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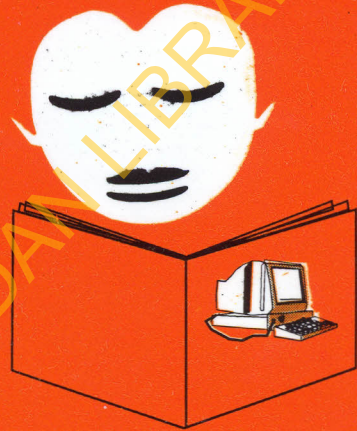
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Evaluating Special Library Services: Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) Library, 1993-2003

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Abstract

The special library services of the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria is evaluated in this paper. Questionnaire, direct interview and observation methods were used in the evaluation. In the decade covered, it was discovered that the library is well used by students and researchers in the University community. 64.3% of the respondents were satisfied with the services while 35.7% were not. 37.5% of the users make use of the library because it gives them access to current books and materials, 30.4% because their reference enquiry are adequately met, 19.6% because both reference and literature requirements are met, and 3.6% because they have reading space. The importance of the library as a special centre bringing together a collection on women and gender issues is noted. It was discovered that the library has resources that are rare and specialised but more attention needs to be pointed at acquisition and collection development as well as cataloguing and classification procedures. Suggestions for the improvement of the collection, information dissemination strategies and general organisation of the collection are made.

Introduction

A special library is a library or information centre maintained by an individual, corporation, association, government agency or any other group. It could be a specialised or departmental collection within a library for the organisation and dissemination of information and primarily offering services to a specialised clientele through the use of varied methods (Special Libraries Association, 1985).

A special library is established for the purpose of serving the information needs of a portion of the community in which it is found, that is, its founding or parent body. It could also be seen in terms of the specialised service it provides. It serves as a specialist information source in the literature of the particular subject using professional expertise in identification, organisation, evaluation and interpretation of the materials it contains. It serves a limited and well-defined clientele. It is broadly one, which is neither academic commercial, national nor public. A special library is sometimes research – oriented and serves the clientele or staff of the organisation that created it. Some special libraries maintain a special collection of material on specific areas of knowledge.

The characteristics of special libraries as different from other types of libraries are:

- Users of special libraries are limited in terms of interest and work.

- The collection of the books, periodicals and other materials is

relatively narrow in scope, with emphasis on a single specific subject area or group of related subjects, which meet the requirements of the parent bodies.

- The clientele in special libraries are usually specialists in their interests and skills, and as such, highly specialised forms of the materials are collected in such libraries.

- Special libraries disseminate the information they have to staff and users through various means such as Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Bibliographical and Current Awareness Services (CAS).

- The staff strength in special libraries is usually small compared to others,

- Information is provided for immediate utility by bringing together user and information in various formats to its clients who are mainly scientists or researchers.

Evaluation of libraries is a crucial factor in library management. It is necessary for a library to assess its performance and see if it is doing well or not, and if not, find ways of improving the services. Literature on collection evaluation is primarily American (Olden and Marshal, 1990).

McGrath (1985) posits that collection evaluation is a major component in the attempt to define what he refers to as the "bioecosystem", the complex ecological relationships existing among our collections and networks of scholars. This is the sense in which this paper is written. The intention is to find out how well the library is serving its clientele.

Majid *et al.* (2001) investigated factors that contribute positively in shaping users perceptions of library effectiveness, in their study of five agricultural libraries in Malaysia. They found out that factors like adequacy of collections, services and facilities were closely linked to the perceptions of library effectiveness. Others were adequacy and effectiveness of library promotion, involvement of users in the selection of materials, convenient library location, participation in user education programmes, availability of assistance for using library resources and facilities and subject background of library professionals

Evaluation or user surveys focus on identifying the preferences of users – what they use, may use/want (Sabaratnam, 1995). Various methods of evaluating libraries exist. The most common is through asking the library users either by direct interview or using questionnaire. Users feedback is thus got from these methods. Suggestion boxes are sometimes placed in libraries to give users an opportunity to pass comments on library services.

Statistics taken in various sections of the library also help in evaluating library services. From the number of books used, journals consulted, photocopies made etc., the library management can determine whether the collection is really relevant and being fully utilised.

Agboola (2001) suggested that undesirable as it may be, graffiti on library walls and furniture could be studied as a means of evaluating library services. Evaluating library services helps ensure that improved Quality of Service (QoS) will be sustained. As revealed by Banwett and Datta (2000) in their study of a New Delhi Library, satisfied users will revisit the library and encourage others to do so. The more improved QoS given to a user, the more

the level of satisfaction. Evaluating library services thus achieves the aim of giving better service and encouraging more patronage.

