

**STRATEGIZING FOR EFFECTIVE LIBRARY USERS RETENTION IN A
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IN 21ST CENTURY. EVIDENCE FROM FEDERAL
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OWERRI (FUTO)**

Chima James Ngozi¹, Nwegbu Chinwe², Akagha Nancy² and Osuji Esther Chioma²

¹Librarian, Federal University of Technology Owerri

²Assistant Librarian. Federal University of Technology Owerri.

ABSTRACT: *This paper is an attempt to study the strategies that leads to effective library users in Federal University of Technology, Owerri with a view to study the expectations of library users, modern infrastructural needs, retention strategies as well as try to bring to light the challenges that confronts the users and recommend some remedial measures for its improvement. Questionnaire was used for data collection, a reliability co-efficient of 0.75 was obtained. The study confirmed that the library needs to do well on some issues such as power supply, internet connectivity, subscription to open access database, etcetera for a very good user's retention profile.*

KEYWORDS: Library Users, Retention, Strategies, 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

Library has been known for centuries as a repository of books and a custodian of knowledge. It is the arm of the university that is responsible for acquisition, organization, and dissemination of information resources and services to meet the teaching, research and community services needs of the users. It is expected that the library will be patronized heavily by the users looking at their resources and services but unfortunately the reverse is the case due to advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in this 21st century. According to Gates as cited in Chaudhary(2001) the success of the academic library can be measured by the extent to which it is able to meet the needs of the library user community. This was supported by Tele (2008) who opined that “libraries are becoming less important for the materials they collect instead their importance is being measured with respect to the fulfillment of the user's needs.

Now, in the 21st century, the library faces perhaps its most momentous challenge. Americans are moving away increasingly from the printed page to digital screens for information and communication. Many library users are looking elsewhere for resources for teaching and research instead of their institutional Libraries, finding solution to their problems in the internet, social media and so on. There is need for library managers to re-strategize their policies and services to align with the 21st century resources and services so as to retain their users. Library leaders nationwide are adapting to this shift by reimagining the library as an engaged community center. The role of librarians is being re-branded to reflect their expertise as content curators and trusted navigators in an ever-expanding ocean of information in whatever format it may exist.

Library user retention is very critical to the long term survival and growth of any library center Lawar (2011). It makes more sense for University libraries to spend money developing user retention strategies rather than continually acquiring new users. The only way for the glory of the library to still be felt in this 21st century is to practice a user retention strategy by which is

usually a product of the quality of service rendered. Reichheld(1996) established the assumption that retention of the right users was as powerful a weapon as user acquisition and in some cases more powerful. The type of experience or service a library user received could go a long way to determine if he or she will come back again and in a situation whereby the he or she receives poor service, they may go on to discourage their friends, roommates, course mates etc. from visiting or patronizing the university library. Reichheld(1996) opined that retention is less costly than acquisition, and then small increases in retention rates can have a dramatic effect on the profits of a library especially in this 21st century where technology is moving at a very fast pace. Librarians need to re-examine their strategies to retain their users, by providing user satisfaction as technology is here and has come to stay.

The main objectives of libraries today are to become relevant in information service delivery and to provide an optimum level of services to reach more potential users and encourage the use of library resources. According to Kevulya(2004) to achieve good library retention goal, it requires a shift from product or service orientation to client or need orientation. More so according to Lawar(2011) University libraries in Nigeria, despite several efforts to attract and retain their users, the library use has reduced dramatically. It is against this background that this study was designed to identify library user's attraction and retention strategies in FUTO library.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Library conventionally is the section of the university that is in charge for acquisition, organization and dissemination of information resources and services to meet the teaching, research and community service requirements of the academic community they serve. In order to meet up with that task, universities and other institutions of higher education spend a lot of financial resources into their libraries to enable the members of the academic community have the information resources and services which are necessary for academic pursuits. It is therefore expected that the libraries will be patronized by members of the academic community as they will only amount to mere pile up houses of information resources if the resources are not utilized. Gates cited in Chaudhary, (2001) stated that the success of the academic library can be measured by the extent to which it is able to meet the needs of the user community. Regrettably, Hiller (2001) has observed the declining patronage of the physical building known as "library" by users. This was supported by Tele (2008) who posited that "libraries are becoming less important for the material they collect or house. Instead, their importance is being measured in respect to the fulfillment of the user's needs with the aim of retaining them". The invention of information and communication technology in the 21st century has brought about a paradigm shift. This shift has improved the disharmony of library services not only in the public area but within the academic environment, which will not only enlarge the boundary of professional services of academic libraries beyond its basic functions but will also; make the products and services rendered to be vibrant and attractive.

