



Value, Impact and Outcome of Library User Education: A Post Freshmen Study in a Nigerian Tertiary Institution.

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Abstract

At entry into higher institutions, most new students-intakes lack basic library and literacy skill, as such they require some form of orientation in this regard. The library at University of Uyo (UNIUYO) Nigeria, like most academic libraries organizes related activities at formal and informal level. This necessitated a post impact survey by the researcher who served as a liaison librarian for the Arts faculty, conducted on 100 second year students from the faculty who had undergone the library instruction programme in their first year. A structured questionnaire was randomly administered to them and results showed that 74% knew how to effectively use the catalogue. 80% also agreed that the course had enhanced their knowledge of library use skills though some of the respondents 27% indicated that they do not use the University library at all. However, 58% affirmed using the library much more than at previous when the course was not taught. With regards to the most understood library instruction module, 'locating books through catalogue use' ranked highest. These findings generally ascertain the credibility and functional benefits of the library user education course. This paper therefore recommends similar research on other faculties and factors which could be responsible for non-library use.

Keywords: Library literacy, secondary schools, user education.

Introduction

Libraries over the years have been repositories of knowledge and have served as frontiers of literacy in higher educational institutions, thereby fostering academic goals. Unlike the elementary and secondary schools where students may rely to an extent on their tutors for guided studies, a student in a tertiary institution such as the university rather, is required to be involved in independent studies as an advanced learner. Academic discourse at such instance may lead to extensive literature search in the library, with outcome either fruitful or otherwise.

It has been found from library-use encounters that one of the major determining factors to effective information search in the library lies on ones knowledge of search and retrieval skills, which often times is derived from library instruction/ user education. These set of abilities as attributed by Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) require the individual to 'recognize when information is needed, to have the ability to locate same, to evaluate and use effectively the needed information'¹.

Issue at stake is whether students which for most libraries in tertiary institutions usually constitute highest number of users do know how to locate information sources effectively and independently. Based on the foregoing, this study was conducted to assess how library user education in the University of Uyo (UNIUYO) Nigeria, has impacted on students' library use and their knowledge of bibliographic access particularly

through catalogue means. It is intended that this assessment will invariably offer a glimpse of the literacy efforts of UNIUYO library as a whole.

Study Rationale: This paper assumes that at entry into higher institutions most of the freshmen lack basic library and literacy skills while some others may feel overwhelmed with 'too much information' in a seemingly large University library, thereby requiring the necessary skills on how to get information required. From the researcher's personal interactions with students at various levels of study when offering library services, it was unbecoming yet true to find that several of them still depended heavily on staff for first contact to locate information source(s) rather than do so independently. At other times, it was equally found that after a fruitless effort to locate library materials required, the user (student) on enquiry would affirm that s/he did not attempt to consult the catalogue at all and with further probing, they would admit not knowing how to use the catalogue! With the researcher having worked as the liaison librarian for the Arts Faculty in University of Uyo and being responsible for handling library instruction course for their student-intakes, it was necessary therefore to carry out this study to determine the students' understanding of the course, extent to which they use the university library and the catalogue in particular which seemed to be technical in content for most of them.

Literature Review: The thrust of a library instruction/ user education programme is to enable library users, students in particular to maximize library services and resources at their

disposal. The library catalogue which represents its available resources is still a veritable 'key' for this purpose in most institutional libraries as it provides bibliographic description and the subject aspect of a book (or other source) with call number designating class and author.² Scholars regard the catalogue as the most invaluable key to the total collection of a library for it opens to the reader available resources by author, title or subject³. They purport that though there are other information retrieving tools in the library, the card catalogue for most libraries still remain the most conspicuous and widely known^{4,5}.

However, what a standard classification is meant to facilitate sometimes appear to pose certain barrier between the user and the catalogue who may lack knowledge of the alpha-numeric representations in the catalogue by making searches using general terms and other trial efforts. In a survey on catalogue use in one of Nigeria's first generation universities, it was found that 45% of students sampled found catalogue description as complex and related subjects not properly linked⁶. A related view is upheld based on a study on catalogue use in Colleges of Education in South-West zone of Nigeria⁷, a situation which as noted is being further compounded when students do not show up when required during library instruction because they believe the library is where they could read their books only⁸. For certain student-users based on other surveys, it was found that a great number of them when searching information in the library move round and browse the shelves rather than search through catalogue for information materials required^{9,10}. The benefits of user education as such cannot be overemphasized following a study that the disposition of students in a University library in South-Western Nigeria was totally positive with 100% respondents indicating that library user education course had enhanced their knowledge of the library and its functions¹¹.

