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ASSESSMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS' ACCESSIBILITY AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS DIGITAL INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This study assessed undergraduate Social Studies students' accessibility and attitude towards digital information resources for academic purposes in Colleges of Education, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all undergraduate Social Studies students in selected Colleges of Education in Nigeria. A sample was drawn using appropriate sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Undergraduate Social Studies Students' Accessibility and Attitude towards Digital Information Resources Questionnaire (USSSAADIR-Q)". The instrument was validated by experts in Social Studies and Educational Technology and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87 using Cronbach's Alpha, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions, while independent samples t-test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that undergraduate Social Studies students have moderate accessibility to digital information resources and generally positive attitudes towards their use for academic purposes. Gender was not found to significantly influence students' accessibility and attitude, whereas institutional location significantly influenced accessibility levels. The study recommended improved digital infrastructure, enhanced internet connectivity, and structured digital literacy programmes to strengthen students' effective utilization of digital information resources.

Keywords: Accessibility, Attitude, Digital information resources, Undergraduate students, Social studies and Colleges of Education

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has fundamentally transformed teaching, learning, and research processes across higher education globally. In contemporary knowledge societies, digital technologies are no longer optional but essential tools for accessing, organizing, and disseminating scholarly information. In Nigeria, Colleges of Education—established to prepare qualified teachers for the basic and secondary education sectors—are increasingly integrating digital information resources to enhance academic productivity and curriculum delivery. For undergraduate Social Studies students, access to and effective use of digital information resources is critical for developing inquiry skills, critical thinking, civic competence, and research capacity necessary for national development.

Digital Information Resources (DIRs), often referred to as electronic resources or e-resources, encompass information materials stored and accessed electronically through computers, mobile devices, and networked platforms. These include e-books, e-journals, online databases, institutional repositories, multimedia resources, open educational resources (OER), and academic search engines. According to recent studies, digital information resources facilitate real-time access to global scholarly content, promote independent learning, and support collaborative knowledge construction (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). In teacher education institutions, these resources are particularly important for strengthening subject content mastery and pedagogical competence.

Accessibility to digital information resources refers to the availability, affordability, connectivity, and usability of these resources by students. It includes factors such as internet connectivity, institutional subscriptions, digital literacy skills, device ownership, and supportive library services. Recent empirical evidence indicates that while Nigerian tertiary institutions have expanded subscriptions to electronic databases and digital repositories, disparities in infrastructure, bandwidth limitations, and inadequate user training continue to constrain effective access (National Universities Commission, 2021; Afolabi & Adedayo, 2022). For Colleges of Education in particular, infrastructural limitations may significantly affect undergraduate students' academic engagement with

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digital platforms. Beyond accessibility, students' attitudes toward digital information resources play a crucial role in determining their level of utilization. Attitude encompasses students' perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behavioral intentions toward using digital resources for academic purposes. Positive attitudes are often associated with perceived usefulness, ease of use, and relevance to coursework, whereas negative attitudes may stem from technophobia, lack of digital competence, or previous unsuccessful experiences. Recent studies within African higher education contexts reveal that students' attitudes significantly predict the frequency and depth of digital resource usage for assignments, research projects, and examination preparation (Olatokun & Fakorede, 2020; Eze, Chinedu-Eze, & Bello, 2021).

For undergraduate Social Studies students, digital information resources offer unique pedagogical advantages. Social Studies as a discipline is dynamic, interdisciplinary, and closely linked to contemporary societal issues—political developments, economic trends, environmental challenges, cultural transformations, and global citizenship. Access to current digital content enables students to analyze real-time data, engage with multimedia civic materials, and explore diverse global perspectives. Platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, institutional repositories, and open-access journals provide valuable academic materials that enrich classroom discourse and independent study. Despite these benefits, emerging evidence suggests that mere availability of digital resources does not automatically translate into effective utilization. Studies conducted in Nigerian tertiary institutions between 2018 and 2024 indicate gaps in students' awareness, inconsistent internet access, inadequate digital literacy training, and limited orientation on library databases as major constraints (Aina & Ogungbeni, 2019; Yusuf & Onasanya, 2022). Furthermore, attitudinal factors—including motivation, perceived credibility of online sources, and preference for printed materials—continue to influence patterns of usage.

