

RESEARCH INFORMATION RETRIEVAL AMONG LIBRARIANS: THE ICT COMPETENCIES

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Abstract: The role of librarians has evolved beyond traditional bookkeeping and cataloging to include dynamic responsibilities in research information retrieval. This study examined the determinants influencing effective research information retrieval among Nigerian librarians, specifically focusing on ICT competencies, web competencies, and web search strategies. A descriptive survey was conducted, sampling 112 librarians from eight universities using questionnaires as the data collection instrument. The findings revealed that all three determinants—ICT competencies, and web competencies,—were positively correlated with librarians' effective information retrieval for research in university libraries. Among them, web competencies had the least. Additionally, the combined influence of these determinants accounted for 68% of librarians' effective information retrieval for research. A multiple regression analysis was performed, yielding an F-ratio value of 37.85, which was significant at the 0.05 level. This underscores the importance of these determinants in shaping the effectiveness of information retrieval practices among librarians in university libraries.

Keywords: Competences, ICT competences, Web Competence, Effective information Retrieval and Research information

1.0 Introduction

In today's digital age, the role of librarians has transcended beyond traditional bookkeeping and cataloging to encompass more dynamic responsibilities, especially in the realm of research information retrieval. With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the proliferation of online resources, the landscape of information retrieval has evolved significantly, presenting both challenges and opportunities for librarians. Effective research information retrieval involves the process of finding and accessing relevant information that can be used to support research activities. To effectively retrieve relevant information for research, it is necessary to define the research topic, choose appropriate search terms, use appropriate search tools, refine search results, evaluate the information's reliability and relevance, and finally, organize and manage the retrieved information (Zhang & Yang, 2022). Librarians play a vital role in facilitating access to research information for their patrons, and their ability to retrieve relevant information in a timely and effective manner is crucial to their success in this role.

Some key factors that can impact librarians' ability to effectively retrieve research information are their levels of ICT competencies, web competencies, and web search strategies. ICT competencies refer to the skills and knowledge required to use information and communication technologies effectively, including software applications, digital media, and the internet (Hussain & Nayab, 2021; Omehia et al., 2021). Also, it refers to the ability of librarians to effectively navigate and utilize various information and communication technologies in their daily tasks. This includes proficiency in using library management systems, databases, digital archives, and other digital tools that facilitate information retrieval. Librarians with higher levels of ICT competencies are better equipped to navigate and use various digital tools and resources to locate and retrieve relevant research information (Bajpai & Madhusudhan, 2019).

Web competencies, on the other hand, refer specifically to the skills and knowledge required to navigate and use the web effectively, including understanding web design, search engine optimization, and web-based applications (Oyieke & Dick, 2017). In an era where a vast majority of research materials are available online, librarians must

possess the skills to identify credible sources, evaluate the reliability of information, and navigate various web platforms efficiently. Web competencies enable librarians to guide researchers and students in accessing and utilizing online resources that are pertinent to their academic and research needs. Having greater web competencies allows librarians to effectively navigate online resources and locate pertinent research information. Additionally, effective web search strategies, such as using appropriate search terms, understanding search algorithms, and utilizing advanced search techniques, are critical for efficient and successful research information retrieval (Tella, 2011; Afebende, 2019).

Information retrieval involves selecting relevant information sources from a variety of sources to satisfy a specific research information need, which can be done using full-text indexing or content-based indexing. It also involves finding information within documents and databases containing texts, pictures, sounds, or metadata, and automated information retrieval techniques are used to reduce information overload. Afebende (2019) highlights that libraries play an important role in meeting the information needs of their users by acquiring, organizing, and preserving a variety of resources. However, with the increasing complexity of the information environment due to the development and use of ICTs and the widening variety of informational formats and contents, information access has become more challenging. It was found that libraries lack the necessary tools to effectively search for information resources, which makes it difficult for users to efficiently navigate and use library resources. To address this issue, there is a need for better information literacy and related technological skills among library users. Academic librarians should possess the necessary IT skills and knowledge to provide electronic services and teach information literacy skills to their users.

