

ROLE OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN FACILITATING RESEARCH: SOME NIGERIAN EXAMPLES

Abstract - The paper discusses the various roles which a University Library can play in order to facilitate research activities. These are outlined to include functional basic Library services; teaching the use of library and information resources; bibliographic activities; documentation and information services; reprography and translation services; and endeavouring to understand the nature of research process. It concludes that research and library operations being essentially information activities, should be designed to support each other.

INTRODUCTION

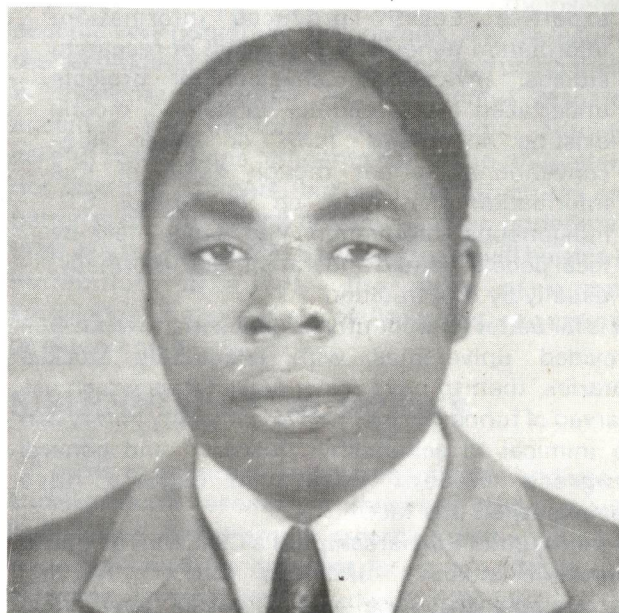
Restating the generally accepted functions of any University, Nigeria's *National Policy on Education*, identified the following commitments of Nigerian Universities:

- "(i) Teaching
- (ii) Research
- (iii) The dissemination of existing and new information
- (iv) The pursuit of service to the community
- (v) Being a storehouse of knowledge"

A careful consideration of these functions will reveal that research is a sine qua non for the effective prosecution of all the other four functions. For according to an experienced Nigerian University administrator,

"i is not enough for a university to function as an excellent teaching institution; in fact it is doubtful if it can so function without being an excellent research centre as well. All the great universities of the World derive their greatness from the quality of the research undertaken within their walls both by the teachers and their postgraduate students. Through research, new knowledge is discovered and old knowledge refurbished and, to this way, teaching is enriched. Through research in the modern world, universities bring their impact to bear on agriculture, industries, and trade, and many a discovery which has revolutionized medicine, transportation and engineering is based upon fundamental research conducted in universities. A developing country needs to grasp this vital point ..."

It follows that in endeavouring to facilitate research in a university, a university library would thereby be fulfilling its central and very vital function. This paper evaluates the existing state of university library activities in support of research, with special reference to Nigeria. The evaluation provides basis for discussing both some present inadequacies, and how a university library could be made more effective, as an important instrument for research. It is postulated that a university library can aid research through, functional basic library services; imparting to researchers the skills of using library and information resources; involvement in bibliographic, documentation and information activities; **development of essential ancillary services, such as reprography and translations; and through researching into the nature of the research process itself.**



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BASIC LIBRARY SERVICES

Traditional library activities involving acquisitions, cataloguing, classification, organisation, and readers' services, are fundamental for the functioning of any library; and as such, can be regarded as basic library services. The levels and manner of operating them, depend largely on the conditions and environments of a particular library system. In a university library situation, they should be operated at such levels and relevance that can facilitate research especially when research as an important aspect of teaching, is regarded as including "enquiry, looking up information oneself and drawing certain conclusions"

In its acquisitions policies and programmes a university library should differentiate between the demands of its research and teaching collections. The levels, trends, nature and specifics of research activities being carried out in the university should be clearly ascertained by its library. Efforts should be made, within the limits of its resources, to provide as adequately, and comprehensively as possible, the essential resources that can sustain both present and future research commitments of the institution, because "collections that fall below certain levels inhibit research"

