

Catalogue Use by Science Students in the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

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This study investigates catalogue use by science students of the University of Ilorin. A questionnaire was randomly distributed to 500 users in the 2004/ 2005 session; 415 questionnaires were completed and form the basis of this study. The study reveals that a preponderance of the respondents (90.1%) use the library catalogue to access the library stock; three-quarters (74%) claim to know how to use both the card catalogues and the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). The users of the OPAC represented a small portion with

33 respondents (7.9%). The study also showed that many respondents (192 or 46.3%) prefer the Subject Catalogue, one-fourth (111 or 26.7%) prefers the Author/Title and about a fifth (88 or 21.2%) prefers a combination of Author/Title and Subject Catalogues. The use of library catalogues increases as the respondents' progress in their academic career. This paper concludes that effective library use education based on subject disciplines would be more beneficial to the users.

Introduction

The catalogue is an inventory of the stock of any library. It is the tool for accessing the collections of the Library in most of the university libraries in Nigeria and in other developing countries. Harrod (1990) defined the catalogue as:

The compilation of a list of documents or printed materials according to a set of rules so as to enable the consulter to know what items are available, and from the class number or other means of identification, where they may be found.

The catalogue reveals the availability and facilitates the retrieval of printed items in a university library. It is the outcome of applying the cataloguing and classification processes to the intellectual materials received from the acquisition department by the cataloguing department. In doing subject cataloguing, the cataloguing department assigns to each item its appropriate subject headings based on internationally recognized standards. Finally, the necessary bibliographical details and classification marks are created, as determined by cataloguing codes and standards, for each item that is presented in the catalogue, regardless of

the catalogue's format. The card format catalogue is used by the majority of users in most university libraries in Nigeria and other developing countries (Odusanya 2001; Duckett 1994; Sanni & Ifi 2005). Zondi (1992) Ssendikadiwa (1996) and Kamanda (1999) also confirm this in their articles. Therefore, to find information about any item in a library stock, users must flip through or search a collection of cards in a filing cabinet, using appropriate access points for known items, or the subject headings for items that are unknown to him/her.

The central role of university libraries is to support the scholarship, research and community service in their parent institutions with the materials required by their clientele that they select, acquire, process and organize. Maloney (2004) also stated that the role of the library is to organize information resources and services in a way that supports the users' needs. Consequently, to facilitate accessing information, the University of Ilorin library creates author/title and subject catalogues to identify and retrieve printed materials in the stock. Unfortunately, these catalogues are not used as well as they might be by the students because of lack of knowledge. The reason for this is that library

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service is dismal, or in most cases absent, at the primary and secondary school levels of the Nigerian educational system. Except for the few Nigerian children who were educated in private secondary schools, most undergraduates have had no prior contact with libraries before arriving at the university. A majority of students go directly to the shelves to locate and retrieve books without using the library's catalogues. A lot of energy is therefore dissipated in accessing library materials with the attendant waste of time, a counter-productive exercise. In order to alleviate these problems, the University of Ilorin library offers a "Use of Library" course under the General Studies Programme of the University, which is compulsory for all undergraduate students.

Background information about the University of Ilorin

Ilorin is the capital of Kwara State in Nigeria and the gateway to the Northern and the Southern parts of Nigeria. The University of Ilorin is located in Ilorin, Kwara State, and is one of the seven third-generation Universities established by the Federal government in August 1975. The University of Ilorin has grown from three faculties in 1976 to nine faculties with 60 academic departments today.

Although the University started in 1975, the University Library did not begin until 1976. Some universities in the country had the opportunity of inheriting collections when they first started, however the University of Ilorin did not have this benefit. It started building its collection from scratch. There are eight units in the library including circulation, references, serial/theses collection, acquisitions, cataloguing, documents, computer and bindery units. (The staff and collection profile of the University of Ilorin library is shown in Table 1.) The main University Library is located at the permanent site of the University. There are two branch libraries, the College of Medicine library and the Law library. The College of Medicine Library is located at the mini-campus of the University while the Law Library is located in the Faculty of Law at the permanent site of the University. The opening hours of the libraries are as follow:

Mondays to Fridays	8:00 am to 10:00 pm
Saturdays	8:00 am to 1:00 pm
Sundays	5:00 pm to 10:00 pm

The library is closed on public holidays

Table 1: Profile of the University of Ilorin Library

Year Established: 1976	
Specialization: Conventional University	
Library Stock: Books/Monographs	350,408 Volumes
Journals	2,256 title
Staffing: Professional/Academic Librarians	18
Para-professionals (Library Officers)	08
Senior non-academic-Admin/Technical/System Analyst	10
Junior Staff – Lib. Asst/Attendants	26
Typist II	12
Janitorial Staff-Cleaners, Porters	25
Drivers	06
Total:	105

Statement of the problem

The situation in Nigeria, that most undergraduate students do not know how to access library resources, is common in other developing countries. Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) stated that studies conducted among undergraduate students in the Makerere University Library in Uganda have shown that most of them are inadequate in using the library. Though the library offers a "Use of the Library" course to all undergraduate students, students still find it difficult to use the library effectively. Since students are still experiencing difficulties in using library catalogues, the Library needed some investigation to help it remedy this situation.

