

ISSN: 1118-227X

# FRONTIERS OF

*Volume 1*

# INFORMATION AND

Number 1

# LIBRARY

2000

# SCIENCE (FILS)

*the journal of the  
world information community*



# FRONTIERS OF INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SCIENCE (FIS)

Volume 1, Number 1, 2000

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## USER EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: A NEED FOR RESTRUCTURING

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### Abstract

User education programme in university libraries in Nigeria needs reviewing if libraries are to justify their establishment in the university system. It is at the moment restricted to the orientation aspect alone without the instruction component. This paper attempts to establish why and what impact a user education programme should have on student life even after university education. The paper also suggests ways of improving education programme by making it a three-year programme to be imbibed throughout the student stay in the University. Of crucial importance are programme duration, timing and presentation. For the programme to be effective, planning and periodic evaluation of the programme must be considered.

### Introduction

Fresh students are introduced into library systems in all Nigerian universities at the beginning of every academic year, but few benefit from such introductory talks which last for a week and is tagged "library orientation".

One is amazed at the attitude of Nigerian students to library use. Most of the students often had never used a library or known the value of the library until they are given assignments for which their lecturers demand a list of references. Even then, most do not have much contact with the library until their final year.

User education, as defined by Mews<sup>1</sup> in her book on reader instruction, is concerned with helping readers to make the best use of a library. Wright<sup>2</sup> in an earlier book on library instruction further emphasized that students cannot be taught the use of the library in isolation but must be trained to see it as a continuous process of education. In other words, user education should be a continuous process starting with school and public libraries and with the possibility of extension into academic and specialised libraries. User education is central to the whole purpose of the library, and the effective utilization of information resources.

### Objectives of the Paper

This paper will attempt to:

1. review the type of user education given to Nigerian students in academic libraries,
2. examine the need to give reader instruction or bibliographic instruction instead of orientation alone, and
3. propose new methods and media to meet the demands of the time.

### Present Practices in User Education in Universities

Given the obvious problems facing the university system in Nigeria, namely; increasing enrolment, staff shortage, change in curricula, cut in finances, information explosion, what type of library user education programmes are being offered?

Any librarian with personal experience and contact with students would recount the following statement and questions that students of various levels, including postgraduate students ask: The library does not have the books? How do I use the Author/Title Catalogue? Where can I get materials?

It follows from such questions that there is an obvious functional defect in the methodology and content of the one orientation programme organised for students in some Nigerian universities. Akinyode<sup>3</sup> in his study validates this finding by acknowledging that user education programme is a flop in Nigerian university libraries because its impact is not evident in the day to day use of library resources by students. Andeh-Muottoh<sup>4</sup> also admitted that the programme has not been a success. This is in spite of the fact that Nigerian university libraries' interest in user education dated back to 1966 when Young<sup>5</sup> wrote on the subject. Various writers have since presented papers on modes of operations in different Nigerian university libraries<sup>6-12</sup>. The narration of these writers leads to the inescapable conclusion that user education has not advanced beyond the orientation level as reported by Aguolu<sup>13</sup>. According to him, Nigerian university libraries have been slow or inexplicably hesitant about accepting the responsibility for instructing students in the methods of library use beyond the traditional but superficial orientation programme.

Some universities such as Ife, Lagos and Nsukka integrate user education with courses. Others like the University of Ibadan make do with one-hour lectures and guided tour of the library. The common practice is to have a library orientation week or once-a-week programme spread over a month at the end of which it is assumed that the students would have imbibed the techniques of effective use of the library to last a life time. The unfortunate defect of such programmes is that they only limit themselves to the orientation component of a user education programme, and neglect the other aspect which is library instruction.

The general format of the orientation programme offered in Nigerian universities consists of: introduction of the University Librarian to new students; explanations on the library collection; presentation of slides on the organisation and layout of the library; guided tour of the university library in groups; and distribution of well written pamphlets that give details of existing library regulations, loans policy, opening hours and other services of the library<sup>13</sup>.

The majority of students coming into Nigerian universities do not have the simplest user education before their admission. Moreover, when it is time to come for introductory talks, they seldom show up, and when they do, the interest displayed is usually very low because they believe the library is just a custodian of materials and an environment where they can always come to read their books.

