

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY EXHIBITIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES - THE UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT EXPERIENCE

The role of the library in the University campuses has been witnessing changes since the beginning of this Century. These changes have resulted from the growth in university enrolment especially from the middle of the twentieth century which made it almost imperative for the university libraries to alter their organization and functions so as to render adequate services to both undergraduate and research oriented faculties and graduate students. This is more so in the developing countries where the development of universities and university libraries are young and as such witnessing a rapid growth. This rapid growth meant changing role for the University Libraries.

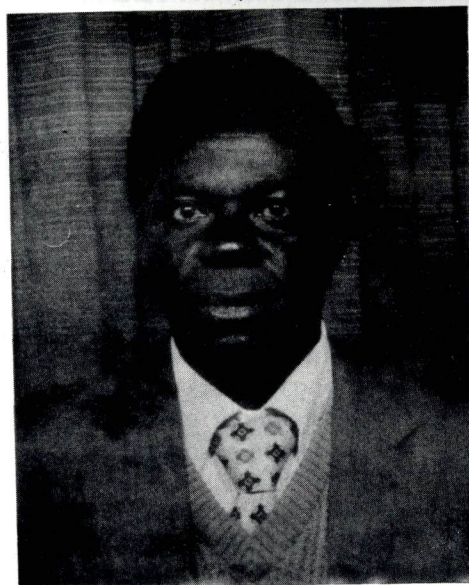
The basic function of the University Library in the academic community is to provide the materials necessary to supplement the teaching-learning programmes of the institution at all levels and to provide where appropriate the materials for graduate and faculty research.

Bearing this service function in mind, the first duty of a University Librarian is to monitor his institution's academic goals and ideals so that he would be able to make the library function in relation to the college objectives. It has to be borne in mind that the library as a primary support of academic programme is not free to set its own goals and immediate objectives but must wait for the university it serves to establish the goals, objectives and educational policies. The University Librarian's first duty is to sell the university library and its holdings to the university community in terms of what the library can do to enhance the success of the University's set objectives. In addition to acquiring, processing, storing and making these materials accessible to the students and staff, the library ought to project itself in the social forces of the community. There are several ways of doing this which a young university library in a developing country can seize and one of these often neglected ways is the library exhibition.

Donald Tonasoca in his article on "Exhibitions, Library", observed that "a more neglected function often ignored by many libraries, is that of library exhibit work. It is perhaps the least explored of library activities, but when it functions with a degree of seriousness it is important enough to be called the act of library exhibit". The above observation by **Tonasoca** is an attempt to remind the professional librarians of the lack of interest and seriousness which are often shown towards the planning and mounting of library exhibitions in most of our academic libraries especially in developing countries. This lukewarm attitude towards library exhibition may be as a result of the following factors:

- (i) Lack of proper understanding of the role that a good library exhibition can play in the university library.

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- (ii) Lack of available space where exhibitions could be mounted.
- (iii) Lack of trained exhibition staff i.e. librarians that have extra training on mounting exhibitions.
- (iv) Lack of exhibit furniture.
- (v) Indecision on the librarian's part over what will interest or not interest the patrons of the library.
- (vi) The type of library exhibition that the library intends to mount.
- (vii) The publicity necessary before the exhibition.
- (viii) Availability and security of borrowed items.
- (ix) Lack of confidence of the success of the exhibition if mounted.

The above problems and other 'heart-sinking' ones act as a bugbear to many academic librarians towards mounting serious exhibitions especially in developing countries.

THE UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT EXPERIENCE

The University of Port Harcourt is about three years old, the first batch of students on the four year degree programme will graduate by 1981. As the University, so the Library. The Library as many young university libraries in developing countries was given two small open buildings formerly meant to be a workshop for the site of the then proposed Technical College on whose site the university took off. As a result of hard work by the librarian, lots of modifications were made which culminated in addition of another building joining the two former buildings. It is in this

"U" shaped building that the University Library is housed. In terms of library holdings, the library inherited nothing and as such, started acquiring books, journals and other library furniture as the university started.

THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The Librarian of the University of Port Harcourt Library makes use of Committee system in his administration of the library. Among these committees is the library Exhibition Committee. This Committee is made up of four librarians, though this depends on the number of professional librarians on the staff at a time. Unfortunately, the library has no trained exhibit librarian and as such all the librarians involved are learning exhibit techniques from day to day exhibitions held, that is from errors, mistakes, omissions and criticisms made by other librarians and outsiders. Among the work of this committee are:

- (i) To make a calendar of possible exhibitions to be held for the session.
- (ii) To plan and execute the exhibitions - collect and borrow materials for the exhibitions, arrange for public relation work for the exhibition, get the exhibit area and furniture ready, make arrangement for the security of the exhibited items, sign writing and labelling of the exhibited items and maintenance of the exhibition register.