Objectives of the study

This study is aimed at:

1. Eliciting relevant information to ascertain the level of use or non-use of the card catalogues to locate and retrieve printed materials by the science students of the University.
2. Ascertaining the type of catalogue mostly preferred by the users.
3. Understanding, articulating and executing remedial measures to optimize the use of catalogues to retrieve relevant printed materials.

Literature review

Information seeking is an important activity in our daily lives and that is why researchers are looking into this area. According to Cheng and Shaw (1999) information seeking has been the subject of

many researchers in library and information science. Thorsteinsdottir (2001) added that researchers have been interested in information behaviour for over forty years although in the beginning the concept was mostly connected with information centres. Although individual researchers take different approaches to the study of information seeking, the end result is how best to serve users. To be able to use the library successfully, users must know how to get needed materials in the library within the shortest time possible. In the University of Ilorin Library, the card catalogues and the OPAC, the most essential library tools in accessing the library collection, are not always consulted because of inadequate knowledge of how to use them. Fister (1992) stated that though undergraduate students are smart people, they find the University library to be a threatening place and find the process of doing research intimidating because they do not have library skills. Librarians must therefore, find ways of removing the barriers that keep students from using library resources effectively.

To this end, Martin and Metcalfe (2001) stated that libraries should embark on current awareness services and selective dissemination of information, either through print or electronic means. Callison (1997) also recommends increased effort to expand library instruction beyond the one-time lesson in introducing undergraduate students to the University library.

Methodology

This study was conducted at the permanent site of the University where science students reside and attend lectures. This study employed the descriptive research method, using a questionnaire as the instrument for eliciting relevant information on the use of library catalogues among science students at the University of Ilorin. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed randomly, of which 415 were returned and found usable. The questionnaires were analyzed using simple percentages and averages.

Results

The study revealed that most respondents, about three quarters (74%) claimed to know how to use the catalogues – card and OPAC, while 108 or 26%

of the sample still have difficulties in the effective use of the catalogues. The use of the OPAC was slight, with 33 or 7.9% respondents involved. As shown in Table 2, about one-third (29.6%) of the respondents visited the library solely to consult library books and journals for assignments, closely followed by another quarter (23.4%) who took advantage of the quiet environment provided by the library to read their personal textbooks and lecture notes. A fifth (21.5%) were in the library to read newspapers and magazines for relaxation. Final-year students (10%) visited the library with the sole aim of executing research which necessitated browsing the Internet to complement textual materials stocked locally. A larger number of respondents were found to prefer the subject catalogue (192 or 46.3%), one-fourth (111 or 26.7%) preferred the author/title catalogue while one-fifth (88 or 21%) accessed library collections using both the author/title and subject catalogues. Twenty-four (24) or 5.8% of the respondents were unsure of which catalogue they preferred (see Table 4).

In establishing a correlation/relationship between the course level of respondents and catalogue use, it was notable that there was progressively greater use from lower to higher educational levels as shown in Table 5. Students generally take 100 Level courses in their first year at the University. The course levels thus correspond roughly to the years of study. At the 100 Level, 81 or 19.5% of the respondents claimed to use the catalogue. The percentage dropped to 18.6% or 77 of respondents at the 200 level and steadily increased at the 300 Level to one-fifth or 83 respondents with appreciable increase to 105 or 25.3% at the 400 Level (final year) where the demands of research and assignments are at their peak. Finally, 69 or 16.6% of the sample were postgraduate students. Of the entire sample, 53 or 12.8% of the respondents sought the assistance of library staff in overcoming difficulties in the use of the catalogues.

Discussion

The frequency of library use and the purpose of visiting the library by the students were examined. Most of the respondents usually visit the library for the purpose of consulting books and journals (see Table 2). This supports the need for evaluating methods of accessing the resources available in

the library, given the fact that there is a limited number of staff available.

