LIBRARY UTILIZATION IN NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS: A SURVEY OF STUDENTS’ USE OF LIBRARY CATALOGUE IN FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, IDAH, KOGI STATE

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Abstract

The study examines the utilization of Library in Nigerian Polytechnics by taking a survey of the use of library catalogue by Higher National Diploma students in Federal Polytechnic Idah library. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consists of 484 registered HND users from which 50% or 242 were sampled based on their availability in the library. The questionnaire was used to collect data which were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Findings reveal that majority (49%) of HND students never use the catalogue at all, while 30% use catalogue occasionally. The students lack searching skill and are unfamiliar with the catalogue. In addition, they seldom locate items on the shelves that were indicated in the catalogue to be there. Recommendations were drawn to the effect that user education programme should be made more pragmatic, regular shelving and shelf-reading as well as preparation of guide for catalogue users, among others.

Keywords: Library, Library Catalogue, Higher National Diploma, Polytechnic

Introduction

Library collections house a broad variety of materials on numerous, different subjects and in many different formats. The challenge in making these items available for the use of library patrons is letting those patrons know what is in the collection. This is the reason for describing in detail library materials in order to build a library catalogue. A library catalogue therefore is a register of all bibliographic items found in a library or group of libraries, such as a network of libraries at several locations (Prajapti, 2015). A bibliographic item can be any information entity, e.g. books, computer files, graphics, cartographic materials, etc. Library catalogues are indispensable tools made available to users for retrieval of information. The library catalogue is of great value to users because it gives access to the materials in the library collection. It is a finding list that gives in a nutshell, the entire holdings of the library. It is therefore, the most valuable and heavily used tools to the library collection.

According to Chaudhary (2011), the main functions of a library catalogue are to enable the library users to determine: Whether the library has a certain item; which works by a particular author are in the collection; which editions of a particular work the library has, and which materials the library has on a particular subject. The catalogue reveals the availability and facilitates the retrieval of printed items in libraries. The role of library as advanced by Maloney (2004) is to organize information resources and
services in a way that supports the users’ needs. Consequently, the Federal Polytechnic, Idah (FPI) Library has created an Author/Title as well as a subject catalogue to facilitate access to and retrieval of items in the library collection. Traditionally, the following types of catalogues exist:

- Author Catalogue
- Title Catalogue
- Dictionary Catalogue
- Keyword Catalogue
- Mixed Alphabetic Catalogue
- Systematic Catalogue
- Shelf List Catalogue (Chaudhary, 2011) and (Prayapti 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Higher National Diploma (HND) students in polytechnics are no strangers to polytechnic, nor to the library. This is because they have completed their National Diploma (ND) programmes in the same or similar institutions earlier. It is therefore expected that this category of library users should have a fair knowledge of the use of library catalogues. Unfortunately, this appears contrariwise. In spite of the purposes and characteristics of library catalogues, there are empirical evidences to support their poor use among undergraduate students in Nigeria and elsewhere. These are reported in Fister (1992) Kakai, Ikoja – Odongo and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) and Okoroafor (2006). This condition seems to prevail despite the teaching of the courses “Use of Library” at both levels of polytechnic programmes. This scenario provoked this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at surveying the use of library catalogue among HND students in the Federal Polytechnic, Idah. Specifically, it is meant to:

i. Determine the extent of use of library catalogue by HND students.
ii. Identify challenges encountered by HND students in the use of library catalogue.
iii. Proffer possible strategies for enhanced use of library catalogues by HND students.

Research Questions

i. What is the extent of use of library catalogues by HND students in FPI library?
ii. What are the challenges encountered by HND students in the use of library catalogues?
iii. What are the possible strategies for enhanced use of library catalogue by HND students?

Review of Literature

The library catalogue has a long history and can be traced to the libraries of antiquity. As early as the 17th Century BC, important libraries of the ancient world had title and author catalogue that were posted on walls for users’ convenience. Library catalogue have changed dramatically over the centuries, having appeared in many forms, from clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, print books and cards to microform and then the online version that are in widespread use today.

