

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVE USE OF NEW ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA:

A Preliminary Investigation At The Ogun State University Library

By

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ABSTRACT: This paper is an attempt at exploring the factors affecting the effective use of new academic library with a focus on Ogun State University Library. It explores general factors that affect use of libraries, these factors form the bedrock of the current investigation. Furthermore factors peculiar to the Ogun State University Library are also identified, these include inadequate orientation programme, the off-campus nature coupled with transportation problem, the structure of the library building, opening hours at weekends as well as lack of space within the campus itself. The library is therefore seen as a piece to while away time since students come mainly to chat away. Recommendations were therefore made with a view to making the library more attractive and to bring the level of usage to what is expected of an academic library.

INTRODUCTION

The Ogun State University, our university of focus in this study, was founded in January, 1983. The institution is one of the third generation of universities in Nigeria following the universities of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello, Lagos, Ife, Nsukka and Benin as first generation, the universities of Ilorin, Port-Harcourt, Maiduguri, Sokoto, Bayero and Calabar which formed the second generation were founded in the seventies.

The Ogun State University is a non-residential institution. Though conceived as a multi-campus university, it is now a unicampus university which is, however, being operated at the moment, as a multi-campus institution since the two largest faculties (Arts and Social and Management Sciences) are located outside the Mini-campus.

The present operation of a multi-campus system has therefore necessitated annexe (branch) libraries apart from the main library. These are the Law Library (located within the mini-campus), the Medical Library (located at the Ogun State University Teaching Hospital (OSUTH), Sagamu) and the Reading Rooms at the Ijebu-Igbo Annexe of the university.

While the Law Library and the Medical Libraries can lay claims to a fair provision of full library services, the Ijebu-Igbo Annexe Reading Rooms only provide tolerable atmosphere for consultation of basic texts for both staff and students. The Ijebu-Igbo Annexe has a copy each of basic text for the faculties, while students from Ijebu-Igbo have to come to the mini-campus for other services such as registration and borrowing.

It is headed by a Senior Library Assistant. Full Library services in terms of large quantity of reference materials, reference services, photocopying services, including administration are only available in the main library.

Much as this paper will derive its resources from the Ogun State University Library, it is believed that the result will on the long-run contribute to the growth of new academic libraries in Nigeria in particular and the developing world in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"I do not know what professionals think, but from the layman's point of view, a library is a repository of books together with a team of operators called librarians who perform a list of ancillary jobs concerning books" — Iya Abubakar (1971)¹

The above statement, one would want to think, is purely an attempt at reaching the minds of laymen and not what the former Vice-Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University thinks a library is, but then the attitudes of users as noted over the years have not debunked the above claims. Librarians, to a layman, include Library Assistants, Library Attendants and whosoever works in a "Library."

Durrence (1986)² says that in 1977 Hernon and Pastine found student assistants as being the same, furthermore 87% of their sample believe that librarians simply sit behind desks. In a nutshell, there is a lot to be done in educating the populace on what the library is and what they can gain from judicious use of libraries.

Studies have shown various factors that do and could affect the effective use of libraries. These factors depend on the type of clientele being served by a particular library and some inherent factors within a particular library too. The rest of the review will therefore examine those factors that are peculiar to academic and college libraries.

The background of readers cannot be separated from their perception or understanding of what a library is and this Bozimo (1986)³ tried to investigate among fresh undergraduates at the

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria. Her survey revealed that the bulk of freshers are knowledgeable about libraries and academic ones especially.

The reason for this, however, is the fact that most freshers in ABU are from the University's School of Basic Studies and ABU's Institute of Education. But she noted that the location of a library could hinder its use.

Le Clercq (1986)⁴ also noted the background problem among undergraduates, hence the call for library connection between high school and academic libraries. According to Marteleto⁵ in a survey conducted between 1979 and '80 at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, it was revealed that even though lecturers recognised the potential value of libraries, they do not use them or encourage their use because of inadequate library services, resources and facilities.

Sekharan (1985)⁶ identified low professional status of librarians in the eyes of teaching staff in Nigerian college libraries and unsuitable library building among some other factors affecting vitalisation of college libraries in Nigeria. Olum (1984)⁷, on the other hand, saw inadequate space as a major issue affecting library use at Oregon State University.