All the major categories of information resources indispensable for research in the third World, should

be acquired, at appropriate levels and scope. They include according to Woodward,

Formal STI: information recorded in periodicals, books and major report series and signalled in major abstracting and indexing services, mostly produced outside the developing countries. Information resources brought into a developing country as a by-product of some other activity e.g. technical cooperation programmes or commercial/industrial activities, largely in the form of acquired expertise. Locally produced information; information generated as a result of research, studies, inventories, development projects undertaken in the country concerned, mostly existing in report form or other non-conventional format though some of this information may end up as formal STI. Indigeneous information; knowledge held by local people, gained and transmitted informally, usually by oral tradition".⁵

It is far better for a country to establish a few but well provided universities with adequately stocked libraries, than to have many universities which are starved of funds. An ineffective university library can be inimical to scholarship, research and general progress. Recent events in Nigeria have demonstrated this fact.

As a result of the hardships of a Civil War, and anti-academic policies under a Military regime, universities, including their libraries have been starved of even the basic recurrent funds. Yet, largely for political reasons, many more universities were being established in different parts of the country. This resulted in a general deterioration and inadequacies of university facilities that have led to series of industrial confrontations with the governments.

Besides the comprehensive and relevant system of acquisition, a university library still needs to analyse its collections in sufficient details in order to enable researchers retrieve various types of information, with convenience and speed. The library systems of cataloguing, classification, subject analysis and organization, are designed to achieve these. However, there are abundant indications that most of these systems in fact do constitute hindrances to many researchers in Nigeria, in their efforts to locate needed information in libraries.

Many users have pointed out that descriptive cataloguing are not detailed enough, and that certain irrelevant information such as sizes of materials and the publishers' commercial series numbers are included, while essential details such as documents and special series numbers, helpful cross references and history cards, are quite often omitted. Many of the subject headings being adopted are not detailed enough as to provide headings for special local subjects, and logical subdivisions of general subjects. Many of the systems of subject subdivisions are not consistent and do not seem to take into account the peculiar African approach to subject associations, and even language usages.

In Nigeria, most of the university libraries adopt the

L.C. Classification scheme; while a few still use Bliss or Dewey systems. All of these systems do not analyse African topics in precise details, nor allocate sufficient places for local subjects. In many cases, they reveal ignorance of local subjects and geographical conditions, which can be misleading indeed. The worse errors are committed in their treatment of African history, geography, religions, languages, literatures, politics, ethnography, and sociology. Since the basic schemes are wrong with respect to these local materials which are growing in numbers and research importance, most of them are misclassified in libraries, resulting in great retrieval problems. It should be realised that a system of arranging materials, does not only influence retrieval, but also has the power of suggesting and conditioning research trends.

Many libraries in Nigeria are modifying these schemes of classification. In fact the whole of the Nigerian and African history of the L.C. Scheme have been revised through the efforts of libraries and the Nigerian Library Association. But this is a half measure effort. In the interest of scholarship and research in Nigeria, the cataloguing, classification, and subject analysis systems now in use in the universities, need to be replaced with different systems, which are better suited to Nigerian conditions.

A chief cataloguer in one of the older Nigerian university libraries, was certainly aware of the problem when he noted that:

... as far as Africana is concerned, general schemes at present in use are simply not good enough. And with institutes and schools of African Studies being established in almost all our universities and the generally intensive researches being carried out on all aspects of Africana, things are going to be worse. If we are going to be of any service to our readers, if the right work is to go to the right reader, then we must revise all Africana sections in the general schemes now in use. By revising them we will at least know what we are classifying. Because the products of the intensive researches call for closer and more specific classification than is at present provided for in the general schemes.⁶