To buttress the job of the exhibition committee are all senior members of the library staff who are free to make individual contributions in terms of suggestions and advice to the members of the Committee.

PLANNING THE EXHIBITION CALENDAR

Obolar, E.M., in reviewing the exhibits of a decade in his library, observed that exhibits fall into four distinct types "those featuring an anniversary (associated with outstanding individuals or events), celebrations of particular "weeks", displays on particular subjects which seemed of general interest, but concerning which materials could not be found by looking in one place in the card catalogue and displays concerning specific library service". **Tonasoca** on the other hand identified three kinds of library exhibition namely - the commercial type, the museum type and the literary type. According to him, the commercial type is exemplified by placards and pictures display, the museum type generally represented by objects on display accompanied by descriptive cards. A literary exhibit according to him "is more than a display of related objects, it is rather a studious effort to introduce to an interested body of people certain books, manuscripts, letters and relevant materials in order to demonstrate the work of an individual or a group of people or a period of history ...". These ideas of both **Tonasoca** and **Obolar** are useful to guide one on the choice of exhibition topics and the type of exhibitions to embark upon at a time. In the University of Port Harcourt Library, the exhibition committee in

planning the exhibition topics and calendar takes into consideration the following factors:

- (i) Request from students and faculty members.
- (ii) Social and political events in the country - in the Rivers State of Nigeria, as well as in the community for one of the goals expressed by the University library is service to the community.
- (iii) Request by organizations or societies who from time to time have conferences in the University campus.

In planning the calendar therefore, the committee has to make allowance for topics which might not have been originally scheduled in the calendar. It must be made clear that such events do not occur always. From experience, the committee has discovered that cooperation with librarians who are not members of the committee are very useful especially when drafting the calendar. The planning committee has also discovered that planning in advance enable special occasions to be observed, provides for purchasing supplies as well as allowing the committee to arrange for artwork.

PLANNING THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition committee first of all meets to discuss the following points:

- (i) The nature of the exhibition or what to exhibit - books, manuscripts, prints, illustration, etc.
- (ii) Items that the library has.
- (iii) Items that could be borrowed from other libraries, organizations, companies, ministries, etc.
- (iv) Publicity - Use of posters, invitation cards, radio and television.
- (v) Official opening and receptions.
- (vi) Security for the exhibited items.
- (vii) Refreshments.
- (viii) Duration of the exhibited items.
- (ix) Arrangement for photographs.
- (x) Exhibition catalogue.

Because of the limited space, a brief explanation of the above points is necessary.

THE NATURE OF THE EXHIBITION OR WHAT TO EXHIBIT

From the experience of the various exhibitions held so far, books, manuscripts, prints, maps illustrations and photographs occupy a large place in all the exhibitions. On many occasions, the exhibitions have been enlightened by introducing artefacts and nonbook materials.

ITEMS THE LIBRARY HAS

The University of Port Harcourt Library is a young one, just about three years old and as such, its holdings are modest and not enough to cover most of the needs in all exhibited topics. A thorough combing is made to get any useful materials for any exhibitions. Efforts are always made to contact both

the academic and professional staff of the university, though the response is not always encouraging despite personal contact which we often resort to.

BORROWED ITEMS

The library committee relies heavily on borrowed materials from other libraries, organizations, companies, research institutions and government departments. One of the problems in this area is the ability to decide precisely what are needed on the spot even without seeing what materials are available. Added to this is the willingness to make available some "restricted and secret" materials; the problem of security of these materials if one is lucky enough to have them and the uncompromising attitudes of many of the top men in those areas to give you what you are asking for despite a letter of introduction from the University Librarian.

PUBLICITY

Publicity work is by posters, press releases, radio, and sometimes by television. Well designed invitation cards are occasionally made use of as well as letters to selected personalities. The press, radio and the television are also given every details in time to arrange for journalists and photographer. Further publicity is given through the student newspapers, and library acquisition list or bulletin.

