

## **RESEARCH SUPPORT SERVICES: ENABLING POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH IN DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY, ABRAKA**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The mission of every academic library is to create an enabling environment that supports research. This study explored the perception of postgraduate students towards research support services offered by the Delta State University Library, Abraka, Nigeria. A population of 190 postgraduate students from six faculties were surveyed using the accidental sampling technique. A questionnaire was designed to collect data for the study. Data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages and mean. The main findings of the study showed that postgraduate students are involved in research activities, however they are unaware of the availability of research support services in the university library. They are of the opinion that, research support services are highly relevant to their research activities, however, they do not visit the university library often. The study recommended that, more intense user education programmes targeted specifically for postgraduate students to improve their library awareness.

**Key Words: Research Support Services, University library, Postgraduate Students, Delta State University, Abraka**

### **Introduction**

One of the major parameters for ranking the strength of any university in today's academic space, is research. Research is so important that it is believed to be the oil that lubricates the engine of human advancement and development. Padhan and Naidu (2022) rightly stated that research is the base on which development of the world is founded. Among those who are part of research activities in any academic environment are Post Graduate (PG) students. According to Ogunsola and Adewole (2021), is anyone studying a postgraduate course such as, a master's degree course, an M.Phil. and a PhD that requires an undergraduate degree as part of the entry criteria. PG students are also defined as a group of students that have passed through undergraduate stage or first degree

education and are now facing a higher level of studies which connotes higher academic responsibilities. They are often regarded as mature students who are focused, interested in their area of study and full of enthusiasm (Onifade, Ogbuiyi & Omeluzor, 2013). PG education is mainly research based and is focused on research training that are meant to bring about development and provide solution to humanity's problems. It therefore becomes important for PG students to have adequate access to the type of support that will facilitate their research.

In the university, an academic library is established to carry out three traditional functions; support teaching, learning and research (Ducas, Michaud-Oystryk & Speare, 2020). It is the responsibility of the library to facilitate research activities for researchers. This, the library does by providing effective, efficient and relevant services to all categories of users including researchers. Today, driven by the need to remain relevant in the academic community, the kind of services that academic libraries provide are goal driven, specific and focused. Tagged research support services, these are a group of academic library services grouped together because of the emerging trend in supporting research. According to Si, Zeng, Guo, and Zhuang (2019), research support services in academic libraries is the future. These are services that have evolved as a response to provide valuable services that support researchers, foster collaboration between the library and the research community. Modern academic libraries are pursuing research support services mainly because they aim meet specific research needs and provide researchers of any category the kind of library services that makes their research activity easier throughout their research process

In response to these research needs, the Delta State University Library, Abraka, Nigeria, introduced some new services geared specifically towards supporting researchers in the university. While, it has been observed by several authors in Nigeria, that most PG students hardly make use

of academic libraries for their research activities (Madu, Aboyade, & Ajayi, 2019; Bokoh, Ajiboye, & Bello, 2023; and Okwu, Oladokun, Enejoh & Dauda, 2023), little is known of the extent to which PG students take advantage of these research support service available in the university's library and their perception towards these services. This study therefore, aims to survey

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the research activities of PG students at Delta State University, Abraka?
2. To what extent are PG students aware of research support services in the university library?
3. To what extent is research support services in the university library relevant to PG students?
4. How often do PG students use research support services in the university library?
5. What are the challenges associated with research support services usage by postgraduate students?

### **Review of Literature**

Post graduate education is research driven. With students being required to carry out in-depth research in their fields of study and specializations, during their course work or during their final work (thesis and dissertations) writing. Based on this, Madu, Aboyade and Ajayi (2019) stated that the importance of having university libraries as research laboratories whose roles are to drive research activities has become inevitable because today's researchers are exposed to overabundant information, hence, it becomes necessary for academic libraries to render services, such as research consultation, research guides, research tools recommendation, etc., which directly caters for research needs. It is therefore safe to assume that through various research support services, the research challenges of postgraduate students could be mitigated.