Ayoku and Okafor (2015) emphasized that most librarians in Nigeria have insufficient IT skills, and that the future of academic libraries will largely depend on the IT proficiency of their librarians. Thus, to effectively operate in the current technological and digital era, librarians must possess extensive IT knowledge and skills. Cheng and Chau (2016) stressed the importance of developing professional ICT competencies through a curriculum tailored for librarians. They highlighted that ICT skills are crucial for librarians to succeed in their profession. More so, Ojiegbe (2010) revealed that library staffs in Nigeria mostly learn ICT skills through self-practice, as library schools lack the necessary facilities to teach these competencies. Additionally, leaders' unwillingness to provide funding, hire additional staff, and grant study leave hinders library employees from attending ICT competency training.

Information retrieval systems are widely used in universities and libraries to provide access to books, journals, and other publications, with web search engines being the most common. Tsai, Liang, Hou, and Tsai (2012) found that users who utilize the internet to find research information have better attitudes and abstract comparisons. Onuoha, Akidi and Chukwueke (2019) emphasized the importance of ICTs and ICT skills in society, including in library services, while also highlighting the significance of information management and email expertise, and the authors also found that users have developed various ICT skills, including web 2.0 and information retrieval competences. Doyle (2019) also identified several competences that librarians need, such as web search, digital marketing, and online collaboration.

Web search strategies encompass the systematic approaches and techniques employed by librarians to retrieve information from the web. This includes employing advanced search operators, utilizing specialized databases, employing citation tracking, and leveraging other search techniques to optimize the retrieval of relevant and reliable information. Effective web search strategies enable librarians to assist researchers in finding the most pertinent and valuable resources, thereby enhancing the quality and depth of research outputs. Effective web search strategies are critical for efficient and successful research information retrieval. Effective search strategies involve using appropriate search terms and keywords, understanding search algorithms and how they work, and using advanced search techniques to narrow down search results (Tella, 2011; Afebende, 2019).

The University of Johannesburg Library (2020) states that in order to locate the necessary research resources, such as library catalogs and online databases, individuals must utilize search strategies that involve the use of research terms and search methodologies. Search terms alone are not enough to produce effective search results. The most commonly used search techniques by internet users include Truncation, Parentheses, Field Searching, Phrase Searching, Wildcards, and Boolean Logic. Tella et al. (2017) conducted a study that found that certain factors, such as search engines, Boolean search operators, and emotional intelligence, have a significant impact on the effectiveness of information retrieval. Tella (2011) also found that factors like emotional intelligence, membership in online discussion forums, and internet and computer self-efficacy significantly impact the effectiveness of users' web searches. Nyemezu et al. (2021) found that most online search engines, except Bing, Yahoo, Google Scholar,

and Google, tend to have poor performance, with Google being the most extensively used by users.

Baro, Obaro and Aduba (2019) highlight the challenges faced by librarians in acquiring digital literacy skills, such as a lack of funds for training and a shortage of equipment and skilled instructors. The librarians also reported moderate levels of digital literacy skills, with disparities among those sampled. To address these issues, Okehie, Nnadieto, Obiano, and Ogonna (2022) recommend that universities provide on-the-job ICT training for librarians and monitor their use of ICT to ensure compliance with international standards.