OFFICIAL OPENING

The official opening of each exhibition is considered as a very important one for it to a large extent determines the type of guests that would turn up for the exhibition. The choice of opener for each exhibition is always determined by the topic and as such, important personalities within and outside the university community are always invited to open the exhibition. From our experience, we normally invite the Vice-Chancellor or some professors in the university to do the opening for we rely on their honouring the invitation. In addition to this, guest speakers, local troupe dancers, recitals and poetry readings are sometimes invited to grace the opening ceremonies. The library has no auditorium or large halls suitable to accommodate the guests for the opening ceremony and as such, a lecture hall fitted with microphones and loud speakers is made use of though this is not often very satisfactory. A member of the library exhibition committee is always around to conduct guests and answer some few questions that may arise.

SECURITY FOR THE EXHIBITED MATERIALS

One of the problems which face the exhibition committee is that of security of exhibited items. The library makes use of porters during the working hours of the day and the university security department is often consulted to take care of the locked rooms

when the porters might have closed for the day. An exhibition register is often kept at the porters desk for signatures and comments.

PROVISION OF LIGHT REFRESHMENT

The exhibition committee usually provides light refreshment on the day of the opening ceremony of each exhibition. One may question the aim of this refreshment but from our experience, the light refreshment has always helped to keep our guests relaxed after the exhibition has been declared open and serves as time for personal exchange of views on the exhibition. Useful suggestions and comments for improvement are often gathered on the spot as a result of friendly discussions.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Tonasoca observed that "the culmination of library exhibit technique lies both in the fulfilment of creating the exhibit and supplementing the exhibit with a catalogue as a guide to the materials on display? Though he equally added that many successful exhibits may not provide a catalogue, but it is essential to provide it for they are "not only guides to the exhibit for the visitor but are also bibliographical aids to the student and scholar. It also supplies all the essential information in a printed form to people who are not present at the exhibit". In keeping with **Tonasoca's** observation, the exhibition committee provides a catalogue guide explaining the arrangement of the exhibited items and short explanations to supplement the lettering of the items. The catalogue guides are usually not very expensive and as such could be taken away by the guests.

DURATION OF THE EXHIBITED ITEMS

The library has not got a permanent place for exhibitions. All the exhibitions are held in the large central reading space. This in effect affects the duration of the exhibition so as to make room for use of the place by the students. It therefore follows that all the exhibitions do not last for more than a month. On many occasions, the library has extended this period on request from students, staff and other visitors. Before the exhibitions are dismantled, photographs of the exhibition are usually taken for future reference.

EXHIBITIONS HELD FROM 1978 - SEPTEMBER, 1980

The University of Port Harcourt Library considers exhibitions as one of the ways by which it can contribute to the information needs of the university community and the public in general. In fulfilling this service consciousness, the library between January 1978 and September, 1980, has mounted exhibitions on the following topics:

- (i) African authors and creative writing (Sponsored by the Board of Studies of the School of Humanities in collaboration with the Library).

- (ii) "Election 1979".
- (iii) Conference on German Teaching (Exhibition of Children's books).
- (iv) The University of Port Harcourt.
- (v) Unesco African Regional Symposium - University - Industry Interaction.
- (vi) Mangrove Workshop - Niger Delta of Nigeria.
- (vii) Art Exhibition (in collaboration with I.B. Princewell)
- (v.ii) Exhibition on the Masquerade in Nigeria.

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED

The exhibition committee in the course of planning and mounting the exhibitions has encountered the following problems:

Time - As the university has no exhibit librarian, all the members of the exhibition committee are librarians permanently attached to one of the sections of the library with the result that they do not have enough time to devote to organizing and mounting the exhibition.

Lack of exhibit furniture such as display cases. In this respect, lots of improvisation is made and the plain surface tables help a lot.

Lack of a permanent area in the library devoted permanently to the mounting of exhibitions.

Poor financial backing by the university to cover the cost of making posters, writing signs, transport and advertisement.

Loans for the exhibitions - Often letters for request of materials are not always honoured. In most cases, where personal contact is possible, there is no better co-operation between industries, schools, ministries, research institutions and even libraries in giving out materials on request.

Security is a major problem especially of rare

materials on the exhibition stand as well as storage and return of borrowed materials.

CONCLUSION

University libraries in developing countries should consider exhibitions as one of the ways by which libraries can call attention to materials belonging to them, helping to fill the gap created by the absence of reading materials on certain pressing social and political issues and should understand that by the peculiar nature of university libraries being a comprehensive collection on human knowledge that demands are likely to be made on the libraries. If and when such demands exist, the library would be receptive to such demands especially if the demand cannot be met otherwise. The libraries should then provide and disseminate information to specialised interests - scientific, individual, social, political and commercial.

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**"IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE
IN NIGERBIBLIOS"**