The concerns raised from the foregoing therefore hold that one of the ways students could be involved in fruitful information search strategy beginning with the library's bibliographic inventory, which gives descriptions for locating appropriate source; the essence of this study was to find out same.

Library User Education at UNIUYO: The function of a library's user education/ instruction programme may to some extent determine the dimension of library use, particularly where information handling and retrieval skills have been imparted to users. Based on its importance, the instruction programme is usually taught first year students/freshmen who require these skills for lifelong learning as young scholars. The growth of inter-disciplinary courses in higher institutions more so require that the student be trained and able to make efficient use of wide range of resources available in the library.

The library user education program in the University of Uyo (UNIUYO) tagged 'Use of Library' comes under the General Studies programme with the subject code GST 121 and is compulsory by University regulation. Some of the major themes

addressed in the course module are as follows: i. Types of Libraries and Units, ii. Organization of knowledge and how to locate source(s), iii. Sources of information, iv. Library regulations, v. Basic reference sources, vi. IT / electronic information sources.

The broad goal of user education reflects positive variations in understanding the uses of information retrieval skills.¹² In which case hours spent on user training is geared towards curbing fruitless hours of searching and frustration in their inability to find required library materials and in so doing the undesirable communication gap is thereby bridged between the library, what it stand for and the user/reader. Suffice to say that ignorance is one of the reasons for non utilization of resources and services in the library¹³.

Being a credit awarding course at UNIUYO, it is required that some form of assessment be conducted as to whether the course had met its prescribed goals. The International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) proffers three types of learning assessment, according to different purposes¹⁴. These are: i. Prescriptive diagnostics which borders on knowledge and skills assessment of participants before the instruction is commenced such as the instructor designed test. ii. Formative- this provides feedback about a students' learning while the instruction is ongoing while allowing the instructor to adjust teaching method. iii. Summative- this is a final evaluation of the criteria for assessment that occurs at the end of the instruction; may be in form of choice questions or essays under condition (such as exam).

Administration of test like examination is geared to assess a students' knowledge-base of the subject taught, though this has been argued by some that it rather encourages the student to concentrate more on reading to pass the test other than reading to know and improve self. However, with cognizance to the goal of library user education being to abreast students with effective library use and information retrieval skills, UNIUYO library undertakes the activity in three phases, first under the university's orientation exercise for their registered new students/intakes. In this forum, an introductory talk on what the library has in store will be communicated with various departmental library heads in attendance to encourage interaction between both parties thereafter. Second phase which comes up under normal credit earning lecture schedule, usually held in second semester when it is expected that the first year students would have settled and been through with registration and other entry logistics. Third phase of the user education occurs under a more relaxed atmosphere where the students in smaller groups are taken round in guided visit relatively to all sections of UNIUYO library. Here, lecture sessions are re-enacted in a more illustrated and visualized form for lasting impression and for revision purposes too. Fourth and final stage of training culminates in the administration of test before the conclusion of lecture followed by subjective written examination with options at the end of the library user

education course. It is statutory for students to pass the library course before graduating from the university, unlike other faculty courses which could be waved. The library user education is thus indispensable and cuts across all faculties in most institutions, and as an outreach programme enhancing partnership between the library and the faculty.

Methodology

The University of Uyo library as at the time of this study was at the brink of its online catalogue service and other automation process. This assessment/ survey were therefore based more on conventional library procedures which users and staffs were conversant with. Through purposive sampling method, undergraduate students from the Arts faculty in their second year of study were randomly administered hundred copies of questionnaire prior to a faculty lecture which normally hosts at least two-third of students from departments under the Arts faculty. As such they were collectively examined rather than per department. All copies of the six-point itemized questionnaire with some having Likert-scale levels of agreement were filled and returned for analysis using simple percentages with frequency rating to analyze.

The choice in selecting students in their second year rather than first year was to allow them the freedom of giving honest responses (even negative) without fear of being tested formally as the case was in their first year and the opportunity to determine their library-use skills one year after the instruction course. It follows that the post impact assessment survey was conducted aside the usual formal examination to ascertain the efficacy of the course.

Results and Discussion

The study was an attempt to capture the impact of library user education course on some undergraduate students in University of Uyo. Their responses were required in the following area: i. Frequency of library use, ii. Use of catalogue, iii. Catalogue consulted, iv. Library use after instruction, v. Library instruction most understood.

The findings are illustrated in various charts and a table of summary. Where data does not add up to 100, indicates that some options were not selected or filled in the questionnaire administered. The gaps were collated and represented under the response 'not indicated' as shown in some of the charts.

