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## Exploring the Dynamics of French Language Acquisition and Leveraging Open Access Journals' e-Resources: A Case Study in Higher Institutions' Libraries across the North-West Zone of Nigeria

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### Abstract

The integration of e-resources in language learning and higher education is an essential development, yet it remains underutilised in the North-West Zone of Nigeria. This paper investigates the dynamics of French language acquisition alongside the adoption of open-access journals in university libraries within this region. It addresses the challenges hindering effective e-resource utilisation, such as limited awareness, insufficient technical skills, and financial constraints. Through a qualitative and comparative methodology that encompasses questionnaires and consultations, the study evaluates the role of e-libraries and virtual libraries, the advantages and varieties of open-access journals, and the barriers to employing e-resources. Specific issues identified include slow internet speeds, inadequate ICT infrastructure, multilingualism, and access to educational materials. Findings from the research emphasize that the use of e-resources greatly facilitates research, education, and industry needs. Insights from analogous studies in Nigeria underscore the significance of promoting e-resource usage in academic settings. The study concludes with essential recommendations towards improving the scenario – advocating for broader database subscriptions, enhanced user training, remote access provision, learning management system integration, and more extensive collaboration and open access initiatives. It calls for government support and infrastructure amelioration to make e-resources more accessible and effectively utilised in higher education. This research contributes to a better understanding of language acquisition dynamics and delineates ways in which open access resources can enrich educational experiences.

**Keywords:** e-resources, open-access journals, higher education, ICT infrastructure, e-libraries

### Introduction

Technology has touched every aspect of life and it has reached every corner of the globe. The use of technology is achieved in different ways and different forms. It can be achieved through e-Commerce economically, e-Banking in banking sectors, and e-Learning in the process of teaching-learning. On this basis, the need for provision and accessing educational material for learning arise such as books, gazettes, journals for further research that involves the provision of e-Resources to ease the task using technology. According to (Caroline, et al., 56) “an effective library system is an essential requirement for research and development in every field of study”. With the transformation of normal activities to virtual or electronic, technology that transforms educational activities into electronic. Electronic is abbreviated as e with hyphen attached to the word or field as indicated above in e-commerce, e-banking, or e-learning. In the teaching-learning process, there are a lot of technologies involved in terms of the resources available, the materials to use, the tools and even the medium of accessing them.

Academically, tools, materials in terms of teaching-learning are channeled through using e-Library technology. e-Library is the powerhouse of academics and the society at large; as there is no field of endeavour that is not available in the library. It involves documents, materials, gazettes, newspapers, media, books, journals and articles. Furthermore,

“the library enables the individual to obtain spiritual, inspirational, and recreational activity through reading, and therefore the opportunity of interacting with the society’s wealth and accumulated knowledge”, (Caroline et al., 56). With the advancement of technology, all these are currently transformed either using digitisation or designed electronically to e-books, e-journals, e-newspapers that are used via the internet with devices like computers or smartphones. The e-Resources can only be accessed through the Internet within or outside the

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institution and with permission of access or download via e-Library. The researchers can add that “experiences from the new information order have shown that a library’s collection is no longer confined within the library’s building, rather they are found across states, nations and the virtual information world epitomised by the World Wide Web”, (Uche et al 2).

e-Resource is used to refer to electronic resources, which are digital or online materials that provide information or support various activities. These resources can cover a wide range of formats and content types and are accessible through electronic devices, such as computers, tablets, or smartphones. E-resources have become increasingly prevalent with the advent of digital technology and the internet. They include, but are not limited to:

Electronic Journals (E-journals): Digital versions of traditional print journals that are accessible online.

- i. E-books are digital versions of books that can be read on electronic devices.
- ii. Databases are collections of organised and searchable information, often containing articles, research papers, and other scholarly materials.
- iii. Online Reference Work are digital encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and other reference materials available on the internet.
- iv. Multimedia Content is a digital content that includes audio, video, animations, and interactive elements.
- v. Websites are various online platforms that provide information and resources on specific topics.
- vi. Educational Software is a digital tools and applications designed for educational purposes.

E-resources play a crucial role in research, education, and various industries, providing convenient and efficient access to information. Libraries, universities, research institutions, and businesses often subscribe to or provide access to a variety of e-resources to support their users in gathering information, conducting research, and staying updated on developments in their respective fields.

Most users are not conversant with Open Access (OA) exist and the few that knows it is underutilising it. E-Resources are not affordable due to data breakage, unacceptability and impatience in some cases. Users are inexperienced in the use of e-resources. The experienced users become skeptical and scarce in the dissemination of the knowledge. It is against this background that there is a need for this study. The researchers need to sensitise staff and students to have skills of e-Resources and on the availability, accessibility of e-Resources in the Library. Libraries are invested in increasing access to resources by making resources more coverable. Many libraries have implemented discovery layers that enable users to easily locate most of a library’s materials which include open access, (Verminski 23).

