

Impact of Current Awareness Services and Library Environment on Students' Library Usage

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Abstract

This study was conducted to assess the impact of current awareness services and library environment on students' use of the library in Federal University libraries in the South-South Zone of Nigeria. A total of 1,510 registered student library users were involved. A Researcher-Developed Questionnaire was used for data collection. Results indicated that for the four components of current awareness services, the mean % positive responses by the students ranged from 13.4 – 22.3 in the universities studied. In the eight components of the library environment, the mean % positive responses were 62.1, 63.8, 71.8, and 75.3 for the Universities of Calabar, Uyo, Port Harcourt, and Benin, respectively. The implications of these results are discussed. In addition, independent t-test showed that current awareness services and library environment exerted significant positive impacts on students' use of the library indicating that effective use of these two strategies enhanced library usage.

Keywords: Current awareness services, Library environment, Students, Library usage.

Introduction

Academic library constitutes an essential component in any academic environment as it engages in activities which revolve around the provision of certain defined services and ensuring that these services are maximally utilized. Thus, various university libraries struggle to anticipate the information needs of their users and to provide necessary services and resources to meet those needs. Ntui (2009) observed that teaching, learning, and research activities in universities cannot be properly achieved without effective libraries that would acquire and disseminate information materials. Obi (2005) stated that the Nigerian Higher Education Act of 1965 compelled academic libraries to provide services to staff and students in order to complement educational programmes

Buckland (2007), in stressing the importance of library usage, emphasized that libraries are designed to act as information services which are expected to have various effects (inspirational, recreational, educational, and utilitarian) on the user. Academic libraries play a

significant role in student performance because it has been shown that students who access library resources and services outperformed students who do not (Cox and Jantti, 2012). This is one of the reasons why librarians are seriously concerned about the underutilization of these services especially in the academic environment. Consequently, librarians are enjoined to create awareness for the relevance of library services by aggressively marketing them.

Madhusudhan (2008) emphasized that the services the library offers must be made known to as many users as possible so that they think of library when they need some information. Similarly, Nooshinfard and Ziaei (2011) observed that libraries and information centers have begun to see marketing of information products and services as essential in promoting library patronage. Some of the strategies which could improve library patronage include provision of current awareness services (CAS) and conducive library environment. Current awareness services are methods by which libraries alert their users on newly published materials. Library environment can be defined as those factors which are interior or exterior to the library and can influence its usage. Such factors include seating capacity and arrangement, lighting and ventilation, cooling system, noise level, opening hours, building design/surroundings, and staff attitude or personality. This study was conducted to investigate the impact of current awareness services and library environment on students' use of library services in some Nigerian Federal Universities.

Literature Review

Current Awareness Services and Students' Use of Library Services

Current awareness services are offered by libraries to assist users in meeting their information needs. University library is expected to regularly sensitize users to its current and relevant information resources and services and to promptly provide these for the advancement of knowledge. Fidoten (1979) opined that, with the proliferation of disciplines and research activities, scholars press for speedier access to current information to keep pace with new developments. According to the author, increased publication output coupled with Information Technology (IT) revolution has led to information overload in the society. Thus, information professionals more than ever before would have to wade through this flood of information and devise means of quickly announcing the availability of current information, thereby making users aware of the most recent development in their fields. Rowley (1979) observed that special libraries take the lead in current awareness activities followed by university libraries.

Antwi (1990) and Agu (2006) observed that CAS is a system for notifying users of current documents and information services in libraries. For Obi (2005), CAS involves a highly personalized service of information repackaging and dissemination in which information is provided in anticipation of users' needs. According to the author, the basic purpose of CAS is to make users and potential users aware of recently published works that may be of interest to them. Edeka (1992) attested to this fact by stating that modern library anticipates the expectation of its users and promptly provide services and resources to fulfill them. This, in fact, is the essence of CAS.

