

# Awareness and Use of Online Databases by Postgraduate Students in University of Calabar, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This study is on the awareness and use of online databases by postgraduate students at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. A total of 50 postgraduate students from the faculties of Education, Science, law, and Allied Medical Sciences were selected for this study through accidental sampling. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection, while the Statistical Package analyzed data for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that postgraduate students are aware of the existence of online databases at the University. It also revealed that postgraduate students make use of friends and colleagues, regular library visits, billboards in the University as a medium of awareness. The study shows that Hinari is the most frequently used online database by postgraduate students at the University of Calabar. The paper also revealed that the purpose of the use of online databases is for research, seminars, presentations, assignments, and the like. Some factors affecting the use of online databases in the University of Calabar are; lack of access outside the campus, Non-functional passwords, and slow Internet connectivity. The paper recommended the provision of current awareness services, continuous information literacy programme, and provision of free reference services such as quick response codes, mobile-optimized websites, and much more. The ICT Department of the University should also ensure excellent Internet connectivity by increasing the bandwidth.*

**Keywords:** Awareness, Internet, Library, Online Databases, PG Students, Technology.

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## Introduction

Information and Communication Technology has collapsed barriers to effective service delivery in academic libraries leading to enhanced teaching and learning in various educational institutions. Akinola (2018) posited that one significant impact of globalization, Information and communication technology on teaching and research in developing countries is access to global information resources by researchers and

postgraduate students of the Universities. The University remains a centre of excellence, a citadel of learning, and, more importantly, the epitome of research. Libraries are agents of educational, social, and economic development. The purpose of setting up libraries is to acquire, process, store, preserve and make available current and relevant print and electronic materials that will meet the need of its users at an appropriate time (Aina, 2014).

An online database is a database accessible from a local network or the Internet, as opposed to one that is stored locally on an individual computer or its attached storage (such as a CD). Online databases are hosted on websites, made available as software as a service or products accessible via a web browser. They may be free or require payment, such as by a monthly or yearly subscription. Some have enhanced features such as collaborative editing and email notification. Awareness of the databases among users in institutions of higher learning is essential because the ultimate aim of the databases is for users to be aware and utilize them adequately for their academic achievement, (Larson, 2017)

The impact of online databases on academic libraries and scholars is noteworthy and unprecedented. These databases are organized digital collections of references to published literature such as journal articles, newspaper articles, conference proceedings, reports, legal publications, thesis, and e-books, amongst others. Online databases are of different types, such as bibliographic, full-text, directory, and multimedia. (Samaravickrama & Samaradiwakara, 2014). Hourcade, Bederson, Druin, Rose, Farber, Takayama (2003) opined that Online databases or web-based databases are widely available to library patrons in the entire world. Many patrons can tap into these databases from their computers or electronic devices anywhere in the world. The Internet, through electronic databases or digital libraries, has become an essential source of academic information for tertiary students.

Electronic databases are now viral among librarians and library users because of several factors like; speed, flexibility, wide range, and the currency (BIAD, 1998). Awareness and use of electronic information resources are very crucial to keep postgraduate students alert of the available media through which they can access needed information. Akpojotor (2016). Aina (2011) also opined that accessibility determines the speed at which an information output in any format is obtained. In light of the above, there is a need for students to have adequate access to these online databases to ensure maximum utilization. Anaraki and Babalhavaeji (2013) also pointed out that where students are not aware of the existence of electronic databases, they tend to use general search engines to meet their information needs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Online databases are critical to teaching, learning, and research in Universities and other higher institutions; hence a substantial amount of money is spent on the

acquisition and yearly subscription to online databases even when facing dwindling budgets. If postgraduate students are not aware of the existence of these databases and do not utilize them, then financial involvement is not justified. Hence, the study aims to determine the level of awareness and use of electronic databases among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary purpose of the study is to determine the level of awareness and use of electronic databases by postgraduate students at the University of Calabar. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain whether postgraduate students are aware of the existence of online databases at the University of Calabar.
2. Identify the channel through which awareness about online databases was created
3. Determine the extent of the use of online databases by postgraduate students.
4. Identify the purpose of the use of online databases by postgraduate students.
5. Ascertain the factors hindering the use of online databases.

