

THE PLACE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES
IN OPTIMIZATION OF EDUCATION FOR THE
NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The vast demand on education in the twenty-first century calls for well-defined strategies towards the production of quality graduates which society can depend on for development. The qualities of such graduates are built on the quality of education they are exposed to as well as the availability of information resources and learning skills they acquire. Libraries play a vital and pivotal role in the actualization of this academic dream through their services and the unique way, in which they select, organize, preserve and communicate information. This paper therefore, focuses on the place of library and information services in optimization of education for the Nigerian university students. Attempt is made to discuss the status of tertiary education in Nigeria; university libraries and their functions in institutions of learning; services of the university libraries and the basic roles they play towards optimum quality education of the students.

KEY Words: Libraries, Information Services, Education

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Introduction

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio- economic, political and cultural development of a nation. It is a mechanism through which society generates the knowledge and skills required for its survival and sustenance. It enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world thereby improving the quality of their lives. University education occupies a strategic position in the educative process as they are mandated for manpower development. They educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacities that accelerate the socio-economic development of a nation (Odekunle, 2001). According to the National Policy on Education (2004), university education is expected to:

- contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- forge and cement national unity; and
- promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Behind the mission and vision of the university education is the academic library, which is primarily established to support and enhance the full realization of the educational goals of the great institution as well as the educational objective of the students through their services. They

are store houses of information and knowledge to which users turn for their information needs. Cain and Locke (2002) indicate that library and information services contributes to academic success and student retention. This work therefore aims at treating the place of library and information services in optimization of education for Nigerian university students.

Conceptual Definitions

Nyarayan (1991) defined the library as a public institution or establishment charged with the care of collection of books, the duty of making every person in its neighborhood a habitual library patronisers and book readers. Thus a library is an instrument of self-education, a means of knowledge and factual information delivery that provides accumulated and preserved knowledge of civilization which consequently enriches holistically. Attached to every institution of learning is academic library which plays central roles in achieving the institution's academic mission. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the school's curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. They are information centers established to conserve the research potential of the university or college and equip people with knowledge in order to serve society and advance the well-being of mankind. Aguolu (2002) noted that the academic library is the heart of the university. This is because, the academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depend largely upon the state of health and excellence of its library which is its lifeblood.

Education

Education, from a broad perspective, is any process or the result of a process by which an individual acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights (Omojuwa, 1993). It includes all those activities outside the family that are consciously or unconsciously planned and organized

to achieve specific goals and objectives. Narrowly, education could be defined as a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills (Omojuwa, 1993). It is usually programmed to train students to attain knowledge and prepare them for the work of life thereby participating actively in national development.

Library and information services play multifarious roles in educational process especially at university level. As stated in the national policy on education, one of the goals of university education is to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to become self-reliant and useful members society (FME, 2004). Therefore, for a country to achieve a standard education system it must depend largely on adequate library and information services to make information resources available to students.

The basic role of the academic library is to serve the mission of the system under which it is created, namely, to support the mission with the provision of teaching materials, for class readings and for student papers. Metzger(1991) note that the role of modern academic libraries ranges from conserving knowledge , teaching, research and development, publication to promote academic visibility, extension services and interpretation. Their resources comprise print, non-print and digital/electronic resources. It is pertinent to discuss the various functions and services of academic library and their roles in optimizing education.

Role of Library and Information Services in Optimizing Education for Nigerian Students

The universities are schools of education and centre of research. University library stems its objectives from its educational institution. The success of the university in accomplishing its message depends on the validity of its libraries, which are responsible for the educational and research process at the university. The mission of the library is part and parcel of the message of the university as being

centred on education, research and community service. It helps the student, the researcher, and the professor carry out their job as it provides them with the varied sources of information. Besides, the library sorts out these sources and keeps them. Similarly, it is responsible for orienting library users to know how to find out sources of information and how to make advantage of them. As a source of information, university library comes first because it serves all educational and research functions of the university. It helps create new vistas of science and knowledge over generations. It connects the past and the present by means of continuity.

Apart from its research role, the university has an educational part in developing capabilities and faculties. Undoubtedly, university library is the centre of learning and scholarship, from which varied activities have radiated due to the treasures of knowledge it possesses and due to the services it provides for its users. These services such as provision of information resources aid those library-goers to achieve their objectives, expectations and ambitions. Hence university community access to information is primarily through the university library. In carrying out this onerous function university libraries should ensure that appropriate resources selected are based on the collection development policy of the institution (Anunobi, Nwakwo and Ezejiofor, 2010)

Educational and research role of library and information services cannot be overemphasized. Research has it that libraries make significant contribution to the effectiveness of the education process and students who are supported with the aid of library resources perform excellently in their academic work (Onohwakpor, 2005). As part of overall educational system, library and information services have helped in optimizing education for Nigerian students through the following services:

Library Orientation/Users' Education

On gaining admission, students have little or no knowledge of basic library tools, procedures or terminology. The library organizes various programs of instruction, education and exploration to bring to the knowledge of the students the existence of the library in the institution and their resources and to enable them to make effective, efficient and independent use of the information resources and services to which they provide access.

