SKATEGIES FOR ENHANCING STUDENT'S USE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

Blessing N. Emuchay

Abstract
An academic library is an indispensable asset in any academic institution. An institution without a library is like a car without an engine. It is for this reason that for any department in the higher institution to be accredited the library must be well assessed. This paper starts by explaining what an academic library and academic institution are. It outlines the different strategies of enhancing student's use of academic libraries. The strategies include user-orientation, user education, among others. The objectives of user education are also highlighted, and the paper is concluded by emphasizing that if the strategies are strictly adhered to they will greatly enhance students use of academic libraries in Nigeria.

Introduction
An academic library can be defined in terms of functions, aims and objectives. The pertinent question is: What is an academic institution? In simple terms, an academic institution is an institution whose primary objective is the pursuit of knowledge or academic. It is an institution that emphasizes teaching, learning and research.

An academic institution is an institution that is primarily concerned with generation of knowledge, conservation of knowledge, and dissemination of knowledge. One can see that there is a remarkable difference between an academic institution and an ordinary school. Thus, an academic library takes its bearing from these definitions because the library is usually governed or guided by the aims, objectives and functions of the parent or host institution (Ahanene,2000). Ahanene went further to state that academic libraries are libraries that are situated or located in an academic institution or environment whose major objective is to provide library and information services that will support teaching, learning, research, generation, conservation and dissemination of knowledge. An academic library is a library and information centre established in academic institution whose function is to support the attainment of the stated goals and objectives of the parent institution. An academic library by its nature provides library and information services that are tailored towards meeting changing and varied information needs of members of the academic communities -namely the lecturers, students, researchers, administrative and technical staff. In other words, an academic library constitutes the fulcrum or the hub around which all activities of an academic institution revolve. The library is therefore an integral and indispensable component of an academic institution.

Nwosu (2000), in her own definition refers to academic libraries as libraries that operate in institutions of higher learning such as University, Polytechnic and Advanced College. They are also identified more precisely by their institution settings as University Libraries, Polytechnic Libraries and College libraries respectively. She further opined that, the academic library may be described as the singular most important resource in the pursuit of the general goals and objectives of the institution of higher learning.

To enhance student's use of academic libraries in Nigeria, the following strategies should be adopted.

A. User Education
User education is very necessary if the users have to be encouraged to make use of the library for their learning and research and to update their knowledge. Thus Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), states that instruction in library use aims at developing the bibliographic skill of library users so that they can make-the most effective use of the library and its information resources. They further stated that most students in Nigeria Universities had never used any type of library before entering the University; some of them had never even seen a library. Yet to be able to undergo a meaningful undergraduate education, they must learn how to exploit the resources of the University library. This skill, if acquired, is essential to lifelong education.

According to Edoka (2000), the objective of giving user education, in broad sense, is to help the users make the best use of the overall library resources. He noted that, carefully planned and executed user
education programme greatly ensures the realization of this objective. He went further to state the specific aims of the programme which he says include:

i. To develop readers' awareness of the overall information resources available to them in their own and other libraries.

ii. To develop skills necessary for retrieving required materials.

iii. To develop in-depth knowledge of materials in readers' subject areas.

iv. To develop skills in presenting bibliographic reference.

v. To develop skills required in making advanced studies.

vi. To create a positive attitude to information searching available at different libraries.

B. User Orientation

Orientation, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is an act of directing one's aims towards a particular thing; training or information one is given before starting something. When fresh students are admitted into the University, orientation programmes are organized, the aim is to orientate the students on the dos and don'ts of the university or institution, the structure and the makeup of the university or institution, the different departments, their reasons for being in the institutions, the goals they should work toward to achieve, the behavioural attitude, etc, at this point, the students, should equally be directed to the library and of course be told the importance of the library to their learning.

