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The Use of the Library Catalogue by Undergraduate Students in Niger Delta University Library

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Introduction

Academic libraries collect material to support the teaching and research objectives of their parent bodies. The library serves both the teaching and non teaching staff of the university, researchers from other academic institutions, and students. Experience has shown that the majority of users of academic libraries are students.

The library collection is organized to give easy access to material. According to Maloney (2004) the role of the library is to organize information resources and services in a way that supports user needs. Cataloguing and classification are basic processes in organizing information. Cataloguing is the process of describing material so it can be identified, while classification is the assignment of a call number that places material in order by subject. According to Opaleke, Olayemi, and Aina (2006) classification is a necessary device in organization. It directs the users to a specific subject, and groups books on the same or related subjects.

The library catalogue is an essential tool. It is an index or a key to the collection, containing an entry representing each item (Clark, 2000). The catalogue also tells where in the library a book is located (Apotiade, 2002).

Literature Review

A catalogue is a list of things exhibited, articles for sale, school courses offered, etc., usually with descriptive comments and often illustration. A library catalogue serves the same purpose. It is a file of records for a library's collection (List 1998, cited by Ojedokun 2007). It is important to both library users and library staff. Its functions include giving a comprehensive record of materials owned by the library, listing what the library possesses by a certain author, on a given subject, and with a certain title, and enabling library materials to be located easily (Clark, 2000). The catalogue provides multiple access points to the library's collection (Osode, 1987).

In spite of these purposes and characteristics, the use of the catalogue is very poor in most Nigerian university libraries. Ezomo (1988), cited by Okorafor (2006) reveals a poor use of the catalogue in Latunde Odeku Medical Library, attributed to lack of user education programmes. Fister (1992) states that undergraduates find the university library threatening and doing research intimidating because they do not have library skills.

The only solution to this problem is prolonged and intensive user education and current awareness services. According to Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo, and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004), the university

library faces a number of challenges in its user instruction programmes, yet it is through user education that librarians' work is made easy and students' effort reduced. If the library is for the use of all, then all must be able to use the catalogue to access the library materials. According to Ranganathan, libraries are for use. Therefore we must be sure that whatever we do serves the ultimate purpose of the library (Littlefield 2008).

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Determine the extent of use of use of the catalogue to locate and retrieve books in the library.
2. Discover problems and constraints militating against the use of the catalogue.
3. Discover why students preferred to search for materials directly in the shelves.
4. Discover ways to make the use of the catalogue easier for students.

Methodology

This study was conducted at Niger Delta University Library, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa state. The study employed descriptive research, using a questionnaire as instrument for eliciting information on the use of the library catalogue among students. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed randomly, of which 294 were returned and used for the analysis. Simple percentages were used.

Findings and Discussion

Table I: Awareness of library catalogue.

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Undecided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 168 • 100 • 26 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57.1 • 34.1 • 8.8
Total	294	100

More than half of respondents are aware of the library catalogue.

Table II: Frequency of use of library catalogue

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly • Occasionally • Never used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 • 102 • 160 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10.9 • 34.7 • 54.4
Total	294	100

About 45 percent of respondents use the catalog regularly or occasionally, while more than half never user it.

Table III: Methods used by respondents to access materials in the library.

Access method	Number	Percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of catalogue • Browsing/reading the shelves to find books and placing back in the shelves • Pulling down the books from shelves to go through them • Asking staff for assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 • 202 • 42 • 22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9.5 • 68.7 • 14.3 • 7.5
Total	294	100

Nearly 70 percent of respondents browse through the shelves to locate books and other materials, while less than 10 percent use the library catalogue.

Table IV: Difficulties using the catalogue

Difficulties using the catalogue	Number	Percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of proper users education • Lack of skill • Undecided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 209 • 79 • 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71.7 • 26.9 • 2.04
Total	294	100

More than 70 percent of respondents lack proper users' education, while nearly all the rest say that they lack the necessary skills. This corroborates Ezomo (1988), who attributed lack of use to users not given the necessary user education. It also supports the finding of Fister (1992) who found that students do not have library skills.

Table V: Making the catalogue easier to use

How to make the catalogue easier to use	Number	Percent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper education on use of catalogue • Computerization of catalogue • Assistance from library staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 206 • 46 • 42 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70.1 • 15.6 • 14.3
Total	294	100

About 70 percent of respondents indicated that user education would make the catalogue easier to use, while the rest were about equally divided between computerization and assistance from the library staff. This corroborates Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo, and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004), who found that, while university libraries face a number of challenges in user instruction programs, the benefits are worth it.

Conclusion

The study reveals that a majority of the students are not aware of the library catalogue and its uses. As a result, a majority of respondents have never used the catalogue. Students preferred browsing through the shelves to locate books, which can lead to frustration and which has caused many to view the library as just a reading place.

High quality user education is the solution to the problems encountered by students in using the catalogue. As revealed in the study there is no proper user education programme in place at the university. A majority of students are in favour of user education to ease and facilitate the use of the catalogue.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for improvement in the use of the catalogue in Niger Delta University.

1. A proper user education programme on the use of catalogue for the retrieval of books and other information sources should be organized and made mandatory for all users. Such a programme should be coordinated by the university librarian and other qualified librarians in the institution.
2. A regular orientation programme should be organized, including guidelines on using the catalogue.
3. The university librarian should organize demonstrations on the use of the catalogue every semester and wide publicity should be give to create awareness among users.
4. University authorities should see that only qualified librarians provide library user education.
5. Guidelines on use of the catalogue should be prepared and displayed where users can easily see them.

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