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Digital Resources Utilization By Social Science Researchers In Nigerian Universities

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Research Article Manuscript

**DIGITAL RESOURCES UTILIZATION by SOCIAL SCIENCE
RESEARCHERS in NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES**

By

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Abstract

This study was conducted to assess the use of digital/electronic information sources and services by faculty members of social sciences of three Universities in Nigeria. The purpose of investigation was to inquire about the respondents' appreciation of the resources, level of utilization based on availability and access, benefits derived from usage as well as challenges encountered, as a result of usage. The study adopted a quantitative research method, using questionnaire survey to collect data on 50 social scientists from each of the faculties. The study revealed non-availability of major sources of electronic information in the social sciences in both the university libraries and faculties; a major barrier to usage was identified as lack of information technology (IT) knowledge to effectively utilise the available resources. The study recommends adequate acquisition of digital resources; improved provision of sources of digital information resources and access; provision of faculty-specific user training and information literacy instruction; improved marketing of digital resources by the university libraries; and a provision of a campus-wide online library services system to the faculties.

Key words: Digital resources, information sources, networked learning, social scientists, teaching and learning.

1 Introduction

Digital information has become a vital resource in the development of higher education. The increasing growth of the Internet and the web has engendered education in a learning environment that is based on instant communication and the ability to explore an extensive range of resources. Shuling (2007) states that electronic information has gradually become a major resource in many universities in recent years with its growth and diversity, especially e-journals having led many to predict the extinction of the printed journals. The growing preference to electronic information in place of the print media in higher education institutions (HEIs) means that both academic staff and student in must utilise those resources for better research output (Agba, Kigongo-Bukenya & Ngumba, 2004). The range of electronic information resources is considered as an outgrowth of the changes in information delivery, made possible through advances in both computer technologies, and user friendly Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) (Fecko, 1997). Liew, Foo and Chennupati (2000) consider it as a new paradigm that is sweeping scholarship with a number of advantages over print

based sources. Consequently, “different disciplines and subject areas show significant divergence in the types and uses of digital resources” (Kemp & Jones, 2007, p.52).

The emergence of the digital era has ushered in a global facilitation of access to information through the use of computers, Internet and the networked environment (Bassey & Odu, 2015) as well as improved academics’ appreciation of the research process. The application and use of computers have by this increasingly become an essential aspect of social science research and teaching. Investigations reveal that the major concern of social science scholars appears to be the identification and location of the diverse range of resources in the discipline (2007). Given the availability of a vast reserve of information sources in the social sciences, it becomes pertinent to assess the extent at which these are accessed and utilized by social science researchers in the wake of networked learning.

The Nigerian higher education (HE) system has in the last two decades witnessed the adoption and application of digital resources and as expressed by Ani, Ngulube and Onyancha (2015), they have provided platforms for accessing and utilising information to enhance research productivity across faculties. It is however evident that adequate provision and effective utilisation of the resources for achievement of institutional goals will be required. This study focuses on the social science researchers in three Nigerian universities to determine the availability and access to digital resources and how their incorporation might benefit faculty members for teaching, learning and research purposes. The main question it seeks to ask is: What is the status of digital resources utilisation by social science researchers in Nigerian universities? Table 7 provides a matrix of major information sources in the social sciences and their uses. The study therefore seeks to determine the effectiveness of utilising the digital resources by exploring the availability and access to major sources of digital information resources by the social scientists in three Nigerian universities.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore digital resource utilisation among social science faculty members in three Nigerian universities. The study was thus guided by the following objectives:

1. Find out the level of utilisation of digital resources by social scientists;
2. Determine the extent of availability and access to digital resources by social scientists;
3. Identify the benefits and or constraints encountered in accessing information from digital resources by social scientists.

2 Literature Review

Digital information resources have been defined as “those which can be either accessible from libraries’ in-house database or from the world-wide web” those resources “which deal with both born digital and digitized materials which can be either accessible from libraries’ in house database or from the world-wide-web” (Islam, 2013, p.112). Islam (2013) goes on to categorise digital resources as ‘born digital’ and digitised’. The born digital materials include; e-books, e-journals, e-news papers, e-magazine, theses, dissertations, reports, website, www-resources and other related materials (Ibid. p.112). They include publications available on the Internet and CD-ROMs (Stark 1996). Digitized materials on the other hand are described as materials converted from other format into digital format. For the purpose of this paper, digital resources also refer to electronic information resources and electronic resources respectively.

