Library Use Pattern among the Undergraduates of a Nigerian University of Agriculture

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Abstract

This research focused on revealing what needs determine the patronage of an academic library in a federal university of agriculture in Nigeria. Also of interest was the purpose of usage, frequency, collections used and type of usage. The study was conducted during the second semester of 2010/2011 academic session. Survey method was employed with a 22-item questionnaire designed to collect data from the respondents. Two hundred and seventy-six (276) copies of questionnaire found usable from the 285 copies of questionnaire returned out of 300 copies distributed formed the base of this study. The data were analyzed using simple percentage and presented on charts. Some of the findings of the study revealed that majority of the students use library for multiple purposes ranging from reading personal materials to consultation of library materials to execute given assignments. Also discovered was that most students use library on weekly basis while textbooks constitute the library collections mostly used. It was also discovered that even when the respondents agreed that the library collections are adequate, majority of them only come to the library during examinations. To correct this trend, the researchers proffered some recommendations.

Keywords: Library Use, Use Pattern, Academic Library, Library Users, Library Services

Introduction

The basic philosophy of academic libraries is based on the concept of service and provision of relevant materials for users. To achieve this objective, professional librarians strive to collect and organize all forms of recorded knowledge in order to satisfy the immediate and future needs of library users.
Libraries all over the world play vital roles in the intellectual development of students at whatever level of their educational career. This is so because the library is the nerve center or the heart beat of all academic activities in any citadel of learning. In order to achieve academic excellence, students usually make heavy use of library resources. The use of libraries, especially academic libraries, is of paramount importance due to the fact that other types of libraries that can complement their roles rarely exist in developing countries (Olanlokun and Lawoyin, 1995).

Information need and information seeking behaviour as opined by Ucak and Kurbanoglu (2008) are two of the most important research areas of the user studies and they are two complementary concepts which are affected by many factors. They further stated that research studies in these areas of user studies indicate that information need and information seeking behaviour of scholars vary from one discipline to another. Such different needs and behaviours necessitate offering different services in academic libraries depending on the academic disciplines scholars come from.

Library user study as an aspect of user studies is a vital aid for effective planning and management in academic libraries. Accordingly, Burns (1978) contended that use as an activity is still the most valid measure of any items’ worth to a library or information system. Therefore, evaluation of the use of academic libraries is a component of the planning process that provides librarians with feedback to improve the total effectiveness of their academic libraries in response to the needs and wants of their target users (Amkpa, 2000).

It is common knowledge that university libraries have information dissemination as one of their primary roles to perform within the university set up. Accordingly, their resources are consciously built up and organized for their user’s maximum exploitation. In this regard, it is envisaged that for development, students’ use pattern should be one of the determining factors to set objectives within the context of the university system.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- determine the membership status of the sampled students;
- discover the frequency of the students’ visit to the library;
- determine their purpose of visits to the library;
- discover users' opinions about the library collection;
examine what sources of information the students consult most frequently;
extract information that will reflect students’ satisfaction with the library’s resources and services.

**Literature Review**

Previous studies on library use in academic libraries are numerous. However few of them shall be reviewed for the purpose of this study. Commenting on the importance of academic libraries, Martin (1976) submitted that studies of use and users are becoming fairly standard in library planning. He attributed this to a changing concept of what constitutes effective service. In his own view, Zwezing (1977) opined that library use is an important measure of output or services provided by the libraries and suggests that it is a possible index by which such measurement can be made. In a research conducted by Fowowe (1989), he surveyed the use of facilities at University of Ilorin library by the students. The result showed that while 94.8% of the students use the facilities, only 5.2% have never used them.

Ucak and Kurbanoglu (2008) critically examined the concept of information need and information seeking behaviour. They supported their argument by citing Wilson and Streatfield (1981) where they submitted that information need is a subjective, relative concept only in the mind of the experiencing individual. They also cited Krikelas (1983) who defined information need as the “recognition of the existence of uncertainty.”

Information seeking behaviour which results from the recognition of some need (Wilson, 1981) is defined by Krikelas (1983) as “any activity of an individual that is undertaken to identify a message that satisfies a perceived need. In other words, information seeking begins when someone perceives that the current state of possessed knowledge is less than that needed to deal with some issue or problem.”

