

PROVISION OF LIBRARY INFORMATION SERVICES: AN IMPERATIVE FOR LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the services that must be provided by librarians in university libraries to enhance maximal utilization of information resources and patronage of these libraries. It also highlights factors that affect the provision of library information services. The strategies that librarians could employ in order to ensure timely provision of library information services in Nigerian university libraries were discussed. Thus government should fund universities and by implication, university libraries so as to encourage higher productivity in acquiring resources and facilities for the provision of library information services.

Keywords: Library information services, provision, librarian, University Libraries

Introduction

As a developing country with vast potentialities, Nigeria's main objective is to enhance this development process through educational development. This is why Nigerian Universities have over the years played a variety of roles from producing skilled manpower, nurturing cultural awareness, and facilitating economic and social progress through university libraries (Etim, 2011). The basic characteristic of a good university library is its total identification with its institution as the measure of its excellence is determined by the extent to which its services and resources support the academic pursuit of the institution (Chisita, 2004). In line with this, Etim (2011) was of the view that the role of the academic library as service institutions, of which the university library forms a part, derives from the fact that they normally encompass the largest collection of information resources for educational growth of Nigerians. The university libraries are expected to provide such services to the researchers in various fields in the form of information services. This will in no small measure help libraries to cope with new and emerging information and technological trends and research needs of the university. The hallmark of library and information service therefore lies in the provision of adequate information materials to enhance research output of students, researchers and lecturers.

Early libraries were regarded as store houses and books were meant for preservation (Okiy, 2008). The librarian was therefore supposed to be a custodian of books and did not encourage the borrowing of books. He was a care taker to a passive and archival institution. However, very recently, the functions of the library have reached new dimensions from the passive or archival institution to a service oriented institution. Its goal is to enable users make effective use of resources of the library. This has made the modern library, unlike the early library able to select, acquire, process and make available for users, resources and services of enduring value. These services are commonly known as library information services.

Library information services can be described as services which are provided to users who either visit or refer to the library to meet their information needs. Library information services refer to services which draw attention to information possessed in the library in anticipation of demand (Aina, 2004). To corroborate this, Obi (2008) also regards the provision of library information service as the degree to which library information service is available upon users' demand. Library information services came into being when personal assistance to library users began and was considered a prerequisite of the library.

These services include lending, reference, Current Awareness, Selective Dissemination of Information, inter library lending, Information Communication Technology, literature search and photocopying services. Popoola and Zaid (2008) asserted that how well a university library is able to render effective information services like lending, referral, microfilming, indexing and abstracting, current awareness, document delivery, photocopying, e-mail, facsimile, bindery, translation, consultancy, on-line database searching, user education, current contents listing, technical writing, selective dissemination of information and data processing has functional relation with the resources available at its disposal.

Library Information Services in University Libraries

To enhance academic success, university libraries must ensure the timely provision of library information services to patron in order to stimulate accessibility and utilization of information resources. Edoka, (2002) noted that the exact nature and intensity of the services will of course vary in the mission of the library and the type of its users. However, there are certain services that are specialized and common to all libraries. Such services include:

Lending services

They are social services in which users of the library have the privilege of borrowing library materials either for reading or consultation, (Gaertner, 2009). The loan periods for library materials may vary based on the material, type of the item and the privileges of the borrower. In lending, the library must own varies materials in different academic fields in the university so as to enhance this service.

Reference services

University libraries also provide qualitative services to the users by means of answering reference questions over the telephone, answering via the web or by e-mail, or by means of a face-to-face meeting (Umoh, 2017). Also, Umar (2008) affirmed that reference services for library users often involve not only answering specific questions but also personalized instruction in the methods of identifying and locating research information resources. To sum up the above definitions, Daya (2008) defined reference service as the personal assistance given by the librarian to individuals in search of information for whatever purpose as well as various library activities deliberately designed to facilitate easy provision of information. It is a type of

service that enables the librarian to provide information to meet the needs of individual library users both in anticipation and on demand.

