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Strategies for Enhancing the Acquisition of Internet Literacy Skills among the Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study examined the strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills among the academic staff in two faculties, in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It sought to find out the level of internet literacy skills, methods of internet literacy skills acquisition, problems affecting acquisition of internet literacy skills and the strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skill among 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 discovered 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 also revealed that guidance by friends and colleagues and institutional training are the major methods they acquired these skills. The study also 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

1. Introduction

The idea of internet literacy has grown, taken shape and strengthened to become recognized as the critical literacy for the twenty-first century. Sometimes interpreted as one of a number of literacies, internet literacy is also described as the overarching literacy essential for twenty-first century living. Today, internet literacy is inextricably associated with information practices and critical thinking in the information and communication technology

environment (Bruce, 2002). Being internet literate is more than being computer literate or being technologically literate, in the same way that being print literate implies considerably more than just being able to read and write.

Internet literacy according to Benson and Reyman (2009) is a skill that goes beyond technical skills and computer literacy but a skill that involves the understanding of the ways in which people read, write and participate actively in the distributed, collaborative environment of internet in its current form. Internet literacy is a literacy based on network technology in a network environment. It is an essential skill for people to live a successful and productive life in a networked information society. While the universities are bestowed the responsibility of producing highly skilled manpower needed for the development of their home countries, it becomes very critical for the academic staff to acquire internet literacy skills to meet up with the revolutionary society.

By academics staff, we are referring to chosen group of men and women who are gifted either by nature or nurture to devote their lives to the business of unraveling society (Echezona and Ogwu, 2010).They are assigned certain basic functions in the Universities which include:

- To promote inquiry and advance the sum of human knowledge,
- To provide general instructions and guidance to students for further readings
- To live and interact with colleagues and others in academic community
- To make direct contribution towards providing solutions to various practical national problems and
- To develop experts for various branches of the public services (Akrami ,2001) .

In a nutshell, these men are required to encourage the advancement and pursuit of learning in all its branches through study, teaching, research and community services. As people who carry out research and communicate research reports, they need information in varying degrees to satisfy their information needs. The use of internet by the Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities is limitless as it has reduced to the barest minimum the stress and strain they pass through in their bid to source for and retrieve information to meet the challenges of teaching, research and community service thereby making it imperative for them to be internet literate in other to effectively harness the needed resources. Hossein (2000) states that internet access has assisted in facilitating education at length and that the use of the internet not only facilitates research and data management, but also helps in monitoring of achievement through learning outcome. She goes further to say that the internet disseminates information twenty-four hours in a day on current works on world events, discoveries and easy dissemination of information in the 21st century and has opened up numerous possibilities for doing resource sharing at local and global levels and information on latest journals, books and discussion can be exchanged directly through the internet.

Although technology promises new ways to promote literacy, educators' reactions to it have been mixed. Some have embraced technology with unbridled enthusiasm while others have held it at arm's length with a healthy skepticism. Yet the growing influence of technology has caused many educators to acknowledge that they need internet skills in other to thrive and compete equitably in this new economy. This work

therefore, seeks to examine the strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills among Academic staff in the faculties of Education and Social Sciences in University of Nigeria, Nsukka in recognition of its great impact in the actualization of their academic mission.

2. Objective of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to examine the strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills among the academic staff. The specific objectives are:

i. To analyze the level of Internet literacy skills possessed by the faculty academic staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
ii. To assess the ways faculty academic staff of the University of Nigeria Nsukka acquire these skills.
iii. To discover the hindrances to the acquisition of internet literacy skills among the faculty academic staff.
iv. To proffer strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills among the faculty academic staff.

3. 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 s sciences.

(c) The study covers only academic staff of these faculties and the study is limited to internet literacy skills.

4. Literature Review

Internet literacy skills acquisition methods in institutions of learning especially in universities take various forms and periods. Internet skill acquisition method is categorized by Kope (2006) into two broad categories – viz; Formal and Informal methods. He went further to explain that the formal method is when the employee is given an organized training on the internet literacy skills by the institution while informal method is when the employee seeks to acquire the skills through other means ranging from self-teaching, guidance by friends or colleagues or reading ICT materials. Kumar and Kaur (2006) equally stated that internet training of the academic staff might be offered using methods like pre-professional education and continuing-education. He explains that it could be given in short courses and workshops or at special programmes organized for them. He also expressed the ideas that professional conferences also another method of internet training of the academic staff. In these conferences, the academic staff share opinions and views that will enhance their individual technological development.

Ojedokun and Owolabi (2003) stressed that universities should guard themselves with the required facilities equipment that will aid the academic staff before embarking on the internet training programme. This is because the training equipment facilitates easy learning, easy teaching and quick understanding. Availability of facilities energizes the trainees to learn the skills in addition to his existing knowledge. Kasperek (2003) also

posited that lectures and discussion methods should be adopted in the course of the academic staff internet training. These methods he said are valuable to provide the background information and ideas to the trainees. The trainers explain the logics and protocols of the technology and follow structured discussion so that the trainees can be evaluated on practical and verbal responses.

