

USER EDUCATION AS INFORMATION MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Library is meant to be keenly involved in social, economic, cultural and lifelong learning of the people. It is the only institution that offers free access to knowledge to both high and the lowly citizens. Yet it is not accorded high priority in planning and development by governing institutions. Libraries have always had to justify their existence to sponsor as they are not considered as 'essential' as compared to sectors like health, education, roads, etc. It is now time for librarians to rethink what library is all about, what is needed, what will be used and what is sustainable in our environment. The paper discussed the various key concepts that are associated with the topic as well as the importance of User Education in Nigerian libraries. The paper also looked at the techniques used by librarians for User Education in libraries as well as the challenges affecting User Education in libraries. The paper was concluded with recommendations such as Improvement in leadership of libraries and information centre; there is need for leadership of libraries to improve their leadership styles by using their salient position to project the image of the library when this is done; they would have succeeded in paving the way for easy User Education. Good rapport between Heads of libraries and policy makers: various heads of libraries should ensure they maintain good relationship with policy makers in their institution, good relationship between both parties can also pave way for successful User Education among others.

Keywords: Library Resources, Marketing, User Education, strategy and academic library

Introduction

In contemporary Nigeria educational system in which academic library and information service is critical activity, the subject matter of user education could be seen to be very pertinent to the information world. It is assumed that education is the key to economic development of any society, if education is the bedrock of any society suffices it to state that librarianship is a hub upon which every educational activity rotates on. However, it is disheartening to note that in most developed countries, in an attempt to enhance the educational system, more often than not, libraries in our educational institutions are neglected in the scheme of things. However, depending on the context under which the term user education is used, it may mean different things to different people from different background. User education is a process of influencing what other people feel, think and believe so that changes can happen the way the influencer want them to happen. User education can be seen as communications processes.

User is the most important component in library or in information system and they are the last links or the recipient of the information in the communication cycle. Availability and access to right information to the right users at the right time can build on to new directions to higher studies for instance; research and development. Our librarians and information managers though appear committed to the doctrine of service provided to users, to facilitate their retrieval for documents but neglect the user education for

long time. Good ethics, personality and psychology are crucial for a librarian's quality so that he can interact with the users and understand his requirements in terms of service providing to the users' information requirements (Kumar, 2019).

The user education in academic library is not only introducing the library resources and also to create the importance of the available resources in library and services provide from library, working hours and what are the resources will be purchased for future requirement and so on. Generally the responsibility of academic library professional is to ensure that the maximum use of library resources and services (Anyanwu, et al, 2023). This kind of instruction is essential for new users. In this article, we are going to present to you about user education, methods of user education, and levels of user education.

User Education

User education may be defined as a process or programme through, which the potential users (may be scientists, engineers, technologists, academics and students) of information' are made aware of the value of information and are motivated to use information resources. In her book on reader instruction, Mews defines this as instruction given to readers to help them make the best use of library.

According to Shahi "It is a process of activities involved in making the users of the library conscious about tremendous value of information in day to day life to develop interest among the users to seek information as and when they requires" "User Education is the program that equips library users with skills to access, evaluate and use the information to satisfy their needs" (IGI Global) Users any person who uses the resources and services of a library, not necessarily a registered borrower is known as user (Reitz, 2004). On the other hand users are individuals who can be divided into different categories on the basis of tasks assigned to them in an organization (Devarajan, 1989).

Importance of User Education in Library

One of the important developments of user education has been the -growing realization that it is important to set goals and objectives, while planning library user education. Concern over the lack of guidelines for instruction in library skills has been expressed by some authors like Lubans and Stevenson. It may be mentioned that the goals and objectives for programmes of library user education must be in agreement with the general aims of the university library; these aims must in turn, User Education be related to the goals and objectives of higher education: "The general" goals of a university library may be expressed in the following way:

1. To contribute to the realization of the aims of the university with regard to teaching learning and research by acquisition of printed and non-print material necessary to cover present day and future information needs;
2. To register and store the material acquired in such a way that it not only permits but even actively stimulates the use of this material;
3. To adopt these information resources to the changing needs of the university and society;
4. To contribute to the integration of both national and international information resources.