Hoffman (2016) defined research support services as any action taken by a library to aid in the scholarly and research endeavours of its parent organisation. They are also regarded as a set of services, tools and facilities that aim to facilitate research tasks (Delgado-Vázquez, 2021). Fischer, Halm and Koltay (2021) explained that research support services are that set of services, provided by a unit of a higher education institution (e.g. the library) that allows academics should concentrate on their research tasks by allocating less time to non-research-related activities. Services could include helping with publication procedures, finding and acquiring scholarly material, and archiving and sharing research findings.

Ideally, research support services are designed to address researchers' information needs. Some studies have reported on the extent to which some university libraries are providing these services to facilitate researchers work. Si, Zeng, Guo, and Zhuang (2019) proposed that there are seven broad categories into which research support services can be placed. They are, research data management services, open access related services, scholarly publishing services, research impact measurement, research guides, research consultation and research tools recommendation services.

Hanif, Ahmed and Sabzwari (2018) listed the research support services offered by university libraries in Pakistan to include, searching literature, writing/publishing research process, statistical software, bibliographic/citation management service and data management services. The majority of university libraries in Punjab provide access to online and printed information resources, conducive learning environment, current awareness service (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI), information and research literacy instructions (Ali & Naveed, 2020). According to Santharooban (2022), the library of Eastern University, Sri Lanka provides research support services that focused more on training the undergraduates in research related aspects by organizing a series of sessions on students' requests. Additionally, the library has

launched an individual research consultation service where researchers can meet with library staff one-on-one or in groups to receive one-on-one help with their research. The feedback analysis from the study revealed that students were extremely thankful for these services. because of its usefulness. Findings from the study of Padhan (2022) reveal that although India's Higher Educational Institution (HEI) libraries have adequate access to resources from institutional repositories, database of theses & dissertations, and faculty research profiles, however, research support tools and services were not given adequate visibility on the library's websites.

At the Redeemer's University and the Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency in Nigeria, majority of the researchers were seen to moderately use research support services provided by the library. The researchers at different levels had access to Internet services (85.9%), library print resources (74.3%) and library e-resources (66.7%). There were no records of support services that covered aspects of interlibrary loans, training workshop on database and bibliographic services (76.9%) (Adeniran & Oyovwevotu, 2019). While Anyim (2018) noted that universities in Kogi state, Nigeria, grouped research support services into e-library resources and service and they were rendered to a minimum extent. On a much wider scale, Osadebe, and Okwor (2021) looked at research support services from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Pretoria, South Africa and University of Nairobi, Kenya. Their study revealed that these academic libraries offer a variety of services, including free internet access and intuitive repository administration. In some of the academic libraries, services for research were grouped under headings such as online services and they were access remotely through the internet, local area network or through a visit to the physical library.

## **Methods**

The study is a descriptive survey. The population of the study comprised of over 10,000 PG students in Delta State University as of the 2023/2024 academic year (Office of the Secretary to Postgraduate School). Adopting the accidental sampling technique, PG students were selected from six out of the thirteen faculties in the university to take part in the study. These students were approached after their lectures and their consent to be part of the study was sought before the instruments were administered to them. A total of 190 students participated in the study. The questionnaire used for the study was a self-developed instrument that was divided into six sections. Section one of the questionnaire asked respondent’s biodata, Section two was on the research activities of PG students, Section three and four focused on retrieving information about awareness and relevance of research support services. Section five and six was on frequencies and challenges of research support services use by PG students. Responses was agreed and disagreed, while a four-point scale of strongly agreed (4), agreed (3), disagreed (2) and strongly disagreed (1) was used to measure the question on extent of awareness. Criterion mean score was set at 2.50. Data collection involved the use of two research assistants and this was done within a one-month period. Of the 190 questionnaires distributed, 141 were returned and found usable for the study. This gave a response rate of 72.4%. The data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages and Mean.