While the adoption of ICTs and web-based resources has expanded the scope of available information, it has also necessitated librarians to acquire new competencies and skills to remain relevant and effective in their roles. However, there is limited empirical research that explores the determinants of effective research information retrieval among Nigerian librarians, particularly focusing on the roles of ICT competencies, web competencies, and web search strategies. Understanding these determinants is crucial as it provides insights into the areas where capacity building initiatives and training programs can be targeted to enhance librarians' capabilities in information retrieval. Moreover, identifying the key factors that influence effective research information retrieval can inform policy formulation, curriculum development, and strategic planning aimed at optimizing library services and supporting research excellence in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

Determinants of effective research information retrieval among Nigerian librarians: The roles of ICT competencies,

- i. ICT competencies of librarians significantly correlate with effective research information retrieval on the web in Nigeria.
- ii. ICT competencies, web competencies and web search strategies of librarians will significantly determine effective research information retrieval in Nigeria

2.0 Literature review

2.1. ICT competencies and Librarians

ICT competencies for librarians refer to the relevant skills needed to utilize digital information search, access, and delivery to the fullest extent possible. These competencies involve acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for carrying out tasks in a professional manner in the workplace (Oyedokun et al., 2018). Competencies in information and communication technologies are vital for meeting the operational requirements placed on individuals working in educational institutions (Jabbarova, 2020). Oyedokun et al. (2018) distinguished ICT skills into three levels: lower-level, moderate, and high-level ICT abilities. They found that a high percentage of users possess lower-level ICT skills. This suggests that librarians' effective performance depends on their proficiency in ICT competencies (Omehia, Okwu, & Nsirim, 2021).

ICT competencies play a special role in carrying out organizational processes at work (Murawski & Bick, 2017). They enable librarians to make strategic decisions (Chae et al., 2018) and provide library services in a free, accurate, and quick manner (Ahmad et al., 2020). The deployment of technologies such as barcode systems, library automation software, and OPAC has been crucial in transforming libraries, highlighting the need for ongoing training to function effectively in the digital age (Ahmad et al., 2020). Olatoye, Nekhwevha, and Muchaonyerwa (2021) revealed that users' ICT proficiency and experience with using electronic resources are typically low, which can limit their productive use of e-resources. Shastri and Chudasma (2022) found that while COVID-19 improved the use of library websites and electronic resources, challenges such as lack of ICT expertise, internet connectivity, and IT infrastructure hindered their effective utilization.

Studies have assessed the ICT competency levels of librarians. Ademodi and Adepoju (2019) found that 87.5% of librarians were computer proficient, with the ability to browse and explore the internet being the most frequently mentioned skill. Omehia, Okwu, and Nsirim (2021) concluded that librarians must be proficient in technological tools for effective information resource management, leading to improved processing, collection, dissemination, selection, and arrangement. Ashraf, Iqbal, Arif, and Asghar (2022) found that participants in blended learning courses exhibited correlated ICT competencies with curriculum content, materials, and teaching methodologies. Their results suggest that instructional methods directly and significantly influence individuals' ICT competencies.

Hussain and Nayab (2021) discovered that most respondents possessed knowledge and skills in using various

application software, including Photoshop, In Page, Microsoft Office Suite, wikis, social media, e-journal searching, webpage design, email communication, and search engines. Amua-Sekyi and Asare (2016) found that lecturers possess ICT skills such as internet access, word processing, database searching, presentation delivery, and email communication, emphasizing the importance of online information-seeking to connect with global education. Despite the availability of ICT resources, studies have identified challenges and barriers to their effective utilization. Madu, Vandi, and Chagwa (2018) noted low utilization of various ICT capabilities (computers, CD-ROMs, internet, and email) in the Ramat Library at the University of Maiduguri, citing poor ICT compliance, reliance on mobile devices, and attitudes toward ICT as potential factors. Network connectivity and power supply issues were also highlighted as obstacles (Madu, Vandi, & Chagwa, 2018; Rana & Bhatti, 2020).

To address the gaps in ICT competencies, researchers have emphasized the importance of revising the Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum, allocating sufficient funds for information infrastructure upgrades, and providing training opportunities for LIS professionals (Oyedokun et al., 2018). Suggestions include encouraging staff members with advanced ICT skills to teach others, scheduling seminars and workshops regularly (Oyedokun et al., 2018), and establishing online training courses to instruct and direct users in the use of e-resources (Shastri & Chudasma, 2022). Despite the recognized need for ICT skill development, studies have identified challenges faced by professionals. Kaltimani and Naik (2013) found that library staff across different designations exhibited significant differences in various ICT skills, such as computer operation, file and folder creation, RFID, library automation software modules, web skills, website design and internet editing, web search, and digitization of information retrieval materials. Additionally, they highlighted that professionals often face financial constraints, excessive workload, and negative perceptions from managers when attempting to learn ICT skills.