Impressions from personal experiences and encounters with students suggest that the orientation programmes currently run in Nigerian universities do not inculcate the required knowledge of how to judiciously and effectively use the resources in the library as they are supposed to be used.

Most of the available literature agree that the first few weeks of a session are not the best time to run user education programme. Students are usually still too preoccupied with adjusting to life in the campus during such periods. Besides, some students get late admissions, and when they do report, they are more interested in covering lost grounds in their academic work.

That an ideal situation has not been achieved is hardly surprising when one considers the content of the traditional approach and the processes involved in organizing a user education programme such as organization of courses, timing, time-table, size of group, optimum duration, as well as the content of the course itself. From the foregoing, there is no doubt that the types of user education given to Nigerian university students are inadequate and out of date when compared with what operates in developed countries where the use of computerized instruction is common place.

Research has shown that undergraduates need to know how to use a library if they are going to be academically successful. According to Joyce<sup>14</sup>, "there is a significant and positive relationship between knowledge of library use and academic standing". Her study of 64 teachers' college seniors revealed that students scoring higher than the median on a library test tended to have higher 4 year course average than those who scored below.

### **The Need for Library User Education and What it Entails**

We are reminded by Whitehead<sup>15</sup> that education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. The art is more than the ability to gain knowledge. It is the ability to use the knowledge gained for self-education and self-development in later years after schooling.

The emphasis on self-education has led to the increased use of tutorials, seminars, projects and guided reading as teaching methods in tertiary institutions. Secondly, the growth of interdisciplinary courses in higher institutions create problems for the students in the location, selection and organization of materials for study because such courses cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries. The quantity and diversity of sources as well as formats make the need for assistance essential. Without training, the students would be unable to make efficient use of all the information that is available and potentially useful in the library.

The pattern of many academic user education programmes is often very similar to that proposed at the Royal Society Scientific Information Conference<sup>16</sup> and by the University and Research Section of the Library Association<sup>17</sup>, a year later. The programme often comprise, one course given to new students to introduce them to library use, followed by courses for advanced studies on the structures of the literature of given subject fields. This approach though practical in many cases, tends to be somewhat disjointed. User education is provided in concentrated doses interspersed with periods of little or no library activity.

Ideally, user-education should be a continuous process with two components, "orientation" and "instruction", combined as necessary.

Orientation would be primarily concerned with ways of introducing the users to the general techniques of library use and services available and to the organizational layout and facilities of a particular library. It aims at creating the right kind of atmosphere for effective communications between user and librarians and to present an image of the library as a pleasant

and friendly institution where help can be obtained.

Instruction would focus on learning to make use of the information resources available within specific subject disciplines. Melium<sup>18</sup> concludes in his survey that library instruction is effective only at a time of need and that learning to use a library is a continuous process. That is to say, and as Malley<sup>19</sup> reported, that a user education programme should impart information handling skills.

### **Need for Changes in Methods of Organising User Education in Nigerian University Libraries**

Teaching methods may be roughly divided into those, which are suitable for group instruction, those suitable for individual instruction and those suitable for both. Choice of teaching methods and media is usually a function of several considerations such as the learning/teaching situation, the subject, the students and teachers. While it is acknowledged, that no single method could be suitable for all occasions, available literature shows that most academic institutions especially in advanced countries are laying emphasis on individual instruction methods, namely; self-instruction, programmed instruction, practical exercises books, printed guide and bibliographic instruction, study skills, information handling skills, communication skills, computer-assisted learning (CAL).

There is therefore an urgent need for Nigerian academic libraries to adopt a new system of user education programme. Otherwise, such libraries will not be able to justify the financial outlay on them by their parent academic institutions.

Fjallbrant and Malley<sup>20</sup> have pointed out that the "bibliographic instruction movement" within the library profession exerts substantial influence on the aims librarians set for themselves and their services. This writer urges librarians to persist in exploring and evaluating the most promising and cost-effective means of providing users with what users need to know in order to exploit library resources efficiently and effectively.

One means of enhancing library user education is through self-paced workbooks or study guides. This method has been in use for several years in a number of universities abroad<sup>21</sup>. The acknowledged advantage is its apparent effectiveness<sup>22</sup> and low cost<sup>23</sup>. Another specific approach is the introduction of self-paced information retrieval courses. This should not be credited to avoid students memorizing to pass the prescribed unit course without being able to apply the knowledge of bibliographic studies to their research even when they leave the university environment. Quite a good number of universities abroad encourage this aspect of user education especially for students in the third year and upwards.