**Results**

**Table 1: Sample Size of Breakdown Respondents**

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>No of PG students</b>	<b>% of PG students</b>
Faculty of Arts	21	15
Faculty of Basic medical sciences	15	10.6
Faculty Education	36	25.5
Faculty of Sciences	27	19.2
Faculty of Management Science	33	23.4
Faculty of Law	9	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 presents the faculty breakdown of the respondents. Faculty of Education has the most respondents with 36 (25.5%) of the respondents. Next is 33 (23.4%) from the Faculty of Management Sciences and Faculty of Science 27(19.2%). Faculty of Law had the fewest number of responses with 9 (6.3%).

**Table 2: Biodata of Respondents**

<b>Biodata</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	78	55.3
Female	63	44.7
<b>Level</b>		
700 (PGD)	24	17
800 (MSc/MBA)	66	46
900 (PhD)	51	37
<b>Category of Programme</b>		
Fulltime	82	58
Part time	59	42

Table 2 shows the biodata characteristics of respondents. Most OG students are males 78 (55.3%) and 63 (44.7%) are females. Implying that there are more males than females in the PG programmes. Majority 66 (46%) of the PG students are studying for a Masters degree, 51 (37%) are studying for their PhD degrees and 24 (17%) are studying for a Post Graduate diploma. As regards the category of programme, 82 (58%) indicated that they are running full time programmes.

**Research Question 1:** What are the research activities of PG students at Delta State University, Abraka?

**Table 3: PG Students Research Activities**

<b>Research Activity</b>	<b>Agree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Paper presentations at Scientific seminars and conferences	23	16.3	118	83.7
Book review sessions	9	6.3	132	93.6
Scientific and scholarly publishing	92	65	49	35
Thesis and dissertation writing	99	70	42	30

Course work seminar papers	103	73	38	27
Art exhibitions	9	6.3	132	93.6

Table 3 shows that majority 103 (73%) of the PG students are mostly involved in seminar paper writing, 99 (70%) students are involved in writing their thesis or dissertations and 92 (65%) are involved in writing for scientific and scholarly publishing. Book reviews and art exhibitions 9 (6.3%) were the least of the research activities that PG students are involved in.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent are PG students aware of research support services in the university library?

**Table 4: PG Students’ Awareness of Research Support Services in the University Library**

Awareness	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Internet service services	12	61	47	21	2.45
Inter library loan services	23	11	78	29	2.19
Computer use service	52	21	57	12	<b>2.81</b>
Ref/Information services	34	25	46	36	2.40
Training workshop on database	15	15	35	76	1.78
Dedicated research spaces in the library (research commons)	76	34	11	30	<b>3.42</b>
Literature search service	28	22	56	35	2.30
Plagiarism check service	19	10	76	36	2.08
Data analysis services	0	0	73	68	1.51
Photocopying service	54	40	18	29	<b>2.84</b>
Binding service	49	35	22	35	<b>2.69</b>
Document delivery services	19	10	76	36	2.08
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>					<b>2.37</b>

**Criterion Mean** **2.37 ≥ 2.50**

The aggregate mean scores of 2.37 is less than the stipulated criterion means score of 2.50. This shows that PG students are not aware of the research support services available to them in the university library. This is evident in the low mean scores attributed to most of the research support services listed. For instance, the lack awareness of the availability of internet service services in the library (2.45), inter library loan services (2.19), data analysis services (1.51) and database use trainings (1.78). Some services however recorded high awareness levels, such as, dedicated



research spaces in the library (research commons) (3.42), photocopying service (2.84), computer use service (2.81) and book binding services (2.69).