The findings from the study conducted by Ucak and Kurbanoglu (2008) in Turkish university led them to the conclusion that regardless of nationality, information seeking behaviour is largely dependent on the type of scholar’s discipline. They reiterated that their insistence on scholars to conduct their own searches despite difficulties encountered can be dealt with through a user education programme tailored to the needs of each discipline.

Nicholson and Barlett (1962) also studied the use of Massachusetts of Technology libraries. Their own results revealed that 71.9% of the undergraduates and 52.4% of the graduate
students use the library for class preparation. In the same vein, Ali and Rogers (1978) surveyed students’ library use at Pahlavi University libraries, the result of the study depicted that the majority of the students have difficulty in locating books and journal articles. But in Katebi’s (1972) survey of the reading habits of the students of the University of Tehran, she found that primarily because of deficiencies in the educational system, students do not look at reading as a way of acquiring knowledge or developing character.

In another study by Unomah (1988), he surveyed students’ utilization of the University of Benin and Bendel State University (now Ambrose Alli University) libraries. He discovered that majority of students did not use library resources for various reasons among which are students’ ignorance resulting in wrong approaches in using the libraries. For instance, he found that about 69% indicated that they approached the library resources by first going to the shelves instead of the catalogues. Finally, McCarthy (1995) studied students’ use of library resources at the University of Rhode Island. The results showed that 60% of the students believed that they are effective seekers and users of library resources. Only 40% were not satisfied with their search for resources in that library.

As long as libraries exist in the world, study of their use patterns remains relevant. The use to which materials are put can be adequately assessed if statistics of the use of library materials are properly documented and analyzed. Statistics of various services rendered provide a graphic description of the extent to which library resources are used. Fowowé (1989) discovered a fair utilization of library resources by students. According to him, 71.9% of University of Ilorin students borrowed library materials while only 23.6% did not. He described this extensive use to the paucity of books available in Nigeria and the high cost of those available. This has forced the students to make maximal utilization of library resources.

Olanlokun and Lawoyin (1995) equally discovered that more materials were consulted in Arts and Social Sciences in 1987/88 by University of Lagos students. Besides, there was an appreciable increase in the books borrowed. Ogunleye (1996) in his study of undergraduate s use of research literature with specific reference to bibliographical citation analysis of science projects at Ondo State University submitted that textbooks were heavily used. Also, he found that the use of journals in Chemistry and Zoology was encouraging (Asiru, 2003).
Methodology
This study was carried out over a period of three months during the second semester of 2010/2011 academic session. A survey method was used in this study. A 22-item questionnaire was designed to collect data from the respondents. The population of the study comprises 300 students randomly selected from 200 to 500 Level from the eight colleges that made up the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. The sampled population forms about 5 per cent of the total students’ population of the university. Three hundred (300) copies of questionnaire were distributed among the respondents. Out of these, 285 which constituted 95% were returned while 9 were found unusable. In essence, 276 questionnaires formed the base of this study.

Results and Discussions

Fig. I: Membership Status of the Respondents

The figure above shows that all the respondents, 276, representing 100% of the total sampled population have membership status of ‘registered users’. This implies that all the respondents for this study are registered users of ’Nimbe Adedipe Library.
From the above figure, we can see that those respondents using the library to read their personal materials were 66, representing 23.9% of the total sample. Those using the library to answer their queries through the reference materials are 48, amounting to 17.4% of the sampled population. Those who use libraries for the purpose of borrowing different types of textbooks were 18, constituting 6.5%. While those who use library to do their subject assignments were 12, which is 4.3%, those who use the library for multiple purposes forms the highest number, 132, which is 47.8%. It is noteworthy here that none of the respondents use the library for leisure. This is not very surprising because of the nature of the library being sampled – an academic library. This is where serious academic studies and researches are being carried out and there is hardly room for leisure in such library. Public libraries are mostly identified with leisure reading.
Figure III above shows that those respondents who use library daily were 54, amounting to 19.6%. Those who use library on weekly basis were 144 in number, representing 52.2% while others who could not be specific were 78, constituting 28.3% of the entire sampled population.