Figure-1 represents findings from question which requested respondents to indicate whether or not they use the University of Uyo Library. On this, 33% comprising 13% and 20% represent those who use library frequently either twice or more than twice weekly. Those who use once in a week or occasionally were 17% while respondents who seldom use the library (quarterly) were 11%. It was rather unexpected yet true to find that 27% indicated having not used the library at all. Based on this finding, the number of students who do not consult the University library from the Faculty of Arts are approximately same as those who do. It follows that despite the user-education course there are still many students who do not consult the library. More so, 12 respondents did not indicate any of the options which is equally an indication that they do not use UNIUYO library.

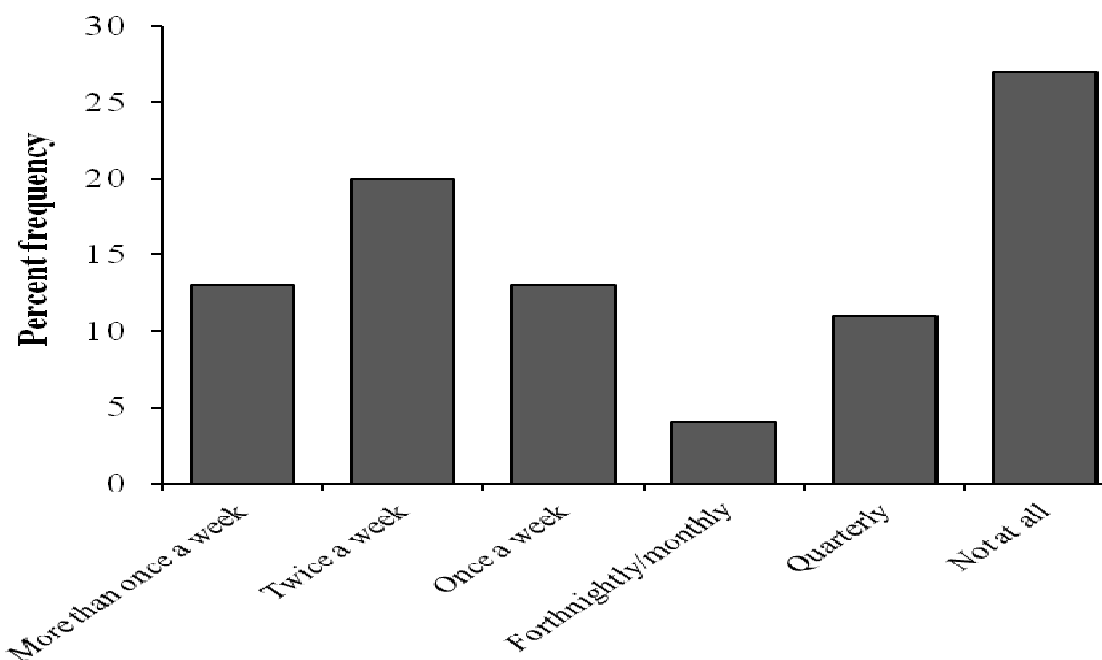


Figure-1
Patronage of UNIUYO Library

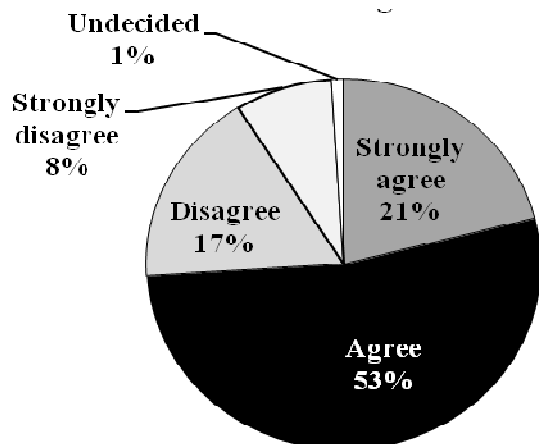


Figure-2
 Use of Catalogue

Response to the research question of whether each respondent consults the catalogue when information is required in the library indicated an outstanding 53% of respondents agreeing to this followed by 21% adding up to 74% who strongly agreed using catalogue as well. This is represented in Figure-2 above while a lesser percentage represented those who do not use it as an index to the library's collection, indicating that there are more students in the Faculty of Arts who consult the card catalogue than those who do not. An earlier discussion in this paper expressed that the non-use of catalogue by students was of concern to UNIUYO library management. Findings from this study have thrown more light on the issue based on the faculty studied. At present, the library patrons still rely heavily in the card catalogue as the library's OPAC is still nascent.

