

Availability, Management and Use of Serial Resources by Lecturers in Owerri Metropolis

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Abstract: *This study examines the availability, management, and utilization of serial resources by lecturers in Owerri metropolis, Nigeria. Serials comprising journals, conference proceedings, abstracts, magazines, and newspapers constitute the lifeblood of academic research and teaching, providing current and specialized information essential for scholarly productivity. Drawing on empirical studies conducted in Imo State universities, including Imo State University, Owerri, and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, the paper reveals a paradoxical situation: while serials are available to a considerable extent, their accessibility and actual utilization by lecturers remain significantly low. Key challenges include inadequate funding, poor storage facilities, insufficient personnel, erratic power supply, and limited awareness of available resources. The study recommends increased budgetary allocations, enhanced staff training, automation of serials management systems, and proactive awareness campaigns to bridge the gap between serial availability and utilization, thereby strengthening the research and teaching capacity of Nigerian university lecturers.*

Keywords: Serials management, availability, utilization, lecturers, university libraries, Owerri metropolis, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

University libraries exist fundamentally to support the tripartite mission of higher education institutions: teaching, research, and community service. At the heart of this support system lies the provision of current, reliable, and specialized information resources, among which serial publications occupy a position of paramount importance. Serials—defined as publications issued in successive parts, usually at regular intervals, and intended to be continued indefinitely—include scholarly journals, conference proceedings, abstracts, indexes, newsletters, magazines, and government publications (Tomomowo-Ayodele, 2018; Nutsupkui & Christopher, 2017). These resources are distinguished by their currency, timeliness, and capacity to disseminate cutting-edge research findings, making them indispensable tools for academic staff engaged in teaching, research, and scholarly communication.

The significance of serials in the academic enterprise cannot be overstated. As Ogunrombi (cited in Akerele et al., 2011) aptly observed, serials constitute the backbone of research and teaching in the academic world. They serve multiple functions: they keep lecturers abreast of developments in their fields, provide raw material for research and publication, offer content for curriculum development, and facilitate professional networking through scholarly discourse. Without adequate access to serial resources, lecturers' capacity to produce quality research, deliver contemporary instruction, and contribute to national development is severely compromised.

In Nigeria, the landscape of serial resources in university libraries presents a complex picture of promise and challenge. Studies have shown that while university libraries endeavor to acquire serial publications, a constellation of factors—including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, insufficient personnel, and limited technological capacity—constrains both the availability and accessibility of these resources (Agan, 2025; Anumkua, 2025). The Owerri metropolis, home to several tertiary institutions including Imo State University (IMSU) and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), provides a particularly instructive context for examining these dynamics. As a major educational hub in southeastern Nigeria, Owerri offers a microcosm of the broader challenges and opportunities facing serials management in Nigerian university libraries.

This paper investigates the availability, management, and use of serial resources by lecturers in Owerri metropolis. It draws on empirical studies conducted in the region, including research on serials accessibility and utilization in Imo State universities (MOUAU Repository, 2023), serials management practices at Imo State University Library (Research, 2018), and student utilization patterns in the Department of Library and Information Science at IMSU (Anumkua, 2025). By synthesizing these findings, the paper aims to identify systemic challenges and propose actionable recommendations for enhancing the contribution of serial resources to academic productivity in Owerri and beyond.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Serials in the Academic Context

Serials constitute a distinct category of information resources characterized by their periodicity, continuity, and currency. According to Tomomowo-Ayodele (2018), serials may be published weekly, fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or at other regular intervals, bearing numerical or chronological designations that distinguish successive parts. The International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) system further codifies this category, providing a unique identifier for each serial title regardless of its format or medium.

The typology of serials encompasses a wide range of publications. Scholarly journals represent the most prominent category, serving as primary vehicles for disseminating original research findings. Conference proceedings and transactions of learned societies capture the proceedings of academic gatherings, providing insights into emerging research directions. Abstracts and indexes facilitate access to the broader scholarly literature, while newsletters, magazines, and newspapers offer more general or professional content. Government publications, including parliamentary records, statistical reports, and policy documents, constitute another important category (Anumkua, 2025; Shaba, Owoye & Maimunat, 2024).