2.2. Web competencies and Librarians

The internet has transformed the landscape of information access and retrieval, providing a vast realm of knowledge for learners and researchers (Borca et al., 2015; Kroustallaki et al., 2015; Tsai, Hsu, & Tsai, 2012). It offers a wealth of diverse information, enabling individuals to search for information related to their interests and obtain current updates (Tsai et al., 2012). However, the abundance of information on the internet has also created challenges for users in locating, retrieving, and evaluating authentic and relevant information (Al-Aufi, Al-Azri, & Al-Hadi, 2017; Sales, Pinto, & Fernández-Ramos, 2018). Librarians, as information professionals, play a crucial role in effectively utilizing the internet for research and information retrieval. However, several studies have highlighted the challenges and competencies required for librarians to exploit the internet's potential fully.

Thanuskodi (2019) emphasized that using the internet for information retrieval requires not only literacy skills but also problem-solving abilities. The study found that LIS professionals use the internet to search for information for research papers, but face obstacles such as poor power supply, slow internet connections, and lack of computer literacy. Kankam and Nsibirwa (2019) stressed the need for information users, including librarians, to be competent and skilled in effectively obtaining online information on the web. Malliari et al. (2014) revealed that individuals have limited options for accessing the internet, and the online infrastructure at the colleges surveyed was insufficient, with inadequate workstations and labs to accommodate regular internet use.

Uwaifo (2013) identified several factors hindering librarians' effective use of the internet, including lack of resources, inadequate localized software, lack of a workable government policy on ICT use, political instability, and lack of ICT skills. Despite the availability of many information resources on the internet, only a small number are fully utilized by librarians due to their average internet usage abilities. To address these challenges, librarians need to develop and enhance their web competencies, which encompass a range of skills and knowledge. These competencies include:

1. Information literacy skills: The ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively from the vast array of online resources (Sales et al., 2018; Thanuskodi, 2019).
2. Technical skills: Proficiency in using computers, navigating the internet, and utilizing various search engines and databases effectively (Uwaifo, 2013).
3. Critical thinking and problem-solving abilities: The ability to analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources, identify reliable and authentic information, and address challenges related to information retrieval (Thanuskodi, 2019).
4. Adaptability and continuous learning: The willingness to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape and engage in continuous professional development to stay updated with the latest technologies and best practices (Uwaifo, 2013).

5. Collaboration and networking: The ability to collaborate with colleagues, researchers, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, resources, and best practices related to web-based information retrieval (Kankam & Nsibirwa, 2019).

By developing and fostering these web competencies, librarians can overcome the challenges posed by the vast and dynamic online information environment, and effectively support research and knowledge creation through efficient and reliable information retrieval from the internet.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a purely quantitative method using a survey as the research design. The population of study consists of librarians in North-central, Nigeria university libraries. Nworgu (2015) asserted that a systematic data collection and description of the traits, characteristics, or facts of a specific population is the aim of descriptive survey research design. The purposive sampling techniques was use to select librarians in eight (8) universities library in South-East, Nigeria. Total enumeration technique or census was utilized to comprise all the 112 librarians in the eight (8) selected university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. A web-based designed questionnaire using Google Forms titled Competencies of ICT, and Effective Research Information Retrieval (CICTWSSERIR) scale of librarians was used for data collection. The questionnaire used in the study consisted of five main divisions, with the first division gathering demographic information, and the second and third divisions measuring respondents' levels of ICT competencies and web competencies, respectively, using adapted sixitem scales from Ojiegbe (2010) with response scales ranging from Very High to Very Low, and exhibiting high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of 0.889 and 0.792 respectively. The fourth division which assessed respondents' web search strategies using a six-item scale adapted from Eke, Omekwu & Agbo (2014), with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree and exhibiting high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.824. Additionally, the fifth division measured respondents' effective research information retrieval using a five-item scale adapted from Tella, Anyim, Memudu & Olaniyi (2017), also with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, and displaying high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.858 in the current study, and 0.89 in the initial instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 27 items and was designed as a web-based form using Google Forms, with a link shared through WhatsApp and Telegram groups by seven research assistants who were trained for two days on distributing the questionnaire and providing guidance on filling it out. A total of 109 responses were collected from librarians in eight designated university libraries in North-central Nigeria, which were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 24 with inferential statistics such as multiple regression analysis and Pearson product moment correlation, with an alpha level of 0.05 for all hypothesis tests. The data collection and analysis were successful, thanks to the cooperation of the respondents and the efforts of the research assistants.