### **e-Resources and its usage in Teaching-Learning of French language**

There are indigenous languages in African and Nigeria but most countries adopt colonial masters’ languages such as English, French and Spanish languages. These are referred to as Foreign Languages and in terms of learning, they become second language acquisition since there are native languages

like Hausa for example which is dominantly spoken in the Northern part of Nigeria. In terms of zoning, the North has three zones: the North-East, North-Central and North-West.

So, there is no field of human endeavour that is not found in the Library. e-Library is a transformation of a hybrid library through digitisation. Digitisation is the process of converting analogue documents into electronic format. Language plays a vital role in the arrangement, management and cataloguing of e-Library. Foreign languages are part and parcel of the Library where English, French and other languages have roles to play and their section in the library.

All e-libraries are managed and maintained by the management of their institution and these institutions are funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria. As funding is now becoming insufficient in terms of internet access, bandwidth, e-Resources management and connectivity in higher institutions. This made it difficult for the maintenance, upgrade and provision of e-resources within and outside institutions. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is trying to make alternative arrangements through the recently commissioned Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN) which is supposed to be a consortium arrangement for providing e-resources and services for Nigerian tertiary education (Atah 2014).

The application of Information technology changes the way institutions access the material resource from print to non-print materials. e-Resources are channeled through e-Library, knowing and understanding how to access these resources is of paramount importance. It becomes a fundamental part of researchers and users of the resources. Some e-Resources available for the learning category are Massive Open Online Course (henceforth, MOOC), courseware, e-Books, e-Journals, Software, e-Articles, Theses and Dissertation, Polytechnics and Universities. The academic and non-academic staff of the said institutions are aware of the e-resources and databases but their usage accesses are the challenge. In addition to academic activities, one can have an online meeting, webinars, online conference, online course, virtual Faculty Development Programme (henceforth, FDPs). Resources. e- resources “are here to stay, and as their technologies continue to change and improve, so will the technical specifications for access”, (Verminski 12). With this, the idea of age and educational level should not be an issue.

Teaching-learning is undergoing a blending or transfer in the recent year especially due to the Coronavirus pandemic that affected all aspects of life globally. And the transfer of knowledge by being a facilitator of Foreign Language Learning such as English and French languages and can be possible with collaborative curriculum designers, instructors, learners. FDP will contour these aspects to systemise and facilitate streamlining of Foreign Language teaching-learning in institutions of higher learning. The selected institutions started training and equipping their staff at all levels with facilities, strategies and tools on the e-Resources and using collaboration for the success of the transfer of teaching-learning against further occurrences. For instance, in terms of virtual teaching-learning, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto reintroduced the use of moodle through [www.moodle.udusok.edu.ng](http://www.moodle.udusok.edu.ng).

Some researches were conducted on the field such as Caroline et al. (2018), Mwantinwa, et al. (2017), and Aladeniyi (2017). Caroline et al., (2018), Libraries provide resources for knowledge acquisition, recreation, personal interests and inter-personal relationships for all categories of users. It enables the individual to obtain spiritual, inspirational, and recreational activities through reading, and therefore the opportunity of interacting with the society's wealth and accumulated knowledge. This study examined the undergraduate students' use of University library services and resources. It was affirmed the undergraduate utilised the University Libraries as a learning centre. This was shown by the massive turnout to patronise the library services and resources weekly.

Mwantinwa et al., (2017) researched to compare the use of electronic information resources in selected universities in Tanzania and employed a mixed methods research approach to collecting, processing, analysing data and discussing the resultant findings. The researchers selected 119 academic staff and researchers that participated in the study and used SPSS and STATA for data analysis. They found out that the majority of academic staff and researchers were aware of, have access to and utilise e-resources to support teaching and research. In fact, most of the e-resources the selected higher learning institutions subscribed to through COTUL were under-utilised. The educational level of academic staff and researchers are predictors of e-resources usage. Though the access has some challenges and problems that deter the effective utilisation of e-resources were include slow internet connectivity, inability to access full-text articles, unreliable power supply, inaccessibility of e-resources outside university premises due to IP address limitations, inadequate ICT infrastructure and inadequate skills and knowledge. The study found that there was a need to promote the usage of e-resources through web technologies to enhance the quality of teaching and research. So besides Nigeria, other countries are facing issues and there is a need for promoting the usage of e-resources in higher institutions.