Progresses in technology have opened up possibilities for sourcing scholarly communication outputs, through access to digital information. The library as an information supplier is anticipated to be equipped and to provide opportunity for users to login and access information resources anywhere in the world, without being limited to the four walls of the library (Okebukola, 2003).

It has become imperative therefore, that libraries begin to reflect on the statement by Feldman (2006) that ‘the important need for today’s libraries is to begin to examine the change in the needs and demands of library patrons’. This is in order to serve them better, and have them go back to library, and usage. Libraries can only remain significant to the academic community when their services are centered on their patron’s needs as this will help them retain their patrons so they will not have the need to look another place. Therefore university libraries needs to devise working strategies that can help to retain the library users.

The conventional (analog) era is gradually diminishing and giving way to the digital era with its innate peculiarities (Arif and Mohammed, 2012). The digital era has given users access to limitless information in cyberspace. With mobile phones, laptops and other ICTs, people are no longer bound by time or space. With the availability of broadband connection, individuals are able, at the click of a button, to get information from anywhere in the world almost at the speed of light. This has empowered people including library users (McConnell, 2002). To this extent, Dempsey (2009) observed that the practice in the past was that users built workflow around libraries, but now libraries must build services around users’ workflow as a new strategy. Kyrillidou (2001); Self and Hiller cited in Council, (2014) noted that many academic libraries have reported declining use of in-library service such as reference and circulation and are rather witnessing increases in instructional activity and preference for electronic content. Along the same line. According to Carlson (2001) in order to survive and maintain relevance in this technological age, academic libraries must find ways to “increase ease of effectiveness, efficiency, access, coordination and responsiveness in all aspects of our work-academic, ancillary and support”.

Also, it is indispensable for University library to note that, a user decision to be loyal or to defect to other competitors is the sum total of many encounters with the organization. In this respect, a university library needs to ensure that the right personnel, right equipment and facilities are made available for the efficient and effective information service delivery to users. Boone and Kurtz (1998) found out that many buyers form their perception of service quality during their service encounters. This implies that frontline employees determine whether customers come out satisfied or not. They also revealed that, service encounter with clients and customers particularly in service organizations/companies can lead to three outcomes, namely: - words-of-mouth communications (negative or positive), service switching and service loyalty. Based on this observation, Ovara (1997) remarked that “a key marketing position in library is the service frontline. Every meeting with a client inside the library or outside is a moment of truth and of opportunity. If the frontline is ill-equipped, fancy strategies from the head come to nothing”.

Another very significant strategy to keep customers or library users is to measure their satisfaction periodically. Kotler and Keller (2006) reported that “a highly satisfied customer generally stays loyal longer, buy more as the company introduces new products and upgrades existing products and talks favourably about the company and its product...”.

Vtrenz (2004) outlined some very important strategies to be implemented by organizations to effectively manage relationships as well as retain their customer base, namely:-

- i. Build awareness of your brand;
- ii. Use variety of offers to retain your customer such as electronic letters, guides, workshops etc.;

Akers (2007) also opines that libraries can retain their customer base by implementing the following strategies:

- a. Delivering consistent quality throughout the library;
- b. Consistently offer good service, promote collections by using creativity in developing displays and exhibitions;
- c. Make sure that library environment is always clean and inviting; and

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this paper is to outline strategies for the retention of Library Users in FUTO as well as factors that hinders user's retention in Federal University of Technology, Owerri Library.