4.0 Results

The respondents demographic profile revealed that of the 109 librarians surveyed, 41 (37.6%) were females, while 68 (62.4%) were males. This implies that men librarians out number female librarians in South-East Nigerian universities. The respondents' institution distribution revealed that 26 were from University A, 16 were from University B, 15 were from University C, 11 were from University D, and 28 were from University E, while 13 were from University F. The responders' ages range from 20 to 50+ years (M=2.50, SD=0.85). Furthermore, Respondents' educational backgrounds ranged from B.LIS to PhD in library and information studies/science (M=2.13, SD=0.60).

Table 1. Pearson's zero-order correlations between study variables

| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| ICT competencies | 1.5505 | .38790 | 1.000 | | | |
| Web competencies | 1.9480 | .42413 | .683(p=.000) | 1.000 | | |
| Web search strategies | 1.6131 | .37876 | .521(p=.194) | .733(p=.000) | 1.000 | |
| Effective research information retrieval | 1.9578 | .32781 | .402(p=.004) | .622(p=.006) | .514(p=.000) | 1.000 |

Table 1 presents the correlation matrixes for zero-order Pearson of respondents' ICT competencies, web competencies, web search strategies, and effective research information retrieval of respondents. It is presumed that there are significant relationships between ICT competencies and effective research information retrieval ($r = .402, p < .05$); web competencies and effective research information retrieval ($r = .622, p < .05$); web search strategies and effective research information retrieval of the respondents ($r = .514, p < .05$). Clearly, there is a relationship that exists between web competencies and ICT competencies of the respondents ($r = .683, p < .05$). Additionally, there is a clear correlation between respondents' web competencies and their web search strategies ($r = .733, p < .05$). Furthermore, there is no significant correlation between ICT competencies and web search strategies ($r = .521, p > .05$) of the respondents.

Table 2. Regression of librarian ICT competencies, web competencies, web search strategies and effective research information retrieval (N=109)

| (a) Model summary | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| Multiple R | 0.532 | | | | |
| R ² | 0.684 | | | | |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.663 | | | | |
| Std. error of the estimate | 0.681 | | | | |
| (b) ANOVA | | | | | |
| | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 3.291 | 3 | 1.097 | 37.852 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 8.315 | 105 | 0.079 | | |
| Total | 11.606 | 108 | | | |
| (c) Coefficients | | | | | |
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
| | B | Std. error | β | T | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 1.065 | 0.361 | | 2.947 | 0.00 |
| ICT competencies | 0.123 | 0.097 | 0.145 | 1.270 | 0.21 |
| Web competencies | 0.004 | 0.093 | 0.006 | 0.056 | 0.96 |
| Web search strategies | 0.430 | 0.077 | 0.497 | 5.595 | 0.00 |

The result in table 2 displayed the ICT competencies, web competencies, web search strategies, and effective research information retrieval of librarians' regression results. Regression analysis results reveal an adjusted R2 value of 0.663 ((a) in Table 2) and an F-ratio of 37.852 ((b) in Table 2); the latter is significant at the level of 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$). According to these findings, the three independent variables—ICT competencies, web competencies and web search strategies— together explained or projected 68.4% of the variations in the librarians' effective research information retrieval as indicated by the R2 value. The F-ratio suggests that the foretold is also significant.