**Fig. IV: Library Collections Mostly Used**

From the above figure, it could be seen that 132 respondents (47.8%) use books mostly among other collections of the library. 6 respondents each representing (2.2%) use journals, newspapers and magazines mostly among other collections of the library. 24 respondents (8.7%) and 102 the highest number of respondents, 40% use reference materials and multiple collections mostly.

**Fig. V: Respondents' Opinion on Collections**

The above figure shows that 54 respondents, constituting 19.6% of the total sample opined that some of the collections in the library are outdated while another set of 6 respondents (2.2%) opined that the collections are too advanced for them. 42 respondents (15.2%) observed that many subject areas are left out while the highest number of respondents, 102 amounting to 37%
of the total sampled population opined that the library collections are adequate. Others with different shade of opinions about library collections were 76 in number, representing 26% of the entire sampled population.

**Fig. VI: Types of Reading in the Library**

![Pie chart showing types of reading]

It is obvious from the above figure that the highest number of respondents, which is 112 representing 40.6% reads in the library for the purpose of examinations, while only 12 (4.3%) comes to browse through the materials in the library. Those whose types of reading cut across examinations, pleasure, browsing, newspapers and magazines were 108, which amount to 39.1% of the total sampled population. Those who answered for other types of reading were 60, amounting to 21.7% of the entire sampled population.

**Fig. VII: Assistance from the Staff**

![Pie chart showing assistance from the staff]

The figure above revealed that 222 respondents, which amount to 80.4%, felt satisfied by the assistance being enjoyed from the library staff. 48 respondents constituting 17.4% of the entire sampled population were unsatisfied while only 6 respondents, 2.2% were undecided.

**Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that the majority of library users use the library for multiple purposes ranging from reading personal materials, use of reference materials, borrowing books, to materials consultations for executing course assignments. It is also concluded that the highest number of respondents uses the library on weekly basis. Books are mostly consulted and in the view of the respondents, the library collections are adequate. Majority of the respondents read in the library mostly for examinations. This implies that the so-called “peak period” in most academic libraries is during the examinations period. This is a sad development because the essence of university education is to acquire universal knowledge, which can only be made possible through the frequent consultation of the avalanche of information made accessible in the university library. This study also concludes that the assistance from library staff to the users is satisfactory.

**Recommendations**

Lecturers play an important role in encouraging students to make use of library as they have a powerful influence on students’ academic behaviour. Thus they should encourage and motivate them to use the library by giving them assignments that require the use of the library. Baker (1989) asserted that, “most students will use the library materials in their course only if the professors required them to do so”. Hence, the need for the lecturers to give assignments and writing of term papers and such exercises that will encourage and spur the students to visit the library regularly, read, study and acquire knowledge in the course of doing ‘their master’s will’. It is therefore imperative on the lecturers to have interest in the use of the library. Such a natural habit will definitely influence the students’ use of library. Librarians should also shift from an era of waiting for readers to approach them for assistance. Reference librarians should more proactive by way of advertising their products through user education programmes and assisting users to locate materials.

Joining Alokun (2003), other recommendations proffer by the researchers are as follows:
1. It is necessary to organize orientation programmes at the beginning of every session on the use and importance of library in education and the teaching of use of Library to students as a compulsory course as part of General Studies. This will expose them to library resources, services and uses. There should also be a devised means of mandating and ensuring that no student is left out of this exercise.

2. Lecturers should cultivate the habit of providing reading lists for students in their various subject areas at the beginning of each semester.

3. Assignments should also be given to them on regular basis that will make students visit the library to look for more sources of information.

4. Reading space should be created in the library where reader can have unhindered 24 hours service without having access to library collections and equipment. Although, this is already in place at ‘Nimbe Adedipe Library, however, the management should look into the proper monitoring of the 24-hour library service to ensure that students take the full advantage of this service in order to enhance their academic performance.

5. Adequate reading facilities such as comfortable chairs, tables, carrels and the provision of air conditioners in the reading areas should be provided to make the library conducive for studying.

References


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