The WORDOC Library

The Women's Research and Documentation Centre Library was established in 1989, two years after the set up of the Centre, in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. It moved to its present location beside the Lady Bank Anthony Hall, University of Ibadan in November 1997 when the Centre celebrated ten years of existence.

The library is a special library, being a special collection on women, womens' studies and gender issues. It is a collection of materials, on women, by women, for women and men interested in gender and gender related issues.

The library seats sixteen readers and is open from 8am to 3.30pm on Mondays to Fridays. It is open to final year students, postgraduate students, researchers and lecturers in the field of women and gender studies. Undergraduate students are allowed only if they are doing gender research and present letters of introduction from their supervisors.

The library was set up to fulfill one of the objectives of the Centre, which is "To establish a documentation centre for the use of scholars, researchers and other interested persons" (Odejide and Oyelude, 1995). The information work of WORDOC Library

and the Centre is documented (Oyelude, 1996; Odejide, 2002). The contribution of the WORDOC Library and Centre to leadership potentials of academics in the University of Ibadan has been noted (Isiugo-Abanihe and Udegbe, 1999). Opeke and Fijabi (2000) also appraised the information dissemination pattern of the WORDOC Library. No evaluation study has been done on the library services since inception, hence this study. The library is evaluated in terms of the adequacy of its collection, statistics of use and user satisfaction.

Library Records

In the initial stages of the library's existence, registration was not done formally. Users only wrote their names down in a register each time they used the library. In 1996 however, users had to start following formal registration procedures and paying a fee. Records were then kept of the users name, matriculation number (if they were students) and their Department.

From this record, from March 1996 to September 2003, one thousand one hundred and ninety-four (1,194) users have been registered. These users are from all faculties in the University of Ibadan. Nine hundred and eleven (911) are students, one hundred and eighty-five (185) are lecturers and ninety-eight (98) are just students from outside the University of Ibadan and members of the public who are researching women and gender issues. See Table 1.

Table 1: Registered Users

Year	Users						
	Students within U.I	% within	Lecturers within U.I	%	Outsiders	%	Total
1996	38	4.2	1	.5	-	-	39
1997	95	10.4	14	7.6	06	6.1	115
1998	146	16	16	8.6	19	19.4	118
1999	165	18.1	21	11.4	22	22.5	208
2000	124	13.6	24	13	07	7.1	155
2001	140	15.4	53	28.6	13	13.3	206
2002	152	16.7	36	19.5	24	24.5	212
2003	51	5.6	20	10.8	07	7.1	78
Total	911	100	185	100	98	100	1194

The visitor's book was kept from 1989 to 1996 when the practices fizzled out and more dependence was put on library registration.
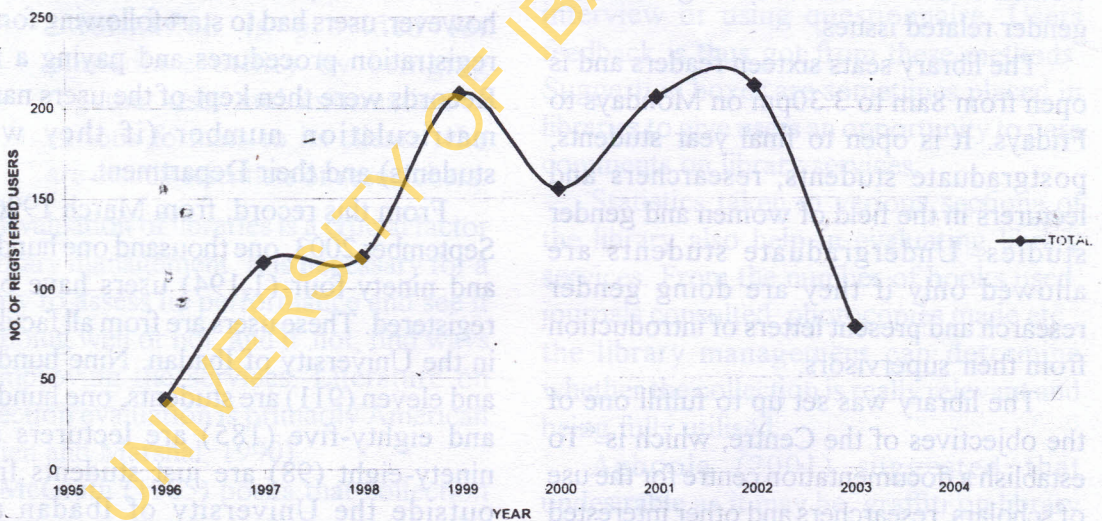
Figure 1 WORDOC Registration of Users

WORDOC's use as an International Centre is brought home in the variety of places from which researchers visit the library. This is due to the fact that WORDOC Centre in times past, organised collaborative conferences and was involved in link programmes with International organisations (Isiugo-Abanihe *et al.*, 1999)

Methodology

Direct interview, questionnaire and observation methods were used in conducting the research. Library users were randomly selected and their opinions sought on library services. Members of the WORDOC organising committee were also interviewed to get a detailed history of the establishment of the library.