Most respondents preferred searching for items using the subject catalogue as shown in Table 4. Preference for the subject catalogue may have predominated because it granted users access to all that was available on the subject matter they were dealing with, whereas, the author/title catalogue requires that they have definite titles or authors in mind. As the respondents progressed in their academic career from lower to higher levels where more independent study was required, they showed preference for the subject catalogue which delivered broad-spectrum data for their projects and research.

Table 2: Purpose of Library Use in Ranked Order

Purpose	No. of respondents	Relative frequency (%)
To consult library books and journals for assignments	123	29.64
To read personal books and lecture notes in a quiet environment	97	23.37
To read newspapers and magazines	89	21.45
To browse the Internet	64	15.42
For research	42	10.12
Total	415	100.00

Table 3: Frequency of Use of Library Catalogues

Frequency of Use	No. of Respondents	Relative Frequency (%)
Always(Daily)	75	18.1
Weekly	81	19.5
Occasionally	181	43.6
When necessary	37	8.9
Rarely (Never)	41	9.9
Total	415	100.00

Table 4: Type of Library Catalogue Preferred

Catalogue type preferred	No. of Respondents	Relative Frequency %
Subject only	192	46.3
Author/Title only	111	26.7
Both Author/Title & Subject	88	21.2
Unsure	24	21.2
Total	415	100.00

In establishing a relationship between the course level of respondents and catalogue use, we found there was progression from lower to higher educational levels as shown in Table 5. At the 100 Level, 81 or 19.5% of the respondents claimed to use the catalogue. The percentage dropped to 18.6% or 77 respondents at the 200 Level and then steadily increased at the 300 Level to one-fifth or 83 respondents with appreciable increase to 105 or 25.3% at the 400 Level (final year). This initial high use in the first year was attributed to respondents who were library users before gaining admission to the University, having attended private primary and secondary schools with standard libraries.

The increased use with progression in the University appears to be due to the demands of research and assignments which are at their peak in the final year. The need to make good grades to shore-up the quality of degree to be earned also serves as the impetus for increased catalogue use. Finally, 69 or 16.6% of the sample were post-graduate students who are required to do more independent study and use the catalogues as indispensable tools for literature search.

Table 3 profiles the frequency of the use of library catalogues. Most of the 75 respondents (18%) who claimed they used the catalogues always, that is daily, were final year and postgraduate students who had spent between three and four academic sessions in the University and required full usage of the catalogues for research projects. A few of the respondents, 41 or 9.9%, claimed that they never used the catalogues. This group claimed that they began the academic session late which disadvantaged them from grasping the full benefits of the use of library course, hence they would go straight to the shelves to browse and pick out relevant books even though this is time-consuming and laborious. The unwillingness of the library staff to guide them on catalogue use was a complaint of some of these respondents. Most respondents claimed to know how to use the card catalogues and OPAC but only a few use them. The possible reason for this low level use of the OPAC is power outages, which have become the rule in Nigeria rather than an exception.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study revealed that a preponderance of the student users use library catalogues to locate

Table 5: Relationship of Course Level with Catalogue use

Course Level	No. of Respondents	Relative Frequency(%)
100	81	19.5
200	77	18.6
300	83	20.0
400	105	25.3
Postgraduate	69	16.6
Total	415	100.00

intellectual materials. Most respondents claimed to know how to use the card catalogues and OPAC but only a few use them. A limited number of respondents have sought the assistance of a library staff in the use of catalogues. Although a majority prefers the subject catalogue to the author/title catalogue, they still use a combination of both catalogue types. Use of the library catalogues was found to increase as the respondents' progress in their academic career.

In view of the central role of the library catalogue in the effective utilization of library materials, more teaching hours should be allotted to the "Use of Library" course, which is credit earning. Library orientation/tours should be based on subject disciplines to make them more focused and beneficial to the student. As rightly stated by Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) the University library faces a number of challenges in its user instruction programs, yet it is through user education that the librarians' work is made easy and the students' efforts reduced when retrieving and utilizing the library's information resources. The current 'Use of Library' course which is compulsory for all undergraduate students should be enhanced to empower students with proficiency in library use. In addition, the Readers' Services Division of the library should mount demonstrations on how to use library catalogues every semester in conjunction with the General Studies Division. Since the library is in the advanced stage of computerizing library materials, efforts should be made to organize an up-to-date user education on Internet access, OPAC access and, if possible, all audiovisual materials in the library. Efforts should be made to ensure that the library acquires more new computers for both staff and students, so that many users can access them at the same time. The issue of electricity should

be investigated. The university library should acquire its own automatic power generator which would come on whenever there is power failure. If these issues are addressed, there will be tangible improvements in the way users use library resources at the Ilorin University Library.

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