2.1 The Social Scientists and use of Digital Resources (EIR)

Networked learning has been described as an educational process that is closely related to the development and use of computer networks and the rise of a networked society (Steeple & Jones, 2002). Advances in Internet technology and the Web in higher education has given the assurance that education can enable a learning environment that is based on instant communication as well as research and retrieval capabilities (Jones, Zenoid & Griffiths, 2004). Information and communication technology (ICT) has greatly affected the gathering, organizing and dissemination of information in higher education institutions of both developed and developing countries. This development has played a major role in making research more productive, in disseminating information and in establishing a strong network system among university libraries. Equally, through the discovery of a diversity of data from computer usage, the social sciences have been able to deal with far-reaching aspects of human behavior in numerous ways. The Web has provided a platform that developed innovative approaches to social science research to address its relevance to a vast range of disciplines, while the web content (described as a cultural artifact and of great interest) offers contemporary confirmation of events in society generally (Aya, 2000).

This study draws on Popoola’s (2008) study in which different ways of Internet usage by social scientists have been highlighted. This is presented from his review of literature on Aya’s (2000) investigation on the utilisation of the Internet by social scientists and academics in Abuja, Nigeria which found that the Internet was used to obtain information; Alasa and Kalechukwu’s (1999)

finding on the Internet provision of access to archives, expertise, convenient and updated information; A study by Bright (1999) which also reported how Mexican social scientists derive their sources of information from the Internet; While a much earlier study (White, 1973), had identified journals as the most frequently used source of information by social science researchers. It is also observed by Popoola (2008) that social science researchers in Nigeria obtain data from a number of official sources which include the national statistical information system, feasibility reports, as well as documents emanating from the government. He however attributed researchers' resort to usage and preference of their personal collections during searches, to university libraries' possible inability to meet their information needs.

Popoola (2008) underscores the value of information sources and services and their roles in shaping quality of teaching, research and community service of social scientists in the university system. This is because information availability, accessibility, and use are essential to teaching endeavors of the Nigerian social science researcher. There is equally emphasis on the importance of research output as one of the critical factors used in determining productivity of social science scholars (Popoola, 2008). A study conducted by Ani et al. (2015) to explore the perceived effect of accessibility and utilisation of electronic resources on research productivity of academic staff in Nigerian universities, found there was no significant perceived effect. They however share the assumption of a correlation between access to information, information use and research productivity. In an earlier related study related by Ani et al. (2014) it was found that demographic variables had significant effect on accessibility and utilisation of electronic resources. Bhatti (2013) equally highlights the usefulness of E-resources, online bibliographical services and databases for teaching, research and other purposes.

This conception about information use and access by social scientists suggests a number of ways in which information services might be optimized in order to best serve them. Increasingly, electronic information is becoming an important source of current information on contemporary issues and events for social sciences researchers and practitioners. This is achieved through the Internet and the World Wide Web which delivers better, faster and timelier sources of information.

2.1.1 Benefits

Digital Information resources pose an advantage over the traditional sources with respect to access to information. One of the best benefits of digital resources is that they can be accessed from users' desk tops (Vinayagamoorthy, 2007). Dadzie (In Egberongbe, 2011, p.1) attributes global access to varied information sources as a main advantage of digital resources. According to Mckie and

Guchteneire (2003), the Internet offers enhanced collaboration, better dissemination of one's information and immediate peer review among other benefits, to social scientists. A study of a cross-section of social science researchers to determine their awareness and extent of adoption of information technologies found that “over 55% used the World Wide Web and e-mail; list services to locate and use government information, while 88% used other electronic sources of information” (Meho & Haas, 2001, p.20).

3.1.2 Constraints

Despite the high level of enthusiasm in the use of electronic resources, social science researchers have identified obstacles in their usage of these resources. They are mainly identified as lack of networked computers to access data bases, “availability, reliability and cost of the necessary equipment” (Harley, et al., 2006, p.31); “poor searching skills, inadequate library resources and lack of effective information service delivery” (Popoola, 2008, p.2).

3 Methodology

The population of the study comprises social science researchers in three Nigerian universities – University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos. They are public-funded universities, also known as first generation universities, which were founded between 1948 and 1962. The choice of these institutions for the study was because of their potential to adopt and utilize digital resources due to their seeming exposure as public universities, to government funding. Moreover, the role of the faculty in HEIs in the attainment of university objectives of teaching learning and research makes it critical for member's need for relevant and accurate information.