The specific objectives are:

1. To find out the expectations of the University Library Users in the 21st Century
2. To identify the strategies for users retention
3. To identify the modern infrastructural facilities needed in FUTO library
4. To determine the factors that hinder user retention in FUTO library

METHODOLOGY

A random sampling technique was utilized and a total of 200 students were selected, from 200 level students to 500 level, 191 questionnaires were returned which gave a return rate of 95.5%, which was used for the analysis.

To guarantee the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on ten participants out of the envisaged population of the study. A test-retest reliability method of two weeks interval was conducted, response obtained were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation method and a reliability co-efficient of 0.75 was obtained.

Mean score was used to outline the effectiveness of the strategies used in the retention of Library Users in FUTO as well as factors that hinder user's retention in Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

In order to empirically ascertain the effectiveness of the strategies used in the retention of Library Users in FUTO as well as factors that hinders user's retention in Federal University of Technology, the Relative Importance Index (RII) was employed. Relative Importance Index or weight is a type of relative importance analyses. RII was used for the analysis because it best fits the purpose of this study. According to Johnson and LeBreton (Johnson & Lebreton, 2004) RII aids in finding the contribution a particular variable makes to the prediction of a criterion variable both by itself and in combination with other predictor variables. In the calculation of the Relative Importance Index (RII), the formula below was used

$$R.I.I = \frac{\sum W}{A * N}$$

Where R.I.I is the relative important index

W= weighting given to each statement by the respondents and ranges from 1 to 5

A=the higher response integer which is 5

N=Number of respondents

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	101	53
Female	90	47
Total	191	100

Table 1 shows that there are more male respondents (53%) than female respondents of (47%). This suggests that there are more male academics than female across the surveyed faculties in the University.

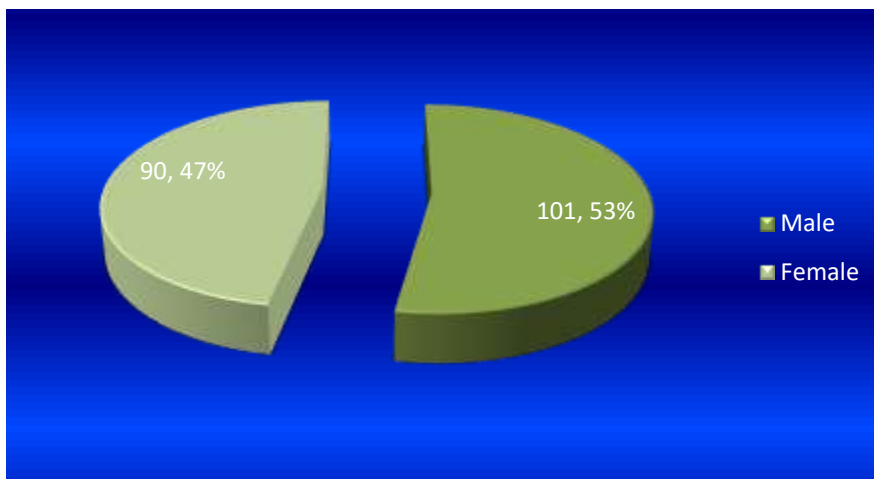


Figure 1: Pie-Chart representation of Respondents' gender.

Table 2: Academic Level of Respondents

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
200	47	24
300	47	24
400	49	25
500	50	27
TOTAL	191	100