Methods of User Education

The following techniques can be used to carry out user education;



Figure 1: Methods of User Education

1. **Lecture Method:** The most preferred kind of instruction is a lecture. They are employed for teaching large groups of learners. The lecture as a mode of communication in education has been harshly criticized. The lecture technique of teaching uses both aural and visual sensory inputs.
2. **Using Audio-visual Materials:** In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the use of audio-visual media in teaching and learning process in general and for library user education in particular. As a result, the information can be conveyed in a series of units such as slides or overhead transparencies or printed illustrations.
3. **Using Computer Assisted Learning:** During the last two decades computers are increasingly being used for information activities. This has resulted in rapid growth of computer-based online information retrieval system. The use of this method depends on the education of users and the availability and functioning of this method of information retrieval.
4. **On-Site Visit to the Library:** Librarians have become more particular regarding the evaluation of programs of library instruction. It might be emphasized that evaluation and the feedback received in the process will lead to the improvement of the education users.

Levels of User Education:

The user education program can be divided into three levels as following;

1. **Library User education:** It is an introduction to library building, card catalogue and some basic reference materials. The user education is aimed at motivation for searching and using the information, creating awareness about available information resources and exposing them to various organizational tools of the library.
2. **Library Instruction:** It teaches the users, how to use the indexes, bibliographic tools, abstracts, and other references materials. This level often gives instructions to the researchers in their field to get specific information resources.
3. **Bibliographic Instruction:** Normally, it is difficult to use the bibliographic tools because of their organizational pattern. Thus, these instructions aim at exposing to the users the bibliographical tools and providing guidance to understand the features of these tools and their nature of subject coverage (Anyanwu, et al, 2023).

Categories of Users

Library users are of one type which is called 'USER' but due to their demands and requirements of information it can be categories the types of libraries. In a public library the users are mainly children, student's, housewives, farmers, retired persons, literates and even also researches. In an academic library the users are students, teachers and researchers, whereas as special groups of users of whom the library is intended. The main categories of users can be categories into four groups, such as; potential user, expected user, actual user and beneficiary user (Shontz & Parker, 2020).

- (1) **Potential Users** are one who needs specific information and know what he/she is needed which can be provided by specific services. e. g. query of a particular book for reference or issuing for his/her

study purpose.

(2) **Expected Users** are one who is known to have the intention of using certain information services and library facilities. e. g.

(a) Browsing and accessing online resources available in the library.

(b) Users' online searching i.e. OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue).

(3) **Actual Users** are one who has actually used of an information service regardless of whether he derived advantages from it or not. e. g. availing the entire library services particularly circulation services such as issue, return and renewal of documents.

4) **Beneficiary Users** are one who derives measurable advantages from information services. e. g. Potential users, expected users and actual users are the main example of beneficiary.

Another type of classification of user community on the basis of library service they make use of, is as following:

(a) **General readers:** This type of user group, for example associated with public libraries, generally use light lending materials.

(b) **Subject readers:** This type of user concentrates their use of library materials on subject field they are working or specializing or research area.

(3) **Special readers:** The users placed in this group are those with special needs, the result of disabilities of one kind or another physical or mental disability may be distinguished.

(4) **Non-readers users:** These are made up of sub-groups who make use of library materials, but not reading materials. A user coming into the library just to borrow a video or audiocassette is the best example of non-reading user.

(5) **Non-users:** In case of public library, there are certain people who because of geographically or other environmental problems could not become members of libraries in their vicinity and make use of the library resources (Kumar, 2019).

Nature of Information Need

It is generally accepted that there are four different types of information requirements or approach based on the recommendations of Mishra and Mahapatra (2023). They are; Current approach, Everyday approach, Exhaustive approach, and Catching up or brushing up approach or browsing approach.

1. **Current Approach** The current approach arises from the need to keep up, to know what other workers in the field are doing (or about to do). Surveys of both scientists and technologists have shown that the most important source of such information is a fairly small core of primary periodicals, systematically scanned.

2. **Everyday Approach** The everyday approach arises in the course of daily work, regularly and frequently, usually in the form of a need for some specific piece of information vital for further progress. This approach is the one most frequently used by scientists and technologists.

3. **Exhaustive Approach** The exhaustive approach usually arises when work begins on a new investigation, and involves a check through all the relevant information on a given subject. It is called for less frequently than the current or every day approaches, but is vitally important, and often urgent.