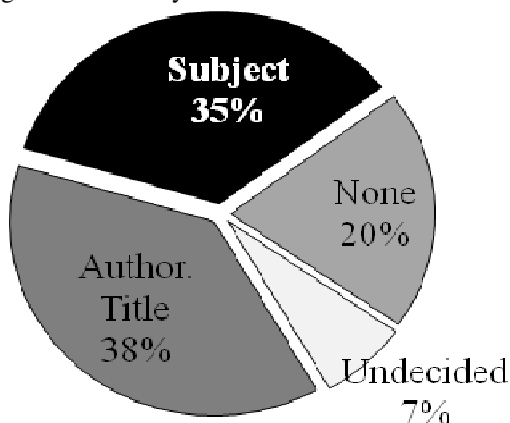


Figure-3
 Type of Catalogue Consulted

Data from Figure-3 shows the ratio of use in the two major catalogues which centrally serve the entire University on all literature and core reference sources available. While author/title catalogue as name implies directs user to names of authors or book titles available in a particular library, the subject catalogues presents to the user a list of various subject entries and fields of study. However, with combined

percentages of those who indicated not using any of the catalogues by 20% and those who didn't tick any of the three options at all by 7%, adds up to 27 in number, indicating that nearly one-third of students from the Arts Faculty neither consult the subject or author/ title catalogue.

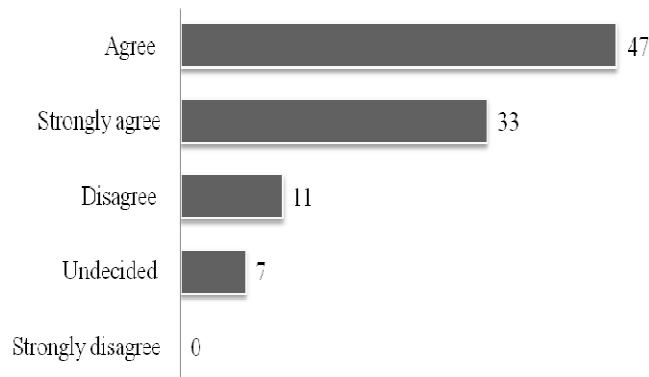


Figure-4
 Effective Use of Library after Instruction (%)

Result from Figure-4 above are indications from respondent as to whether the user education course on 'Use of Library' has enabled them know **how to use** the library much better than previously when they were not taught. Results therefore showed that majority of the respondents by an appreciable number of 80% comprising those who simply 'agreed' (47%) and 'strongly agreed' (33%). These findings ascertain the credibility and functional benefits of a user education for library users which are to enhance information acquisition skills for various purposes. Results are an indication that the course was well tutored by library professionals. None of the respondents 'strongly disagreed' to this fact and only a few of them indicated otherwise.

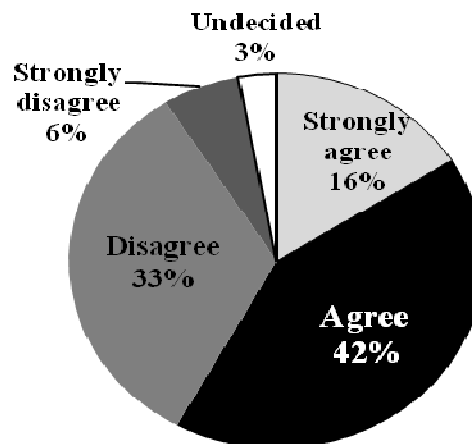


Figure-5
 More Library Use after Instruction

One of the aims of library instruction is to encourage constant library use. Figure-5 has findings of questions on whether the course had enabled them use the library more often than previously when it was not taught. A total of 58% respondents

affirmed, being of those who agreed (42) and those who strongly agreed (16). Those who disagreed collectively were 36%, suggesting that frequency of library use at UNIUYO library was unconnected to library education.

Figure-6 states respondent's choice with regards to library instruction course most understood. On this, selections were as follows: locating 'information material through catalogue' rated highest by 58% followed by 'types of libraries' 36% and

'library regulation' by 35%. Highest rating may however have arisen from the fact that the process of locating a library material by catalogue means, was a major and only continuous assessment take home test administered to students, which could have compelled them to study more on this aspect of topic. Lowest response however was in the area of 'information technology' by 4%. Reason for this may not be far from the fact that UNIUYO library is yet to offer outstanding automated services.