Oyewole (1983)⁸ noted that the set-up of a library in terms of location of its service staff like Readers Adviser is of utmost importance. It was shown in his work that the conspicuous location of the Readers' Adviser at the Ibadan Polytechnic Library accounted for maximum exploitation by library users, whereas the same cannot be said of its Ibadan University Library counterpart. Ajileye (1984)⁹ pointed out that lack of use of catalogues and problems of locating materials on shelves also affect use of academic libraries.

Affia (1983)¹⁰ observed that the "Library staff, who though convinced of the value to students of all information resources, are withdrawn from meaningful interactions with academic staff and are generally apathetic and inadventurous, believing that the academic community should be able to articulate its desires. He may be unwilling to explore new grounds and innovate new areas of service and may see them as unnecessary interference with other peoples areas of interest."

This speculated attitude of library staff can result in ineffective use of library resources and this has implication on the value of education of library users. Aguolu (1983)¹¹ rightly pointed out that the value of a degree granted by a university is a reflection of the value of the resources available to its staff and students.

Other familiar works on the effective use of academic libraries though unpublished include Azubuike's (1983)¹² "PG students awareness of reference services offered by the Ibadan University Library" and Dina's (1983)¹³ "Attitudes of students towards library use and services: University of Lagos as a case study" to mention just two. Dina's study identified availability of needed resources, library building etc. as factors that affect use of the University of Lagos Library.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The paper intends to document experience and observation as far as Ogun State University is concerned in the first place, this will then be used later as a springboard in examining the situation in other new academic libraries in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was conducted. In all, one hundred and thirty questionnaires were distributed, one hundred and fifteen were filled and returned. This represents 88.41% of the number administered. The questionnaires were distributed at the Circulation Desk and respondents were expected to fill and return same to the point of collection.

Visits were also paid to two new academic libraries and experiences were shared with professional colleagues in the libraries visited. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the following information from users general knowledge of libraries, frequency of use of the library, reasons for using the library, sources of information about available materials, users' assessment of library resources, problems encountered in their attempt to use the library and finally respondents were given a chance of commenting outside the scope of the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

FREQUENCY OF USE OF THE LIBRARY

The question on frequency was posed so as to be able to determine how high the users place the library as a necessity in an academic setting.

TABLE I: SHOWS THE SUMMARY OF THE FREQUENCY OF USE OF THE LIBRARY BY THE RESPONDENTS

Frequency	Number of Respondents	% age of Respondents
(a) Daily	42	36.5
(b) Two-three times weekly	15	13.0
(c) Once a Week	8	7.0
(d) Ocassionally	45	39.1
(e) No Response	5	4.4
Total	115	100.00

It was shown that 42 or 36.5% come to the library on daily basis, 45 or 39.1% come ocassionally, 15 respondents or 13.0% use the library two to three times weekly, while 8 or 7.0% use the

library once a week. 5 or 4.4% respondents did not answer this question at all.

REASONS FOR USING THE LIBRARY

In order to ascertain the reason why users came to the library, a number of options were proposed out of which respondents were asked to tick relevant ones. They were also to indicate what they consider the main reason.

TABLE II
SHOWS WHY READERS COME TO THE LIBRARY

The first column shows reasons, the second column shows number of respondents and percentage in bracket while column three shows main reason with correspondent percentage in bracket as well.

Proposed Reasons	Number of Respondents	Main Reason (% age)
(a) To read Newspapers	80(69.57)	2(1.74)
(b) To do assignment	81(70.43)	18(15.65)
(c) To discuss tutorial questions	15(13.04)	-
(d) To read personal books	72(62.60)	14(12.17)
(e) For reference purposes	101(87.83)	73(63.46)
(f) Equal ratings for the above	-	8(6.96)
		115(100.00)

It was shown that making use of library materials top the list of what users came to do in the library either as one of the reasons or as the main reason. Those who come to read newspapers ranked third as one of the reasons, but rated lowly in terms of the main reason.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT AVAILABLE MATERIALS

The question was posed so as to be able to determine respondents understanding or knowledge of information sources of available materials in the library in comparison with the unconventional ways. Respondents ticked as many avenues as they utilized when searching for information in the library. The breakdown of their response is as shown in Table III

TABLE III
SOURCE(S) OF INFORMATION

Source of Information	No. of Respondent (% age)
a. By scanning through shelves	71(61.73%)
b. Recommendation of lecturers	37(32.17%)
c. Advice by friends	38(33.04%)
d. By asking library staff	31(26.96%)
e. Use of library catalogues	40(34.78%)

Seventy-one respondents or 61.73% scan the shelves, the use of catalogues rated a distant second with 40 respondents or 34.78%, asking library personnel rated least with 31 respondents or 26.96%.