The Role of Serials in Academic Activities

The utility of serials for academic staff extends across the full spectrum of their professional responsibilities. Research, the cornerstone of academic life, depends heavily on serials as sources of current information, methodological inspiration, and contextual grounding. Shaba, Owoeye and Maimunat (2024) found that library and information science educators in Nigerian federal universities use serials to a high extent for conducting research (mean score = 3.01 on a 4-point scale), teaching (mean = 2.99), setting tests and examinations (mean = 2.97), and preparing theses and dissertations (mean = 2.96).

Beyond research and teaching, serials support seminar presentations, conference papers, and professional development activities. They enable lecturers to stay current with developments in their disciplines, identify gaps in knowledge, and position their work within broader scholarly conversations. For academic staff seeking promotion, tenure, or professional recognition, publication in reputable serials is often a non-negotiable requirement, underscoring the centrality of these resources to academic careers.

Serials Management in University Libraries

The effective management of serials presents unique challenges that distinguish them from monographic resources. Unlike books, serials require ongoing subscription management, claims processing, binding or preservation, and check-in procedures that track the receipt of successive parts. The management cycle encompasses selection and acquisition, organization and storage, preservation, and provision of access through both physical and electronic means (Research, 2018; Agan, 2025).

In the Nigerian context, serials management faces several systemic challenges. Research conducted at Imo State University Library identified inadequate funding, insufficient accommodation, lack of storage facilities, and inadequate personnel as primary obstacles to effective serials management (Research, 2018). These challenges are compounded by erratic power supply, limited information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, and the high cost of both print and electronic subscriptions.

The adoption of automation tools offers a potential pathway to improved serials management. A study on KOHA software implementation at the National Open University of Nigeria found that open-source integrated library systems can enhance access to resources, streamline cataloguing and circulation processes, and improve user satisfaction through online public access catalogues (OPAC) (MiddleBelt Journal of Library and Information Science, 2025). However, the same study identified challenges including inadequate funding, staff capacity gaps, and technical maintenance difficulties that constrain optimal utilization.

The Nexus between Policy and Service Delivery

Institutional policies play a crucial role in shaping serials availability and utilization. Onwuekwe (2024) found a significant relationship between serials management policy and service delivery in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Libraries with clear, well-implemented serials management policies were better positioned to acquire relevant resources, provide consistent access, and meet users' information demands.

The policy framework should address selection criteria, subscription management, access provisions (both physical and electronic), preservation strategies, and user education. When such policies are

absent or poorly implemented, serials management becomes ad hoc, resulting in gaps in coverage, underutilization of available resources, and diminished support for academic activities.

Utilization Patterns and Challenges

Despite the recognized importance of serials, empirical studies reveal a concerning gap between availability and actual utilization. Research conducted in Imo State universities found that while serials were available to a high extent, accessibility was low, and actual utilization by lecturers was correspondingly limited (MOUUAU Repository, 2023). This paradox—the coexistence of relative availability with low utilization—suggests that availability alone is insufficient to ensure use.

Several factors account for this utilization gap. A study examining academic staff utilization of serials at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike found that lecturers do not patronize available serial materials, with observation and user register analysis confirming low usage levels (Amadi, 2024). The study identified a lack of awareness about available resources, inadequate user education, and limited integration of serials into teaching and research routines as contributing factors.

