

Assessing the Effectiveness of User Education in Meeting Undergraduate Students' Information Needs in University Libraries in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study assessed the effectiveness of user education in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in university libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The population for the study comprised of 4058 library registered third year students in the three universities in Benue State for the 2017/2018 session. The sample size for the study was 364 students who were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument employed for data collection was a self constructed structured questionnaire validated by experts. Data was collected and analyzed using Means and Standard Deviation. The study found that, the undergraduate students in universities in Benue State are exposed to several contents of user education programs in line with the objective of the programme. The finding also revealed that user education programmes taught in the universities have been effective in meeting undergraduate students' information needs. Students can effectively and efficiently use library information resources as a result of their exposure to user education. The study concluded that user education is indispensable in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in universities. The study recommendations that, User education is pertinent in meeting students information needs and hence concerted efforts should be made by librarians to encourage students participation in it as it would equip them with necessary skills to succeed in their academic pursuit.*

Keywords: *University, University Library and User Education*

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I. Introduction

Universities are often referred to as the citadel of learning and represent the apex institution for the acquisition of knowledge. Universities are established for the purposes of teaching, learning, and research and community/public service. The university library is indispensable in the actualization of all the purposes, as none of them can effectively take place in the absence of a functional library. The library is established to provide information resources and services to support academic activities of their patrons, including students, teachers and other stakeholder in education development.

The responsibility of the university library is to ensure that the use of its information resources and services are maximized to meet the users' information needs, hence the need for library user education program. This came as a result of the realization that the availability of information resources and services in university library does not equate their accessibility, hence the need for introduction of an intervention that will develop skills necessary to achieve a higher degree of competence in the use of information resources and services (Oyedipe & Okewale 2012). University libraries in their evolution have to comprehend the implications of serving a diverse user group and develop strategies to accommodate the diversity and to level the playing fields so that students can benefit from the information resources provided by the library. Universities in Benue State which is the focus of this study has students coming from diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences. The diversity in student/user population is often reflected in positive or negative library experiences, developed or underdeveloped library culture, as well as different levels of appreciation, understanding and orientation (Suleiman 2012). Discrepancies in library experiences amongst library users is evident in underdeveloped or developing environments like Benue State which is characterized by high levels of poverty, low levels of literacy, and the marginalization of libraries in national priorities. Usually in a deprived environment, people do not have a strong library background because of lack of exposure and experience.

In a concerted efforts by the university libraries to acquaint their students with skills in effective use of the library comes the introduction of library user education as a course for all students. User education is strategy that the libraries use to convert non-users of library into habitual users by moulding and equipping them with relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes that can reduce the discrepancy between the

knowledge and use of collections (Kumar, 2001 in Moyane, Dube & Hoskins, 2015). Chinyere (2014) notes that user education creates a connection between the users and the materials or tools; its significance for the library cannot be overemphasized. Without this intervention, the user who may not have any prior library experience or who has probably only had access to much smaller school and public libraries might be marginalized (Aderibigbe & Ajiboye 2011; Ogunmodede, Adio & Odunola 2011).

User education is the instruction given to readers to help them make the best use of the library. Its core is to teach – to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is the umbrella term to describe a range of activities – from basic guidance in library layout to the more formal, structured and systematized programmes of instruction or training – on the effective and efficient use of information resources, materials, services and retrieval systems (Kannappanavar & Swamy 2012). This is in line with the National University Commission which encourages university libraries to equip students with the effective use of library materials (NUC, 2007). In the view of Husen 2003 in Madiako (2013), user education represents an attempt by librarians to teach students on how to locate and use information effectively. This entails that, library users (undergraduate students) need to acquire skills in identifying the purpose of information, the location of information and the use of information. The basic intent of library user education programmes is to be an instructional pedagogy (Hindagolla 2012) a method of enabling users to become information literate and self-sufficient (Maduako, 2013; Syaikhu 2013); a lever to empower them to become their own gatekeepers of knowledge; a continuum of skills, behaviours, attitudes and values which enable users to navigate the ever-changing information arena (Ogunmodede, Adio & Odunola 2011). According to Okoye (2013), user education is meant to improve the users' knowledge of the library's collections and services and to be a motivating factor for patronage, change of attitude, higher usage and more demands on the library. It entails systematic efforts to teach a set of principles or search strategies relating to the library, its collections or services using pre-determined methods in order to accomplish a defined set of objectives. Bhatti (2010), asserted that the changing nature of higher education worldwide, along with ever increasing growth of library collections, technological developments in handling and retrieving techniques, and information and fundamental changes in the nature of reference services, has justified the need for user-education in order that new models of education can be effective and improve the academic performance of students.