**Research Question 3:** To what extent is research support services in the university library relevant to PG students?

**Table 5: Relevance of Research Support Services in University Library to PG Students**

	HR	R	MR	NT	Mean
Internet service	87	41	10	3	3.50
Inter library loan services	36	42	12	51	2.44
Computer use service	71	36	30	4	3.23
Ref/Information services	34	53	24	30	2.64
Training workshop on Database	73	30	31	6	3.19
Dedicated research spaces in the library (research commons)	48	20	4	69	2.33
Literature search service	85	37	11	8	2.92
Plagiarism check service	68	29	44	0	3.17
Data analysis services	81	22	30	8	3.24
Photocopying service	42	42	45	12	2.80
Binding service	49	41	43	8	2.92
Scholarly publishing recommendation,	62	45	30	4	3.17
Document delivery services	24	15	65	37	1.95
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>					<b>2.88</b>

**Criterion Mean**

**2.88 ≤ 2.50**

Table 5 shows an aggregate Mean score of 2.88, which implies that PG students believe that services for research support are important to them. This is evident in the high mean scores for most of the services listed. the three most relevant services are internet services (3.50), data analysis services (3.24) and training workshop on database use services (3.19). The least relevant services to the PG students are document delivery (1.95) and research spaces in the library.

**Research Question 4:** How often do PG students use research support services in the university library?

**Table 6: Frequency of use of Research Support Services by PG students**

Use	Frequency	%
Daily	11	8
Weekly	8	5.6
Monthly	23	16.4

Occasionally	64	45.3
Not at all	35	24

Presented in Table 6 is the frequency with which PG students make use of research support services in the university library. Majority which is, 64 (45.3%) occasionally make use of these services. 35 (24%) claimed not to make use of research support services at all, while monthly users are 23 (16.4%).

**Research Question 5:** What are the challenges associated with research support services usage by postgraduate students?

**Table 7: Challenges to Research Support Usage by PG Students**

Challenges	Agree		Disagree	
	No	%	No.	%
Poor Internet Access	82	58	59	42
Opening Hours	20	14	121	86
Uncomfortable Space for PG students	33	23.4	108	76.6
Lack of time	72	51	69	49
Obsolete ICT facilities	70	49.6	71	50.3
Electricity outage	69	49	72	51
Inadequate orientation exercise to crate awareness for PG students	78	55.3	63	44.7
Unpleasant library staff	31	22	106	78
Obsolete library information resources	50	35.4	91	64.6
Location of library building	77	54.6	64	45.4

Table 7 highlighted the challenges faced by PG students with regards to research support services. The major challenge identified as indicated by the PG students was poor internet connectivity 82 (58%). Next, 78 (55.3%) stated that inadequate orientation exercise for PG students to be aware of research support service was a challenge, while 77 (54.6%) stated that the location of library building was a challenging factor. Others, 70 (49.4%) cited obsolete ICT and 69 (49%) stated that electricity outage was also a challenge to their use of research support services.

## **Discussion of Findings**

PG students are being trained to be researchers and as such this study sought to identify the research activities that the students studying in the university were mostly involved in. Their response showed that majority of them were involved in seminar paper writing. Next to this is thesis or dissertations writing and followed by writing of papers for scientific and scholarly publishing. This result is not surprising because seminar writing and oral presentation is a requisite course for most PG students in the university, it is one of the first ways through which students are gradually introduced into research writing along with physical oral presentation to peers and a department-based panel of examiners. In addition, the result on scientific paper writing may not be unconnected to the university's PG policy on adequately supervised research from PG students, which has to be published in a reputable and peer reviewed journal before graduation. This is with the view of improving not only the research skills of PG students but also to improve the research visibility of the university. This result confirms an earlier report by Desmennu and Owoaje (2018) that almost all the PG students had high interest for research development and implementation and that they were interested in conducting research because it constituted a major part of the generic and existing doctoral programme. On the other hand, this finding is not consistent with that of Razeghi (2019) who observed that PG students in Iran did not have a high level of research activities, with almost 70% of them indicating attendance for seminars and scientific conferences as "little" and "very little".