Students, too, exhibit patterned variations in serials use. Anumkua (2025) found that undergraduate and postgraduate students at IMSU primarily access journals, conference proceedings, and abstracts, while newspapers, magazines, and government documents are accessed to a much lesser extent. This pattern suggests that certain serials are perceived as more academically legitimate or relevant than others, shaping utilization decisions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design, drawing on multiple empirical studies conducted in Owerri metropolis and Imo State. The paper synthesizes findings from:

1. Accessibility and Utilization of Serials by Lecturers in Selected University Libraries in Imo State (MOUUAU Repository, 2023): A study of 317 lecturers from Federal University of Technology, Owerri (160) and Imo State University, Owerri (157), using a 101-item questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations, and t-tests.
2. Acquisition and Management of Serials in Imo State University Library (Research, 2018): A study using survey methods including questionnaires, interviews, and observation, with data analyzed using simple percentages.
3. Use of Serials in the Departmental Library by Students of the Department of Library and Information Science, Imo State University (Anumkua, 2025): A study of 120 students (100 undergraduate, 20 postgraduate) using questionnaire instruments and descriptive statistics.
4. Academic Staff Utilisation of Serials in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike Library (Amadi, 2024): A study based on observation and user register analysis.

By triangulating findings from these studies, this paper provides a comprehensive picture of the serials landscape in Owerri metropolis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Availability of Serials

The empirical evidence reveals that serials are available to a considerable extent in university libraries in Owerri metropolis. The MOUUAU Repository (2023) study found that serials were available to a

high extent based on mean scores and standard deviations calculated from lecturer responses. This finding aligns with Agan's (2025) research in Cross River State, which confirmed that serials are acquired and managed in university libraries. However, availability is not uniform across all serial types. Anumkua (2025) found that journals, conference proceedings, and abstracts were more readily available than newspapers, magazines, and government documents. This pattern reflects the prioritization of scholarly serials perceived as more academically relevant, potentially at the expense of resources that could support broader academic activities.

Accessibility Challenges

Despite availability, accessibility remains a significant challenge. The MOUAU Repository (2023) study found that serials were accessible to a low extent, a finding consistent with Shaba, Owoeye and Maimunat's (2024) identification of factors hindering serials access among library and information science educators in North-central Nigeria. Key barriers include:

Inadequate Funding: Research (2018) identified insufficient financial resources as a primary obstacle to serials acquisition and management. In an era of shrinking university budgets, serials subscriptions—particularly for expensive international journals—are often among the first casualties.

Infrastructure Deficits: Poor storage facilities, inadequate accommodation, and erratic power supply constrain access to both print and electronic serials (Research, 2018). For electronic resources, unreliable electricity and internet connectivity pose particular challenges.

Staffing Constraints: Insufficient personnel in serials departments limits the capacity for effective check-in, binding, organization, and user assistance (Research, 2018; Amadi, 2024). This staffing deficit compounds other access challenges.

Limited Technological Capacity: While automation tools like KOHA can enhance serials management, their implementation requires technical expertise, reliable infrastructure, and ongoing maintenance—resources that are often scarce (MiddleBelt Journal of Library and Information Science, 2025).

Utilization Patterns

The utilization of serials by lecturers in Owerri metropolis reveals a complex picture. MOUAU Repository (2023) found that serials were utilized to a low extent by lecturers in selected university libraries, a finding consistent with Amadi's (2024) observation of low academic staff patronage of serial materials. However, the extent of use varies by purpose. Shaba, Owoeye and Maimunat (2024) found that lecturers use serials most extensively for conducting research (mean = 3.01), followed by teaching (2.99), setting tests and examinations (2.97), and preparing theses/dissertations (2.96). Use for seminar papers (2.76) and conference papers (2.92) was comparatively lower. This pattern suggests that serials are seen as most essential for core academic functions directly tied to assessment and qualification.

Citation Patterns as Indicators of Use

An analysis of serials citations in graduate theses provides an indirect but revealing indicator of utilization. Onwubiko, Okeke and Nwosu (2023) found that journals accounted for 76% of serials citations in library and information science theses submitted by four government-owned universities in eastern Nigeria, while conference proceedings/reports accounted for 20%, and government publications for only 0.5%. This pattern echoes Anumkua's (2025) findings and confirms that scholarly

journals are the preferred serials for research purposes. The dominance of journals in citations suggests that lecturers and postgraduate students prioritize resources that are perceived as carrying the highest scholarly legitimacy. However, the underutilization of government publications and other serial types may reflect limited accessibility or awareness rather than irrelevance.