Extant literature has shown that user education quickens the efforts of undergraduate students in accessing, retrieving and effectively utilizing the library materials. Quest for the use of library resources calls for the need to ensure that users have effective and efficient access to these resources. User education programmes offer undergraduate students and the other library users the knowledge, skills and training on how to source and use the library system and services offered by the physical library building of the university as viewed by Ogunmodede and Emeahara, (2010). User education can be in the form of orientation/training programmes, workshop, seminar, “know your library programmes” occasionally organized by the library for both new and old library users (Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku, 2016). These programmes/activities may be packaged in hard copies, i.e. manuals, handouts or in soft copies i.e. compact disc. These programmes include library instruction, reader instruction, library education, library orientation, bibliographic instruction and information literacy (Siddiqui & Walia 2013; Umeozor 2013). These user education programmes are taught in universities in Benue State as courses in general studies to enable students acquire knowledge and efficient skills and develop positive attitudes towards the use of the library.

Problem Statement

Despite the recognition that user education is capable of adding value to university education, in particular academic outcomes, it has emerged from the literature that, in certain circumstances, user education can be ineffective. Like any other initiative or project, user education is susceptible to pitfalls which, if not well anticipated and managed, can be barriers to the effective implementation of user education. Although most university libraries have extensive collections ranging from print to electronic resources, it has emerged in the literature that most university students are unable to use information resources effectively and efficiently (Aderibigbe & Ajiboye 2011; Suleiman 2012). The fact that most students are still unable to explore and use library resources is proof that, without a concerted effort to empower and capacitate students with skills, knowledge and attitudes to use information effectively, the existence of information in large quantities is not likely to benefit the user; sheer abundance of information and supporting technologies does not in itself create more informed students (Aderibigbe & Ajiboye 2011; Ogunmodede, Adio & Odunola 2011; Suleiman 2012).

From observations, the researchers discovered that many undergraduate students in universities in Benue State do not use the library. Some of them are not even aware of the existing information materials in the library. Those who use the library find it difficult locating needed materials because they lack the knowledge of the search tools which would help them locate information materials needed. Consequently, the library resources are under-utilized and this seems to account for students' inability to do meaningful research which

ultimately results in poor academic performance. One would therefore wonder why the concerted efforts by librarians to acquaint users with knowledge and skills in the use of library seem to be in vein.

This has become an issue of concern to the researcher that warranted their investigation to assess the effectiveness of user education in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in universities in Benue State. This investigation is in line with the submission of Blummer, Kenton & Song (2010) who suggests that libraries should assess their existing programmes and determine if they meet students' information needs.

II. Literature Review

The fundamental objective of user education is to expose, acquaint and inculcate in the clients, the basic knowledge or understanding and skills which are necessary for effective and efficient use of the library services and resource. The effectiveness of any library is measured by the use made of its resources and services (Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku, 2016). According to the authors, this justifies all the efforts librarians put in, in organizing library resources so that they can be fully utilized. They further submitted that one of such efforts is the instruction given to library patrons to acquaint them with the library, its resources and services with a view to enabling them retrieve needed information without difficulty. Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku (2016) reported that user education teaches students how to: use the library, use the catalogue, use indexes, organize of library resources, identify useful reference materials, document research reports, do online searching, retrieve materials from the library using eternal tools and search information. User education consists of all types of activities designed to teach users about library facilities, services, organization, resources and search strategies in order to equip them with basic skills to enable them make optimal, effective, efficient and independent use of information resources and services available in the library (Ogunmede & Emeahara, 2010). The importance of user education as instrument for effective utilization of library resources is not in question. This is because the extents to which the library resources are used depend largely on users' skill and knowledge of information search and retrieval. Esse & Ugwumba (2014) are of the opinion that there cannot be a connection between user and materials or tools without proper education given to users who may not have prior knowledge or idea on the use of such materials or tools. User education is not taught in a vacuum. There are goals and objectives guiding the programme which must be pursued and realized. Edom (2007) outline the following as the objective of user education: teach the children how to make efficient use of the library; make the students aware of the resources of the library in the widest sense; contribute to the personal and intellectual development of the student and to develop his ability to continue with independent learning after his formal education; provide him with capacity to conduct research; obtain and access relevant information and present his findings in a manner acceptable to his peers.

