

**Information Literacy Skills and Lifelong Learning Support in an Open and Distance
Learning Environment: Impacts of the NOUN Benin Study Centre**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined information literacy and lifelong learning support in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environment, with particular focus on the NOUN Benin Study Centre Library. A descriptive cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 1,800 registered library users at the NOUN Benin Study Centre, while data were collected from 81 respondents using a structured questionnaire distributed through online platforms. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that the library significantly enhances students' information literacy through targeted initiatives through orientation programs, user education for effective searching, access to electronic databases for research skills, and librarian assistance in evaluating and citing sources. The study also revealed that the library supports lifelong learning through the provision of diverse learning resources and opportunities for self-directed learning. However, challenges such as erratic power supply, poor internet connectivity, inadequate digital skills, and insufficient training opportunities were identified as major barriers affecting effective utilisation of library services. The study further revealed that regular information literacy workshops, improved digital infrastructure, online tutorials and stronger collaboration between librarians and lecturers would enhance students' information literacy competencies and lifelong learning. The study concludes that the NOUN Benin Study Centre Library plays a significant role in promoting information literacy and lifelong learning within the ODL environment. The study recommends improved technological infrastructure, continuous digital literacy training, and enhanced instructional support services to strengthen students' lifelong learning capabilities.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Lifelong Learning, Open and Distance Learning Environment, Academic Libraries

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of higher education in the twenty-first century has accelerated the expansion of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) across many parts of the world. ODL offers flexible learning possibilities, allowing students to study whenever, wherever, and at their own speed, regardless of geographic, social, or economic restrictions. The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in Nigeria has significantly increased access to university education for a wide range of learners, including working-class adults, rural residents, individuals with family responsibilities, and those who are unable to participate in traditional face-to-face education (Umar & Habib, 2022). The effectiveness of this adaptable learning approach is dependent not only on the availability of learning materials, but also on students' capacity to find, assess, and successfully use knowledge for academic and personal development.

Within this setting, academic libraries have transformed from their original role as printed material repositories into dynamic learning centres that promote teaching, research, independent study, and knowledge creation. The integration of knowledge and communication technologies (ICT), digital libraries, electronic resources, and online reference services has revolutionised library operations and increased access to scholarly knowledge. As a result, academic libraries are increasingly expected to provide not only access to information resources, but also educational services that provide students with the skills needed to navigate today's complicated digital information landscape. (Goodsett & Schmillen, 2022; Carlsson, 2025). Advancements in digital technologies such as the internet and artificial intelligence have transformed how we manage information, driving the rise of the information society. While these changes have increased access to knowledge for students, they have also led to challenges like information overload, disinformation, and difficulties in locating credible sources. This situation emphasises information literacy as a critical skill for effective participation in academic and professional contexts (Pinto et al., 2024).

The ability to recognise when information is required, as well as to access, analyse, organise, use, and share information in an effective and ethical manner, is known as information literacy. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2016) defines information literacy as a set of integrated skills that include reflective information discovery, critical evaluation of information sources, and ethical information usage to develop new knowledge. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2023) defines information literacy as a lifelong learning ability that enables people to make informed decisions and actively engage in a knowledge-driven society. Information literacy thus goes beyond searching for information to include identifying information needs, evaluating the authority, relevance, accuracy, currency, and reliability of information sources, organising and synthesising information, and using information responsibly through proper citation and adherence to copyright regulations. Academic libraries play an important role in fostering these competencies in students by providing information literacy programmes, library orientation, user education, research consultations, online tutorials, digital reference services, and access to electronic information resources. These services are especially significant in open and distance learning institutions, where students rely largely on self-directed learning and remote access to information resources.

Academic libraries improve students' self-directed learning, critical thinking, research competency, and problem-solving abilities by developing their information literacy skills. (Acharya & Vagdal, 2023).

Information literacy is strongly related to the concept of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is defined as the continual, voluntary, and self-directed acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competences throughout one's life for personal, academic, professional, and social development. It is a continuous process that occurs from childhood to adulthood and is crucial for inclusion, sustainable development, active citizenship, and lifelong employment. (UNESCO 2020). Information literacy is the foundation of lifelong learning because people with strong information literacy skills are better able to identify their information needs, critically evaluate available information, and apply acquired knowledge to solve problems and make informed decisions throughout their lives. (Fistiyanti, 2023). These qualities are even more important in an open and distance learning context, as students take greater responsibility for controlling their learning. As a result, academic libraries make major contributions to lifelong learning by providing access to a wide range of information resources, digital technologies, instructional programmes, and research support services that promote ongoing learning beyond formal education.