To achieve good referencing services, the following steps must be taken:

Encouraging the patron to contact the library when there is an information need, finding out what his real information need is, finding the information that will meet his need, making sure that the need is met (Anderson, Boyer and Crone, 2002:4 ; Houston Area library, 2002 ; Aina, 2004).

Reprographic Services

Photocopying refers to the process of preserving a document by making a full sized (usually bound, similarly to the original) facsimile copy on archival paper by creating a photographic copy of the images of the pages contained in the document possibly using a photocopier Eiseman (2006).

Photocopying is a process where the original is scanned and is widely helpful to researchers because it generates significant indirect cost by providing a readily accessible and very cheap means for reproducing information. Rare books, theses, periodicals or heavily used items which are not normally loaned may be photocopied (Umoh, 2017).

Current Awareness Services (CAS)

Current awareness services alert scholars, researchers and health care practitioners to recently published literature in their fields of specialization. (Johnson, Osmond and Holz, 2014). These authors further stated that librarians who provide these services use various methods to keep current with academic and professional literature. Cornell University Library (2014) stated that it is vital for researchers and academics to keep up-to-date with the most recent information and developments. In a similar vein, Kent (2010) defines current awareness service” as a service that assist students and researchers in keeping up to date with current literature in their particular subject area. This service usually requires the user to register his or her search profile and whenever something that matches the profile is published, an alert notification e-mail is sent to the researcher.

Current awareness information can be made available to users through telephone calls, e-mail, messages, letters, pre-prints of papers, photocopying of table of contents, periodical routings maintenance of card files of references, library bulletins, subscriptions to specialized services, and electronic new groups.

Electronically, current awareness services are provided in the forms of Table of Contents (TOC) - based alerting services. This takes place in the form of e - mailing to a (researcher) subscriber, the table of contents of a particular journal when published. This system allows the subscriber to see the complete tables of contents from their favourite journals. Clarke (2002) stated that current awareness services can be done in the library in the following ways:

- a) Routing new issues of journals round a selected clientele.
- b) Circulation of content lists of a number of issues of various journals just after receipt.
- c) Circulation of library accession lists.
- d) Telephone calls to clientele.
- e) Developing and maintaining card files on subjects areas of interests to the clientele, thus: current awareness service is not a personalized service.

Selective dissemination of information (SDI)

Selective Dissemination of Information has been described by Okolo (2002) as an attempt by libraries to provide a personal current awareness information service to individuals and groups. SDI is also known as documentation profile, personalized profile and search profile.

There are two types of SDI namely; private and public Selective Dissemination of Information. (Bassy, 2006). Private SDI is the supply of bibliographical references corresponding to the profile, strictly individual. It allows any authenticated reader to create a person's documentation profile. This profile enables him or her to stay current with new acquisitions of the library corresponding to his or her fields of interest. Public Selective Dissemination of Information is the supply of bibliographic lists of a more general coverage corresponding to the fields of interest of a homogenous group of users.

One of the major impacts of this new communication technology has been to increase the speed and ease of information between people. Aina (2004) noted that SDI relieves the user of the problem of sieving through a large number of documents before getting the relevant documents.

Literature Searching

Reading previous researches enables the researcher acquire a broad understanding of his topic to determine the key issues and put the researches in the researchers area of interest into context (Robertson, 2005). This is the systematic search of the various formal and informal publications used in order to find items relevant to the researchers' areas of interest. Literature search establishes the fact that no other researcher has already undertaken the research the researcher is about to undertake. It helps the researcher to find any existing research that has already been done in related areas.

Some sources of information for literature search are bibliographies, reference sources, textbooks, recent journal articles, abstracting journals and electronic data bases like OPAC computer catalogue, CD-ROM, videos, internet lecture notes. Searches are also conducted in the World Wide Web (www) and also through library catalogues and bibliographic databases.