The understanding of the importance of user education depends on the level at which the concept and/or practice is marketed by the library and also its perceived value (Moyane, Dube & Hoskins, 2015). According to the authors, if marketing of user education programmes is inadequate, users will lack a clear and meaningful understanding of user education; consequently, response to user education programmes will be less than optimal. Key to the success of user education is the fact that the library itself and the user have to appreciate and understand the value of user education. Aguolu & Aguolu (2002) submits that user education must be designed to acquaint students with the full, resources of the library. If the library appreciates the value of user education, it will realize that the common practice of bringing students to the library for a one-to-two-hour session at the beginning of the academic year (when students are not even aware of their information needs) is inappropriate, ineffective and inefficient (Birch 2012; Maduako 2013; Kannappanavar & Swamy 2012; Ogunmodede, Adio & Odunole 2011).

Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku, (2016) reported that library education positively affect the information needs of students. Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku, (2016) found out that there is a significant relationship between library user education and students, grades. Iheaturu (2002) states that that user education helps students to learn how to make effective use of the library and its resources. A study conducted by Afolabi (2010) reported that student who took part in the orientation programme visited the library very often, used the library resources for their assignments and reported a positive impact on their scores, while their counterparts who did not take part in the programme mostly visited the library for leisure purpose. This implied that user education meets the information needs of the students. A study conducted by Gbuushi & Ubwa (2018) report that User education program has positively updated the undergraduate students' use of the library as well as their academic performance

Research Questions

The study was conducted to answer the following research questions

- i. What is the content of user education programme exposed to undergraduate students in university libraries in Benue State?
- ii. How effective is the user education in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in university libraries in Benue State?

III. Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. The population for the study comprises 4058 library registered third year students in the three universities in Benue State for the 2017/2018 session. The sample size for the study was 364 students. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane Formula (1969) for sample size determination. In selecting the sample for the study, proportionate stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure that proportionate number of students in each university was represented in the sample. The instrument employed for data collection was a self constructed structured questionnaire titled "User Education Effectiveness Questionnaire" (UEEQ) which was validated by experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach Alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.92 was obtained. Data was collected and analyzed using Means and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions and Chi-Square statistic to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A benchmark of 2.50 was used for the study. Item with a Mean value of 2.50 and above was agreed while those below 2.50 were disagreed

IV. Results

Research Question One: What is the content of user education programme exposed to undergraduate students in university libraries in Benue State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Content of User Education Programmes in Universities in Benue State

S/N	Course Contents of User Education	Mean	Std Dev	Decision
1	I was exposed to instructions on how to search for information resources in the library	2.97	.84	Agree
2	I was exposed to instructions on key library services necessary for my academic pursuit	2.92	.99	Agree
3	I was taught on how to do online searching	2.77	.81	Agree
4	I received instruction on how to identify useful reference materials	2.81	.89	Agree
5	I was given instruction on library rules and regulation	2.79	1.01	Agree
6	I was exposed to various information materials available in the library	3.11	.78	Agree
7	I received instruction on how to document research reports	2.72	.89	Agree
8	I was taught on how to retrieve materials from the library using eternal tools	2.51	.91	Agree
9	I was exposed to the proper form of making a scientific bibliography	2.87	1.00	Agree
10	I received instruction on the organization of library resources	3.15	.83	Agree
11	Library orientation helps me to know about the physical layout of the library	2.66	.84	Agree
12	I was acquainted with skills on how to use e-books	2.82	.93	Agree
13	I was taught how to evaluate information sources especially those found on the internet	2.90	.95	Agree
14	I was taught on how to log onto library computer and search for materials	2.88	.91	Agree
15	I was taught the basics of database searching	2.68	.79	Agree
16	I was exposed on how to communicate information in different formats	3.00	.99	Agree
17	I was taught physical layout of the library	2.98	1.02	Agree
18	I received instruction on the basics of library catalogue	2.67	.90	Agree
Cluster Mean		2.85	.90	Agree

Results in table1 shows that the undergraduate students agreed to all the eighteen (18) items as the content of user education programmes they are exposed to. This is because their mean score ranges between 2.51- 3.15 which is above the benchmark of 2.50. The grand mean of all the items was revealed to be 2.85 and SD= .90. The table also revealed high standard deviation values ranging from .78-1.02 meaning that the undergraduate students in the universities were homogeneous in their responses.