There are situations where some students go through the university but never make use of the library throughout their stay in the university. This author in her second year in the university, met a final year student who told her she never made use of the library and the more shocking information was that she never knew where the library was situated. It was a shocking revelation. The author then asked a question. Was it that orientation programme was not organized in her time? Or she never bothered to know? Any of these could be her case and there are many others like that. The orientation programme of some academic institutions is very poor thereby making a lot of students uninterested in it. The adverse effect is students' lack of knowledge on the use of the library.

Edoka (2000), asserted that user orientation is designed to give new library users a general awareness of the library resources and to emphasize that, in addition to materials, there are also library staff who are there to help them with their needs. The user orientation programme will normally cover:

1. The development of readers' awareness of the overall information resources available to them in their own and other libraries.

2. Developing skills necessary for retrieving required materials. These skills and knowledge are provided by a well-planned executed programme for user instruction. This programme will impact skills and knowledge required to use the library catalogues, to be able to locate books, pamphlets, etc., to use some standard bibliographic sources and to ensure precision in giving bibliographic references.

C. Acquisition of Up-To-Date Materials

Users are not interested in obsolete or outdated textbooks. The acquisition department or the Librarian should study the information need of the user. The academic libraries must reflect the information needs of the various academic programmes of the parent institution in the acquisition policy with a clear perception of the information material required by the library, the work of acquiring them becomes streamlined.

D. Reprographic Services

The provision of photocopy machines, according to Nwosu (2000), enables many libraries to reproduce multiple copies of single texts that are in heavy demand. The availability of photocopying services within the library also enables users make personal copies of needed texts especially those that cannot borrow out of the library.

According to Aguoiu and Aguolu (2002), the provision of photocopying services in an academic library is a necessity. It helps to reduce the incidence of pilfering and mutilation of books and journals, as students and faculty members can photocopy pages of materials they would like to read at their own time.

E. Availability of Adequate Reading and Seating Carrels

Adequate studying and seating carrels should be provided to accommodate a good number of students or users. If these facilities are not there, the users find it difficult to use the library. In some higher institutions in Nigeria, one finds users sitting outside the library's buildings reading and at this point cannot
access the library resources. It discourages users if these facilities are not put in place.

F. Making Time Convencement for Users

The opening and closing hours of the libraries should be made convenient for users. Edoka (2000), stated that most of the services are available to users only if the library opens at hours convenient to users. This means that in fixing the opening hours of any library, the convenience of the user should be the overriding consideration.

G. Provision of Internet Service

The provision of internet services in academic libraries will go a long way to speed up researches by students, lecturers, faculty members, researchers, etc. Edoka, asserted that from the use of computer one can access and disseminate information on a variety of topics: Cataloguing and other bibliographic data as well as a whole text of documents in all areas of human endeavours. It features comprehensive information on all aspects of arts, education, science and technology as well as coverage of politics, recreation, entertainment, sports, shopping and employment opportunities. Library services provided on the internet include table of contents, journals and current awareness services.

H. Bibliographic Services

Identification and location of information or document pertinent to users' inquiry depends upon the availability of effective bibliographic apparatus in general and specialized field. The library is expected to provide access tools to facilitate identification and location of information materials. Because an academic library is more or less a research library, it should be fully equipped with all relevant bibliographic resources.

Conclusion

Because of the financial inability of the students, as many come from economically poor homes, to purchase the recommended books becomes difficult and even if they have the money the books they desire to have might not be available in the local market, so the students are forced to depend heavily upon their institutions' library resources.

Oyeniyi (1974), in his study asserted that the problem of the Nigerian student is not the question of whether or not wanting to use the college library. The question is whether or not his university library can provide for his needs in the first place, and secondly, whether or not he has access to what is provided.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that if these strategies are adopted by the academic libraries in Nigeria, they will enhance in a great measure the students' use of the library and they will inculcate in them the habit of using the library even on their own without being sent by the lecturer on research or assignment. Once the habit is formed by them, a great deal of knowledge will be acquired and the library itself would have achieved its purpose as well.

References