The organization of a library can also affect research activities. In Ibadan University Library there are a number of special collections, such as — Africana, Nigeriana, Maps of Manuscripts, Arabic, Serials, Thesis, References, Librarianship, Archives, Government Publications and Microforms; while the entire library system is divided into the General and the Research Sections, reflecting the nature of the collections in each section. This arrangement in itself, does facilitate research activities within the system. It has also been observed from the same library, that proper house keeping involving apparently simple practical issues, such as shelving, dusting, workable loans and circulation systems, do have vital effects on research and retrieval processes, for "the basis of all good library experience is a well-run library and being ... that books can be found either in their right places on the

shelves when they are wanted or can be properly accounted for if they are not there."⁷

TEACHING THE USE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH

It is becoming quite obvious to many library users, that academic knowledge does not automatically develop the skills for seeking and using information. Therefore it is a very important function of any university library to impart the skills of using resources to its users, in order to enable them make the best and fullest use of their study and research opportunities.

Following trends in many developed countries, many university libraries in Nigeria have developed special programmes in the use of libraries, particularly for their undergraduate students. In the University of Nigeria, and Lagos, the programmes earn credits, and are integrated into the academic programmes. However, appropriate programmes for research students have been developed by only a few Nigerian Universities.

The most developed programmes is the series of seminars on library methods for research, which has been going on at Ibadan University, since 1972. It is designed for postgraduate and other research users of the library, and held usually at the beginning of the academic year; soon after the general introduction of students to the use of the library. It is now conducted on faculty basis. The programme comprises of, methods of using the library, its records and facilities for research; demonstrations on the use of reference materials, non-book materials, and other special resources such as indexes, abstracts, reviews, etc; instructions in documentation centres, societies, organizations, and human resources, relevant to various research fields. At the end of about two hours of instructions and demonstrations, by professionally qualified librarians with relevant subject backgrounds, seminar notes with relevant subject bibliographies, are handed out to the participants. Other features of the Seminars include discussion on research methodologies, and bibliographic styles. There has been no formal evaluation of the programme, nor have the students been involved in practical projects.

Its effects on the research capabilities of the participants are therefore not precisely known, but effect may be minimal. Not many students do participate, and there has been no real cooperation from the University teachers and research supervisors. It has become clear that like the general instruction in library use, the co-operation of academic staff in determining goals, methods, evaluation, and participation, is vital for the necessary motivation on the part of the participants. This may be the only way to ensure the success and effectiveness of such programmes. It is however hoped that the effects may be gradual and cumulative; and that non-participants will eventually come to realise what they have been missing. Perhaps after some time, both the staff and

students, will see the need for such a programme, and will then give the necessary support to it.

However, the fact still remains that there is great need for such a programme, especially in Nigerian universities. The students, including the postgraduates, are known to have poor library using skills. And yet, their university libraries are becoming more complex in their organizations.

Reference materials, such as indexes, abstracts, reviews, etc, which are the means for controlling the ever growing corpus of knowledge, have themselves become very numerous and complex. A knowledge of the techniques and skills of judging and using them, is therefore essential for meaningful research activities and life-long self education. Through careful instructions, students can get to understand not only the contents, but also the structures and patterns of information communication, underlining their areas of research. Such students will be able to manipulate creatively, the store of human knowledge, in the process of discarding, re-working, or extending it.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ACTIVITIES

In order to ensure the easy transmission and use of knowledge for research, a university library should be involved in the proper recording and analysis of knowledge, through different forms of bibliographic activities. They should include the following:

- (i) Analytical or historical bibliographies — which examine structural details as well as historical transmission of the intellectual contents of important works.
- (ii) Content analysis — which seeks through systematic analysis, to depict certain structured trends or developments in the contents of certain important communication media.
- (iii) Social epistemology — which involves the recording and "analysis of the production, distribution and utilization of intellectual products in much the same fashion as that in which the production, distribution, and utilization of material products have long been investigated ..."⁸
- (iv) Bibliometrics — which employs the techniques of statistical and graphical methods to shed light on the patterns and structure of information communication within subject fields.
- (v) Enumerative or descriptive bibliographies — these give identifying details of intellectual works, which may carry useful annotations, and are arranged in some sort of order in order to facilitate their use.