Table 2 (c) shows the individual contributions of the three factors in determining librarian's effective research information retrieval. Firstly, the results show that every factor significantly influences the forecast, as shown by the significance of the t values, which are higher than 0.05, as shown in the "t" column of the table. Furthermore, the standardised coefficients (β values), which demonstrate the relative significance of each variable influencing librarians effective research information retrieval, showed that ICT competencies contributed few to the determinant of effective research information retrieval (βvalue =0.145), followed in a positive descending sequence of strength by web competencies (β =0.006), and also followed in order of increasing strength by web search strategies (β =0.497). These results show that the three variables (ICT competencies, web competencies, and web search strategies) make significant contributions to the determinant of librarians' effective research information retrieval.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

This study found a significant relationship between ICT competencies and effective research information retrieval, suggesting that raising ICT competencies will raise effective research information retrieval. In line with this

finding, Oyedokun et al. (2018) defined library staffs' ICT competencies as the relevant skills needed to utilize digital information search, access, and delivery to the fullest extent possible, and as the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for carrying out tasks in a professional manner in the workplace.

The study revealed that web competencies had a positive influence on the effective research information retrieval of librarians. This result is in consonance with Kankam and Nsibirwa (2019) stated that information users must be competent and skilled to obtaining online information on the web effectively. Additionally, this study found that ICT competencies, web competencies, and web search strategies are important factors in effective research information retrieval among librarians. The relationship that occurs in this study among ICT competencies, web competencies, web search strategies, and effective research information retrieval corresponds with that of Nyemezu et al. (2021) study that most online search engines, with the exception of Bing, Yahoo, Google scholar, and Google, tend to have poor performance. Among these four search engines, only Google is extensively used by users, whereas Bing, Yahoo, and Google Scholar are rarely used. The findings also correspond with the study of Amua-Sekyi and Asare (2016) found that respondents possess ICT skills such as Internet access, word processing, database searching, presentation delivery, and email communication, but highlight the importance of information-seeking online to connect with global education. These results also concur with those of other research by Eke et al. (2014) highlighted that librarians in their study utilized search engines, databases available at the university library, and keyword searches to conduct research, but they lacked awareness of other Internet Search Strategies (ISS) such as Boolean operators, phrase searching, and emailing researchers to request research materials, as revealed by the current study. The findings is also in line with the study of Pavani and Veerla (2019) who stated that online search systems are characterized by several features, including information coverage and sources, indexing mechanisms, vocabulary management, searching tools, ranking strategies, search changes, and online search systems.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the significant influence of ICT competencies and web competencies, on the effective retrieval of research information among librarians. The findings reveal that proficiency in ICT skills is essential for leveraging digital resources and technologies to their fullest extent, thereby enhancing information retrieval efficiency. Moreover, the positive correlation between web competencies and effective research information retrieval highlights the importance of navigating the online landscape adeptly to access relevant information. Additionally, the study underscores the critical role of employing effective web search strategies in locating and retrieving pertinent research materials. Collectively, these findings emphasize the interconnectedness of ICT competencies, web competencies, and web search strategies in optimizing research information retrieval processes in university libraries. The following recommendations are given in light of the study's findings:

1. Libraries should collaborate with ICT training centers to offer specialized training programs tailored to enhance the ICT competencies of librarians.
2. Organize workshops focusing on improving web competencies, including online navigation, evaluation of digital resources, and utilization of online databases and platforms.
3. Implement training sessions on advanced web search strategies, emphasizing the use of Boolean operators, search engines, and other innovative search techniques to enhance information retrieval efficiency.

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