Jagboro (2003) stipulated that acquisition of internet literacy skills could also be enhanced through the introduction of computerized programmed instructional methods. Woo Park (2009) described this method as flexible and participatory, in that it gives the user more power and more choices. This method is basically one by which the employee teaches or trains himself. It offers the advantage of reaching a large number of employees with the same instructional content at a relatively low cost with the involvement of a minimum number of training personnel. Osiakwan (2007) also acknowledged these innovations as it makes for possible carrying out of wide range of class-related activities in cyberspace and it is possible to get training anywhere, anytime.

5. 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
1	Logging out the internet	137	65	2	-	3.66
2	Booting of computer	98	96	7	3	3.41
3	Using www to find information for academic purpose	80	101	22	1	3.27
4	Saving files from a web page	60	121	21	2	3.17
5	Use of various search engines in sourcing	62	102	35	5	3.08

	for information materials					
6	Connecting to the internet	48	117	34	5	3.01
7	Sending and receiving e-mail messages	51	100	41	12	2.93
8	Downloading files from the internet	66	74	48	16	2.93
9	Sending attachment with e-mail messages	30	127	42	5	2.89
10	Use of e-resources in teaching and research	20	68	77	39	2.33
11	Uploading files on the internet	27	52	79	46	2.29
12	Use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and research	7	20	78	99	1.77
13	Taking part on on-line discussion and chat with colleagues	3	12	85	104	1.57

KEYS: VH: Very High**, H:** High**, L:** Low**, VL:** Very Low

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 Method of internet literacy skills acquisition

S/N	ITEMS	Frequency	Percentage
14.	Guidance by friends & Colleagues	50	24.5%
15.	Institutional training	45	22.1%
16.	Self-teaching	37	18.1%
17.	Formal education	26	12.7%
18.	Attending IT programmes	19	9.3%
19.	Attending workshops, seminars & conferences	15	7.4%
20.	Through learning materials	12	5.9%
	TOTAL	**204**	**100**

It could be deduced from the table that guidance by friends and colleagues and institutional training have the highest frequencies of 50 (24.5%) and 45 (22.1%) which denotes that these are the methods through which greater number of people acquired their internet literacy skills while the acquisition of the internet literacy skills through learning materials has the lowest frequency of 12 (5.9%) which denotes that only very few people acquired their internet literacy skill through that method.

Table 4: Academic Staff response on problems that affect the acquisition of internet literacy skills

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
21.	Time constraint	199	4	1	-	3.97
22.	Unstable power supply	190	11	2	1	3.91
23.	Unstable internet connectivity	183	13	5	3	3.84
24.	Lack of governmental and institutional	178	15	8	3	3.80

	funding for ICT and training					
25.	Breakdown of computer system	37	108	54	5	2.86
26.	Lack of personal computer	40	86	62	16	2.73

KEYS: SA – Strongly Agree; **A –** Agree; **D –** Disagree; **SD –** Strongly Disagree.

Table 7 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 5: Academic Staff response on strategies for improving the acquisition of internet literacy skills

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

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. They range from collective advocacy for government and institutional funding for ICT and training, stable internet connectivity, provision of stable power supply, use of train-the-trainer technique, making teaching via ICT compulsory, providing ICT facilities to the academic staff, encouraging self-learning and learning through group influence, training collaboration with institutions abroad to creating more training programs.

6. Findings

The study has presented findings on strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy skills among faculty academic staff in university of Nigeria Nsukka. Findings revealed that the academic staff have low level of internet literacy as the survey indicated that they rated low on proficiency of higher internet applications. The survey also found out that guidance by friends and colleagues and institutional training are the two major ways the academic staff acquired their internet literacy skills as they rated 24.5% and 22.1% respectively. All the academic staff

responded in affirmation to the problems that affect acquisition of internet literacy skills. Majority said that unstable power supply, unstable internet connectivity and time constraints are the problems that hinder the acquisition of these skills. With regards to strategies for enhancing internet literacy skills, it was found that collective advocacy for government and institutional funding for ICT and training, stable internet connectivity, provision of stable power supply, use of train-the-trainer technique, making teaching via ICT compulsory, providing ICT facilities to the academic staff, encouraging self-learning and learning through group influence, training collaboration with institutions abroad and creating more training programs are some of the strategies for enhancing the acquisition of internet literacy

7. Recommendations

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

i. 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.
ii. 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 and the academic staff should be more conscious of the technological revolution around the world and try catching up with it.
iii. There should be constant power supply in order to give a steady access to internet services thereby helping them to be more competent.

8. Conclusion

Internet has revolutionized the way we work, teach and learn today. Traditional literacy skills are no longer sufficient for those who wish to take advantage of the opportunities and avoid the pitfalls presented by the Internet. Indeed, lack of internet literacy skills is a deterrent to the academic staff to participate competitively especially in this information age. Hence, effort should be made towards implementing the strategies so given. The academic staff, the university management and stake holder must work in synergy in making sure that both technology and enabling environment are created for effective acquisition of internet literacy skills among the faculty academic staff.

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