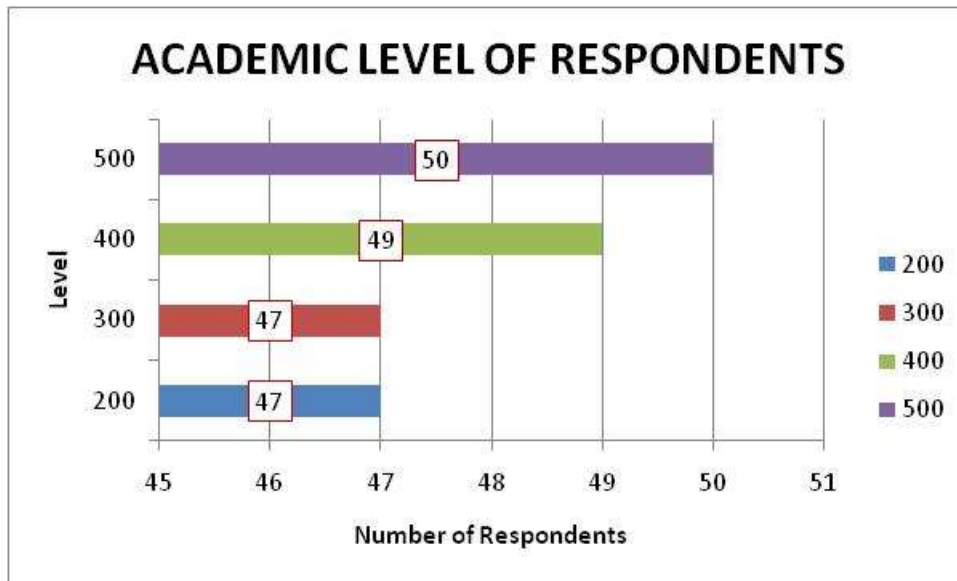


Figure 2: Bar chart representation of Respondents' Academic Level.

Table 1: Age of respondents

Age range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20	89	46
21-25	56	29
26-30	46	25
TOTAL	191	100

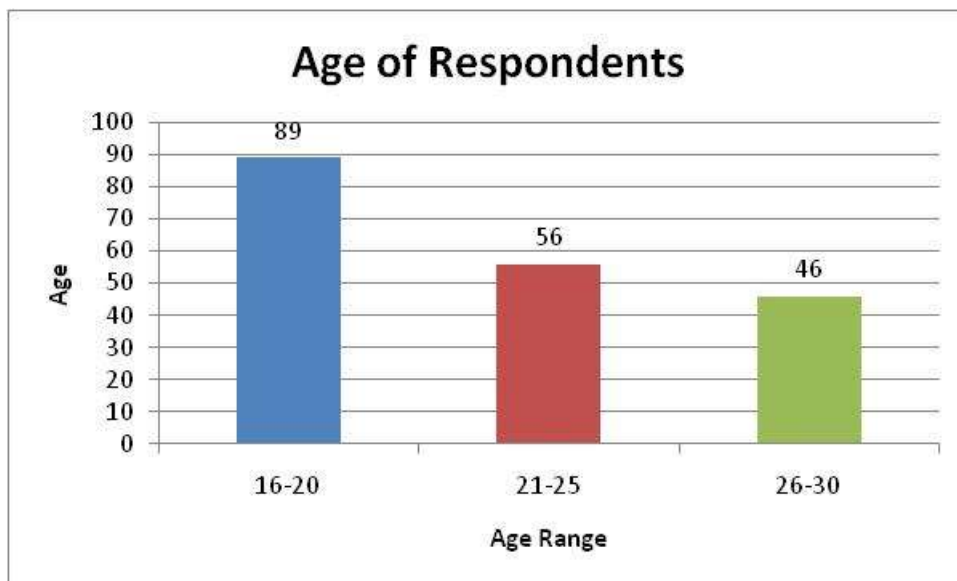


Figure 3: Column Chart representation of respondents Age range

Table 1: Expectations of the University Library Users in the 21st Century

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	SD	Mean Score	R.I.I
Availability of open access databases to enable readers have access to current information resources	114	27	29	21	44.30	3.23	2
Creating awareness of open access resources available for readers.	103	14	44	30	38.82	2.99	3
Availability of social media services	45	27	54	65	16.07	2.27	9
Subscription and accessibility of databases like AGORA, TEEAL, PROQUEST, HINARI, OARE	66	33	46	46	13.62	2.62	6
Provision of enabling environment with free flow of internet connectivity and constant power supply	118	41	18	14	48.32	3.38	1
Training different categories of users for skill on digital information access.	56	44	67	24	18.41	2.69	5
Employing marketing strategies for selective information dissemination to users categories through e-mailing, blogging, institutional websites, flyers	68	30	62	31	20.07	2.71	4
Developing Institutional Repository bibliography to help users.	55	30	76	30	22.22	2.58	7
Building library services around user workflows	58	25	63	45	16.96	2.50	8