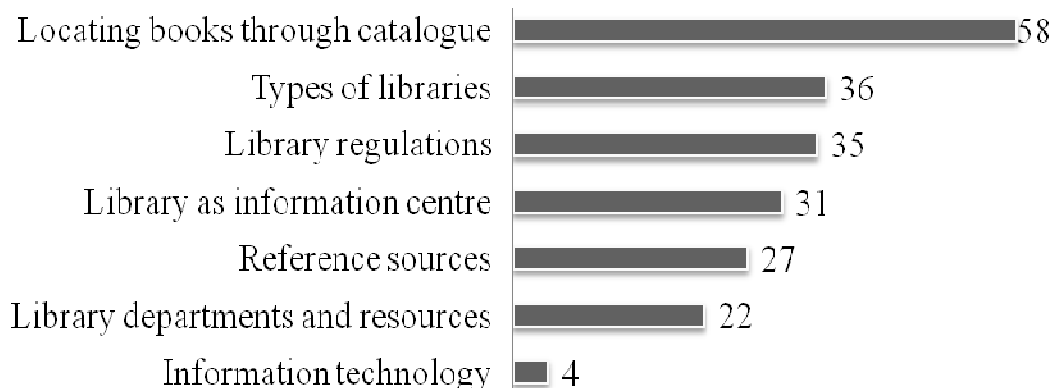


Figure-6
Most Understood Library Instruction

Table-1
Cross-tabulation of frequency rating with variables on use of library

Variable	Frequency rating (%)					
	Responses/ Level of Agreement	Very Frequently (33%)	Frequently (13%)	Occasionally (17%)	Not at all (27%)	Total (100%)
Use of catalogue	SA	7	1	6	7	21
	A	21	9	15	8	53
	D	5	1	4	7	17
	SD	0	1	1	6	8
Catalogue consulted	Author/Title	17	4	13	14	58
	Subject	11	5	9	11	36
	None	5	1	4	10	20
Library instruction and use	SA	17	3	7	6	33
	A	14	9	16	9	48
	D	1	1	2	5	9
	SD	2	0	0	6	8
	U	0	0	1	0	1
More library use through instruction	SA	9	3	2	2	16
	A	19	6	11	6	42
	D	4	3	11	15	33
	SD	1	0	1	0	2
Course area best understood	Library Concept	11	3	7	10	31
	Access by Catalogue	20	5	18	15	58
	Types	14	5	7	10	36
	Sections	11	3	7	1	22
	Rules	11	5	8	9	33
	Reference sources	8	4	10	15	37
	Information Tech.	1	0	2	1	4

A cross-tabulation of frequency rating with variables on use of library (Table-1) shows a positive trend with regards to the general outcome and the value of library user education as being favourable. About 26-33% of respondents strongly agree/agree to using (particularly author/title and subject) catalogues and the library more/very frequently as result of the user education instruction received. This further confirms their assertion to understanding access by catalogue as the top most component understood in the course.

The summary in Table-1 shows comparison between those who use the University of Uyo library very frequently and those who do not at all. Though the latter had indicated not using the University library at all, yet they signified using the two known catalogues, which perhaps may be from use of other libraries. Also, it was found in Table-1 that options reflecting agreement levels rated high while the reverse was the case with those who indicated otherwise.

Conclusion

Research was conducted on Students from the Arts Faculty in University of Uyo who had undertaken the library user-education course with purpose of ascertaining their library use skills towards effective information retrieval and self directed learning. Based on findings, the expected impact of the course was ascertained in view of the number of students who consult the library a year after the instruction; as such factors responsible for non- library use is recommended for further research. For instance, it has been observed that undergraduate students in final or semi final year, tend to use the library more when in need of articles for long essays, seminars and other academic work. In such instance there is an inter-play of the user factor amidst other intervening variables which surreptitiously influence library use. For instance, some adolescents demonstrate 'significant preference for the internet and electronic resources over print resources' an issue which every library requires serious consideration if it intends to remain at the mainstream of the information milieu and patronage¹⁵. ACRL furthermore attests that information literacy is related to information technology skill and an information literate individual should develop some technology skills. As such a follow up survey should be conducted on other academic faculties with consideration to other forms of information retrieval tools/indexes, particularly of electronic sources as indicated.

A study assessing the instruction method and delivery is further recommended as lecture methods are still largely conventional in some tertiary institutions. It had not only been established that a relationship exists between students' catalogue use and library instruction but was observed that methods of teaching contributed significantly to students' academic performance^{16, 17, 18}. In addition, a short term library refresher course should be implemented for academics at various faculties whom by

personal observation do require much assistance in information search when they visit the library.

Three factors obviously are interconnected in information search and retrieval process: the user on how well skilled s/he is; the system factor which should signify relative ease in use and a user-friendly environment designated beyond the physical library domain. Suffice to say, the library user education programme should be a continuous activity not only at tertiary level of education, but from the elementary and secondary levels to acquaint beneficiaries with the rudiments before they advance into tertiary level of library user course.

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