This researcher managed the library from February 1995 to August 2000 and did an evaluation in 1999, the results of which are unpublished. The need for this evaluation has arisen from the fact that the management of the library partially changed hands and there seem to be more users than in previous years.

The questionnaire, which contained twenty variables divided into three parts, was designed to elicit necessary information from respondents. The first part asked for general information about age, sex and level of education.

The second part focused on use of the library. Questions were asked as to whether the user was registered or not, for how long the library had been used by the respondent, why the library was used, how useful the collection was to them, what they hoped to gain from the library, how they located materials, the nature of and time of use of the library.

The third part sought to find out the respondents' evaluation of the library's services in terms of satisfaction with services, relevance of the collection, facilities provided, opening hours and general comments.

Distribution of Questionnaire

Copies of the questionnaire were given to the users as they came into the library and they were requested to return the completed questionnaire to the library officer at the circulation desk.

Of the 75 (seventy-five) questionnaire given out, 60 sixty) were returned and 56 representing 74.6% were viable for analysis. This response is probably due to the fact that some of the respondents at the time of taking the forms were about finishing their research and as such, did not return to the library before the data was collected for analysis.

Findings

Of the 56 respondents, 43 were registered members of the library. The remaining 13 represented users who are not very constant in use of the library, hence, their not formally registering. 41 (73.2%) were female and 15 (26.8%) were male. 39 were full time students and 4 were part-time students. No lecturer was among the respondents. See table 2.

Table 2: Registration

Response	Number	Percent
Full time	39	69.7
Part time	4	7.1
Lecturer	0	0
Other	0	0
Non-registered	13	23.2
Total	**56**	**100**

Three (5.4%) of the respondents were Ph.D holders, 21 (37.5%) were Masters Degree holders, 14 (25%) had a 1st Degree and 18 (32.1) were undergraduates. 29 (51.8%) of them were between the ages of 21-30, 22 (39.3%) were between ages 31-40 while 5 (8.9%) were 41 and above. Of the 56 respondents, 33 (58.9%) had used the library for less than one year, 5 (8.9%) had used it for 1-2 years, and 14 (25%) for more than 5 years. See table 3.

Table 3: Years of Use

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 year	33	58.9
1-2 years	5	8.9
2-5 years	14	25.0
5 years & above	4	7.1
Total	**56**	**100.0**

On how they knew of the existence of the library, 32 (57.1%) claimed they knew

through friends telling them. 9 (16.1%) said it was through a member of staff of the university, 8 (14.3%) got to know through their lecturers, 2 (3.6%) knew by just passing by and seeing that it was a library, and 1 each got to know through their parent, another library, and the day the new library was opened. One respondent did not answer this question. See Table 4.

Table 4: Knowledge of Existence

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Through friend	32	57.1	1.8
Through Staff Member	9	16.1	74.5
On passing by	2	3.6	78.2
Day library opened	1	1.8	80.0
Another Library	1	1.8	83.6
Lecturers	8	14.3	98.2
Friend and staff	1	1.8	100.0
Total	**55**	**98.2**	
Unanswered	1	1.8	
Total	**56**	**100.0**	

An evaluation of gains of using the library shows that 21 (37.5%) use the WORDOC Library because it gives them access to current books materials, 17 (30.4%) because their reference enquiries are adequately met, 11(19%) because the library provides both current literature and reference services, 2 (3.6%) indicated that the library gives them current literature,

reference services and space to read while 1(1.8%) said access, space and reference services are received and another 1 (1.8%) indicated that the gain was only in terms of reading space. 3 persons did not respond to this question. See fig. 2.