Table 4.1 Reveals that 141(74%) of the respondents are affirmative about the Availability of open access databases to enable readers have access to current information resources as one of

the basic expectations of the 21st century library users while 50(24%) of the respondents did not agree which gave a mean score of $3.23SD\pm44.30$ R.I.I. of 2, The table also reveals 117(61%) of the respondents are affirmative that Creating awareness of open access resources available for readers is one of the basic requirement of the 21st century library users while 74(39%) did not agree, this gave a mean score of $2.99SD\pm38.82$ R.I.I. of 3. 72(38%) of the respondents agreed with the opinion that Availability of social media services is one of the basic expectations of the 21st century library users while 119(62%) of the respondents disagreed. This gave a mean score of $2.27SD\pm16.07$ R.I.I. of 9. 99(52%) of the respondents agreed that Subscription and accessibility of databases like AGORA, TEEAL, PROQUEST, HINARI, OARE are one of the basic expectations of the 21st century library users while 92(48%) did not agree. This gave a mean score of 2.62 ± 13.62 R.I.I. of 6. 159(83%) of the respondents agreed that Provision of enabling environment with free flow of internet connectivity and constant power supply is one of the expectations of the 21st century library while 32(17%) of the respondents disagreed this gave a mean score of $3.38SD\pm48.32$ R.I.I. of 1. 100(52%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Training different categories of users for skill on digital information access is one of the basic expectations of the 21st century library user while 91(48%) of the respondents disagreed. This gave a mean score of $2.69SD\pm18.41$ R.I.I. of 5. 98(51%) of the respondents agreed that Employing marketing strategies for selective information dissemination to users categories through e-mailing, blogging, institutional websites, flyers is one of the basic expectations of the library users while 93(49%) of the respondents disagreed this gave a mean score of $2.71SD\pm20.07$ R.I.I. of 4. 85(45%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Developing Institutional Repository bibliography to help users is one of the basic expectations of the 21st century library user while 106(55%) of the respondents disagreed. This gave a mean score of $2.58SD\pm22.22$ R.I.I. of 7. 83(43%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Building library services around user workflows is one of the basic expectations of the 21st century library user while 108(57%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.50SD\pm16.96$ R.I.I. of 8.

Table 2: Strategies for users retention

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	SD	Mean Score	R.I.I
Provision of research commons	57	37	49	48	8.22	2.54	7
Loaning of laptops for users.	34	25	92	40	30.14	2.28	10
Provision of an awesome box	25	34	93	39	30.72	2.24	11
Usage of embedded librarians as liaison officers to users	43	34	70	44	15.50	2.40	9
Availability of constant internet facility and power.	102	39	33	17	37.34	3.18	1
Libraries should acquire and secure ownership of digital content, through licenses, to enrich users' needs	64	44	67	16	23.50	2.82	3

Incorporation of selective dissemination of information (SDI) for better information delivery to users.	68	34	62	27			
					20.27	2.75	4
Libraries should store resources contents on their local servers and make them accessible to their users	86	29	33	43			
					26.17	2.83	2
Update and accessibility of databases subscribed to by library users	77	33	31	50			
					21.28	2.72	5
Exhibitions of library resources to users	45	43	61	42			
					8.92	2.48	8
Users' relationship management	56	32	73	30			
					20.56	2.60	6