## **PG Students' Awareness of Research Support Services in the University Library**

The aggregate mean score of 2.37 reveals a low level of research support service awareness by PG students. This implies that PG students do not have the knowledge of the existence of most

of the university library services available to help them carry out their research activities. A close look at the Table shows that PG students are only aware of dedicated research spaces in the library (research commons) for PG students, photocopying services, computer use services and book binding services. Whereas they indicated low awareness for services such as internet service, inter library loan, data analysis and database use trainings. This finding does not agree with some earlier findings such as Maria (2019), where their studies revealed that the postgraduate students were aware of the various services provided by the university libraries in different parts of Nigeria.

### **Relevance of Research Support Services in University Library to PG Students**

The study was interested in the opinion of PG students about how relevant they perceive that services for research support are important. PG students are of the opinion that research support services are highly relevant to their research activities. For instance, internet services, data analysis and training workshop on database use services and plagiarism check services are all rated as highly relevant. This result shows the importance PG students attach to the availability of internet services in the university library. Modern libraries can only be taken seriously when there is free internet service available for users, this will be one of the attractions that might draw students to the university library. This affirms a study carried out on PG students in University of Benin by Adeyemi and Oluwabiyi (2013) where students highly rated the library as a gateway for learning and research and that the library enables them to be more efficient in their research in publishing their research work. Similarly, Bokoh Ajiboye and Bello (2023) also found that PG students in federal universities in Southwest Nigeria affirmed that library services are crucial in postgraduate studies in order to achieve their academic objectives. The study by Agboola, Bamigboye and Owolabi (2019) indicated that, although the PG students at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta felt the resources and services of the library were adequate and relevant,

they however revealed that they mostly used personal modem for internet service and were not satisfied accessibility to electronic databases.

### **Frequency of use of Research Support Services by PG students**

The study was curious to find out how often PG students visited the university library to make use of research support services. Finding showed that PG students are occasional and monthly library users. The implication here is that majority of the PG students do not use the library on a regular basis even as fulltime students and they are expected to be on ground for their studies. This is poor and may explain why they are not aware of the numerous research support they can have access to from the university library. This is similar to the findings of Okwu, Oladokun, Enejoh and Dauda, (2023) where these authors observed that PG students in Nigeria universities were not frequent users of the university library which may be detrimental to their efforts in research activities.

### **Challenges to Research Support Usage by PG Students**

It was also important to gain some insights into the kind of challenges associated with the use of research support services by PG students. Majority of the respondents identified poor internet connectivity as a challenge. While some pointed to the fact that inadequate orientation exercise for PG students to be aware of research support service was a challenge, others cited inadequate orientation exercise for PG students, that lack of time to visit the library and the library's location was a challenge to their use of research support services. The implication of this results is that two of most prominent challenges to the use of research support services are library based. After ensuring that research support services are put in place too support researchers, the library must have adequate internet access and also tell potential library users about the services for optimal utilization. This study's finding agrees with that of Onanuga, Ilori and Kusoro (2020)

where they reported that constraints to the use of library included absence of regular orientation programmes for the postgraduate students, irregular ICT training and inadequate desktop computers to access databases.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Carrying out research is an important part of the PG study at the Delta State University. Hence, the efficiency with which they undertake every research task in front of them is crucial. While the university library makes effort to support the PG students in their research activities. The study showed that they are well informed of the relevance of these research support services to their research activities, therefore, it is important the PG students are made aware of the availability of these services. In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The management of the university library must improve the drive for improved internet access in the university library, as this is a major determinant of research support services success in any modern research environment.
2. Adequate funding should be provided for library facilities and operations. When sufficient fund is made available, electronic resources, ICT facilities and functional alternative power supply would be procured.
3. User education programmes should be improved upon and extended with the postgraduate students in mind. This will enhance their level of awareness of the library facilities and services that could aid their research activities.

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