4. **Catching up or Browsing Approach** The browsing approach by definition unplanned and certainly inefficient, is nevertheless a fruitful path to information, definitely part of the scientific and technological communication system, and could well be added to Voigt's three approaches. Hence, Surveys have shown that printed sources play a major 'Triggering' role in stimulating new ideas and interests (Nagaraju, 2020).

Psychological Approach

The library users are different types based on their psychology. i.e. Some of the users are in superiority complex; some of the users are in inferiority complex and so on. So, the library professionals should identify the users' attitude and give the user education. That approach also gives the more result for providing user education and also attracting more readers.

User Education -Library Services

The user education is not only introducing the resources, but also rendering library services to the users in the academic library. Different types of services such as display new arrivals, CAS, notice board display and other related services are provided by the library professionals to the users. The entire user may know that what are all the services are providing in the library, it supports to utilize the library properly by the users (Gupta, 2012).

Therefore, systematic study of user community will reveal the various characteristics of users seeking information. This will give necessary base guidelines to librarians to serve various types of users groups.

The user's characteristics enunciated by Lehman are:

- 1) Personality level.
- 2) Variability level.
- 3) Capacity level.
- 4) Satisfaction level.
- 5) Functional reading level.
- 6) Visual level.

Challenges of User Education in Nigerian academic libraries

Akhalumhe (2019) has identified the following as problems of user education programme in some Nigerian academic libraries;

1. Over dependence on one session teaching GSP programme
2. Lack of collective curriculum for user education in Nigerian tertiary institutions
3. Lack of examinable library instruction

Over concentration (on the part of Librarian) on library technical services like acquisition, cataloguing and classification and shelving of books rather than information retrieval mechanism, and

4. The use of unqualified personnel to teach the use of library in some institutions.

According to Ewa, (2012) it was established that there were some major impediments to effective use of library by students in the higher institutions which included lack of periodic user education programme, and lack of relevant and up to date resources, inadequate staff to assist users, poor attitude of staff towards users. Ottong (2005) also identified the problems associated with user education programmes to include; lack of time for teaching and practical work, lack of qualified personnel, inadequate funding and poor evaluation of methods of user education.

Conclusion

Library is a trinity of staff, resources or documents and users. Among them 'User' is the key and dynamic component of any library and information system. The thirst for information 'Need' is satisfied by having access to the identified information in a particular package and form, and at a suitable time. This is the impact of user education in the library, because it motivates for searching and using the information, creating awareness about available information resources, and exposing them to various organizational tools of the library. Therefore user education plays an important role in academic library. The academic libraries have variety of resources to fulfill the user's requirement and also motivate the users. The vast development of ICT also influences the resources and presents the resources in electronic format. In this circumstances library staff may update their knowledge about publication and search methods from internet are very essential. The library professionals periodically conduct user education in libraries, in addition to that it establish strength of Library.

Recommendations

1. There is need for leadership of libraries to improve their leadership styles by using their salient position to project the image of the library when this is done; they would have succeeded in paving the way for easy lobbying and advocacy.
2. Various heads of libraries should ensure they maintain good relationship with policy makers in their institution, good relationship between both parties can also pave way for successful lobbying and advocacy.
3. Librarians should change their attitude towards library services. We should embrace the fact that we as librarians are of noble profession because you cannot lobby and advocate effectively in an environment where you display poor images of yourself and the library profession. When librarians change their attitude, the society at large will change their perception of librarians and library services.
4. All State Chapters of the Nigerian Library Association should organize special events in their states inviting library supporters to meet and speak with state legislators.
5. Nigerian Library Association should seriously chart the modules of capacity building and engage all sectors of libraries in articulating the areas that need immediate lobbying and advocacy and the best strategy to adopt.
6. A practical method rather than theoretical approach should be employed by the libraries as this was make the programme more interesting for students and encourage them to participate. Lectures may feature documentary to show students how to use the catalogue and how materials are prepared and made ready for use.
7. User education programmes should be taught when students have settled down to school activities probably in the second and not the first semester when students are going about their registration process.
8. Awareness of the user education programme should be created through students library handbook or bulletin made available to students during registration in the library and on notice boards in every department.
9. Adequate and qualified staff should be employed for the programme to reduce workload. In addition, the staff needs to be sponsored to training and development programmes to enhance their performance.
10. Adequate provision of funds by management of the institutions for the user education programme should be the priority in library budget and allocation for every fiscal year.

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