willingness towards internet training programmes is one of the attitudes exhibited by the staff towards the internet literacy skill acquisition. He equally maintained that some staff with long experience may not normally show interest in programmes that do not have any weight for purpose of assessment. On the other hand, Ascroft and Watts (2005) stated that some staff see internet training as an opportunity for visiting places where they have not been or even travelling abroad on holidays as the case may be thereby ignoring the reason for the training as a means for increasing knowledge for the achievement of the institutional objective. Aye (2008) argued that good internet skill training should be based upon the needs of trainees, that is, on what the learner or trainee needs to know or should be able to do. The absence of this automatically makes staff develop negative attitudes towards internet literacy skill acquisition. He went further to state that lack of facilities for ensuring proper understanding amongst the staff also contributes to negative attitudes towards internet training programmes by staff of an institution.

Another prominent factors is lack of motivation. According to Liener (2000), information service delivery generally lacks motivation and he sees motivation as a force that energizes and directs one's drive to accomplish goals. When you relate this to internet literacy skills it means that the academic staff are not motivated in one way or the other to devote their time to acquire internet literacy skills. It was also buttressed by Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) that lack of staff training in the use of information technology tools has adversely affected the use of internet driven information. A situation where the academic staff is not well trained in the use of information technology tool will obviously affect usage of the internet resources. In the view of Eshet-Alkalaj (2004), lack of awareness of the internet services available in the university is one of the problems associated with poor internet literacy skills. He suggested the use of marketing strategies to create awareness and stimulate the interest of the users in the services provided. This is one of the factors that affected the academic staff from acquiring internet literacy skills. To alleviate this problem, he suggested that information should be packaged as attractive as possible and that it is the duty of the information provider to package, publicize, advertise or stimulate the varying information resources available in the internet.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 354 academic staff. Sample size of 212 (60%) of the population was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaires. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Distribution and return rate of the questionnaire

POPULATION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	NO DISTRIBUTED	NO RETURNED	% RETURNED
Faculty of Education & Social Sciences	212	212	204	96%

From the population of 354 academic staff in faculties of Education and Social Sciences, a sample of 212 respondents which represent 60% of the population was chosen using stratified sampling technique. From the table 1 above, a total number of 204 (96%) out of 212 questionnaires distributed were returned and correctly filled.

Table 2: Academic Staff response on the level of internet literacy skills

S/N	ITEMS	VH	H	L	VL	Mean	Decision
1	Logging out the internet	137	65	2	-	3.66	A
2	Booting of computer	98	96	7	3	3.41	A
3	Using www to find information for academic purpose	80	101	22	1	3.27	A
4	Saving files from a web page	60	121	21	2	3.17	A
5	Use of various search engines in sourcing for information materials	62	102	35	5	3.08	A
6	Connecting to the internet	48	117	34	5	3.01	A
7	Sending and receiving e-mail messages	51	100	41	12	2.93	A
8	Downloading files from the internet	66	74	48	16	2.93	A
9	Sending attachment with e-mail messages	30	127	42	5	2.89	A
10	Use of e-resources in teaching and research	20	68	77	39	2.33	R
11	Uploading files on the internet	27	52	79	46	2.29	R
12	Use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and research	7	20	78	99	1.77	R
13	Taking part on on-line discussion and chat with colleagues	3	12	85	104	1.57	R

KEYS:

VH: Very High**, H:** High**, L:** Low**, VL:** Very Low, **R:** Rejected, **A:** Accepted

Table 2 above shows the level of internet literacy skills possessed by the academic staff in a descending order of their mean score as follows: logging out of the internet with a mean score of (3.66), booting of the computer (3.41), using www to find out information for academic purposes (3.27), saving files from a web page (3.17), use of various search engines in sourcing for academic materials (3.08), connecting to the internet (3.01), sending and receiving e-mail messages (2.93), downloading files from the internet (2.93), sending attachments with e-mail messages (2.89), use of e-resources in teaching and research (2.33), uploading file on the internet (2.29), use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and research (1.77), taking part on on-line discussion and chat with colleagues (1.57).

From the table, it could be discovered that the academic staff are illiterate in such areas like use of e-resources in teaching and research, uploading files on the internet, use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and research and taking part in on-line discussion and chat with colleagues. It is quite amazing and alarming that they are only literate on what could be called the rudimentary aspects of the internet usage but are illiterate in the critical areas that tend to play tremendous roles in improving their academic activities.

Table 3: Academic Staff response on problems that affect the acquisition of internet literacy skills

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Time constraint	199	4	1	-	3.97	A
2.	Unstable power supply	190	11	2	1	3.91	A
3.	Unstable internet connectivity	183	13	5	3	3.84	A
4.	Lack of governmental and institutional funding for ICT and training	178	15	8	3	3.80	A
5.	Breakdown of computer system	37	108	54	5	2.86	A
6.	Lack of personal computer	40	86	62	16	2.73	A

Table 3 depicts in descending order a picture of the problems that hinder the acquisition of internet literacy skills amongst the academic staff. The table revealed that time constraint (3.97), unstable power supply (3.91), and unstable internet connectivity (3.84), lack of governmental and institutional funding for ICT and training (3.80), break-down of computer system (2.86), and lack of personal computer (2.73) are some of the problems faced by the academic staff in the acquisition of internet literacy skills.