The range of core disciplines offered in the social science faculties of universities studied were – anthropology, economics, geography, political science, psychology and sociology. The study was conducted from a positivistic viewpoint employing a quantitative design for data collection from both primary and secondary sources. The choice of the approach was to enable the researcher to obtain broad views of a number of participants from across the faculties investigated. The primary data was obtained through a self-developed survey questionnaire titled: Utilisation of digital resources by social science faculty members. The survey which took place between March and May 2011 was first piloted on six social science researchers with the purpose of ensuring reliability of the instrument. The total population of teaching staff in the three faculties was 282. Fifty copies of the questionnaire were subsequently administered to a random sample of respondents at each of the three faculties. This is in line with Khan's (2006) argument that a minimum of 50% is one way of achieving representativeness of a population when determining a sample size. The questionnaire was

structured in five sections to cover: personal data of respondents as demographic variables; availability; access; utilisation; and constraints of digital resources. In all, 63 questionnaires were completed and returned; from which nine questionnaires were rejected because they were not filled appropriately. However, this resulted in only 54 useable responses, given a response rate of 36%. Given the exploratory nature of the study, i.e concerning digital information resources and sources in the context of study, it was considered worthy of investigation, in spite of the low responses recorded. Details of the questionnaires administered and their retrieval are provided in Table 1. Analysis of the data obtained from the survey questionnaires was conducted using simple descriptive statistics. This aided in providing an elucidation for realising the study objectives. Secondary data was gathered from textbooks, journal articles and electronic resources.

4 Presentation of results

Data analysis is guided by the main objective of study which seeks to determine the extent of utilisation of major information sources by social scientists in three Nigerian universities.

4.1 Demographics of respondents

First part of the questionnaire dealt with the personal profile of the respondents. It collected information about universities, gender, qualification, academic status and professional experience. The total response rate was 54% from University of Ibadan, 30% from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife and 24% from University of Lagos respectively. The response rate for the survey is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Administration of questionnaires and retrieval

	Date of Establishment	No. sampled	No. of responses
University of Ibadan, Ibadan	1948	50	27
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	1962	50	15
University of Lagos, Lagos	1962	50	12

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Respondents	Gender	Frequency
	Male	8
	Female	46
	Total	54

An analysis of the demographics of the respondents reveal that a significant number (46) of respondents were female while only eight males took part in the study as shown in Table 2. The study sought to know the educational qualification of respondents. The results showed that 29 respondents (54%) hold PhD degrees, six (11%) MPhil, 15 (28%) have M.A. and 4 (7%) M.Sc. in their fields. Of the twenty nine respondents holding PhD, four were professors, four senior lecturers; thirty two were in lecturer 1& 2 categories and fourteen in assistant lecturer cadre. These are depicted in Table 3 and Figure 1 for educational qualification and academic status respectively. The study also sought to know respondents' professional experience to ascertain its influence on their usage of digital resources. Frequency distribution of the respondents' experience shows that 28 (51.9%) respondents had professional experience between 1-5 years, 12 (22%) 6-10 years, 3 (5.6%), 11-15 years, 5(9.3%) 16-20 years, 4(7.4%), 21-25 years, and 2 (3.7%), 26-30 years respectively (Table 4).

Table 3: Academic qualification of respondents

Respondents	Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
	MA	15	28
	MSc	4	7
	MPhil	6	11
	PhD	29	54