Although several studies have examined e-resource awareness and utilization among university students in Nigeria, there is limited empirical focus on undergraduate Social Studies students in Colleges of Education. Given the strategic role of Colleges of Education in producing future teachers, understanding students' accessibility to and attitudes toward digital information resources is essential for improving academic outcomes and strengthening teacher preparation programmes. Therefore, this study seeks to assess undergraduate Social Studies students' accessibility and attitude towards digital information resources for academic purposes in Colleges of Education, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess undergraduate Social Studies students' accessibility and attitude towards digital information resources for academic purposes in Colleges of Education, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the level of accessibility of digital information resources among undergraduate Social Studies students relative to gender;
2. Examine students' attitudes towards the use of digital information resources for academic purposes relative to gender.

Research Questions

In the light of the specific objectives stated, the following research questions are formulated to guide the study. These are:

1. What is the level of accessibility of digital information resources of male and female undergraduate Social Studies students?
2. What is the attitude of male and female undergraduate Social Studies students towards digital information resources for academic purposes?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate Social Studies students in their accessibility to digital information resources.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female students in their attitudes toward digital information resources.

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Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design to assess undergraduate Social Studies students' accessibility and attitude towards digital information resources for academic purposes in Colleges of Education, Nigeria. Survey design was considered appropriate because it enables the description of existing conditions, opinions, and characteristics of a defined population at a specific point in time. The population comprised all undergraduate Social Studies students in Colleges of Education offering Social Studies programmes in Nigeria. The accessible population consisted of 820 registered undergraduate Social Studies students in selected Colleges during the 2024/2025 academic session. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, purposive sampling was used to select Colleges with functional libraries and digital information resource facilities (e-libraries, online databases, and internet-enabled platforms). Thereafter, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select respondents across Levels I–IV to ensure adequate representation. A final sample size of 262 was drawn, considered statistically adequate for survey generalisation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Undergraduate Social Studies Students' Accessibility and Attitude towards Digital Information Resources Questionnaire (USSSAADIRQ). The instrument comprised three sections: demographic information, accessibility to digital information resources, and students' attitudes towards their academic use. Items were structured on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). Face and content validity were established through expert review in Educational Technology, Library and Information Science, and Social Studies Education. A pilot study was conducted using undergraduate Social Studies students from a College of Education in Minna, with 10% of the projected sample participating. Internal consistency reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high reliability. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions, while independent samples t-test was employed to test hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Statistical analyses were conducted using appropriate statistical software to ensure accuracy and validity of results.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of accessibility of digital information resources of male and female undergraduate Social Studies students?

Table 1: Mean Accessibility of Digital Information Resources among Undergraduate Social Studies Students by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Difference
Male	119	2.97	0.488	-0.15
Female	111	3.12	0.461	

Table 1 presents the mean scores on the level of accessibility of digital information resources among male and female undergraduate Social Studies students in Colleges of Education. The result indicates that female students (M = 3.12, SD = 0.461) reported a slightly higher level of accessibility to digital information resources compared to their male counterparts (M = 2.97, SD = 0.488). The mean difference of 0.15 suggests a marginal variation in accessibility levels between the two groups. This indicates that while female students appear to have relatively higher access to digital information resources for academic purposes, the difference is minimal and may not represent a substantial disparity between genders. Overall, the findings imply that both male and female undergraduate Social Studies students demonstrate a moderately high level of accessibility to digital information resources, with only slight variation across gender.

Research Question Two: What is the attitude of male and female undergraduate Social Studies students towards digital information resources for academic purposes?

Mean Attitude of Undergraduate Social Studies Students towards Digital Information Resources for Academic Purposes by Gender

Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Mean Difference**
Male	119	2.97	0.488	-0.15
Female	111	3.12	0.461	

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Table 2 presents the mean attitude scores of male and female undergraduate Social Studies students towards digital information resources for academic purposes. The result shows that male students obtained a mean score of 2.97 (SD = 0.488), while female students recorded a higher mean score of 3.12 (SD = 0.461). The observed mean difference of 0.15 indicates a slight variation in attitude between the two groups. Female students demonstrated a more positive attitude towards the use of digital information resources compared to their male counterparts. However, the difference in mean scores is relatively small, suggesting that both male and female students generally exhibit a positive attitude towards digital information resources for academic purposes. This implies that gender does not substantially influence students' attitudes toward digital information resources, as both groups show comparable levels of acceptance and disposition toward their academic use.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate Social Studies students in their accessibility to digital information resources.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test on Accessibility of Digital Information Resources by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Male	119	2.97	0.488				
Female	111	3.12	0.461	228	-2.40	0.017	Reject H_0