Reading Environment

Most students find it difficult to read in their respective hostels. Conducive reading environment, good lighting, good ventilation, standby generator etc are among the services the library provides that spur the students to good reading.

Display and Exhibition

The library displays and exhibits periodically new additions of library stock or resources in order to bring to the awareness of the student their existence in the library collection. They are usually displayed on stand made of plain glass, tables or shelves. This helps students to develop healthy habits of keeping track of recently published literature.

Book Fairs

This is a forum whereby leading booksellers and publishers are invited by the library to display information materials, where relevant books and journals are sold to the students at reduced prices.

Interlibrary Loan/Connection Services

No library, however large or comprehensive, can possess all the resources it needs to satisfy the needs of its users. The academic libraries provide required connections by organizing library

networks, in order to ensure that the users have enough material to enable them make the most of whatever stock and facilities available.

Abstracting and Indexing Services

Indexing services enable the users to locate the books that are available in the subject areas they need and abstracts provide summaries of the contents of reading materials in the library thereby serving as time-savers for the library users.

Lending Services

The library also gives out books or other library resources to registered students for a short and defined period of time.

Selective Dissemination of Information

Libraries which have the profiles of their readers assemble all the available resources, in anticipation towards building data banks with which to solve information needs when necessary. By so doing, indexes, abstracts and bibliographies are compiled in different subject area.

Electronic Information

Library function today has gone beyond the use of print and non-print materials in information services. Current practice involves new information technology device. Libraries with these modern devices download information through internet. The internet services offer full text database of journals, books, newsletters, standards, theses and dissertation. It leverages the vast and specialized knowledge resources accessible via the library network system for the benefit of the user. There is no limit to information with this outfit.

Information Re-packaging

information repackaging is the re-arrangement of the media in which information has been presented and tailored to the requirements of specific clientele. It is the presentation of information in more understandable, reward-able, acceptable and usable forms with a view of communicating a message in a convenient and effective form to target audience. It entails a systematic process of adding value to information services.

Problems students Encounter in Use of the Academic Library

The students in their bid to utilize library resources encounter some hindrances which could be summarized in the following points:

Lack of Library experience

The major problem affecting Nigerian students in their effort to use the libraries could be from the type of educational foundation they had before proceeding to higher education. In most cases they usually visit the library during examination period and what they usually read is their handout, notebooks and textbooks relating to the exam.

Poor conception of the Library

Some students have poor conception about the libraries because of scanty presence of new books and journals in their subject areas.

Confusion about Library Organizational Pattern

Many students found in academic libraries in Nigeria do not make effective use of available material because they lack knowledge of the organizational pattern on the resources.

Inadequate Reading space

Almost all the students are interested in using the library space to prepare for their examination because of its conducive nature but there is usually the problem of insufficient seats and reading spaces.

Misplacement of the student library card

Some careless students put their library cards anywhere and in the process lose them. This prevents them from visiting the library because they will not be granted access without user card.

Attitude of the library Staff

Some librarians display unfriendly attitude toward the student users of the library and this scares the students from visiting the library for fear of being embarrassed.

Challenges of library and information services in optimizing education for Nigerian students

The following are challenges militating against library and information services and preventing the transformation of the educational sector:

- Inadequate trained personnel in librarianship who can effectively render quality library services.
- Lack of resources, financial constrains to equip our libraries.
- Lack of national policy, norms and standard of library establishment at the grassroots level all through the educational sector.
- Poor distribution of network of libraries

- Shortsightedness of our leaders on the relevance of library.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing challenges, the following recommendations are proffered with view to solving the problems and having the library and information services appraised.

- There is need to train more librarians who will manage both the human resource and the library resource to enable the offer of quality library services in the institution of learning.
- There should be adequate provision of funds for library maintenance .
- Standard national policy for library establishment should be developed
- There should be properly coordinated library network for resource sharing in order to avail the user access to varied information resources.
- Leaders and stakeholders should see the relevance of library and information service in education and invest and develop it.

Conclusion

Library and information services have very important roles to play in achieving high standard in the educational sector. It offers the students the opportunity to become lifelong readers, learners and leaders. It has its problems and challenges but given the determination of the government to educate its citizens these problems can be surmounted. The government and stakeholders at various levels should see establishment of well-equipped libraries in the academic institutions a top most priority as no attainment can be envisaged without the intellectual nerve centre.

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