This shows that the WORDOC Library is a useful one that gives current literature and provides adequate reference services.
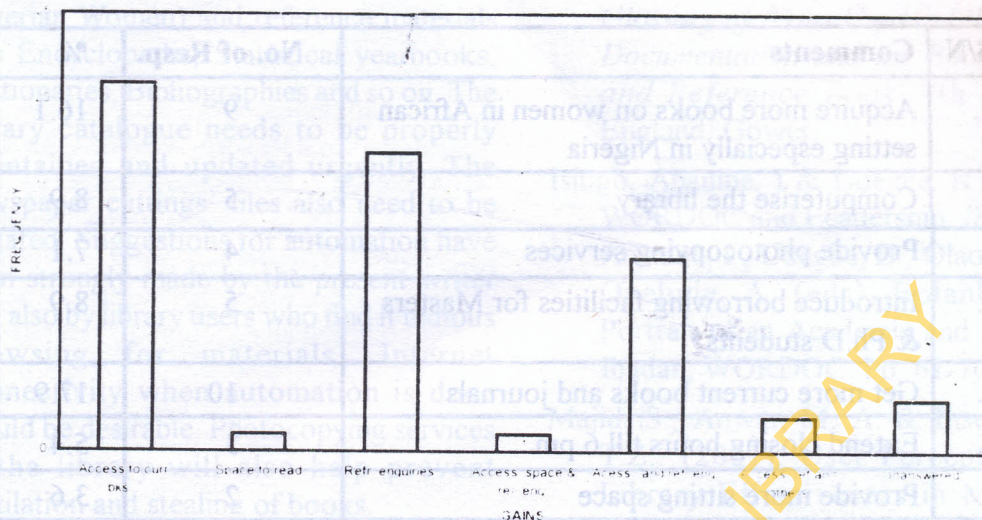
Figure 2: Gains of Use of WORDOC Library

On how the respondents locate materials in the library it was discovered that majority of users located materials by asking library staff. 17 respondents representing (30.4%) so indicated. Browsing was the next method of getting what they wanted. 16 respondents (28.6%) browse the shelf. 8 respondents (14.3%) used both methods mentioned earlier. 6 users (10.7%) used the card catalogue and also asked library staff, 2 (3.6%) used the catalogue, browsed and also asked library staff. Only 3(5.4%) indicated that they used the library catalogue only, while 1 (1.8%) said that asking library staff and also relying on peer or friends assistance was their method of locating materials. One respondent did not answer this question.

In all, asking library staff is the major means of getting materials in WORDOC Library. The next commonly used method is browsing. From observation, the low response to using the library catalogue (23 %) is probably due to the fact that the catalogue is not well maintained.

When asked a direct question as to their satisfaction or not with the library services, 36(64.3%) said they were satisfied while 20(35.7%) said they were not satisfied.

A few of the respondents in their general comments on how they felt improvement could be put in the library indicated that the library catalogue needed to be updated to enable users get at materials they want. Some also requested that the library be air-conditioned. This will help to preserve the materials from weather conditions as well as make readers more comfortable. Another wrote, *The sitting space is small.* Another said, *I would suggest a monthly orientation and familisation session between the librarian and users, so that users will know the facilities offered and how to make use of them. The library should be computerised and probably hooked on to the Internet so that access to information will be easily facilitated.*

Table 5: General Comments

S/N	Comments	No. of Resp.	%
1.	Acquire more books on women in African setting especially in Nigeria	9	16.1
2.	Computerise the library	5	8.9
3.	Provide photocopying services	4	7.1
4.	Introduce borrowing facilities for Masters & Ph.D students	5	8.9
5.	Get more current books and journals	10	17.9
6.	Extend closing hours till 6 pm	3	5.4
7.	Provide more sitting space	2	3.6
8.	Provide air conditioning	2	3.6
9.	Update the present Author/Title catalogue and add a subject catalogue	3	5.4
10.	Provide internet facilities	4	7.1
11.	Provide weekend services	2	3.6
12.	Provide *timely* Current Awareness Services	1	1.8
13.	Increase number of library assistants	1	1.8
14.	Provide newspapers	1	1.8
15.	Provide generator	1	1.8
16.	No response	3	5.9
	Total	**56**	**100**

From the data gathered, 54 (96.4%) indicated that they would like to be given the opportunity to borrow books from the library. 1 (1.8%) indicated that it would not be advisable to allow borrowing. 1 respondent (1.8%) did not respond to this question. The respondent who replied negatively indicated that *If you start borrowing facilities most of the books will get lost thereby reducing the quality of the library.* It was felt that maintaining a "reference only" library would help protect the collection. The respondent also indicated that providing photocopying services within the library would help in this regard.

Conclusion

From the study, it is seen that the WORDOC Library is a very valuable resource centre on women and gender issues. The collection is adequate but

lacking in local materials, (materials on Nigerian Women) and reference materials like Encyclopedia, Statistical yearbooks, Dictionaries, Bibliographies and so on. The library catalogue needs to be properly maintained and updated urgently. The newspaper cuttings' files also need to be updated. Suggestions for automation have been strongly made by the present writer and also by library users who find it tedious browsing for materials. Internet connectivity when automation is done would be desirable. Photocopying services in the library will also help prevent mutilation and stealing of books.

The opening hours at present are adequate for some but others demand extension of time so they can use it for longer periods. *The library could close by 6pm and open half day on Saturday* said one respondent.

On the whole, the WORDOC Library is serving the University community well, and also outside users but there is always room for more development. In the words of one of the respondents, *The library has being doing a good work in the lives of many young researchers.*

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