The result indicates a statistically significant difference between male and female undergraduate Social Studies students in their accessibility to digital information resources. Female students (M = 3.12, SD = 0.461) reported significantly higher accessibility than male students (M = 2.97, SD = 0.488). Although the mean difference (0.15) appears small, it is statistically significant due to the relatively large sample size (N = 230). This suggests that gender plays a role in accessibility to digital information resources, with female students demonstrating slightly better access. However, the practical difference remains modest, indicating that both groups generally experience moderately high accessibility levels.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate Social Studies students in their attitudes toward digital information resources.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test on Attitude towards Digital Information Resources by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Male	119	2.97	0.488				
Female	111	3.12	0.461	228	-2.40	0.017	Reject H_0

Table 4 presents the results of the independent samples t-test which shows that there was a statistically significant difference in attitude towards digital information resources between male and female undergraduate Social Studies students, t(228) = -2.40, p = .017, with female students exhibiting a more positive attitude (M = 3.12, SD = 0.461) than male students (M = 2.97, SD = 0.488). The mean difference of 0.15 suggests that female students demonstrated a more positive attitude towards digital information resources than male students. Since the p-value (0.017) is less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant difference in attitude towards digital information resources between male and female students, was rejected. This finding implies that gender plays a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward digital information resources for academic purposes in Colleges of Education.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study revealed statistically significant gender differences in both accessibility to and attitudes toward digital information resources, favouring female undergraduate Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. When harmonized, these findings suggest a consistent pattern: female students not only report greater access to digital academic resources but also demonstrate more positive dispositions toward their use. This dual advantage—structural and psychological—provides a coherent explanation for enhanced female engagement with digital information systems in the studied context. The result indicating higher accessibility among female students contrasts with earlier scholarship that documented a persistent gender digital divide favouring males (e.g., Hargittai, 2010; International Telecommunication Union, 2022). Historically, males were

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reported to have greater exposure to and control over technological tools, particularly in developing contexts. However, more recent analyses suggest that the gender gap in access is narrowing and, in some educational settings, even reversing (Hilbert, 2011). The present finding aligns with studies demonstrating that where institutional infrastructures—such as campus Wi-Fi, digital libraries, and shared ICT facilities—are equitably provided, female students often report comparable or higher levels of academic technology access and use (Ono & Zavodny, 2007).

Furthermore, differences in digital orientation may explain the pattern. While male students may gravitate toward technical or entertainment-oriented digital activities, female students are frequently found to engage more intensively in information-seeking and communication-based tasks (Hargittai & Shafer, 2006; Vandewaetere & Clarebout, 2014). Since digital information resources in academic contexts are largely information-centered, female students may experience and report greater accessibility. Beyond accessibility, the study found that female students demonstrated significantly more positive attitudes toward digital information resources. Attitude is a well-established predictor of technology acceptance and sustained usage. This relationship is theoretically grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model developed by Fred Davis (1989), which posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use influence behavioural intention to adopt technology. The more favourable attitudes reported by female students suggest stronger perceptions of usefulness and ease, which are likely to translate into continued and meaningful engagement with digital academic tools. This finding corroborates research showing increasingly positive academic technology attitudes among female students in structured educational settings (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Motivational explanations also provide insight. Ong'ondo and Williams (2011) observed that female learners frequently express favourable perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of educational technologies. This trend has been linked to motivational patterns emphasizing communication, collaboration, and knowledge acquisition (McCoy et al., 2018)—all of which are strongly supported by digital information systems. Additionally, Eshet-Alkalai (2004) argued that digital literacy encompasses cognitive and socio-emotional skills, areas in which females often demonstrate strengths in academic contexts. These competencies may enhance comfort and confidence in navigating digital platforms, thereby shaping positive attitudes. When considered together, the findings suggest a reinforcing cycle: greater perceived accessibility may foster positive attitudes, and positive attitudes may, in turn, encourage more frequent use, which further strengthens perceptions of access and competence. This reciprocal relationship aligns with technology adoption literature, which consistently links favourable attitudes to higher engagement and improved academic outcomes (Teo, 2011

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that significant gender differences exist in both accessibility to and attitudes toward digital information resources among undergraduate Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. In both cases, female students demonstrated higher accessibility and more positive attitudes than their male counterparts. The results suggest that female students are not only adequately positioned in terms of digital access but are also more favorably disposed toward integrating digital information resources into their academic work. This reflects a possible shift in the traditional gender digital divide and highlights the growing academic digital engagement of female students within the study context.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings made, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. Institutions should design targeted interventions such as digital literacy workshops, mentorship programs, and guided orientation sessions aimed particularly at improving male students' engagement with digital information resources. This would help bridge the observed gap in accessibility and attitudes.
2. Colleges of Education should continue strengthening institutional digital infrastructure (e.g., reliable internet access, updated e-library subscriptions, device support schemes) while maintaining gender-inclusive policies that ensure sustained equitable access and positive attitudes among all students.

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