ASSESSMENT AND ADEQUACY OF LIBRARY RESOURCES

Respondents were asked to assess library resources by ticking one of the options-very useful, not useful, don't know.

TABLE IV
SHOWS USERS RATING OF LIBRARY RESOURCES

Rating of Reasons	No. of Respondents (% age)
a. Very useful	38(33.04%)
b. Useful	72(62.61%)
c. Not useful	2(1.74%)
d. Don't know	3(2.61%)
TOTAL	115(100.00%)

Thirty-eight respondents or 33.04% rated library resources as very useful, while another 72 or 62.61% rated same as useful. Two (1.74%) rated the library resources as not useful, while 3 or 2.61% respondent would not comment at all.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE USE OF THE LIBRARY

A number of constraints were proposed out of which respondents were asked to tick as many problems as they encounter whenever they went to or are using the library. The result is shown in Table V.

TABLE V
PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST
EFFECTIVE USE OF THE LIBRARY

Problems	No. of Respondents (% age)
a. Transportation	61(53.04%)
b. Lack of Space	50(43.48%)
c. Red Illumination	4(3.48%)
d. Red Ventilation	35(30.43%)
e. Inadequate opening hours	20(17.39%)

Sixty-one respondents or 53.04 picked as one of the problems affecting their use of the library, lack of space came second with 50 respondents or 43.48%, poor ventilation, of the library was also noted with 35 (30.43%) respondents. Opening hours also ranked fairly low with 20 (17.39%) respondents and illumination of the library ranked lowest with 4 or 3.48% respondents.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Asked to make open comments or recommendations on how services could be improved, most respondents called for more books, space and control of noise in the library.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As shown in the methodology the questionnaire opened with a question on the respondents conception of a library, responses show users have a good idea of what a library should be, but observation shows that the mode of use of the library by students especially is at variance with their understanding of a library.

A large number of students do not know how to search for materials, they come to the library to chat as well as to discuss, oftentimes one finds as many as nine students squeezing themselves around a reading table meant for five users discussing tutorial questions as against their claim in Table II which shows that discussing tutorial questions is not a major factor of their coming to the library.

Personal discussion revealed that there is lack of other spare rooms to use within the campus for group discussions in-between lectures. This situation led to the decision that only staff can read in the serials section of the library. Students are, however, allowed to scan serials and select appealing ones for reading of the general reading area.

In conformity with Hernon and Pastine as noted by Durrence this work also revealed that most respondents cannot differentiate between Librarians and Clerical Assistants, hence it is not uncommon for readers to refer to Library Assistants and attendants as Librarians and on a few occasions when one is opportuned to discuss with some readers, they often ask who librarians are and what they do.

On frequency of use Table 1, it was noted that 45 respondents or 39.1% who come occasionally are

from the Ijebu-Igbo Annexe based faculties, that is, the faculties of Arts and Social and Management Sciences. These two faculties it should be noted are faculties where students and staff see the library as their own laboratories. While majority of those who use the library daily are from the minicampus based faculties. The implication of the above is that the reading room at the annexe is not at the moment adequately meeting the demands of the annexe based library users.

Since column III of Table II shows that reference purpose is the main reason for use of the library, it could be concluded that library resources limited as it is, are still useful enough. Furthermore the ranking of resources in Table IV confirms the above especially if one were to consider the number of respondents who rated the library resource as being very useful and useful together. The two figures of those who rated resources as useful and above would be 110 that is 95.65%.

Of the problems observed and subsequently proposed, transportation was highly pinpointed as shown in Table V; this is as a result of the rural setting of the university. Transportation accounted for early closure of the university library at 7.00 p.m. as library staff who worked till this time cannot be assured of taxis to take them home.