The table above reveals that 94(49%) of the respondents are affirmative that provision of research commons are good strategies for users retention while 97(51%) are of the negative that it is not a good strategy, this gave a mean score of $2.54SD\pm 8.22$ with R.I.I of 7. 59(31%) of the respondents agree that Loaning of laptops for users is a good retention strategy, while 132(69%) disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.28SD\pm 30.14$ with R.I.I of 10. 59(31%) of the respondents are affirmative that Provision of an awesome box is a good retention strategy while 132(69%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.24SD\pm 30.72$ with R.I.I of 11. 77(40%) of the respondents are affirmative that usage of embedded librarians as liaison officers to users is a good retention strategy, while 114(60%) disagreed. This gave a mean score of $2.40SD\pm 15.50$ with R.I.I of 9. 141(74%) of the respondents are affirmative that Availability of constant internet facility and power is a good retention strategy, while 50(26%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $3.18SD\pm 37.34$ with R.I.I of 1. 108(56%) of the respondents agree that acquiring and securing ownership of digital content, through licenses, to enrich users' needs is a good retention strategy while 83(44%) of the respondents agree. This gave a mean score of $2.82SD\pm 23.50$ with R.I.I. of 3. 102(53%) of the respondents are affirmative that Incorporation of selective dissemination of information (SDI) for better information delivery to users is a good retention strategy while 89(47%) disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.75SD\pm 20.27$ with R.I.I of 4. 115(60%) of the respondents are affirmative that storing resources contents on their local servers and make them accessible to their users is a good retention strategy, while 76(40%) this gave a mean score of $2.83SD\pm 26.17$ with R.I.I of 2. 110(57%) of the respondents are of affirmative that update and accessibility of databases subscribed to by library users is a good retention strategy while 81(43%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.72SD\pm 21.28$ with R.I.I of 5. 88(46%) of the respondents agreed that Exhibitions of library resources to users is a good retention strategy while 103(54%) of the respondents disagreed. This gave a $2.48SD\pm 8.92$ with R.I.I of 8. 88(46%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Users' relationship management is a good retention strategy while 103(54%) of the respondents disagreed this gave a mean score of $2.60SD\pm 20.56$ with R.I.I of 6.

Table 3: Modern infrastructural facilities needed

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	SD	Mean Score	R.I.I
Expanded computer laboratories.	101	24	38	28	35.98	3.04	2
High density computer servers.	78	27	52	34	22.75	2.78	7
Free internet access in libraries.	103	46	30	12	39.36	3.26	1
Available space for plug-in points for wireless computers.	79	32	45	35	21.56	2.81	5
Open access databases such as AGORA, HINARI, DOAJ, TEEAL, PROQUEST.	81	19	73	18	33.93	2.85	3
Creating open access resource services for users.	64	33	66	28	20.04	2.70	8
Creation of electronic reference services for users.	68	38	62	23	20.98	2.79	6
Publication of current collection (books, journals and special collections).	85	29	34	43	25.50	2.82	4
Exhibition of current holdings of specialized resources.	58	11	51	71	25.86	2.29	9

The Table above reveals that 125(65%) of the respondents agree that the Library needs Expanded computer laboratories, while 66(35%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $3.04SD \pm 35.98$ with R.I.I of 2. 105(55%) of the respondents agreed that the library needs High density computer servers, while 86(45%) did not agree, this gave a mean score of $2.78SD \pm 22.75$ with R.I.I. of 7, 149(78%) of the respondents agreed that the library needs to provide Free internet access in libraries while 42(22%) disagreed this gave a mean score of $3.26SD \pm 39.36$ with R.I.I of 1. 111(58%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that the library needs to provide Available space for plug-in points for wireless computers, while 80(42%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.81SD \pm 21.36$ with R.I.I of 5. 100(52%) of the respondents agreed that the library needs to provide Open access databases such as AGORA, HINARI, DOAJ, TEEAL, PROQUEST, while 91(48%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.85SD \pm 33.93$ with R.I.I of 3. 97(51%) of the respondents are affirmative that the library should Create open access resource services for users, while 94(49%) disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.70SD \pm 20.04$ with R.I.I of 8. 106(55%) of the respondents agreed that the library should Create open access resource services for users while 85(45%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.79SD \pm 20.98$ with R.I.I of 6. 114(60%) of the respondents agreed that libraries should embark on Publication of current

collection (books, journals and special collections) while 77(40%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.82SD\pm25.50$ with R.I.I of 4. 69(36%) of the respondents agreed that the library should embark on Exhibition of current holdings of specialized resources while 122(64%) disagreed this gave a mean score of $2.29SD\pm25.86$ with R.I.I of 9.