For Aladeniyi (2017), The study surveyed the use of e-journals by academic staff of Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. A questionnaire was designed to gather information on the use of e-journals by the academic staff. Data gathered from the respondents were analysed through the use of a frequency table and percentage. From the analysis, it was discovered that all the academic staff use e-journals and it is used for different academic purposes. All the academic staff agrees to the use of e-journals for research purposes. It was also observed from the findings that most of the academic staff uses e-journals occasionally. The advantages derived from the use of e-journals were also revealed in the study. These include a good source of information, currency and timeliness of information, ease of access, ease of storage and time-saving. The study also identified some problems encountered by the academic staff while accessing e-journals. Among these problems were slow internet connectivity, frequent power outage and the high cost of a journal subscription. Recommendations were therefore given, this include the increase of internet bandwidth, reduction in the prize of articles on e-journals, payment of

subscription fee for e-journals by the management of the institution and making it available to their academic staff.

There are challenges of sharing e-resources among Nigeria higher institutions which include among others lack of awareness of the existence of resource sharing platforms, inadequate ICT facilities for resource sharing networking, absence of institutional repositories, high cost of Internet connectivity, lack of e-resource sharing policies/standards in the institutions, declining budgets for e-resources acquisition/licensing, slow rate of building local content for national and international access, uneven development of libraries in EIR acquisition and licensing, the inability of libraries to meet the minimum commitment required to join consortia, nationally and internationally poor bibliographic control of available e-resources by university libraries, insufficient bandwidth for easy access to the internet, lack of government support to universities on e-resource sharing and the inadequate number of librarians with web technology skills.

### **e-Learning**

Learning conducted via electronic media especially through access to the Internet is called e-Learning. Courses are offered 24 hours and 7 days a week by instructors, all you need is a computer that you can learn from anywhere in the world with Internet access to reduce the cost of travel, save time, increase workplace productivity to learn at home.

Some of its Importance includes flexibility and consistent training, interactive and hands-on, test, quality increase, efficient and easy to use exciting.

### **e-Library/ Virtual Library**

It provides resources to institutions of learning. There is no academic institution without Library. A library is an institution that holds and/or other forms of media for use by the public or qualified people often lending them out, as well as providing various other services for its users. It is usually in a non-printed form and other forms of stored information.

On one hand, e-Library is an equivalent collection of analogous information using software routines that provide the functionality to be incorporated into or used a computer program. Hard copies of library collections are converted to the digital collection through the process of digitisation along with digitally born resources to provide digital access to users. This digitisation process is costly as only rich institutions can afford the machines involved.

On the other hand, a virtual library is a system by which users can access information that resides only in electronic format on computer networks without any physical boundary of the information. Furthermore, "the ability to do so has an effect not only on how a library presents itself and markets its resources, but also how publishers and vendors design their platforms and databases for information retrieval" (Verminski 12). There is a difference between the two terms as e-Library primarily focuses on the electronic format of resources, while a Virtual Library extends to the overall online environment and services that simulate a physical library. It's worth noting that the terms may be used interchangeably in some contexts, and

the specific features and offerings can vary depending on the institution or organisation providing these services.

### **Open Access Journals**

OA is a set of principles and a range of practices through which research outputs are distributed online, free of cost or other access barriers. With OA strictly defined or libre open OA, barriers to copying or reuse are also reduced or removed by applying an open license for copyright. Some benefits are attached to the use of OA as several pieces of research prove that OA articles are viewed more often than articles that are only available to subscribers and above all are cited often. It has types that are gold, green and hybrid OA journals. The main target of OA is to make scientific and scholarly works of literature and materials freely accessible to all users.

OA also means that as long as “the original source is acknowledged and cited, readers are allowed to redistribute, re-use and adapt the content in new works (in accordance with the Creative Commons license selected)”, (Cambridge 2). OA has become an important way to make research findings freely available for anyone to access and view.

OA is a newer form of publishing model for research communication that make research information available to readers at no cost as opposed to the traditional model which readers pay for subscription usually via a library. It reduced permission requirements and eliminates price barriers for readers as proof that it receives more citations than subscription publications. It is a well-established peer-review processes and it maintains high publishing standards. OA can be in form of journals or books. Users prefer using hard copies in the study area and are not conversant with the OA material.

The higher institutions especially universities in the north-West zone are Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) – Zaria. ABU Library is the main library at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It is one of the largest academic libraries in Nigeria. Bayero University Kano (BUK). The university has a central library that serves as the main information resource center for the academic community. Usmanu Danfodiyo University (UDUS) – Sokoto. UDUS has a library that supports the teaching, research, and learning activities of the university. Federal University Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA) - Dutsin-Ma. The university, located in Katsina State, has a library that support academic activities.

### **Research Methodology**

The researchers apply comparative approach in the study through mixed-methods, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. A questionnaire is employed as a means of collecting data and surveys can be distributed to students and educators to gather quantitative data. Interviews and focus groups can provide qualitative insights and a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved.