For example, at the University of Texas at Austin, library instruction was taught as part of a two-semester course sequence to over 150 sections of Freshmen English per semester. Over 8000 students attended the programme in 1977. The programme combined self-paced and course-related instruction. First semester started with self-guided tour of the library and a short exercise. Then instructions were given on basic library skills which the students found useful in their various term assignments.

The usefulness and success of the above example can be attributed mainly to the involvement of faculty members who are in a position to exert enormous influence on students'

attitudes. This is the kernel of the Timothy D. Jewell's theory of library use<sup>24</sup>: "faculty influence". In essence, the theory holds that without the active support and encouragement of faculty members, students will not actively use the library or pay very serious attention to library use instruction.

There is a total lack of appreciation of the importance of faculty involvement even in the limited or qualified "user education" programmes run in Nigerian universities. It needs to be understood that library use consists of series of skills, which can be applied to different academic studies. It should, therefore, with the full involvement and co-operation of the faculty members, be integrated with the teaching programmes as part of the curriculum. One way of getting faculty involvement is by introducing or giving literature in research or problem-solving assignments occasionally.

Similarly, the teaching staff should involve librarians right from the curriculum/course planning stages to ensure effective provision of learning materials and user education programmes. As Harris<sup>25</sup> admonished, academic librarians should refine library services and give effective support to their parent institutions. They should play a full part at the planning and decision-making stages of course creation and should develop user education programme which emphasizes the literature, structure and patterns of information transfer within a given subject area. There is no doubt that the success of subject-related instruction is closely related to establishing real co-operation between the academic staff and the professional librarians.

### Programme Evaluation

Programme evaluation is a key component of instructional design. Its focus is usually on the collection and analysis of pertinent information geared to determining the efficacy of a given course or programme as an aid to decision making. While literature abound on "user education practices" scanty notes exist on evaluation. Person<sup>26</sup> attempted a long-term evaluation of bibliographic instruction in 1981, while King<sup>27</sup> made a study of the effects of library instructions on students' research at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. No evaluation report has been carried out on any of the user education programmes in Nigerian university libraries, though Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, usually carries an informal evaluation report in the University Library Report. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Effective evaluation requires extensive planning and knowledge of complex evaluation techniques. Besides, such an exercise is usually time-consuming and generally difficult to conduct. But from a cost-benefit stand point, the need for periodic evaluation cannot be over-emphasized.

The feed-back information that an evaluation programme generates could serve as a guide for a revision or update of either the materials, methods and or resources currently in operation in a user education programme. Results emanating from such an evaluation exercise could equally throw up possible alternatives for a better user oriented programme while improving on the standards of instruction/performance of the programme.

### **Recommendations on an Effective Library Instruction Programme**

By way of recapitulation, user education encompasses orientation and instruction. While both are given in advanced countries; in Nigeria, user education programme ends with orientation to the benign neglect of the library instruction component.

Students, especially in the Arts and Social Sciences, need regular library instruction to assist them with their literature review. Such instruction will be of equal benefit to Science and Technology students since it will keep them abreast of new discoveries in their fields of specialization. Besides, no Nigerian university library bothers to carry out a thorough evaluation of its user education programme to enable it ascertain the degree of appropriateness to the needs of its users.

One way of remedying the current defects is to introduce a three-year library instruction programme which will go beyond the usual Freshman Orientation Week and be self-paced with emphasis on the individual student. Its implementation could be in three phases.

Phase I of the programme should be planned to acquaint the first year students with the physical layout of the library indicating the general location of all the major resources housed. They should also be introduced to the rules and regulations on library usage as well as to the library staff at the reference and circulation desks. The thrust of this phase is generally to provide information on the why, what and who of the library rather than on how to use it.

Phase II should begin in the last semester of the students' second or third year in the university. The focus should be on methodical instruction in the use of the library. Detailed instruction should be given on the use of the card catalogues, and especially the subject catalogues. Other areas that should be covered include: filing rules, periodical indexes, selected reference works and reference sources.

Phase III instruction should be for the final year, that is, for 400-level students and above. It will be a continuation of phase II but geared to the needs of advanced students. The commencement of the phase is the period when students are at the peak of their needs for advanced reference tools to facilitate independent study and preparation of their terminal and research papers. It is therefore, essential at this stage to emphasize the use of specialized reference tools in their major fields, as well as the required knowledge for research into interdisciplinary areas.