Inter library lending

This type of service is usually seen to be practiced between two or more libraries with mutual benefits who come together with an agreement to share and exchange information resources (Umoh, 2017). In a similar view, Aina (2004) defined inter library lending as involving essentially transactions between two libraries. This is also a cooperative arrangement between libraries which involves books or materials from one library, loaned out to a user from another library. In fact, Edekarobor (2010) has described it as a transaction in which the material moves from library to library. Inter library loan (ILL) is sometimes called inter loan, document delivery, document supply or resources sharing. It is a service where by a user of one library can borrow books, videos, DVDs, sound recordings, microfilms or receive copies of articles in magazines, that are owned by another library (Calahan, 2012).

In many university libraries, this service is free. Sometimes, the service is for a small fee or possibly no cost but it is only available to those currently affiliated with the university. However, it should be noted that interlibrary loan policies vary from library to library.

The purpose of inter library lending is to obtain upon request, library materials not available in the users' local library. Inter library lending is a mechanism for different libraries to share materials despite the size and comprehensiveness of the collections. It thereby enables academic staff and researchers to borrow books that are not available in their own university

libraries. In most cases, inter library lending is the easiest way to have access to difficult or rare information resources. Through inter library lending researchers are able to obtain materials that are not available in their university libraries but are commercially available and may be too expensive.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and Communication Technology is a tool that connects individuals, communities and societies to promote sharing of information and coordination of resources, goods and services beyond the confines of geographical and social boundaries (Hultman and Axelsson, 2005). ICT enhances certain library services and functions such as the selective dissemination of information (SDI) to a large number of users (Maflul 2010). Oghenero (2010) has the view that ICT makes possible the networking of information (data) stored in one computer to be transmitted to another computer regardless of the distance. Through networking, the author noted, many libraries can cooperate in the production of databases. This can bring about terms such as electronic library and virtual library, as one can access many libraries from one's desk in the office or study room. Major applications of ICT in libraries include the Internet. ICT seeks to explore information in various ways that includes the Internet.

The use of ICT covers all areas of research for every profession. Information Communication Technology (ICT), therefore aids researchers, as lectures can be conducted online than in lecture rooms, (Dada, 2002). No doubt, advances in ICT have great potentials for teaching, learning, and research as observed by Omekwu (2004) who stated that ICT has made the work of the researcher whether lecturers or doctoral degree students, a lot easier, faster and less stressful. ICT facilitates many other services in the library like reference service, SDI, CAS, online database searching for support of their research activities, social networking, etc.

The electronic mail popularly called e-mail is another popular ICT facility. It is a system by which persons or agencies belonging to a computer network can use their computers through a device called a modem to send and receive messages via telecommunication channels. Edoka, (2000) emphasizing on the other areas of ICT, Omekwu (2004) added that resources available with the ICT include e-mail notice of all new titles, book list management, virtual classroom, legal research sites, legal education news, regular case law updates and teaching manuals.

The Internet is described as a huge network of computer networks (Woheren 2000). The Internet links millions of people and thousands of companies, educational institutions and many other types of organizations worldwide, which enables them to be able to communicate with one another. The term, Internet stands for International Network for Communications or for short, NET (Nedosa and Eseyin, 2000).

The facilities that are required before using the Internet are a current pentium, computer system, laser printer, modern telephone system, server service provider and software. Institutions, agencies, countries or individuals do not control the internet. Some of the internet applications include the e-mail, mailing list, USE NET, downloading of relevant information; etcetera. (Aina, 2004). Searching for information on the internet is vast and diverse but through search tools, any information can be 'retrieved. The three main search tools used in searching for information at the NET are: search engines, meta engines, and directories (Aina, 2004, Nedosa and Eseyin, 2000).

Technical Services

The university library provides the following services to its users as enumerated by Gbaje (2007) thus:

- i) **Acquisition/Collection Management:** This is simply to acquire, collect and manage information resources in order to ensure are provided to users so as to meet up with their information needs.
- ii) **Systems Department:** Users use the computer or automation department to search for their information needs online.
- iii) **Cataloguing and Classification:** this entails using either manual or electronic cataloguing systems to process information resources so as to assist users in retrieving such materials easily.
- iv) **Digital Initiatives:** This programme oversees the selective digitization of the entire manuscript collection of the university and other records.
- v) **Indexing and Abstracting Services:** This are services carried out in order to provide access to information resources.