The researchers consulted books, journals, resource persons in the field of library studies. Then, the researchers design a questionnaire through Google form so that the targeted staff and students are reached easily. The data is going to be collected from the selected institutions: Usmanu Danfodiyo

University, Sokoto, Federal University, Dutsinma, Katsina, Bayero University Kano, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. This will help the researchers in evaluating the usage of e-Resources in the above institutions’ libraries. The research used random sampling technique.

### **Research Findings**

However, the researchers can provide some general considerations and potential issues that are often relevant.

- i. Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country with many ethnic groups and languages. Language education programs in the North-West Zone should consider the multilingual nature of the region, aiming for inclusivity and effective language instruction that reflects the linguistic diversity.
- ii. Challenges related to access to quality education may exist, particularly in rural areas. Addressing issues such as infrastructure, teacher training, and community involvement is crucial for improving language education outcomes.
- iii. Availability and accessibility of library resources, including books and digital materials, may be uneven across the region. Efforts should be made to enhance library infrastructure, expand collections, and integrate technology for better resource management.
- iv. Embracing technology can enhance language education and library resource management. Digital platforms, e-books, and online resources can help bridge gaps and provide access to a broader range of materials.
- v. Involving local communities in the development of language education and library initiatives is essential. This ensures that programs are culturally relevant and meet the specific needs of the communities.
- vi. Continuous professional development for educators and librarians is crucial. Training programs can help them stay updated on effective teaching methodologies, information management, and the use of new technologies.
- vii. Supportive government policies play a significant role in the success of language education and library resource management. Adequate funding, clear guidelines, and policies that promote inclusivity and access to education are essential.

### **Recommendations**

The researchers suggest that the effective utilisation of e-resources in higher learning libraries in the North-West zone, or any region, can be enhanced through the implementation of various recommendations:

- i. Subscribe to a diverse range of academic databases covering multiple disciplines.
- ii. Include databases offering access to scholarly journals, e-books, conference proceedings, and relevant materials.
- iii. Conduct regular training sessions for students, faculty, and staff on efficient e-resource utilisation.

- iv. Provide online tutorials, guides, and workshops to assist users in navigating and maximising the benefits of digital resources.
- v. Ensure e-resources are accessible through user-friendly platforms compatible with various devices and operating systems.
- vi. Facilitate remote access to e-resources, especially for off-campus students and faculty.
- vii. Implement secure and user-friendly authentication systems for off-campus access.
- viii. Integrate e-resources into the university's Learning Management System (LMS) for seamless access within the online learning environment.
- ix. Regularly assess usage statistics to identify popular resources and address potential gaps.
- x. Use user feedback to enhance the collection and access methods continually.
- xi. Collaborate with publishers and vendors to negotiate favourable subscription terms and access to e-resources.
- xii. Implement robust digital preservation strategies to ensure the long-term availability and integrity of e-resources.
- xiii. Support and promote OA initiatives to increase the availability of scholarly content to a broader audience.
- xiv. Implement security measures to protect user data and ensure the privacy of individuals accessing e-resources.

By implementing these recommendations, libraries in the North-West zone can create a conducive environment for the effective use of e-resources, supporting the academic and research needs of their users.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical use of technology in e-learning and e-libraries, focusing on protecting user data and privacy, is discussed. Additionally, there's a call for educational institutions and policymakers to address disparities in access to e-resources, emphasising the need for inclusive strategies to bridge the digital divide.

### **Conclusion**

This research has illuminated the critical role that e-resources play in enhancing the quality and reach of education in higher institutions of learning, with a focus on Nigeria's North-West Zone. Libraries in these institutions are gateways to a wealth of information through e-journals, e-books, databases, and multimedia content, yet their potential remains underutilised due to challenges such as limited awareness, inadequate technical skills, and financial constraints.

The research has underscored the necessity for library staff to develop robust e-resource skills to overcome technical complexities and has highlighted the imperative of ongoing training and sensitisation for both educators and researchers. Addressing these challenges is key to fostering an environment that fully harnesses the potential of e-resources in teaching, research, and student learning.

Moreover, this study brings to light the transformative impact of e-learning platforms and virtual libraries. These innovations not only democratise access to information but also offer flexible and interactive pathways for knowledge acquisition, thereby contributing to enhanced workplace productivity and a more informed society.

Furthermore, the paper stresses the importance of OA journals, which serve to break down the barriers of knowledge dissemination by making research freely available to all. The practice of resource sharing among institutions emerges as a strategic solution to expand access to various e-resources, which could spearhead a revolution in collaborative learning and intellectual synergy.

While the research has thoroughly diagnosed the current state and offered valuable insights, it also prompts the necessity for future studies to track progress on the recommendations made and to explore new ways to facilitate the adoption of e-resources on a larger scale.

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### **Abbreviations**

FDP	-	Faculty Development Programme
MOOC	-	Massive Open Online Course
OA	-	Open Access
UDUS	-	Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto