

USER EDUCATION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

INTRODUCTION

As research and scholarly publications continue to proliferate, the problems of accessing the information required by undergraduate students and even faculty members have become substantial. Consequently it has become imperative that users should become more ambitious in order to retrieve resources accurately. It has therefore become expedient to develop an awareness of the complex bibliographic structure of the literature of their fields.

Although many librarians have long regarded user education as beneficial, not until the last five to ten years has any appreciable effort been made to develop programme which are essential components of a library's overall operation. Literature review on user education provide evidence of the steady growth in importance of this aspect of librarianship.

The need for increased library user education may be partly related to the exponential growth of published materials, particularly marked in certain disciplines like the sciences and technology. More and more people all over the world are engaged in scientific and technological work and this has led to information explosion. It has therefore become increasingly difficult if not impossible for an individual student and researcher to obtain relevant information easily.

It is pertinent also to note the astronomical increase in the number of students involved in higher education today. This increased proportion does not match the number of librarians available. A well informed user, has less and less reason to need the assistance of the librarian for trivial problems.

There is also the changing form of higher education which is moving in the direction of project oriented studies in many institutions. In Nigerian universities, for instance, methods of teaching and course contents have changed considerably in recent years and research is becoming more diversified and more specialised. There is also the application of interdisciplinary approach to nearly all fields of study and the growth of new combination of subject matter within fields, bring pressure to bear on the student and users generally.

Evidence abound that students and researchers are generally not finding it easy to use the library properly. For instance studies have shown that 71% of undergraduates are not aware of the existence of the subject catalogue, that only 25% are aware of the existence of abstracts, 32% are aware of the existence of indexes, 36% of inter-library loans services. Of the undergraduates who are aware of the existence of the subject catalogues, about half do not use it or have difficulty in using it.¹

The situation is even more bizarre in Nigeria and indeed most developing countries, where the system of education in elementary and secondary schools, does not promote library use. Majority of the schools have very small libraries which do not meet their educational needs, and students who graduate from these schools came into the university with very low reading habit and little or no knowledge of the use of library resources.

The reasons for educating the user of information have been discussed by many writers, T.H. Cannon Summarises these reasons as follows:²

1. The world still appears to be suffering from an exponential increase in all kinds of information - bearing materials. Even if much of it is of little value, it still has to be sifted to find the required information.
2. Several new methods of information transfer, such as mechanised information retrieval systems, are being developed giving rise to new aspects of user education.
3. Both educational and research topics are becoming increasingly multi-disciplinary in nature, thereby drawing information from a wider range of sources.
4. Not being able to find necessary information delays research or decisions.
5. Lack of awareness of information leads to duplication of effort. Various estimates of the extent and cost of this have been made.
6. As yet, little use has been made of modern information storage and retrieval system. A recent estimate suggests that only 3.5% of the potential population use or have used mechanised SDI Systems.
7. Little use is made even of printed abstracts and indexes, especially in engineering and technology.
8. Library surveys reveal many unsatisfied customers, many of whom do not consult either the staff or the appropriate aids to retrieval.
9. In 1967, the Parry Report found that among undergraduates, only 37% knew of abstracts, 25% did not know about library catalogue, 41% did not know about inter-library loans and only 14% had been taught to use the library.
10. Many undergraduate courses involve extensive class and practical work. Therefore the little time available for private study must be efficiently used.
11. In all educational institutions, students must be able to find, acquire, and use all kinds of educational materials".



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Connon's summary speaks for itself and academic libraries have a duty to make sure that their materials are efficiently used and users time is economised.

Definitions

In her book on reader instruction, Mews defines user education as instruction given to readers to help them make the best use of a library.³ There are two types of library user education. One is library orientation and the other is bibliographic instruction.

Orientation is primarily concerned with ways of introducing the user to the general techniques of library users and services available and in particular to the organisation of the library, and its services. It helps users know for example when the library opens, how to obtain books, how to borrow materials needed, where specific items are to be found and so forth.

Apart from all these, orientation helps to create the right kind of atmosphere for effective communication between users and library staff. Orientation helps to portray the library as a helpful and friendly institution. Infact orientations are inspirational as they create in the users the assurance that the library staff is ready to assist them at any time. Jolley said that at the end of the orientation, apart from knowing all these things, the student should be confident that the library staff is competent and willing to help him.⁴

On the other hand, bibliographic instruction is concerned with introducing the students to the sources of information and the techniques of making use of the resources. These bibliographic instructions are given at appropriate times, especially prior to the students project or long essays.

The following is a list of short term objectives of a bibliographic instruction. After completing the course the student should have ability to:-

1. Recognise the different types of information research, current awareness services, locate, select, and obtain information relevant to a specific subject or topic of his/her own choice.
2. Carry out the logical stages in a retrospective information retrieval search.
3. Define accurately search topics.
4. Be able to express search topics in a number of search terms.
5. Use the various tools available for retrieval properly, like project catalogues, report indexes, abstracts, reviews, bibliographies, subject catalogue and of course.
6. Be able to present the information obtained in the form of a written list of references.

Whether it is library orientation or bibliographic instruction, the objective of user education is that at the end of the programme, the student should:

1. Want to use their university and other libraries in connection with their studies and future work.
2. See the library as a place in which to work and to borrow materials.
3. Experience interest and enjoyment in the process of obtaining information.

Methodology

During the 1986/87 academic session, a mail survey of university libraries in Nigeria was conducted. The writer was

eager to investigate not only some of the facts about current trends and practices in library user education in these universities, but also opinions of university librarians and perceptions of their own effectiveness, problems, needs, suggestions for improvements and the like.

Out of the 24 university librarians who were sent questionnaires, 22 (97%) completed and returned them. The high response rate, plus the extensive comments included in the cover letters on the questionnaires, is indicative of their keen interest. The questionnaire was broadly worded to allow each respondent an opportunity to give as much view as possible.

Apart from the questionnaire, some librarians were personally interviewed and these interviews yielded much dividend as the personal contact afforded them the opportunity of intimately expressing their opinions on the situation as they saw it.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 22 (97%) of the universities surveyed, perceive themselves as having an ongoing programme of user education. The prevailing orientation programmes for freshmen at the beginning of each session, the incorporation of "Use of Library" as a credit course in the General Studies Programme (GNS) and some fairly organised reference service work at the circulation, all show that most academic libraries in Nigeria do have some kind of user education programme going.

However, looking at the survey more critically, one is not as happy and almost disappointed at the situation as at present. The general pattern that has emerged from the survey is that user education in academic libraries in Nigeria is characterised chiefly by its lack of calculated trend towards marrying students experiences in library use instruction with their actual course work.

The use of worksheets, exercises and the like in accompaniment with instruction is less commonly practised; no concrete participation and support by classroom faculty and university administration; no abiding determination to ensure that existing instructional programmes are modestly developed and modestly successful; no attempt is being made to articulate defined goals and objectives for the programme; nor are there subsequent evaluations of even the barest minimum of instruction they have been given; no arrangements or concerted effort has been made for conferences on teaching "library use" and providing professional literature on the subject; and more importantly, our librarians in Nigeria have lacked a discoverable "body of theory" and a "methodology" with which to advance their instruction.

This is presently the picture of the extent of user education in academic libraries in Nigeria. From the foregoing therefore it could be safely said that library user education in academic libraries in Nigeria is yet to come of age.

STUDENT ABILITY TO USE THE LIBRARY

Respondents were asked to assess students' ability to use the library during the last five or six years. Only four respondents (18.2%) were of the opinion that students have shown marked ability to use the library and they attributed it to the improvements in library orientation.

On the other hand, 18 respondents (81.8%) were of the

opinion that students seemed to have completely lost the ability to use the library and to think for themselves. They said that only few students read library textbooks, while majority of them depend on their lecture notes for examinations. This latter assessment of the students ability to use the library properly, agrees with a recent survey result on student utilization of academic libraries in Nigeria. In that survey it was discovered that about 85% of the students had one type of difficulty or the other in using the library and that 45% of them had extreme difficulty.⁵

In yet another recent survey on "unavailability syndrome in academic libraries in Nigeria", it was discovered that out of the 66% unavailability rate in the Bendel State University Library, students' mistakes, unfamiliarity with library procedures and general inability to use the library properly, accounted for 18.18%⁶

Generally all respondents were of the view that the ritualistic freshmen orientation conducted annually by the library, should be sufficiently supported by an aggressive, purposeful and well articulated user instruction in order to improve student ability to use the library.

Trends of User education in Nigeria

Respondents were asked to express their personal views about user education trends in Nigeria. Eight respondents (36.4%) said they are running real library user education programme which of course entails extensive bibliographic instructions. On the contrary, fourteen (63.6%) do not have the programme going. They, however, organise the annual freshmen orientation, during which time they give lectures and provide handouts and guides to students. They also teach the "use of library" as credit earning courses under the general studies programme.

On whether they had any concrete plans to introduce the programme in their libraries, most of them (n=14) had no plans now due to constraints of funds, professional staff and relevant literature on the subject.

For the institutions that have the programme going, (n=8), respondents were asked to estimate the stage of development of the programme in their libraries, as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Excessive | Nil % |
| 2. Adult what it should be | Nil % |
| 3. Not what it should be | 20% |
| 4. Approaching a proper balance | 8% |
| 5. Low | 10% |
| 6. Pitifully meager | 62% |

Respondents were asked to estimate how far in their opinion librarians in Nigeria have fared in terms of identifying the proper approaches to user instruction and also in terms of developing effective instruction, as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. Very well | Nil % |
| 2. Coming along fine | Nil % |
| 3. Just started | 30% |
| 4. Still trailing behind | 70% |

Most of the respondents were of the view that the apparent inability to identify the proper approaches to user education in Nigeria stems from lack of articulated user instruction philosophy and methodology with which to pursue the programme. A philosophy of user education ought to have been based on the belief that ability to use the library effectively is one of the vital assets of the educated person. Not many people, at least in Nigeria, have this ability. It becomes

necessary if not mandatory to teach users the "art" of utilizing the library resources. It is now clear that apart from the other inhibiting factors, the single most important problem facing user education is this absence of methodology.

What is lacking is not manpower or any other factor as such, but lack of a useful, working tradition for library user education which would contain broad teachable concepts. This should form the main nucleus of the philosophy of user education. But this has been hitherto neglected in formal education and this need be corrected. These perceptions form the basis of a vision that must first be conceptualised and explored in the minds of librarians and then later communicated to others with clarity.

Part of this package of theory, methodology and philosophy and all that, will involve re-orientating users concepts of and attitudes towards the library by demonstrating for example:-

1. That libraries are the dynamic memories of civilization, not static, unchanging repositories of an unknown past as it were;
2. That this memory can be consulted as one consults one's memory;
3. That libraries demand active, and inspired effort for their riches to be fully explored.

University authorities and even at times librarians themselves, believe that there is nothing so much in "Learning the library", there should therefore be no need wasting money and so much of the students time. Yet the same university authority will easily agree that teaching any "language skills" is very crucial. The New York Times for example had reported that Cornell University in the United States appointed a "dean for writing"⁷. If a dean whose sole responsibility is simply to teach precise exposition, can be appointed, then it is even more necessary and long over due to appoint deans for library instruction in universities.

There is no doubt at all, and infact all respondents agree that there is an urgent need for a well articulated user education programme in academic libraries. They are agreed that it is necessary for a greater percentage (about 70%) of their total user education efforts to be integrated with course work in the regular curriculum. All the respondents also feel that a special budget should be provided for the programme. If the authorities is made to understand the value of user education they are likely to make funds available.

Objectives and evaluation of user education programmes

Another factor that has bedevilled user education programme in Nigeria is that constructive attempts had not been made to articulate defined goals and objectives for the programme, nor had there been subsequent evaluations of even the barest minimum of instruction given so far in schools. Respondents were asked to estimate the extent to which they made use of performance objectives and if they evaluated their goals. Only 2 respondents (9.1%) claimed to have been drawing up goals and objectives for the programme, but agreed that they had not been evaluating the programmes.

The use of performance objectives is the bedrock of a solidly established programme of user education, because it helps to measure results. From the above responses it is clear that majority of the operations of user education programme in academic libraries in Nigeria, rely solely on impressionistic assessment of the result of its programme. In such a situation, they can not be said to be overwhelmingly confident that they

are achieving the desired goals.

This problem is not peculiar to Nigeria in any case. For example in a 1977 survey of 377 Southeastern academic libraries in the United States of America, only 12% of the libraries indicated that measurable objectives had been developed. Things have changed since 1977 and so Nigerian academic libraries must not rest on their oars. Infact awareness of the need for performance objectives, and evaluation has since gained currency in the States and Europe generally. Fjallbrant has written extensively on the value of objectives and evaluation and notes that it is futile attempting to evaluate user instruction without predetermined objectives⁸.

To facilitate the design and evaluation of user instruction, a useful guide has been prepared by the Association of College and Research Libraries Bibliographic Instruction Task Force⁹. The guide provides concepts of general, terminal and enabling objectives and it also furnishes illustrative materials that explicate these concepts. This guide is strongly recommended to academic librarians.

TEACHING METHODS AND MEDIA USED

The effectiveness of user education programme depends majorly on teaching methods and media used for instruction. For any methods used, it is important that elements of "motivation" and "activity" are taken into consideration. For instance if instruction is given when the student is about to start writing a project, he is likely to be highly motivated and would be very keen to benefit from a user instruction programme.

Also important is the factor of activity, that is involving the student in the process of finding an information. If a student "learns by doing", he is actively involved. He learns faster and performs better if he participates in the process of finding by himself the information needed. Figures taken from an American survey indicated that learners retain about 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they say and talk and as high as 90% of what they see as they do a thing.¹⁰

In Nigeria different types of methods and media are used, ranging from lectures, seminars/demonstrations, guided tours, programmed instruction, self instruction, individual helps, and practical exercises. For audio visuals-slide/tapes, video/tapes and audio cassettes are used.

Each of these methods and media has merits and demerits. A good method of instruction should be capable of achieving the following:-

1. sufficiently motivate the student
2. enable the student to relate new work to existing knowledge
3. make it possible for student to control the rate of flow of instruction.
4. make it possible to actively involve the student
5. enhance teacher/student instruction
6. enhance student/student interaction.

It is not possible that every method can have all these qualities. Some have it more than others. As much as possible however, instructional librarians should aspire to use methods that are capable of combining as many of these qualities as possible.

Respondents were asked to indicate, methods and media used in their user education programme and table I is a summary of methods and audio visual materials used.

TABLE I:

TEACHING METHODS AND MEDIA USED IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Teaching methods and Media	Percentage of its use
Lecturers	40%
Seminar/Demonstration for (Small groups of five or six)	5%
Guided Tours	40%
Tape/Slide for group instruction	2%
Tape/Slide for individual instruction	1%
Book/Printed media	5%
Practical Exercises	0.5%
Programmed Instruction	0.5%
Self Instruction	1%
Individual help	5%

As could be seen from the table, lectures (40%), guided tours (40%), book/printed media (50%), are the predominant methods, with lectures and guided tours ranking highest. Lectures have the advantage of making use of both auditory and visual sensory inputs. On the other hand, however, it has great disadvantages as follows:-

1. The speed of delivery of instruction cannot be controlled by the receiver and repetition is not possible unless printed handouts are provided.
2. Although the lecture gives the student a possibility to relate new facts to existing knowledge, it reduces the student to a passive role, since he is involved in taking notes.
3. With regards to orientation lectures for freshmen, lectures are not very useful because the fresh students are not motivated. Most of the freshmen orientation lectures are given during the first two weeks of their stay in the University. During this period the student is struggling to adjust to university life and therefore he is not likely to be interested, more so when attendance is not compulsory. As Ford puts it:

"the lecture commonly given to freshmen students at the beginning of their first session, must surely be a waste of time"¹¹.

On guided tours, all university libraries in Nigeria conduct their freshmen students round the university libraries. During the tour, students are shown the various key areas in the library. Also like the lecture method, guided tours have some disadvantages. The first disadvantage is that these tours are conducted when students have little or no motivation to use the Library. They had just arrived at the university and no lectures had been given.

The students therefore followed the staff passively and most often, over 80% of them had either stopped listening or completely dropped out of the procession. In fact in recent times countless writers have excoriated staff-guided library tours as often worse than worthless and felt that so much expensive staff time is being spent on guiding students about the library. Mary Jo Lynch has made one of the best statements regarding what value can be made of such tours:

"Too often librarians have acted as if users could learn all about the library in a brief tour..."¹²

During the tour librarians attempt to go through the use of

encyclopedias, indexes, abstracts, reservation, reference services, inter-library loans and all that.

The first few days of a student in the university should not be concerned with imparting of information and knowledge as it were. In fact the tour should aim at creating the impressions that the library is a place where help is available and the staff are helpful and friendly.

Instead of wasting staff time guiding the students, tape/slide packages, and films could be used to teach the students the library layout, library collections and services, internal arrangements, location of materials, borrowing procedures, the catalogue and many other things.

Provision of books/printed guides constitute 5% of the methods used in user instruction in academic libraries in Nigeria. These materials are given out to students mostly during fresh students orientations. The obvious disadvantages of this method is the time when the materials are given. Students receive an overwhelming mass of information in paper form during their first weeks at the university and so, this is not the best time to give yet further reading materials.

Printed guides and handouts can be very useful media of user education, when they are given at the right time, like during examinations or project writing etc. In fact printed guides and handouts are most useful in real bibliographic instructions which come up later in the students life at school.

Audio visual materials are sparingly used in academic libraries in Nigeria. Only a few of the older universities are using video/tapes, slide/tapes, audio cassettes and overhead projectors. Virtually all the new universities in Nigeria (Over 17 of them) do not have audio visual materials in their libraries.

Most of the respondents indicated lack of funds, problem of spare parts, power failure and power fluctuations as constraints which usually render the use of audio visual materials either unattractive or impossible. Table II shows the pattern of use of audio visual materials in user education in Nigeria.

TABLE II
USE OF AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT IN LIBRARIES
INSTRUCTION (n =)

Type of Equipment	No. of Libraries that use it	%
1. Audio Cassette	7	32%
2. Overhead projectors	6	27%
3. Slide/tapes	5	23%
4. Slide without sound	8	36%
5. Video tapes	5	23%

The paradox of the Nigerian situation is that majority of the university libraries use more of the methods that have a greater margin of disadvantages. As seen above, audio visual equipment and materials are sparingly used, yet they are more effective. Audio cassettes for example can be used for self guided orientation tours while slide/tape programmes and video tapes can be used to introduce students to library system, basic search strategy, indexes and abstracts etc.

Many students find audio visual presentations helpful, like the slide/tape programmes, despite Hill's claim that some students and staff dislike it due to their impersonal nature¹³. It

is important therefore that audio visual materials be vigorously incorporated in our user education programme.

The choice of method for instruction should be determined by the elements of motivation and activity. In the processes of using relevant method, the student is given an opportunity to relate new facts to existing knowledge. In fact a combination of teaching methods can be expected to yield the best result. As Lubans puts it:

"Librarians should give bibliographic instruction that will take the student through his period in the university and after formal education"¹⁴

BARRIERS

Although a few barriers and inhibitions have been highlighted in this essay, the respondents specifically mentioned the following as very vital:-

1. Faculty Non-Cooperation:

On faculty apathy and non-cooperation, the survey showed that it was a serious problem. Faculty members sometimes view librarians as little more than clerical support staff whose functions are not in anyway related to academics. Faculty members are not sympathetic with requests made by librarians that enough lecture periods be given to the teaching of "use of libraries", in lecture time-table.

In some universities, as few as only eight hours are allocated to user education programme for a whole session. Faculty members also care less about the quality of library resources used by their students for research. The result of such attitude is an equivalent reduction in the effectiveness of any bibliographic instruction given to students. Faculty members do not readily give reading lists to students despite their immense importance in the whole spectrum of library user education exercise.

Librarians need not be demoralised, and in fact they should see faculty non-cooperation as a challenge. Faculty members themselves need to be educated on the usefulness of the programme as follows:-

- Demonstrate to them that students are unskilled in library use and that this affects curriculum assignments. In order words, it is to the advantage of lecturers that students know how to use the library properly.
- Convince them of the importance of the library and librarians in the learning process.
- Convince them that the academic departments have little or no internal user instruction courses, which the students used very badly.