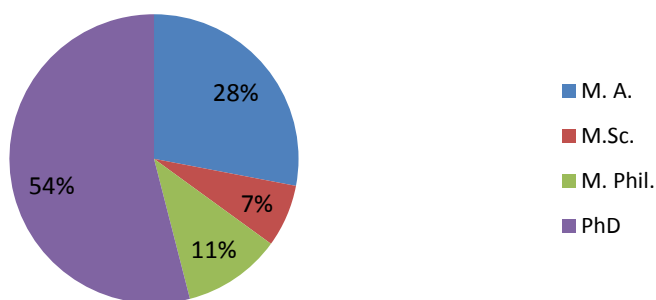


Fig. 1: Educational qualification

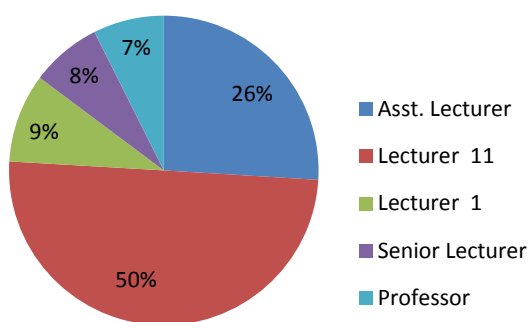


Fig. 2: Academic status

Table 4: Professional Experience

Category	Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
A	1-5	28	51.9
B	6-10	12	22
C	11 -15	3	5.6
D	16 - 20	5	9.3
E	21 -25	4	7.4
F		2	3.7

4.2 Purpose of using digital resources

The data showed that respondent’s purposes for using digital resources are varied. Thirteen (25%) use it for teaching, 17 (32%) for research 15 (28%) for communication through Internet services,

while eight (15%) use it for general information such as health, sports and foreign news, as depicted in Figure 3.

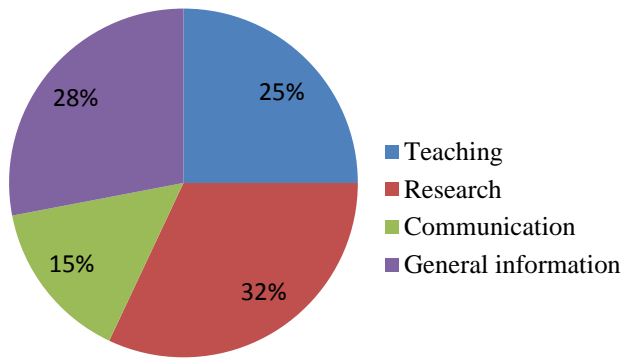


Figure. 3: Purpose of resource usage

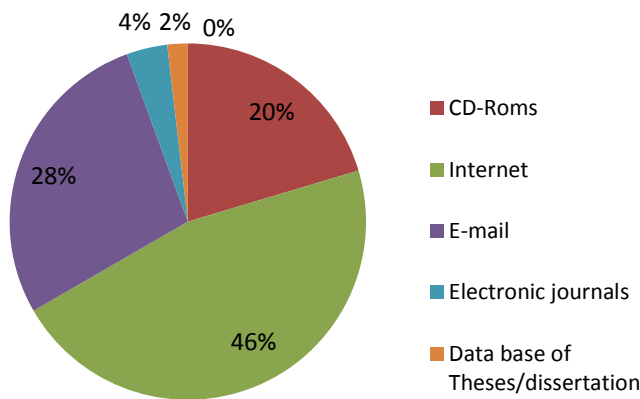


Figure 4: Sources of digital resources

4.3 Available sources for acquisition of digital resources

Respondents gave different sources from where they acquired needed information for their educational and research activities from both faculty and the university library. As shown in Figure 4, twenty-five (46%) indicated that their sources of acquiring digital resources were the Internet.

This was followed by 15 (28%) respondents who gave their sources as the E-mail, 11(20%) gave their sources as CD-ROMs, two (4%) gave electronic journals and one (2%) respondent indicated data base of theses /dissertations. The frequencies of responses are shown in Table 5. Responses regarding availability of a variety of social science digital resource services revealed greater frequency in non-availability in all the items in both faculty and the university library. The only items where availability seems to be higher were in consortium of online Public catalogue (COPAC), Columbia International Affairs online (CIAO) and Esrc Society Today with 35%, 32% and 30% respectively. Frequencies are presented in Table 9.

Table 5: Distribution of available sources of access to digital resources.

<u>Electronic Resource</u>	Frequency	Percentage
CD-ROMs	11	20
Internet	25	46
E-mail	15	28
Electronic journals	2	4
Data base of thesis/dissertation	1	2
Total	54	100

4.4 Preferred location of access to Digital Resources

Respondents were asked to state their preferred places of accessing the Internet for digital resources. Results showed that 15 (28%) use their university main library, 16(30%) use faculty facilities and whereas 10 (19%) prefer home for Internet usage. The preference for home access can be attributed to the larger participation of women in the study who may find the home a more suitable place to combine domestic commitments with academic work. The low response rate, as shown in Table. 5 may be due to problems of limited Internet connectivity. Responses to whether respondents had web access to digital resources had majority (68%) indicating ‘No’ to access While 32% indicated ‘Yes’ as shown in Table. 6.