Table 4: Academic Staff response on strategies for improving the acquisition of internet literacy skills

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Collective advocacy for government and institutional funding for ICT and training	199	5	-	-	3.97	A
2.	Stable internet connectivity	194	10	-	-	3.95	A
3.	Provision of stable power supply	181	23	-	-	3.88	A
4.	Use of train-the-trainer technique	175	29	-	-	3.85	A
5.	Making teaching via ICT compulsory	167	37	-	-	3.81	A
6.	Providing ICT facilities to the academic staff	153	51	-	-	3.75	A
7.	Encouraging self learning	144	60	-	-	3.70	A
8.	Learning through group influence	142	62	-	-	3.69	A
9.	Training collaboration with institutions abroad	128	76	-	-	3.62	A
10.	Creating more training programs	127	77	-	-	3.62	A

Table 4 above shows that all the items listed as strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills amongst the academic staff are necessary for effective acquisition of internet literacy skills.

Discussion of Findings

The internet literacy skills of the academic staff focus on the critical skills that are needed in other to make effective utilization of the internet. Different skills at different level of proficiency were incorporated in this study's questionnaire in other to determine the academic staff internet literacy level. The findings reveal that academic staff have internet literacy skills on booting of the computer, logging in and logging out of the internet, using www to find out information for academic purposes, saving files from a web page, use of various search engines in sourcing for academic materials, connecting to the internet, sending and receiving e-mail messages, downloading files from the internet and sending attachments with e-mail messages as their rating values are above 2.50 but are illiterate in the following

areas; uploading files on the internet, the use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and research, taking part of on-line discussion and use of e-resources in teaching and research as their mean rating values ranges from 1.57 to 2.33. Palvia (2009) attributed this to the dwindling interest amongst the academic staff to embrace the internet deeply in their academic and research activities. As stated by Bacon (1995), the academic staff require a holistic knowledge and utilization of the internet for optimum service delivery.

Despite the fact that internet literacy skills has been found to be more crucial in information sourcing and retrieval, some problems are discovered from the study to be an impediment to effective acquisition of these skills amongst the academic staff. The findings revealed unstable power supply, unstable internet connectivity, computer system breakdown, lack of personal computer, lack of governmental and institutional funding for ICT and training and time constraints as part of the problems that hinder the acquisition of these skills. These problems are known to be causes of frustration with internet use among the academic staff. This result can be related to the findings of Attama (2007) when he submitted that irregular power supply from public source of power means that internet cannot be utilized whenever there is power failure. Hesselmark (2003) cited unstable internet connectivity as one of the greatest obstacle in the adoption of IT faced by university faculties. He noted that unstable internet connectivity affects the attitudes, abilities and desires to acquire internet literacy skills and integrate it into any system. The respondents also identified time constraint as one of the major factors that hinders the acquisition of internet literacy skills amongst the academic staff. Majority of them have so much work load that they rarely have time to use the internet.

Findings also revealed that collective advocacy for governmental and institutional support for ICT funding, use of train-the-trainers' technique, stable internet connectivity, creating more internet programs, encouraging self-learning, training collaboration with institutions abroad, making teaching via ICT compulsory, learning through group influence and providing ICT facilities to the academic staff are some of the measures that should be taken to enhance the acquisition of internet literacy skills. Ojedokun and Owolabi (2003) wrote that in digital age, internet has become the ideal means to disseminate and acquire knowledge. They explained that network must be actively and continuously sustained in order to be effective. This implies that infrastructure such as electricity must be constant which is a major Nigerian factor rendering internet ineffective. In line with the above findings, Adam & Wood (1999), Womboh and Abbam(2008) and Akintunde (2006) in their different works emphasized the suggested strategies for effective acquisition of internet literacy skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on findings of this study to improve the situation.

1. Government and other authorities should demonstrate political will towards internet culture by ensuring adequate funding of ICT projects in universities nationwide in order to actualize effective internet connectivity.
2. The academic staff should be more conscious of the technological revolution around the world and try catching up with it so as to follow the trend and enhance their ease of using the internet in their academic activities.
3. The university should pursue aggressively the acquisition and provision of ICT and its resources for use. The training and re-training of the academic staff in internet literacy skills for teaching and research should be approached with greater zeal and commitment.
4. Considering that most ICT and their accessories are electricity driven, there is need for improvement in the supply of electricity through national grid. This will help reduce the huge amount incurred in installation and maintenance of alternative sources of power which is a huge relief for universities.
5. Slow connectivity should be tackled with high bandwidth by installing V-sat of maximum speed. Firewalls and other antivirus devices should be installed for protection against viruses.

Conclusion

Engaging in internet literacy skill acquisition should be a positive experience for the academic staff. When such is not the case, it is important for them to rethink their approach because the academic staff without internet literacy skills is shortsighted, limited and somehow localized which results to decrease in access to information, poor performance and low productivity. Therefore every factor affecting the acquisition of internet literacy skills should be dealt with in order to for them to be on a better footing to acquire the skills and be able to access the avalanche information on net to support their academic mission.

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