The National Open University of Nigeria's study centre libraries provide a variety of services to promote information literacy and lifelong learning, including orientation programmes, information literacy instruction, online tutorials, remote access to electronic resources, digital reference services, and user support initiatives. These services attempt to improve students' academic performance, research capabilities, and self-directed learning abilities. Nonetheless, many students continue to face challenges such as a lack of knowledge about available library services, limited digital literacy skills, unstable internet connectivity, intermittent electricity supply, and limited access to electronic information resources, all of which may reduce the effectiveness of library support in promoting information literacy and lifelong learning. Although many studies have examined information literacy and library services in traditional universities, few empirical studies have focused on how academic libraries promote information literacy development and lifelong learning in open and distance learning institutions, particularly the

National Open University of Nigeria. This distinction is significant since ODL students rely more on independent learning and library-mediated access to information than students at traditional universities. As a result, it is vital to look into how NOUN study centre libraries help students build their information literacy skills and promote lifelong learning. Against this context, this study investigates information literacy skills and lifelong learning support in an open and distance learning environment: a case study of the NOUN Benin Study Centre library.

Statement of the Problem

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) depends largely on students' ability to engage in independent learning through effective access, evaluation, and use of information resources. Consequently, information literacy has become an essential competency for academic success and lifelong learning within ODL environments. Although advances in digital technologies have expanded access to electronic information resources, online learning platforms, and virtual library services, the availability of these resources does not necessarily guarantee their effective utilisation. Many ODL students continue to experience difficulties in locating, evaluating, organising, and ethically using information, which may hinder their academic performance and their ability to become independent, lifelong learners.

Academic libraries must tackle these challenges by providing information literacy instruction, user education programmes, research support services, and access to quality information resources. However, students' effective use of these services may be constrained by factors such as inadequate awareness of available library resources, limited digital competencies, poor internet connectivity, and unreliable electricity supply. These challenges raise concerns about the extent to which academic libraries are successfully promoting information literacy and fostering lifelong learning among students in ODL institutions.

Although previous studies have examined information literacy and library services in conventional universities, there is limited empirical evidence on how academic libraries in open and distance learning institutions support the development of information literacy and lifelong learning, particularly within the study centres of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This gap is important because NOUN students rely heavily on study centre libraries

and digital information services for academic support, information access, and independent learning, unlike students in conventional universities who have regular physical access to campus facilities and library services.

The NOUN Benin Study Centre provides an appropriate setting for investigating this issue because it serves a large and diverse population of ODL learners. Despite the availability of library resources and support services, it remains unclear what information literacy skills are being promoted by the library, the extent to which the library supports students' lifelong learning, and the challenges affecting the effective provision and utilisation of these services. Without empirical evidence on these issues, it is difficult for library administrators and university management to develop evidence-based strategies for strengthening information literacy programmes and improving library services to support independent and lifelong learning. Therefore, this study investigates information literacy and lifelong learning support in the National Open University of Nigeria Library, Benin Study Centre, with a view to examining the information literacy skills promoted by the library, assessing its contribution to lifelong learning, identifying the challenges affecting effective service delivery, and providing recommendations for enhancing library support in the open and distance learning environment.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the types of information literacy skills being promoted in National Open University of Nigeria, Benin Study Centre
2. Evaluate the extent to which the National Open University Library, Benin Study Centre supports lifelong learning among its users;
3. Identify the challenges that limit students' information literacy and lifelong learning at the National Open University Library;

Research Questions

- 1) What types of information literacy skills are being promoted among students of the National Open University of Nigeria, Benin Study Centre?
- 2) To what extent does the National Open University, Benin Study Centre Library support lifelong learning among its users?
- 3) What challenges limit students' information literacy and lifelong learning at the National Open University, Benin Study Centre?