### **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, crucial consideration that should always be borne in mind is the fact that lasting impact can be made when a user shows interest or need to use the library. In other words, correct timing is of vital consideration. For example, a good time for the orientation component of the user education programme is the beginning of the academic year when students are given an overview of available library facilities. The second component of a user education programme which involves instruction in the use of library materials is best given when students are working on non-library projects or courses which require literature search.

In effect, library instruction would be an on-going exercise involving both the academic and library staff throughout the students' stay in the university.



Underlying the foregoing is the need for co-operation and joint efforts of the academic and library staff. To derive the much coveted mileage, a user education programme needs to be seen as part of the total teaching-learning process. Constant dialogue, cooperation and involvement of both the faculty and librarian in the clarification of objective and defined goals as well as in the development and planning of the programme is a sine qua-non for effective results.

Team teaching approach at Hatfield Polytechnic was reported successful because its user education programme was the joint responsibility of both the academic and library staff which helped to overcome the negative attitude of students. As an example of joint effort, a seminar on specialized reference tools can be given by the academic with the assistance of subject librarians. This can be preceded by a seminar for the academic staff. Lipow<sup>28</sup> describes a successful series of library seminar for academic staff at the University of California and stressed that it is the responsibility of librarians to influence the teaching faculty who will in turn influence the students. Cowley<sup>29</sup> gave the same advice when he urged librarians to be proactive on behalf of library service. He noted that pressing the library's viewpoint and selling its strength more assertively will give the library a higher profile and can encourage policies which reflect library needs, such as the need to incorporate user education in course proposals.

To make librarians more effective, their skills should be regularly improved and renewed. Staff that are likely to be involved in user education programme could be selected, on the basis of their interest in this area and their skills in communicating to staff and students. Thereafter, intensive in-house training sessions on teaching and learning methods should be organized for them. Advantage could also be taken, under the staff development component of the current World Bank credit facility to Nigerian federal universities, to give such staff international exposure in how user education programmes are run and evaluated in selected universities in Europe and America.

It is equally imperative for library management to give due cognizance to user education programme by according it a prime place in the yearly budget priority list. A programme budgeting approach that lays emphasis on this important aspect of the library services should be advised by both the National Library Association and the Committee of the Librarians of Nigerian Universities. Such a policy stance will present the library as an active participant in the educational process rather than, as probably conceived by the general public, as a mere warehouse to support formal teaching.

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### Introduction

The desire for recency and immediacy in information delivery led to the purchase of PCs and CD-ROM equipment by the National Universities Commission of Nigeria for distribution to the university library system. The National Universities Commission has given every federal university the *minimum* configuration which are: (1) CD-ROM drive unit (2) interface-connecter (3) signal cable (4) A.C. (5) CD-caddy for the application of CD-ROM technology in their libraries. This provision was meant to stimulate the libraries into action to get into the mainstream of CD-ROM technology in information retrieval and dissemination.

### CD-ROM Technology

CD-ROM means Compact Disc Read-Only-Memory. This rainbow coloured 12cm diameter disc is not visible as a book. They are resistant to dust, humidity, insects and fungi, and each one weighs just seven grams. It is made from durable plastic with a reflective metal coating and laminated surface. This light weight pocket-size disc, is made from polycarbonate material which is used to make bullet proof glass. Data is permanently encoded on the disc by the use of laser, burning a series of "pits" or microscopic holes into the surface of the disc. The areas between the pits are known as "lands", and the information on the disc is accessed through continuous spiral track of pits and lands.

The tracks are very condensed on the disc as there are 16, 000 tracks per inch. The data is encoded on one side of the disc only, usually the bottom, with the top of the disc dedicated to holding the label. Thus, a disc is always inserted into a CD-ROM drive with the label side facing up, so that laser in the CD-ROM drive can focus on the bottom of the disc. This technology is extraordinary because the disc can hold 650 megabyte of data plus another 100-megabyte memory available for error correction codes. According to Compton<sup>1</sup>, the information that can be stored on a CD-ROM is equivalent to 1800 floppy disks, or 330,000 A4 typewritten pages or 750 volumes of averaged sized books.