Current awareness services may involve a variety of activities. Lawal and Amusa (2005) argued that the circulation of "accessions list" can serve as a catalyst to users' interest and

hence spur prospective users to check for materials for their academic, professional or research needs. Fidoten (1979) aptly described CAS components to involve a combination of processes including the selection of pertinent information from periodicals, books, patents, and reports. Other scholars (Johnson *et al.*, 2009; Fernandez, 2002; Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002) have identified the most preferred strategies of CAS efforts to include distribution of accession list, press cutting bulletin, abstract bulletin, photocopies of table of contents of journals and books, list of new library services, newspaper cuttings, and Selective Dissemination of Information(SDI) to users and potential users. Newer methods of CAS include conducting saved searches in preferred databases and creating e-mail table of contents alerts (Johnson *et al.*, 2009). Fidoten (1979) added that traditional strategies for provision of CAS involve telephone calls or visits to users and recording and forwarding individual references to target patrons. Also included are online or web-based CAS such as e-mail alerts, internet search engines, and other online search services. Major online CAS (e.g. e-mail alerts) enables users to automatically monitor newly published information.

Bell (2009) emphasized that current awareness services are ways of promoting the library and regretted that most academic librarians are no longer familiar with the art of current awareness services, and this may be an unfortunate shift in our practice.

Library Environment and Students' Use of Library Services

A conducive environment of a library is that in which noise is controlled and other factors such as lighting, library space, furniture, and good ventilation are adequately provided to enhance learning (Oyedum, 2012). Unattractive library environment may hamper library usage. Adekanye (2004) identified major problems associated with library environment in Nigeria to include insufficient reading chairs and tables, inadequate space for displaying and storing materials, poor ventilation and lighting, and lack of functional cooling systems.

Clee and Maguire (1993), in a study of the importance of library environment in influencing library usage, stressed that, although individual factor in the library environment (guiding, lighting, noise level, heating, seating, etc) does affect a user's perception and use of the library negatively, combination of these factors have the greatest negative impact. For Sherman (1981), a library should be a pleasant, quiet, and a comfortable place to visit. Thus, bright colours, fresh flowers, simple layout and directions, attractive surroundings, and pleasant staff will help to promote library usage. Supporting this view, Bakewell (1996) stressed that more attention should be directed to lighting, ventilation, and elimination of pollutants to create conducive library environment that may improve library usage.

Seating Capacity and Seating Arrangement

Seating usually receives serious consideration when planning surface requirements of a library. There are different approaches to the provision and arrangement of seating in libraries. According to Edoka (1992), determining the overall number of seats and their arrangements depend on how the librarian perceives the use of the library. Seating capacity is the size of seating space which can accommodate all the users at the same time while seating arrangement involves proper arrangement of reading desks, chairs, and carrels in a library. Bakewell (1996) suggested that seating arrangements be varied – mini carrels, conventional

reading tables with chairs, informal seating areas with easy chairs and low tables, and seating arrangement suitable for group work.

Staff Attitude

Staff attitude towards users may influence library usage. Library staff should show willingness to effectively and efficiently provide services and resources to users. Hamilton (1990) pointed out that if the staff have the right attitude, users will be encouraged to come. According to the author, if staff are friendly, out-going, and with some sense of humor coupled with obvious expertise and intelligence, the word will spread quickly that there are approachable and reliable information experts in the library. Bakewell (1996) identified the factors that help to create good impression with a user and the feeling of a user-friendly library as: giving a welcoming smile and greeting, listening attentively to users' information needs, avoiding "talking down" to customers, and showing willingness to help.

Noise Level and Opening Hours

Steps must be taken to control noise level in a library environment to create a conducive atmosphere for study. Oyedum (2012) identified noise as one of the environmental factors in university libraries that could influence the use of the libraries. Ntui (2009), in a study in which students rated noise level in the University of Calabar library, observed that the disruptive effects of noise on the activities in the library were enormous. It is also essential to keep library open for longer periods especially in the academic community in order to accommodate the convenience of the majority of its users. Thus, Edoka (1992), acknowledging the variation in the opening hours of different types of libraries, stressed that, in scheduling the opening hours of a library, the convenience of the users should be given overriding consideration. Also, the opening hours of any library should be clearly indicated in a strategic location.