Theoretical Framework

The study explores the intersection of information literacy theory and lifelong learning theory, emphasising the role of academic libraries in enhancing students' information use and fostering lifelong learning. Information literacy is framed as a socially and contextually shaped process, enabling individuals to recognise information needs, locate relevant information, evaluate sources, and utilise information effectively (Webber & Johnston, 2000). To operationalise this concept, the Big6 Skills Information Literacy Model (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 1990) is employed, outlining a systematic problem-solving process comprising six skills: task definition, information-seeking strategies, location and access, use of information, synthesis, and evaluation. This model is particularly relevant for students in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environments, where independent information retrieval and evaluation are crucial. Despite criticisms regarding an overemphasis on individual competencies (Taylor & DiGiacomo, 2023), the Big6 Model effectively illustrates the application of information skills in specific learning contexts. Jarvis (2004) conceptualises lifelong learning as a continuous process in which individuals learn through their experiences and interactions with their social environment. This perspective underscores the importance of the National Open University Library in providing resources and support that facilitate self-directed and continuous learning.

Review of Related Literature

Information Literacy in Higher Education

Information literacy (IL) is a vital academic skills that allows learners to identify information needs, locate resources, critically evaluate information, and use it ethically. Chourio-Acevedo et al. (2024) describe IL as a multidimensional skill necessary for navigating the complex digital

information landscape, while Pinto et al. (2024) view it as an integration of information, media, and data literacy competencies. Grounded in constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, IL is seen as a socially situated practice influenced by learning environments and institutional support (Lloyd, 2005; Webber & Johnston, 2000). In higher education, IL is increasingly recognised as crucial for academic success, research productivity, and digital citizenship (Tachie-Donkor & Ezema, 2023)

Empirical studies underscore IL's significance in enhancing academic performance. Goodsett and Schmillen (2022) found that structured IL instruction improves critical thinking and research skills. Naveed et al. (2023) reported that IL training enhances students' abilities to access and utilise scholarly information, recommending its integration into academic curricula. Chen et al. (2022) emphasised IL's role in academic achievement, advocating for tailored IL programs in higher education. Tachie-Donkor and Ezema (2023) highlighted IL's influence on information-seeking behaviour and lifelong learning, suggesting interactive training approaches. Additionally, Naveed et al. (2022) noted that IL fosters creativity and professional competencies, recommending collaborative learning and project-based initiatives to enhance research skills.

Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Information literacy and lifelong learning are closely interconnected concepts because the ability to identify, access, evaluate, and use information effectively is fundamental to continuous learning. Lifelong learning (LLL) refers to the continuous process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies throughout an individual's life for personal, academic, professional, and social development. Unlike formal education, which is generally confined to structured learning institutions, lifelong learning extends beyond the classroom and involves self-directed, voluntary, and continuous learning activities. In the context of rapid technological advancement, globalisation, and changing labour market demands, lifelong learning has become increasingly important as individuals need to continuously update their knowledge and acquire new competencies to remain relevant in a dynamic society (Chen et al, 2022; Karatas et al, 2024).

Information literacy provides an important foundation for lifelong learning because it equips individuals with the ability to recognize information needs, locate relevant information, evaluate

the credibility and usefulness of information, organize information, and apply it appropriately. Individuals with adequate information literacy skills are therefore better positioned to engage in self-directed learning, solve problems, make informed decisions, and acquire knowledge beyond formal educational settings. In this sense, information literacy enables learners to become independent and active participants in the learning process rather than depending entirely on teachers or formal instructional structures.

The relationship between information literacy and lifelong learning is particularly important in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environments. Thwe and Kálmán (2023) describe lifelong learning as an ongoing process that occurs throughout an individual's life, while Karataş et al. (2024) emphasise its importance in enabling individuals to respond effectively to social, technological, and professional changes. In ODL institutions, learners are expected to assume greater responsibility for identifying their learning needs, locating relevant information, evaluating information sources, and applying acquired knowledge. Since ODL students often depend on electronic resources, digital platforms, online databases, and library services for academic support, information literacy becomes an essential competency for successful self-directed learning and the development of lifelong learning habits.