Lack of assured transport facilities coupled with its high cost can also be seen as a major reason for annexe based students coming to the library occasionally as shown in Table I. Further analysis shows that of the 61 who saw transportation as a hindrance, 42 reside at Ijebu-Igbo.

Lack of reading space was also mentioned. It was specifically mentioned that space constraints manifests itself especially during examination periods. Hence it could be concluded that readers are more library conscious during examination periods.

From the results and discussions the following problem areas have been identified.

- (i) Deficit Library knowledge
- (ii) Sources of information
- (iii) Boosting of library resources
- (iv) Transportation
- (v) Lack of adequate reading space
- (vi) Ventilation problem

RECOMMENDATION FOR BOOSTING THE EFFECTIVE USE OF THE LIBRARY

As noted in the literature review and subsequent discussion, library users are not very sure of what the library is or what it should be, hence the need for an aggressive library orientation programme for freshers so as to improve on present "minimum user education" of one hour talk and one hour tour of the library. Nwafor (1963)¹⁴ suggested what the objectives of the user education should be and this can be summarised as follows:-

- (a) getting the student to develop the art of discrimination, the ability to judge the value of books in relation to specific needs and education as a whole.

- (b) to train independent learners to teach themselves and
- (c) to prepare students for the continuing process of self education (i.e. lifelong learning).

(i) SOURCES OF INFORMATION

It is believed that with improved knowledge of the library and its resources, the problem of sources of information will be alleviated. There is the need to boost information sources to users within the library itself. It has been stated that users do not know what librarians do.

Most of the readers do not know the library staff in-charge of sections or who perform what in the library as well as where to get personal assistance on various problems that might arise in their use of the library resources.

Oyewole,¹⁵ as earlier mentioned, noted that the conspicuous location of the Readers' Adviser at the Polytechnic of Ibadan Library is of advantage to readers (and this was acknowledged by them) unlike that of Kenneth Dike Library where the Readers Services' Librarian is not conspicuously located. The Ogun State University Library can make available table notations for its staff (where necessary) especially the Readers Services' Librarian.

(iii) BOOSTING OF LIBRARY RESOURCES

The writer is not unaware of constraints facing collection development in the library, all the same it is recommended that multiple copies of basic texts should be aimed at whenever purchases are being made. There are semesters when as many as 20 - 30 core titles have to be placed on reserve for lack of multiple copies for readers as well as for loans.

(iv) TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM

The public transportation in Ago-Iwoye and its environs has not proved reliable and efficient due to its rural setting. It is equally exorbitant and in view of the off-campus nature of the university the urge to use the library at week-ends especially or on days when users have no classes, stands automatically discouraged. If there is a reliable means of commuting, more readers will make use of the library which in turn could operate longer hours as is the case in older residential universities.

(v) SPACE PROBLEM

The library at present usually maximises the use of space especially at the eve and during examination periods. This approach can be maintained until the library is expanded or a permanent one built.

(vi) VENTILATION

The problem of ventilation is not unconnected

with the fact that the library was conceived as one to be air-conditioned, but this aim has not been realised. Hence some sections of the reading area are usually stuffy and dark in the afternoons and unbearable during the dry season, especially when there is power failure.

Provision of ceiling fans is recommended since the standing ones placed along the walls cannot adequately serve those reading at the inner tables effectively.

(vii) OPENING HOURS

There is the need to review opening hours especially for week-ends, 9.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. is recommended for Saturdays, while 11.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. is recommended for National Environmental Saturdays.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper starts with the historical background of the Ogun State University and then examined factors that can affect and have affected effective use of libraries generally, the factors are then related to the Ogun State University specially.

While most of the established factors are confirmed, it was also shown that some other factors are peculiar to the library in question. These include transportation, ventilation as well as extra rooms which could be used for discussion by lecturers. Recommendations were therefore made with a view to making the library more attractive and to bring the level of its use to what is expected of an academic library.

Finally as the title of this paper shows and with the optimism expressed in the introduction, efforts are already being geared towards a comprehensive study, which will involve three additional new university libraries so as to identify peculiar problems of third generation university libraries in Nigeria.

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