2. Shortage of Professional Staff

There is real shortage of librarians in Nigeria. Table III shows the total number of professional and para-professional librarians in Nigeria by the end of 1981/82 session¹⁵.

In the 1981-85 fourth National Development Plan, it was estimated that 900 additional librarians would have been produced during the plan period. By that projection, library schools in Nigeria should be turning out more than 180 librarians each year. But from statistical data available, library schools were not and still have not been able to meet up with this projection¹⁶.

TABLE III
PROFESSIONALS AND PARA-PROFESSIONAL
LIBRARIANS — 1981/82 SESSION

Professionals		Para-Professionals	
1. ALA	16	1. Certificate in library studies	42
2. BLS	264	2. Diploma in library Studies	972
3. PGDL	250		
4. MLS	143	3. National Diploma in Library Studies	24
5. M.Phil/ Ph.D	66		
	659		1,038

The situation is better appreciated when it is realised that in 1985, there were about 186 libraries in Nigeria, comprising 85 special libraries, 40 colleges and polytechnic libraries, 25 university libraries, 15 public and state libraries and 1 national library and to render the required services were 750 librarians and about 3,500 para-professional and clerical staff¹⁷.

In the face of the magnitude of the need for an aggressive user education programme envisaged in this survey for Nigeria, it does seem clear that the number of librarians in Nigeria, particularly instructional librarians, is grossly inadequate.

3. Inadequate Funds

A well organised user education programme is expensive in terms of equipment and other related materials and staff. A lot of audio visual materials are necessary for the programme. A look at the use of these audio visual materials in table I, shows, that the students are not getting the best out of the programme as only very few libraries in Nigeria use these equipment currently, due majorly to financial constraints. A substantial amount of university library funding is derived from the government.

Although the National Universities Commission has recommended that 5% of the recurrent university budget be allocated to the university library, this recommendation is more honoured in the breach than in the compliance, with the result that none of the university libraries in Nigeria gets this stated amount. Worse still, as the year rolls by, cuts and a withholding of funds are arbitrarily decided on by university administration and library funds are often an attractive source of funds to slash or borrow from¹⁸.

In the face of the present dwindling national economy and the devastating inflation, the financial situation in all the university libraries in Nigeria has been very bad indeed. Book

subscriptions have been drastically reduced and for many university libraries, user education is now a luxury, and where these programmes had been established, they have either been reduced or completely discontinued.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this survey, the writer has attempted to assess the extent of user education in Nigeria. To start with majority of the respondents (over 90%) agree that students grossly under utilize library resources presently because they (students) have not mastered the art of using the library. They also agree that there is need for an aggressive user education programme. The survey showed that very few academic libraries (34.4%) are currently running user education programme, while the rest are simply hanging on to the ritualistic freshmen orientation organised annually.

Various constraints have been identified to be militating against user education programme in Nigeria and these include lack of funds and professional staff, student indifference, faculty apathy and others. But most important of all the obstacles is the complete lack of a theory and methodology for handling the programme.

In this survey, the recommendations made are intended to suggest (certainly not to define comprehensively) a possible route to a very large goal. Not all the suggestions made in this paper represent entirely new thinking. They certainly draw upon a large body of useful work that has been carried out and reported in the past. Nevertheless the suggestions argue a new emphasis for and extension of approaches to library user instruction that have proven most useful.

The revelations in the survey are not intended as an indictment on library chief executives in Nigeria, rather they are intended to expose the situation of user education in Nigeria with a view to stimulating a greater interest in the programme. The impasse to users' understanding of the library deserves serious attention in order to dislodge it, and the myths about library use ought to be challenged repeatedly until they are laid to rest.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the writers humble opinion that the following will help ameliorate the situation:

1. Nigeria university librarians should come together and work out a theory and methodology for user education programme in Nigeria.
2. There should be co-operative lending of literature on the subject and audio visual equipment and materials.
3. User education programme should be vigorously integrated into the school curriculum.
4. Adequate provision for user education programme should be made in the library budget.
5. A "Dean" should be appointed to co-ordinate user education in the universities.

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