Academic libraries play a significant role in this process by providing access to diverse information resources, electronic databases, digital technologies, research support, and user education services. Through these resources and services, libraries create opportunities for students to independently acquire, evaluate, and apply information. This role is particularly important in ODL institutions, where physical interaction between learners and instructors may be limited. Academic libraries consequently serve as important learning support centres by providing resources and services that facilitate independent study, information access, and continuous knowledge acquisition (Frahm-Arp, 2023). Libraries also promote lifelong learning through information literacy instruction, research assistance, user education programmes, and digital literacy initiatives. These services help learners develop the competencies required to navigate increasingly complex information environments and make effective use of available information resources. Pinto et al. (2024) argue that academic libraries strengthen lifelong

learning by integrating information, media, and digital literacy programmes into their operations, thereby enhancing users' critical thinking and digital competencies.

Challenges Affecting Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning in Academic Libraries

Despite the important role of academic libraries in promoting information literacy (IL) and lifelong learning (LLL), several challenges continue to limit the effectiveness of library services and programmes. These challenges are particularly pronounced in developing countries, where inadequate funding, limited staff capacity, insufficient information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, inadequate digital competencies, and changing information needs of users may constrain the ability of academic libraries to provide effective and innovative services (Dei & Asante, 2022; Frahm-Arp, 2023; Bangani, 2023). Inadequate financial and technological resources can also affect the implementation of information literacy programmes and the sustainability of lifelong learning initiatives (Hamad et al., 2023; Chukwueke & Idris, 2023).

The challenges confronting academic libraries can broadly be understood in terms of resource gaps, skill gaps, and policy and institutional gaps. Resource gaps include inadequate funding, outdated information resources, limited access to electronic databases, and insufficient ICT infrastructure. Inadequate library funding may hinder the acquisition of current information materials, subscription to electronic resources, and modernisation of the technological infrastructure required for the delivery of contemporary library services (Dei & Asante, 2022). These limitations can directly affect students' ability to access and use information resources necessary for academic work and independent learning.

Skill gaps also constitute a significant challenge to effective information literacy and lifelong learning support. These gaps may occur among both library personnel and users, particularly in relation to digital literacy, information searching, evaluation of online information, and the effective use of emerging technologies. (Nzeyimana, et al 2022). Library staff require appropriate digital skills to provide effective support to users in an increasingly technology-driven information environment. Chukwueke and Idris (2023). (2024) therefore emphasises the importance of continuous professional development in areas such as digital librarianship, data

management, and emerging technologies. Similarly, students who lack adequate digital and information literacy skills may be unable to fully exploit electronic resources and library services, even where such resources are available (Fistiyanti, 2023).

Institutional and policy-related challenges may further limit the capacity of academic libraries to promote information literacy and lifelong learning. Weak institutional support, inadequate library policies, limited staff training, and poor implementation of existing policies may affect the sustainability and effectiveness of library programmes (Hamad et al., 2023). At the user level, inadequate awareness of available library resources, lack of time, low participation in information literacy programmes, and poor engagement with library services may prevent students from fully benefiting from the opportunities provided by academic libraries (Fistiyanti, 2023). Thus, the availability of library resources alone does not necessarily guarantee their effective use for information literacy development and lifelong learning.

Infrastructure and technological challenges are particularly important in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environments, where students depend substantially on digital platforms, electronic resources, internet connectivity, and library technologies for learning. Internal challenges may include inadequate staff training, insufficient institutional support, and limited access to appropriate digital tools, while external challenges may include the high cost of electronic resources, unstable internet connectivity, unreliable electricity supply, and inadequate government or institutional funding (Nzeyimana et al., 2022). In the Nigerian context, inadequate electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, and insufficient digital competencies among library personnel and users have been identified as factors affecting the effective provision and utilisation of academic library services (Chukwueke, & Idris, 2023). Such infrastructural limitations can reduce students' access to digital library resources and consequently affect their opportunities for independent learning and continuous knowledge acquisition.

Empirical studies further demonstrate the effects of these challenges on information literacy and lifelong learning initiatives. Dei and Asante (2022) identified inadequate funding and shortages of qualified library personnel as significant constraints on academic library services, while Bangani (2023) reported that outdated resources and limited user outreach can restrict students'

engagement with library services. Nzeyimana et al. (2022) emphasised the importance of continuous digital training and institutional partnerships in strengthening library service delivery. Similarly, Chukwueke, and Idris (2023) recommended regular staff development programmes to improve librarians' competencies in emerging technologies, while Hamad et al. (2023) stressed the importance of appropriate digital competency frameworks for the effective integration of information technologies into academic library services.