Nearly all the bibliographic activities carried out by Nigerian university libraries belong to this class. Efforts should also now be directed towards

compiling the other types of bibliographies, in order to make available to researchers, varied forms of essential tools for the advancement of knowledge.

Bibliographies are essential tools of research. They help to speed up the process of research by assembling in ready and useful orders, what have been published in subject areas. They help researchers to form reliable pictures of what have been done and what need to be done in areas of knowledge; they can thus condition necessary research topics, as well as help to identify authoritative resources and contributors in subject areas.

For bibliographies to perform these essential functions their entries should be comprehensive, and selected from wide variety of sources. They should meet the demands of their set objectives and scope, very adequately; and should be well arranged, with annotations so as to facilitate use. Materials should be listed correctly, completely, and consistently, following a standard bibliographic style. They should be adequately indexed, so as to indicate, at least, all their essential subjects and another elements.

DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION SERVICES

In order to assist research workers to understand the complexities of modern information systems, and to keep up with the ever-growing literatures of their subjects; as well as control other inhibiting effects of publishing explosions, university libraries should move into the more dynamic areas of documentation and information services. The University of Ibadan Library has moved very far in the direction of providing documentation and information services.

The Library has since its inception in 1948, published its monthly *Library Record*, which carries new accessions lists, as well as other useful notices, necessary for understanding the system. It has published other useful information items such as, *A student companion to the Library*, (1968); *Library guide*, (1970); *Ibadan University Library brochure*, (1973); and *Guide to Branch/Faculty Library*, (1977).

It has also published a number of guides to its collections. These include, "A guide to reference sources in the Library: Social Sciences (1975); Physical Sciences (1975); Humanities (1976); Biological Sciences (1976); and Education (1978)."⁹

Ibadan University Library has also been publishing information services bulletins. These include *Journal bulletin of Medicine in West Africa*, (1975 -). It is based on the computer print outs from the Medline data base of the National Library of Medicine, U.S.A.. Other bulletins which have been running since their first issues, are — *Journal bulletin for Technology*, (1977); *Journal bulletin for Library and Information Sciences*, (1976); and *Journal bulletin for Agricultural Sciences*, (1976 -).

There have been no real efforts on the part of any university library in Nigeria to engage itself in such important information services as S.D.I., or in indexing and abstracting, although it is well known that researchers are finding it very difficult to access

numerous local publications, because most of them are not indexed or abstracted by either local or international services. Due to financial and poor communication reasons, the Nigerian University libraries have been unable to benefit from the services of most of the numerous data bases and banks, scattered throughout the World, either on-line or even manually. There is great need to train qualified librarians, with adequate subject backgrounds, in the fields of documentation and information services, if researchers in these universities are to benefit fully from modern information systems.

Nigerian university libraries have however made some progress in the compilation of union lists of books, serials, and other items; so researchers have access to the nation's entire resources, irrespective of their areas of operation. Another service which Ibadan University Library is exploring, is the identification of 'gate keepers' in various areas of research, and how to operate information services through them.

These various information services are vital to research, because they enable scholars to draw their references from a much larger pool than ever before.

DEVELOPING ANCILIARY SERVICES

Besides the core library and information services, there are a number of vital ancillary services, which facilitate research activities. These include reprography and translation services.

No library can be self-sufficient with respect to the resources which researchers need. Duplication through reprography, is often employed, in obtaining and keeping, rare resources for research purposes. It also enables a researcher to obtain its individual copy of resources which he can use at his convenience, outside the normal library periods.

Information systems have experimented with different forms of reprography, with different products, which include microfilms, microcards, microfiche, photostat, copycat, verifax, thermofax, dyeline, blueprint, and xerography. Xerography appears to be the most successful, and most used, in libraries both in Nigeria and elsewhere. It is a very stable process, and is printed on ordinary printing paper, consequently its shelf life is anticipated to be as long as that of a normal printed book.