Methodology

The population of the study comprised all registered students library users in the Federal University libraries in the South-South zone of Nigeria. The population size was estimated at 16,000 students. The sample size was 1,610 registered student library users representing 10% of the total population.

A researcher-developed questionnaire: Current Awareness Services and Library Environment Questionnaire (CASLEQ) was used in data collection. The CASLEQ was designed to solicit for students' opinion regarding the provision of current awareness services and conducive library environment in their respective university libraries and also to measure the respondents' rating of these two strategies and their level of utilization of library services in their university libraries.

The CASLEQ had three Sections – A, B, and C. Section A was for respondents' demographic data - gender, faculty, years of study, and degree in view while Section B solicited for the respondents' opinion with regard to the provision of current awareness services and conducive library environment adopted by the library management, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The opinion scales for this section consisted of strongly agree (SA), agree (A),

undecided (U), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD) responses scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Section C focused on the frequency of utilization of library services and resources by students all rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The response categories for Section C were very often (VO), often (O), occasionally (OC), rarely (R), and never (N), scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The responses from Section B of CASLEQ were used in categorizing the two factors studied as either available or unavailable and treated as the independent variable while the responses from Section C were used as the dependent variable.

The Questionnaire was administered to respondents in each of the institutions studied and completed questionnaire was collected for data analysis. Data were analyzed by calculating the % positive responses of students to the provision of current awareness services and conducive library environment in their various university libraries and by using Independent *t*-test statistics to assess the influence of these strategies on students' use of the library.

Results

Current Awareness Services

Results in Table 1 indicate that in all the Universities studied, the total Agreed (A) and Strongly Agreed (SA) responses were lower than 30% in all the components of this marketing strategy except for University of Benin which scored 40.6% on the provision of news alert/news release on new library services. According to students' rating, the least available component of this strategy was, "providing users with list of newly acquired audio visual materials" in which all the Universities scored below 10%. The mean students' responses on the provision of current awareness services ranged from 13.4 – 22.3% with the University of Benin having a score of 22.3% (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage positive responses of students to the utilization of current awareness services in some Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Components of current awareness services	Universities			
	UNIBEN Students (N= 394)	UNICAL Students (N= 370)	UNIPORT Students (N= 380)	UNIUYO Students (N= 366)
Students receive news alert/ news release on new library services from the library.	40.6	17.9	17.5	21.1
Students receive list of newly acquired journals, books, abstracts, indexes and other library resources from the library.	24.7	24.1	22.4	15.3
Students receive list of newly received government documents from the library.	15.8	14.1	08.4	12.0

Students receive list of newly acquired audio-visual materials from the library.	08.1	07.1	05.3	09.9
Mean responses	22.3	15.8	13.4	14.6

Library environment

For students' positive responses on the provision of conducive library environment, Table 2 shows that the total of Agreed (A) and Strongly Agreed (SA) responses were quite high for most of the components of this marketing strategy. Only in two of the eight components, "functional cooling system" and "power generating unit," were the ratings fairly low in all the universities except the University of Benin which scored 75.5% and 71.1% for functional cooling system and power generating unit, respectively. The component that received the highest rating across the universities was "library operates from a building designed for library purposes", with the University of Port Harcourt scoring 89.7% followed by the Universities of Benin, Calabar, and Uyo with 88.6%, 84.6% and 83.6%, respectively. The mean % positive responses for all the eight components of library environment were 62.1, 63.8, 71.8, and 75.3 for the Universities of Calabar, Uyo, Port Harcourt, and Benin, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage positive responses of students to the provision of conducive library environment in some Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Components of library environment	Universities			
	UNIBEN Students (N= 394)	UNICAL Students (N= 370)	UNIPORT Students (N= 380)	UNIUYO Students (N= 366)
Library operates from building designed for library purposes.	88.6	84.6	89.7	83.6
Provision of seats and seating arrangements are adequate in the library.	80.7	55.9	75.3	71.3
There is adequate provision of light in the library.	74.1	66.5	76.9	79.5
Library is well ventilated.	53.3	89.7	88.2	66.4
Library has functional cooling system (e.g Air conditioners)	75.7	28.9	38.2	41.8
Noise level in the library is minimal.	87.3	78.6	83.7	74.3
Library has functional power generating unit.	71.1	31.0	32.9	54.9
Library premises are attractive addition to	71.3	89.2	61.6	38.8

library environment.