### **Research Questions**

1. Are postgraduate students aware of the existence of online databases at the University of Calabar?
2. What are the channels through which online database awareness is created?
3. To what extent do postgraduate students use online databases?
4. What is the purpose of the use of online databases
5. What are the factors hindering the use of online databases at the University of Calabar?

### **Methodology**

A survey design was used for this study because it allows the researcher to make use of a sample of the entire population. The target population for this study was postgraduate students at the University of Calabar. Fifty (50) postgraduate students from four faculties (education, science, law, and Allied Medical Sciences) were selected through accidental sampling. A well-structured questionnaire was administered on the respondents, and 47 copies of the questionnaire were returned. SPSS was used for data analysis through a simple percentage (%) frequency counts, standard deviation, and mean.

## Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

**Table 1: Awareness of the Existence of Online Databases.**

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Not Aware	8	17.02
Aware	39	82.98
Total	47	100

From Table 1, 39(82.98%) of the respondents were generally aware of the online databases under consideration, while 8(17.02%) were not aware. From the analysis, the majority of postgraduate students at the University of Calabar are aware of the existence of online databases subscribed by the University Library. This finding corroborates with the results of (Akinola 2019) that 66.4% of the postgraduate students in the University of Ibadan were generally aware of the electronic databases.

**Table 2: Medium of Awareness**

Source	Yes	No
Library Orientation	17(36.17)	30(63.83)
During Regular Library Use	12(25.5)	35 (74.5)
Through colleagues and Friends	27(57.44)	20 (42.56)
Bill Boards in the University Library	15(31.91)	38 (68.09)
University Website	14(29.78)	33 (70.22)
Through my lecturers	17(36.17)	30 (63.83)

From Table 2, 57.44% of postgraduate students agreed that the medium of awareness of online databases is through colleagues and friends. In comparison, only 25.5% affirmed that the medium of awareness was during regular library use (25.5). Another medium of awareness includes; library orientation (36.17), billboards in the University Library (31.91), University website (29.78), through lecturers (36.17). The finding is in line with a study by (Kwadzo, 2015) which revealed that sources of awareness of electronic databases include colleagues, lecturers, visiting library websites, library staff, and University websites.

**Table 3: Extent of Use of Online Databases**

<b>Online Databases</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Frequentl y</b>	<b>Occasionall y</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Science Direct	5 (10.6%)	6(12.8%)	13(27.7%)	23(48.9%)	2.15	1.02
Hinari	2(4.3%)	3(6.4%)	17(36.2%)	25(53.2%)	2.38	0.79
IEEE Xplore	4(8.5%)	6(12.8%)	11(23.4%)	26(55.3%)	2.26	0.98
Digital Library						
Agora	3(6.4%)	6 (12.8%)	10 (21.3%)	28(59.6%)	2.34	0.93
Oxford	4(8.5%)	3(6.4%)	10 (21.3%)	30(63.8%)	2.30	0.94
Academic(Law Journals)						
Ebsco	7 (14.9%)	10(21.3%)	15(31.9%)	15(31.9%)	1.81	1.05
Host						
JSTOR	6(12.8%)	4(8.5%)	14(29.8%)	23(48.9%)	2.15	1.04
OARE	5 (10.6%)	6(12.8%)	5(10.6%)	31( 66.0)	2.32	1.06

Table 3 presents information on the extent of the use of electronic databases. The result shows that HINARI (2.38%) ranked highest as the most frequently used online database and was followed in succession by AGORA (2.34%) and OARE (2.32). Other electronic databases responded in succession are Oxford Academic law Journal (2.30%), IEE(2.26%), JSTOR (2.15%), EBSCOhost (1.81%). Generally, we see a shallow extent of the use of online databases. The result corroborates with a study by Abdulganiyu et al., (2019) that there is a low extent of use of the subscribed online electronic databases among the students. The majority of respondents utilized some of the databases like AGORA, ARDI, EBSCOHOST, LAW PAVILLION, and LEXIS AND LEXIS to a shallow extent.

**Table 4: Purpose of Use of Online Databases.**

<b>Purpose of Use</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
For research work	36 (76.6)	11(23.4)
For Assignments	33 (70.2)	14(29.8)
To get relevant materials	29(61.7)	18(38.3)
For seminars and presentations	29 (61.7)	18(38.3)
To enhance knowledge in the field of study	26(52.3)	21(44.7)

From Table 4, 76.6% agreed that they use online databases for research work, while 70.2% agreed that they use it for assignments. The students also agreed that they use online databases to get relevant materials and for seminars and presentations, which make up 61.7% and 61.7%, respectively. Lastly, 26 respondents making up 52.3% of

the total respondents agreed that they use online databases to enhance their knowledge in their field of study. The findings corroborate research carried out by (Anane, 2016) on the use of electronic databases by final year students of the University of Ghana. The study revealed that students make use of electronic databases to download articles, search for information on research topics and related issues. Other purposes students make use of electronic databases for is search for information, for assignments, to access information on a wide range of health and science topics.

**Table 5: Factors Affecting the Use of Online Databases**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Lack of access outside the University	28(59.6)	19(40.4)
Slow Internet Connectivity	33(70.2)	14(29.8)
Lack of information retrieval skills	12( 25.5)	35(74.5)
Only a few open access journals available	26(55.3)	21(44.7)
Non-functionality of some passwords	20(42.6)	27(57.4)

From table 5 sizeable numbers of respondents amounting to 70.2% agreed that slow Internet connectivity was a significant factor affecting the use of online databases. While only 25.5% agreed that lack of information retrieval skills as a factor affecting the use of online databases, other factors include; lack of access outside the University (59.6%). However, only a few open access journals (55.3%), non-functionality of some passwords (42.6%). Akinola, (2019) reported some of these factors, which include slow internet connectivity, lack of knowledge of search engines, No access to full-text citations, and abstracts.

### **Summary of the Findings**

- 1 The postgraduate students of the University of Calabar are aware of the online databases available.
- 2 The medium through which the postgraduate students used to be aware of the availability of online databases was through colleagues and friends, library orientation, and lecturers.
3. The finding showed that HINARI ranked highest as the most frequently used online database and was followed in succession by AGORA, OARE, Oxford Academic law Journal IEE, and JSTOR
4. The study also discovered that postgraduate students used online databases for research work, writing assignments; get relevant materials for seminars and paper presentations.
5. Slow Internet connectivity, lack of access outside the University and access to few open access journals were the significant factors affecting the use of online databases.

## Conclusion

This paper has looked at the awareness and use of online databases by postgraduate students at the University of Calabar. The study revealed that most postgraduate students are aware of the existence of online databases, and the significant media of awareness is through colleagues and friends. However, some postgraduate are not aware of these databases been subscribed to by the University. The study also established that Postgraduate students use online databases for research work, assignments, to enhance knowledge, to get relevant materials, and for seminars and presentations. HINARI ranked highest as the most frequently used online database in the University of Calabar, which may be as a result of the popularity of the database. Certain factors affect the utilization of online databases. Some of these factors include; Lack of access outside the campus, slow internet access, only a few open access journals, and non-functionality of the passwords.

## Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. More efforts should be made by the University of Calabar Library to make more postgraduate students aware of the online databases.
2. More sources of awareness like billboards in the University Library and University Library website of the University of Calabar should be used in addition to other sources for awareness on the availability of online databases.
3. The postgraduate students of the University of Calabar should utilize Ebscohost, Law Pavillion in addition to other online databases usually utilize
4. The postgraduate students' interest in the use of online databases for research work, writing assignments, get relevant materials for seminars and paper presentations should be sustained
5. The University should provide optimized Internet services by increasing the bandwidth and ensuring steady connectivity. Access to online databases outside the University should be provided to postgraduate students.

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