In Nigeria, complaints against reprography by researchers include, high cost of duplication; delays arising from the fact that these are no coin-operated machines, but usually a single point in the library for the duplications. There are usually frequent breakdown of machines, and non-availability of electricity for long periods. In many cases products are no where near as good as the originals. Coin-operated machines, located at various points in the library, will help a great deal in Nigeria. They can easily pay their way, and help to speed up the photocopying processes, as well as reduce the present high cost of photo-duplications in libraries.

Translation is another vital service which has hardly been considered by university libraries in Nigeria. An

attempt to introduce the service in Ibadan university in 1972 did not really succeed.

There are real language barriers to effective research in Nigeria. Tell, is right when he wrote that "most developing countries have serious inadequacies when it comes to knowledge of language especially in the mastering of a few of the World languages like English, French, German, languages in which the World's scientific and technological knowledge is exposed in the primary and secondary literature".¹⁰ Even the developed countries have similar problems. For example, Ellen, found from a 1979 survey, that "the situation with regard to the language barrier in Britain does not appear to have improved in the last 13 years. In some respects the problems experienced by scholars and research workers have increased."¹¹ One can safely assume that the language barrier to research is unfortunately a World wide phenomenon, which is hindering cross fertilization of ideas, and consequently limiting human consciousness and general progress.

The problem is multidimensional. Not many libraries and information systems are willing or capable to accept the fact that translation should logically be a part of their service responsibilities. Researchers do not know how to locate existing translations, or translation services available, even within their countries. There are only a few of these services in most of the countries. Most of these services are slow, and often the products are not accurate or genuine translations and so are not reliable for research purposes.

Research libraries should educate users about existing translations and services and be ready to translate certain works themselves. There are useful publications which can be used e.g. *Index translationum*, an international bibliography of translations from member countries of the UNESCO, published by UNESCO, since 1932. *World Index of Scientific translations*, now called *World Transindex*, which is published by the International Translations Centre, Deft. The Netherlands. It lists translations from non-Western languages into Western languages, (both complete and in process) of serial articles, patents and standards relating to science and technology. It also includes a fair number of social science translations and a few dealing with various other subjects. *Journals in translation*, is another one. It is joint publication of the International Translations Centre and the British Library Lending Division. There are also, *Translations Registerindex*, published by National Translations Centre, John Crerar Library, Chicago; and *The Aslib Index of unpublished translations*.

University libraries have vital role to play in the conquest of the language barrier. According to the Director of the International Translations Centre, libraries can play a dual role in helping users overcome the language barrier. They can help at the stage when references are being sought by advising on the bibliographic tools and on-line search services to use and by providing multilingual guides to the services concerned. They can also help the

identification of translations, in obtaining documents, and if necessary in the production of translations either in full or in outline¹²

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF RESEARCH PROCESS

If a university library is to facilitate research, then it must understand the research process, and itself be involved in research. According to Aboyade, "a librarian should have a scholarly bent of mind as well. If he undertakes once in a while his own private research not necessarily for a higher degree, he should have more insight into some of the problems researchers often face."¹³ Research is a long and tedious process during which every bit of information is crucial; a simple library material may become very important, and knowledge is not as differentiated as library classification and organization tend to treat them. A researcher is essentially a cross-disciplinary user. "A single research worker could exhibit a chameleon — like quality, becoming now a palaeographer, now a geographer, now nuclear scientist, sometimes even an archaeologist, as his work develops."¹⁴

There is need for current user studies to focus also on the research worker. Then university library acquisition, processing, and user services could be based more realistically on their findings. It may become necessary for special classification schemes, based on broad inter-disciplinary approaches, to be evolved for research collections. The practice of separating undergraduate and research libraries in some universities seems a good decision, for in reality, two quite different uses are made of a university library - instructional, and research uses.

CONCLUSION

Research should be a principal pre-occupation of any good university; and the university library should serve as an important instrument for research support. Both the library operation and research, are essentially information activities. Both should therefore, be designed to support and facilitate the objectives of each other.

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