Table 6: Preferred location of access to digital Resources

Location	Responses		
	Yes	No	Total
University Library	15 (28%)	39 (72%)	54 (100%)

Faculty	16 (30%)	38 (70%)	54 (100%)
Home	10 (19%)	44 (81%)	54 (100%)

4.5 Benefits encountered in accessing information

Responses regarding the perceived benefits derived by respondents from accessing information revealed that majority (89%) consider it to provide ‘faster access to information’. Two (9%) respondents chose ‘access to a wider range of information’ and one (2%) respondent indicated ‘improved academic performance’ as shown in Table. 7.

Table 7: Distribution of benefits derived from digital resource utilisation

Benefit	Frequency
Frequency	5
Faster access to information	48
Improved academic performance	1

Table 8: Distribution of constraints encountered in accessing digital resources

Benefit	Frequency
Lack of IT knowledge to effectively utilise the services	24
Limited access to computers	22
Uncooperative staff to facilitate easy access	6
Time consuming and wastes a lot of time	2

4.6 Constraints encountered in accessing digital resources

Another objective of the study was to know the challenges faced by social scientists in accessing digital resources. Respondents enumerated their challenges (Table 8) as:

- Insufficient knowledge of IT application to effectively utilise the services;
- Limited access to computers;
- Uncooperative (library and faculty) staff to facilitate easy access to digital resources; and thereby
- Rendering self-search time consuming and time wasting.

Participants in the survey were finally asked to suggest ways to improve utilisation of digital resources in their university libraries and faculties from a number of choices. Some of the suggestions provided by respondents were as follows:

- 1) Acquisition of more computers to create a networked environment by the universities;
- 2) Effective marketing of digital resources to improve awareness of digital resource usage;
- 3) The university should introduce easy access to digital resources;
- 4) Improved communication between university libraries between the libraries and the user communities;
- 5) Introduction of university-wide Internet services to ensure easy access to digital resources.

5 Discussion

The study aimed to examine the availability and access to major sources of digital information resources by the social science researchers in three Nigerian universities. The survey method was employed to collect data for the study. A random sampling technique was used to administer questionnaires to 50 respondents at each of the three faculties of Social Sciences. A number of observations were consequently made in the survey as follows:

Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents to the study were at the ranks of lecturer 2 and assistant lecturer while few from the ranks of lecturer 1, senior lecturer, and professor participated in the study. The study revealed that many respondents were at the rank of lecturer 1 and below. The difference in responses gives an indication of the research interests of junior and senior academic staff. Most senior academics in Nigerian universities combine teaching with administrative appointments which give them little or no time for participation in surveys or interviews. Junior

lecturers on the other hand tend to be well-oriented to research for their career advancement and therefore appreciate the need for digital resources. Figure 2 presents a reflection of results where the majority of respondents are those still active in teaching and research.

Sources for acquiring digital information resources were varied as shown by 100% respondents, specifying different sources. The Internet accounted for 46%; with 28 from electronic mails; 20% from CD-ROMs electronic journals; while electronic journals and data base of thesis/dissertation accounted for 4% and 2% respectively. As shown in figure 3, participants' main aim of digital resource usage is for meeting their teaching and research endeavours. This is a reflection of social scientists' information-seeking behaviour (Khan, 2010; Kemp, 1976). A longitudinal study by Ani et al. (2014) on the extent of accessibility and utilisation of electronic information resources by academic staff at selected Nigerian universities found that the main purpose of the faculty's use of electronic resources was to access information for teaching and research. This was upheld by Bassey (2015) and Ani et al. (2015) who attributed research productivity as significant effect of access to and use of electronic resources.

Results in Table 9 shows non-availability of most social sciences digital resources in the faculties investigated. This suggests failure of the respective institutions to meet the research needs of the scholars. Choice of available digital resources on the other hand revealed a high frequency in non-availability of the sources for use. It is significant that the three digital information sources indicated as available (consortium of online public catalogue (COPAC), Columbia International Affairs online (CIAO) and Esrc Society Today) accounted for an average of 30% as shown in Table 9.

The results on the preferred location of access to digital resources in which 81% chose their homes, confirms the lack of adequate sources of digital information sources. This result seems to corroborate Popoola's (2008) argument on social scientists' preference to personal collections, as their responses to both choices of the university library and faculty are low (28% and 30% respectively).