Factors affecting the provision of library information services

The provision of library information services is hampered by lack of awareness of the current state of knowledge in the field and the use of outdated research paradigms and methodologies. In line with this, Nelson in Popoola and Zaid (2008) in his survey on the degree of information and communication between librarians and faculty members to determine the provision of various reference services in six institutions made up of colleges and universities in California, U.S.A, reported that communication was less than adequate and faculty members were unaware of more than 50 percent of the reference services that were provided. Most university libraries provide obsolete and out date library books due to poor information services which beget lecture notes with stale contents (Jobs, 2010).

Utilization like provision is affected by non availability of some needed services, (Shuttleworth, 2010). Most university libraries are not keen on providing library services especially as it has to do with ICT. Therefore, Steel in Popoola and Zaid (2008) reported very little appreciation among the faculty of the skills applied by librarians and the high level of responsibility the job entails in the academic branch libraries in New York. Morrison (2010) supported this view when he stated that poor professional training given to librarians by their parent bodies also amount to this.

Poor funding is a major factor that affects services provision of library information services. Popoola and Zaid (2008) asserted that how well a university library is able to render effective information services, has functional relation with resources like adequate finance, available at its disposal. To subscribe to this, Ojuade and Ochai (2000) took note of funding as the crisis facing Nigerian University libraries and the book industry generally. In corroboration with the above author, Daniel (2002) also affirmed that poor quality of information services have depressed the quality of teaching, learning and research institutes and libraries have suffered from deep funding cuts since the 1980s and so library services have not been adequately maintained.

Strategies to increase provision of library Information services

Therefore, to increase the provision of library information services Edekarabor (2010) and Emojoborho (2013) suggested the provision of adequate funds for the libraries to acquire more library information services, information materials and to improve on the existing ones. This is to enhance aesthetic appeal and a variety to choose from, which will invariably attract users to the

library. In order to increase the provision of library services, computer applications to university library services has been suggested by Aguolu (2012). This is because the university libraries that have adopted computer usage can now access important information for their users through the Internet, database, online searching and other library networks thereby increasing their services provision.

Therefore, Ojedokun and Owolabi (2003) in their investigation on internet access competence and use of Internet for teaching and research activities by university of Botswana academic staff, the authors reported that the respondents used internet facilities for literature searching and to improve their teaching of students. Therefore, Nse (2013) also suggested that Internet facilities in our university libraries should be made more functional and

Tinuoye (2010) emphasized that librarians should increase their services provision by carrying out robust information services, analyzing and repackaging information to suit users' needs. Collaborating with international donor agencies such as British Council, United Nations, International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) etc, has been suggested as a way of increasing library services (Otubelu, 2010). These international donor agencies help in the funding of libraries by providing access to education and technology.

University library staff should step up efforts and interests in making materials needed for library services available on their own without being forced to do so since it is part of their job (Obaro, 2008). In line with this, Poopola and Zaid (2008) stated that the university library system must ensure closer relationship with its clientele and even among the library clientele themselves. To achieve this laudable goal, the authors added that library personnel should provide specialized information services for which students and lecturers as well as other university community members should make contacts with the library. The authors further stated that most popular promotion programmes adopted in African University libraries are study tours, orientation and user education. This should be adopted in all university libraries so as to enhance awareness of the provision of library information services in order to facilitate utilization. Bassey and Otu (2013) were of the view that university libraries must have a clearly defined philosophy or an articulated set of policies to guide their operations. This should guide information services provision and every other library operation.

Conclusion

Librarians are becoming increasingly aware of the enormous challenges that await them as they seek to devise diverse means towards the provision of library information services.

Recommendations

Librarians in university libraries must therefore rise up to the challenge by providing both manual and automated services in order to increase the utilization of information resources as well as the services provided and also increase utilization and patronage of these libraries. The needs of library users should be commensurate with the services supplied, in order to enhance the education of the Nigerian citizenry.

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