Table 4: Factors that hinder user retention in FUTO library

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	SD±	Mean Score	R.I.I
Lack of constant power supply	78	16	81	16	36.68	2.82	2
Funds	34	21	102	34	36.68	2.29	6
Lack of qualified and skilled librarians	43	11	120	17	50.13	2.42	5
Lack of Internet connectivity	79	9	75	28	34.69	2.73	3
Inadequate infrastructure	76	42	42	31	19.53	2.85	1
Lack of adequate awareness on the use of library e-resources	64	8	67	52	27.28	2.44	4
Traditional attitude of librarians	29	13	72	77	31.64	1.97	7

The Table above reveals that 94(49%) of the respondents agreed that Lack of constant power supply is a factor that hinders users retention in FUTO Library, while 97(51%) is agreed this gave a mean score of $2.82SD\pm36.68$ with R.I.I. of 2. 55(29%) of the respondents are affirmative that funds is a factor that hinders users retention in FUTO library while 136(72%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.29SD\pm36.68$ with R.I.I of 6. 54(28%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Lack of qualified and skilled librarians is a factor that hinders users retention in FUTO library, while 137(72%) of the respondents disagreed. This gave a mean score of $2.42SD\pm50.13$ with R.I.I. of 5. 88(46%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Lack of Internet connectivity is a factor that hinders users retention in library, while 103(54%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $2.73SD\pm34.69$ with R.I.I of 3. 118(62%) of the respondents agreed that Inadequate infrastructure is a factor that hinders users retention in FUTO library while 73(38%) of the respondents disagreed this gave a mean score of $2.85SD\pm19.53$ with R.I.I of 1. 72(38%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Lack of adequate awareness on the use of library e-resources is a factor that hinders users retention in FUTO Library while 119(62%) disagreed this gave a mean score of $2.44SD\pm27.28$ with R.I.I. of 4. 42(22%) of the respondents are of the affirmative that Traditional attitude of librarians is a factor that hinders users retention while 149(78%) of the respondents disagreed, this gave a mean score of $1.97SD\pm31.64$ with R.I.I. of 7.

CONCLUSION

The study found that majority of FUTO library users expects the library to provide an open access database, provide an enabling environment with free flow of internet, create awareness of the open access resources available etc. Table 1 revealed that almost all the question items

listed are above 2.5 average mean score apart from the availability of social media services which scores below 2.5 average mean score.

From Table 2, it revealed that provisions of research commons, availability of constant internet facility and power, acquiring of secure ownership of digital content, through licenses to enrich user needs, incorporation of selected discrimination of information (SDI) for better information delivery to users, storage of resources content to local servers, updating and accessibility of database subscribed to by users, and users relationship management are very good retention strategies for the 21st century, that needs to be implemented or enhanced as all the question items listed were found to have a mean score above 2.5.

In table 3, all the question item listed were found to have a mean score above 2.5 apart from the exhibition of current holdings of specialized resources, which has a mean score of $2.29 < 2.50$ average mean score. Free internet access (Mean score=3.26, RII=1), expended computer libraries (Mean score =3.04, RII=2) and Open Access Database (Mean score=2.85, RII=3) were found to be topping the list of library users infrastructural needs.

Table 4 pointed out the basic factors that hinders users retention in FUTO Library, inadequate infrastructure(Mean score=2.85, RII=1), lack of constant power supply(mean score=2.82, RII=2), lack of internet connectivity (mean score=2.73, RII=3) were found to be topping the list of the factors that hinders users retention in FUTO library.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. The university library should strive to meet up with the basic library users needs
2. The university should put more effort in the aspect of power, as factor has been found reoccurring, both in users expectation, users retention strategy and factors that hinders users retention
3. Also availability of internet connectivity is very important especially in the 21st century, which almost every 21st century library users needs.
4. The university should subscribe to more open access databases and create awareness for student to know of their availabilities.
5. The university should try to create an enabling environment for the library users so as to make them feel very comfortable to study.

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