Research Question Two: How effective is user education in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in university libraries in Benue State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Effectiveness of User Education Programme in University Libraries In Benue State

S/N	Effectiveness of User Education Programme	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
19	User education acquaints me with skills in identifying relevant information resources from the library for my academic pursuits.	2.88	.89	Effective
20	User education helps me to be skillful in identifying relevant information services from the library for my academic pursuits	3.07	.81	Effective
21	With user education, I can now search the library catalogue independently	2.79	.85	Effective
22	With user education, I am no longer dependent on the subject librarian for searching information from the library	2.92	.95	Effective
23	User education acquaint me with the use of library information resources	2.99	.99	Effective
24	User education helps me to understand the classification system used in the library	3.17	.93	Effective
25	With user education, I can now a scientific report	2.41	.91	Not Effective
26	User education helps me to be an independent lifelong learner	2.68	.83	Effective
27	User education instills in me critical thinking skills	2.39	1.00	Not Effective
28	User education helps me to understand basics of database searching	2.97	.79	Effective
29	User education helps me to communicate information in different formats	3.02	.98	Effective

30	User education helps me to know the needed research tools in the library for my studies	3.13	.95	Effective
31	User education helps me to feel at home in the library thus meeting my information needs	3.18	.78	Effective
32	User education helps me to understand ownership of information source and copyright	2.52	.94	Effective
33	User education has enhanced my use of index as a retrieval tool	2.70	.89	Effective
Cluster Mean		2.85	.89	Effective

Results in Table 2 shows that only two (5) out of the fifteen (15) items are not effective in meeting undergraduate students' information needs mean score of 2.41 and 2.39 which are below the benchmark of 2.50. (i.e items 25 and 27) while others have mean ranges between 2.52-3.18 which are above the benchmark of 2.50 indicating the effectiveness of user education. The grand mean of all the items was revealed to be 2.85 and SD= .89. The table also revealed high Standard Deviation values from .78-1.00 meaning that the undergraduate students in the universities were homogeneous in their responses.

V. Discussion

Findings of the study as shown on table1 revealed that the undergraduate students in universities in Benue State are exposed to several contents of user education programs. The result of the analysis reveals that the content of user education given to undergraduate students is in line with the objective of the programme. The major objective of user education is to inculcate in library users the skill to make use of the library, exploit the information resources and retrieve the needed information with minimal assistance and supervision by the library staff. This finding corroborate with that of Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku (2016) who in their study reported that user education teaches students how to: use the library, use the catalogue, use indexes, organize of library resources, identify useful reference materials, document research reports, do online searching, retrieve materials from the library using eternal tools and search information. The finding is also in line with Iheaturu's (2002) who outline of the objectives of user education to includes: making students aware of library resources, contributing to the personal and intellectual development of the students and to develop his ability to continue independent learning after his formal education, helping users to conduct research obtain and access relevant information and present his answers in a manner acceptable to his peers. The finding is in tandem with Husen in Maduako (2013), who asserted that user education represents an attempt by librarians to teach students on how to locate and use information effectively. This finding is also a confirmation of assertion of Okoye (2013), who stated that user education is meant to improve the users' knowledge of the library's collections and services and to be a motivating factor for patronage, change of attitude, higher usage and more demands on the library.

Finding of the study as revealed on table 2 revealed that, on the whole, user education has been effective in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in universities in Benue State. The implication of this finding is that the undergraduate students can effectively and efficiently use library information resources as a result of their exposure to user education. This finding is in tandem with that of Uwakwe, Onyeneke and Njoku (2016) who reported in their study that user education has positively affected the information needs of students. The finding also agrees with that of Gbuushi & Ubwa (2018) who in their study report that User education program has positively updated the undergraduate students' use of the library as well as their academic performance. Similarly Chinyere (2014) noted that user education creates a connection between the users and information materials. The finding also corroborate with that of Tiekkel (2001) in Uwakwe, Onyeneke & Njoku, (2016) who found out that there is a significant relationship between library user education and students, grades. Iheaturu (2002) also states that that user education helps students to learn how to make effective use of the library and its resources.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concluded that user education is indispensable in meeting undergraduate students' information needs in university libraries in Benue State. The user education programmes has positively affected the students information needs.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

- i. User education is pertinent in meeting students information needs and hence concerted efforts should be made by librarians to encourage students participation in it as it would equip them with necessary skills to succeed in their academic pursuit
- ii. Librarians should consider the extension of user education programmes in terms of content, depth and teaching strategies and methods as being critical for further success of the programme.

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