Constraints on Effective Serials Management

- ❖ Synthesizing the findings across studies, several persistent constraints on serials management in Owerri metropolis emerge:
- ❖ Financial Constraints: Inadequate funding remains the most commonly cited challenge, affecting acquisition, infrastructure, staffing, and technology (Research, 2018; Agan, 2025).
- ❖ Infrastructural Deficits: Poor accommodation, lack of adequate storage facilities, and erratic power supply hinder both physical and electronic access (Research, 2018).
- ❖ Human Resource Challenges: Insufficient personnel in serials departments, compounded by limited training opportunities, constrains service quality (Research, 2018; Amadi, 2024).
- ❖ Awareness and User Education: Limited awareness of available serials among lecturers, coupled with inadequate user education, contributes to underutilization (Amadi, 2024; Shaba, Owøye & Maimunat, 2024).
- ❖ Technology Gaps: While automation offers solutions, implementation challenges including inadequate funding, staff capacity gaps, and technical maintenance difficulties limit its impact (MiddleBelt Journal of Library and Information Science, 2025).

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthening Institutional Funding and Policy Support: University management should increase budgetary allocations to library serials departments, prioritizing subscription to essential journals and databases aligned with institutional programs. As Anumkua (2025) recommended, enhanced budgetary provision is critical for improving both acquisition and accessibility. Furthermore, institutional serials management policies should be developed or revised to articulate clear selection criteria, access protocols, and evaluation mechanisms (Onwuekwe, 2024).

Enhancing Technological Infrastructure: The automation of serials management through integrated library systems such as KOHA should be prioritized. Investment in reliable power supply, internet connectivity, and technical expertise is essential to support electronic access and streamline management processes. Agan (2025) recommended automation to avoid quick damage or disaster, while the MiddleBelt Journal of Library and Information Science (2025) highlighted the transformative potential of open-source systems for Nigerian academic libraries.

Improving Awareness and User Education: Proactive awareness campaigns, including embedded librarianship, should be implemented to inform lecturers about available serials and their academic benefits (Amadi, 2024). Training sessions on accessing and utilizing electronic serials should be organized, particularly targeting faculty members who may be unfamiliar with digital resources (Shaba, Owøye & Maimunat, 2024). Deans and Heads of Departments should partner with librarians to promote serials use among academic staff.

Strengthening Staff Capacity: The recruitment of additional personnel for serials departments, combined with continuous professional development opportunities, is essential to improve service

delivery. Staff should be trained in both traditional serials management techniques and emerging technologies, including electronic resource management systems.

Expanding Collaborative Networks: Nigerian university libraries should explore consortia arrangements to share subscription costs, provide joint access to electronic resources, and facilitate resource sharing. Such collaborations can help address financial constraints while expanding access to serials that individual institutions cannot afford independently.

Integrating Citation Analysis into Management: Citation analysis should be systematically utilized as a tool for serials management decision-making. By analyzing citations in theses and faculty publications, librarians can identify core serials for retention and acquisition, optimize resource allocation, and justify budget requests (Onwubiko, Okeke & Nwosu, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the availability, management, and utilization of serial resources by lecturers in Owerri metropolis, drawing on empirical research conducted in Imo State University, the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, and related institutions. The findings reveal a paradoxical situation: while serials are available to a considerable extent, their accessibility and actual utilization remain limited. This gap between availability and use reflects systemic challenges including inadequate funding, infrastructure deficits, staff shortages, limited awareness, and technological gaps.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach encompassing enhanced institutional investment, policy development, technological adoption, user education, and staff capacity building. University libraries in Owerri and similar contexts must evolve from passive custodians of serials to proactive facilitators of access and use. By strengthening the connection between serial availability and actual utilization, Nigerian universities can better support the research and teaching that are essential to their academic mission.

The scholarly productivity of lecturers and, by extension, the quality of Nigerian higher education—depends in no small measure on the effective management and utilization of serial resources. As the backbone of academic research, serials deserve sustained attention, investment, and innovation to ensure they fulfill their potential as drivers of knowledge creation and dissemination in Nigerian universities.

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