These challenges have important implications for the relationship between information literacy and lifelong learning. Where students lack access to reliable infrastructure, current information resources, effective library support, or the skills required to locate and evaluate information, their ability to engage in self-directed learning and develop lifelong learning habits may be weakened. Conversely, adequately funded libraries with appropriate ICT infrastructure, competent personnel, effective information literacy programmes, and strong institutional support are better positioned to provide students with the skills and resources required for independent and continuous learning. Continuous assessment of library services is therefore necessary to identify existing barriers and determine the extent to which they affect information literacy development and lifelong learning among users.

These challenges are particularly pertinent to the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Benin Study Centre, where students are expected to assume considerable responsibility for their own learning within the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environment. The availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of library resources and services may influence students' ability to independently identify information needs, access and evaluate information, conduct academic research, acquire knowledge, and develop competencies for continuous learning. Therefore, examining the challenges affecting information literacy and lifelong learning at the NOUN Benin Study Centre is essential for determining the extent to which the library is able to support students' independent learning, academic development, and continuing professional development (CPD) within the ODL environment.

Strategies for Enhancing Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries should be innovative, open, user-centred to be relevant in the changing information landscape, says scholars. Research also suggests that libraries need to adjust their approach to accommodate evolving user information needs especially in higher education where digital learning is becoming a significant part of life (Abidin et al., 2022; Wiggil, 2022). Libraries are encouraged to move from a repository of information to an active space where knowledge is created, shared, and lifelong learning takes place (Thwe & Kálmán, 2023; Ali & Richardson, 2025).

Transformation strategies can be grouped into three areas: service oriented, digital and partnership strategies.

1. Service-oriented strategies – Programmes, workshops and outreach to improve users' information literacy and critical thinking skills. To help students develop necessary skills to achieve good academic performance, libraries regularly organize training sessions and user education programs to provide students with these skills (Abidin et al., 2022).
2. Digital strategies refers to the use of information technologies to make access to library services easier, such as the digitization of collections and providing online reference services, which are essential in the case of remote access in open and distance learning environments (Thwe & Kálmán, 2023; Ali & Richardson, 2025).
3. Partnership strategies focus on finding ways to partner with academic institutions and community organizations to expand library impact. To support the role of libraries in promoting lifelong learning, efforts were developed, such as collaborative research or community involvement, which help to improve libraries' role in supporting lifelong learning (Nzeyimana et al., 2022).

Studies indicate that successful integration of these strategies could be very beneficial for students' information access and learning outcomes (Ngozi, 2024). However, there can be issues with lack of funding, skilled personnel, resistance to change, and problems with technological infrastructure that can make successful adoption difficult (Ali & Richardson, 2025; Wiggil, 2022).

These strategies have been shown to be effective in practice. For example, Abidin et al. (2022) reported that community workshops have contributed to digital literacy, and Ngozi (2024)

commented that information literacy programs have also contributed to academic achievement. Wiggil (2022) underscored the importance of librarians in their role of curriculum planning, while Ali and Richardson (2025) brought attention to the increased user engagement that can be achieved with emerging technologies, such as AI. Furthermore, the study by Stanikūnienė et al. (2023) showed that by engaging users in the process of service design, user satisfaction can be increased.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design to examine information literacy and lifelong learning support in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environment, using the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Benin Study Centre Library as a case study. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from respondents regarding their perceptions and experiences of library services, information literacy development, lifelong learning support, associated challenges, and improvement strategies. Although the study population was relatively large, the survey design was considered appropriate for obtaining structured responses from registered library users and for systematically describing their perceptions of the library's information literacy and lifelong learning support.

The population of the study comprised 1,800 registered users of the NOUN Benin Study Centre Library. A sample of 81 respondents was selected using a convenience sampling technique due to the dispersed nature of ODL learners and the accessibility of participants through online platforms. The use of convenience sampling was necessitated by the accessibility of the respondents and the online nature of communication among ODL learners, particularly through students' WhatsApp groups.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed based on the study objectives and relevant literature. The questionnaire consisted of items measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was administered electronically through Google Forms, and the survey link was distributed via students' online communication platforms, particularly WhatsApp groups. This approach facilitated participation among learners regardless of their geographical location.

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency counts, mean scores, and standard deviations. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as the benchmark for decision-making, with mean scores of 2.50 and above indicating agreement, while mean scores below 2.50 indicated disagreement. The results were presented in tables and interpreted according to the research questions.

THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Research Question one: What types of information literacy skills are being promoted among students at the National Open University of Nigeria, Benin Study Centre?

Table 1: Types of Information Literacy Skills Promoted among Students of the National Open University of Nigeria, Benin Study Centre

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD
1	The library provides orientation programmes that improve my ability to locate information resources.	31	29	12	9	3.01	0.99
2	Library training sessions enhance my skills in evaluating the credibility of information sources.	14	10	29	28	2.12	1.07
3	Access to digital databases through the library improves my research skills.	32	29	12	8	3.05	0.94
4	Library staff provide adequate guidance in using online academic resources.	29	26	16	10	2.91	1.00
5	The library helps me develop proper citation and referencing skills.	26	26	19	10	2.84	0.97
	Grand Mean					2.79	

The findings in Table 1 above showed a grand mean of 2.79, which means that the NOUN Benin Study Centre Library positively influences students' information literacy skills development. Access to digital databases (Mean=3.05) and orientation programmes (Mean=3.01) were found to be the most important library services that facilitate students' research competence and information literacy skills. In contrast, the mean score for training sessions that aimed to improve students' critical information evaluation and source assessment skills was the lowest (mean = 2.12), indicating the need for better instructional support for critical information evaluation and source assessment.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the National Open University Library support lifelong learning among its users?

Table 2: Extent of Library Support for Lifelong Learning

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD
1	The library provides adequate resources that support my continuous learning beyond classroom requirements.	34	34	7	6	3.19	0.88
2	Access to digital resources from the library encourages me to engage in self-directed learning.	14	32	16	19	2.51	1.03
3	The library environment (physical and virtual) motivates me to develop independent study habits.	15	39	14	13	2.69	0.95
4	The library services have helped me acquire skills that I can apply beyond my academic programme.	22	34	16	9	2.85	0.94
5	The availability of diverse information resources in the library supports my personal and professional development.	19	29	16	17	2.62	1.06
	Grand Mean					2.77	

The result revealed the grand mean of 2.77, which means that the library extends reasonable support for the extension of lifelong learning among the students. The results showed that the provision of adequate learning resources obtained the highest mean score (Mean = 3.19), and the digital resources supporting self-directed learning obtained the lowest mean score (Mean = 2.51), indicating that digital resources for self-directed learning were moderately supported.

Research Question 3: What challenges limit students' information literacy and lifelong learning at the National Open University?

Table 3: Challenges Limiting Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD
1	Limited internet connectivity affects my ability to access the library's online	38	42	1	0	3.46	0.52

	resources.						
2	Erratic power supply hinders my effective use of library services.	65	9	1	6	3.64	0.83
3	I lack sufficient digital skills to fully utilize the library's electronic resources.	48	33	0	0	3.59	0.48
4	Inadequate awareness of available library resources limits my use of the library.	45	35	0	1	3.53	0.57
5	Insufficient training opportunities reduce my ability to develop strong information literacy skills.	42	38	1	0	3.51	0.52
	Grand Mean					3.55	

The results in Table 3 showed a grand mean of 3.55, which means that there is a high level of agreement on the impact of infrastructural and digital challenges on information literacy and lifelong learning. The most important obstacles to effective use of the library services were erratic power supply (Mean = 3.64) and inadequate digital skills (Mean = 3.59).

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study showed that the NOUN Benin Study Centre Library contributes significantly to the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environment for information literacy skills of the students of NOUN. The positive ratings in digital databases and orientation programmes indicate that students heavily rely on electronic information resources because of the independent nature of distance education. This discovery further suggests that academic libraries in ODL institutions are not only changing their role from a repository of information to an active facilitator of digital learning and research competence, but they are doing so at a rapid pace. The discovery also corroborates the study done by Goodsett and Schmillen (2022) on how information literacy instruction enhances students' research and critical thinking skills. Likewise, Naveed et al. (2023) observed that the structured information literacy programmes boost students' capacity to access and use scholarly resources effectively. The relatively low rating for training in assessing the credibility of information sources, however, indicates the possibility of students having trouble locating academic information in the digital information environment.

This is especially valuable in today's information-rich, misinformation era, when learners need to develop enhanced critical evaluation skills.

The study also confirmed the role of the library in the promotion of lifelong learning in terms of offering a variety of information resources and facilitation of self-directed learning. The results suggest that flexible provision of learning resources can facilitate students' learning beyond class. This is in line with Frahm-Arp's (2023) opinion that academic libraries play a significant role in promoting lifelong learning in higher education institutions. Although these are positive contributions, this study also found a number of challenges to effective information literacy support and lifelong learning. The high mean scores obtained for the variables of erratic power supply, poor internet connectivity and poor digital skills show that there are still a lot of infrastructural challenges in the ODL environment in Nigeria. The results are similar to those obtained by Dei and Asante (2022) that "poor technological infrastructure and low digital competences are a challenge to the effective provision of academic library services in the context of developing countries".

The study also identified high-level support for several strategies, including regular workshops, virtual support services and improved liaison between librarians and lecturers. This indicates that students see an ongoing partnership between the classroom and the library as an important element in developing research skills and in lifelong learning.

Conclusion

This study has established that information literacy skills significantly promote lifelong learning among students of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Benin Study Centre. The findings demonstrate that the ability of students to identify, locate, evaluate, organise, and effectively use information resources enhances their capacity for independent learning, continuous knowledge acquisition, and adaptation to changing academic and professional environments. Thus, information literacy is not merely an academic skill but a fundamental competency that enables learners to become lifelong learners. The study further revealed that the NOUN Benin Study Centre Library plays a critical role in developing students' information literacy and supporting lifelong learning through the provision of digital resources, orientation programmes, user education, and research support services. These services provide students the skills they need to manage the growing amount of information and learn on their own. However,

challenges such as limited internet access, unstable electricity supply, inadequate digital skills, and insufficient information literacy training continue to affect the effective use of library resources. The study, therefore, concludes that strengthening information literacy programmes within ODL institutions is essential for promoting lifelong learning. Academic libraries must move beyond providing access to information resources and focus more on structured information literacy instruction, continuous digital skills training, improved virtual library services, and stronger collaboration with academic departments. By equipping learners with lifelong information competencies, academic libraries can significantly contribute to the development of independent, adaptable, and knowledge-driven learners capable of responding to the demands of the twenty-first century.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Promotion of Comprehensive Information Literacy Skills:

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Benin Study Centre Library, should strengthen its information literacy programmes to ensure that students acquire essential skills in identifying information needs, locating relevant information resources, evaluating information sources, organizing information, and using information ethically. Regular practical training sessions, user education programmes, and research skills workshops should be organized to enhance students' ability to effectively navigate both physical and digital information environments.

Strengthening Library Support for Lifelong Learning:

The NOUN Library should expand its role as a facilitator of lifelong learning by providing continuous access to quality digital resources, electronic databases, virtual reference services, and self-directed learning support programmes. The library should develop more online tutorials, research guides, webinars, and personalized support services that enable students to independently acquire knowledge and develop learning skills beyond their formal academic programmes.

Addressing Challenges Affecting Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning:

The university management should improve the infrastructure required for effective information access and utilization by providing reliable internet connectivity, stable electricity supply, and adequate technological facilities at the study centre. These improvements will enable students to access electronic resources and participate effectively in digital learning activities.

Enhancing Digital Competencies Among Students:

The university and library management should introduce continuous digital literacy training programmes to improve students' confidence and competence in using online databases, electronic resources, and other digital learning platforms. Such training will reduce barriers associated with inadequate ICT skills and promote independent learning among ODL students.

Strengthening Collaboration Between Librarians and Academic Staff:

Librarians should collaborate with academic staff to integrate information literacy instruction into course activities, research assignments, and academic programmes. This collaboration will ensure that information literacy skills are developed as part of students' academic experiences and contribute directly to lifelong learning outcomes.

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