A number of studies on access to electronic resources in Nigerian university libraries have been based on Internet connectivity which is crucial to successful academic research. The response as shown from the results of this study in Table 5 indicate a reasonable provision of Internet facilities and suggests the relative essence of the availability of information sources for research productivity by the social science scholar. Respondents demonstrated their appreciation of benefits derived from gaining access to digital resources by expressing its potential to provide faster access to information, though majority indicated that lack of IT knowledge and limited access to computers to effectively utilise the services, is a constraint on realising the benefits.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to investigate the availability and extent of usage of major sources of digital information resources by social science researchers in three Nigerian public universities. The inquiry was borne out of the need to establish the extent of usage of digital information – considered as vital to the development of higher education – by social science researchers. The study revealed a high level of non-availability of digital resources for social science research. It also revealed the extent of usage of the resources and sources of access to information employed by researchers studied. This study showed that the social scientists studied are very much aware of the need for acquisition of digital information for their research endeavors. It also verified their dependence on the resources for teaching and other academic activities. The study however revealed inadequacies on the parts of the university libraries and faculties in providing required services and resources to the respondents and thereby making lecturers avoid their services. It is thus evident from the analysis of data that both the university libraries and faculties did not have the required digital resources in the social sciences to meet the needs of researchers in the field.

Although, the sampling techniques used in the study should have been representative of the sample population, based on the random sampling technique adopted, the low response obtained from the survey did not allow for much broad perspectives from potential respondents, the simple statistics carried out on the survey responses ensured that required results were obtained based on available data. Moreover, the respondents' perceptions were found salient enough to provide meaningful inference on the research objectives and question. Based on the foregoing arguments, the results of the study can be considered as a reflection of developments among social scientists in other academic environments in Nigeria. Similar views have been expressed in related studies (e.g. Ani et al., 2015; Bassey et al., 2014). The limitation mentioned in this regard however, may suggest interesting areas of future research for enhancement of research productivity for the social science researcher, for ultimate contribution to the fulfillment of institutional goals and objectives.

In order to ensure the provision of adequate electronic/digital resources and its usage, it is recommended that managements of the respective universities should provide funds for acquisition, subscription and development of electronic/digital resources for the social science faculties. University libraries should provide faculty specific information skills and bibliographic instructions for better use of their electronic resources. Such training is essential as it will assist users such as the social scientists investigated who tend to search for electronic and digital resources on their own. In addition it is also recommended that university libraries make direct marketing of available information resources to specific faculties. Such action will engender faculty involvement in creating

awareness of resource availability to its members. Furthermore, faculties of social sciences should be adequately funded in order to make financial contributions in providing resources to equip and improve their libraries; this will ensure the transformation of the latter from extensions or branches of university library reading rooms to standard faculty libraries.

There should be recruitment of qualified library and information specialists in the faculty of social sciences for quality management and effective service delivery of information resources; while it is finally recommended that university managements should work towards connecting online services system between university libraries and faculty branches to enable ease of access and use of the resources. The foregoing will go a long way to encourage the utilization of electronic information resources among social science researchers in Nigerian universities.

Table 9: Distribution of availability of some major information sources in university library/faculty

Item	Available Frequency	%	Not avail. Frequency	%	Total	%
International Bibliography of Social Science (IBSS)	7	13	47	87	54	100
Ageinfo	7	13	47	87	54	100
Child data	12	22	42	78	54	100
Columbia Int. Affairs Online (CIAO)	11	20	43	80	54	100
Consortium of Online Public Catalogue (COPAC)	12	22	42	78	54	100
Economic and Social Data Service(ESDS)	6	11	48	89	54	100
ESRC (Society today)	5	9	49	91	54	100
Electronic Oxford Reference Online	8	15	46	65	54	100
Ethical Corporation	8	15	46	65	54	100
EUROSTAT	11	20	43	80	54	100
Lexis- Nexis Butterworth's	10	19	44	81	54	100
PSYCHINFO	15	28	39	72	54	100
SCOPUS	12	22	42	78	54	100
Social Care Online	16	30	38	70	54	100
Statistical Data Online	12	22	42	78	54	100
UK National Statistic Online	16	30	38	70	54	100
Web of Knowledge	16	30	38	70	54	100
ZETOC	20	37	33	63	54	100

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