Mean responses	75.3	71.8	62.1	63.8
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In Table 3, the t-calculated value, t-cal, for the influence of provision of current awareness services on students' use of library services is 7.66 and its critical value, t-crit, at df 1508 and $p=0.05$ alpha, is 1.96. The t-cal (7.66) is greater than the t-crit (1.96). This shows that there was a significant positive influence of current awareness services on students' use of library services in the universities studied. Provision of current awareness services, therefore, influenced the use of the library services

Table 3: Independent t-test summary of students' responses on the influence of the provision of current awareness services on their use of the library.

Current awareness services	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	df	t-crit	Decision
Available	627	45.86	12.75	7.66	1508	1.96	S
Unavailable	883	41.13	11.14				

S = significant at $p < .05$ alpha

The results in Table 4 show that the calculated t-value, t-cal, for the influence of library environment on students' use of library services is 6.97 and that its critical value t-crit, at df 1508 and $p=0.05$ alpha is 1.96. The t-cal (6.97) is greater than the t-crit (1.96). This indicated that there is a significant influence of library environment on students' use of library services in the study area. That is, library environment exerted a significant influence on students' use of library services and resources.

Table 4: Independent t-test summary of students' responses on the influence of library environment on their use of the library.

Library environment	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	t-crit	Decision
Attractive/Conducive	1444	43.21	12.08	6.97	1508	1.96	S
Unattractive/Not conducive	66	40.61	11.21				

S = significant at $p < .05$ alpha

Discussion

Current Awareness Services

The mean % positive responses of students on the provision of current awareness services in all the universities studied ranged from 13.4 – 22.3. This low % response indicated that this strategy was poorly utilized by the providers of library services to enhance students' library usage. Independent *t*-test showed that the provision of current awareness services exerted a significant positive influence on students' use of library services and products. This observation is explained in terms of the effect the provision of these services have on the

users and potential users. According to Agu (2006), current awareness services provided users with relevant information on newly published materials in forms of e-mail alert services or table of contents display or distribution of list of new services and publications added to the library. Modern libraries anticipate the expectations of their users and promptly provide services and resources to fulfill them (Edoka, 1992). The librarians in the institutions studied are encouraged to utilize current awareness services to improve library patronage.

Library Environment

Results indicated that the mean % positive responses on library environment ranged from 62.1 – 75.3 in the institutions studied. This indicated that the library environment in the study area was quite conducive and should enhance library patronage. In fact, in one of the components of library environment, “noise level in the library is minimal,” the mean % responses were 74.3, 78.6, 83.7, and 87.3, for the Universities of Uyo, Calabar, Port Harcourt, and Benin, respectively indicating that the noise level in these institutions was minimal. Independent *t*-test showed that environmental factors of the library exerted a positive significant influence on students’ use of the library, that is, attractive and conducive library environment enhanced students’ patronage of the library. This observation agrees with that of Bell (2009) and Oyedum (2011) who, based on the findings from their respective studies on physical facilities and students’ library usage, concluded that physical facilities of the library influence students’ library usage. Similarly, Ntui (2009) observed that negative library environment such as high noise level had negative effect on students’ use of University libraries. Blackwell (1996) asserted that pleasant, quiet, and comfortable library environment with bright colours, fresh flowers, simple layout and directions, comfortable surroundings, and pleasant staff attitudes promote libraries and create conducive library environment that may improve library usage. The outcome of this study underscores the need for the library management in academic institutions to pay serious attention to the environmental factors of the library to encourage library usage.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that current awareness services and environmental factors of the library exerted significant positive influences on students’ use of university library. This observation implies that effective use of these two strategies enhanced library usage. It was also observed that librarians in the institutions studied were not paying adequate attention to the use current awareness services as an effective strategy for improving library patronage. They are, therefore, encouraged to do so.

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