Ordinarily, the word catalogue means list or inventory. But in library parlance, a catalogue means the systematic and complete record of books, maps, microform, audio recording, etc in a collection. It records, describes and locate each item present in the collection. The collection may be that of the library, internet resources or a database. Harrod, in Aedibu (2008) 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.

A Library catalogue is an essential and important tool in a library. It is a must for library especially when the collection becomes large. Without it, It world not be possible to know what is available and where. It is the key to the resources of the library (Kumar and Kumar, 2010). The library catalogue is an essential tool. It is an index or a key to the collection, containing an entry representing each item. The catalogue also tells where in the library a book is located (Clark, 2000) and Apotiade, 2002). That the
catalogue must be well prepared is beyond doubt. The extent of the use of library resources depends greatly upon the quality of a library catalogue. The rational for use of the library catalogue varies from individual to individual. While some use it for subject guide, others use it as access tool and some others use it even for statistics. Many other categories of users have various reasons for using the catalogue.

Okorafor (2006) reveals a poor use of the catalogue in Latunde Odeku Medical Library, attributing it to lack of user education programmes. Ebiwolate (2010) added that under graduate students find the university library catalogue difficult and doing research intimidating because they lack the skills. Clifford and Zaccus (2015) revealed that the major problems students are facing in their quest to use the library catalogue includes: inability to locate materials on the shelves indicated in the catalogue as being available, poor understanding of information on library catalogue and difficulty in getting information from card catalogue due to poor retrieval skills.

A Number of solutions have also been suggested to address the challenges associated with use of library catalogue. Ebiwolate (2010) averred that high quality user education is a panacea to problems encountered by students in using the catalogue. The author reiterated that a regular orientation programme should be organized, including guidelines on using the catalogue, and that guidelines should be displayed where users can easily see them. Clifford and Zaccus (2015) made recommendations which aligned with the views above.

Methodology

The survey research design was used in this study. The population consists of 484 registered HND users. 50% of the population i.e 242 were the sample drawn, based on their availability in the library at the period the research was carried out. The questionnaire was used to collect data. The instruments were administered to respondents within a period of two weeks by two trained research assistants selected from among the circulation staff. The completed and returned questionnaire was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, percentage and frequency distribution. Out of the 242 questionnaire distributed, 218 were returned, while 202 were found suitable for analysis.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Gender Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Void</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>202</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Extent of Catalogue use by HND Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Extent of Catalogue Use</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Never Use</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>202</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Challenges encountered in the use of catalogue by HND Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non familiarization with the catalogue</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of searching skill using catalogue</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non understanding of information in catalogue</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non assistance from staff</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Inability to locate materials on shelves indicated in catalogue</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Strategies towards enhanced catalogue use by HND students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Strategies for catalogue use</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>More pragmatic user education</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Regular shelving and shelf reading by staff</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Provision of assistance by library staff</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Guide to use of catalogue should be provided</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Regular workshop on effective use of library catalogue</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings/Discussion

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by gender. A greater percentage of them were female with 57%. Male were 40% and 3% did not indicate their gender, hence the void entry. The higher percentage of female is a reflection of HND registered users.

Data on extent of catalogue use by HND students in FPI were analyzed in table 2. It reveals that majority use them occasionally while 21% use them regularly. It can be deduced therefore, that majority of HND users obtain library materials through direct browsing of the shelves. It is an indication that they lack the necessary skill to use the catalogue and thus avoided it entirely rather than seek assistance from library staff. These findings are in consonance with Okorafor (2006).

On challenges encountered by HND students in the use of catalogue, respondents are of the view that non-familiarization with the catalogue, lack of searching skill, lack of understanding of information in catalogue cards and inability to locate items on shelves indicated in catalogue are major challenges faced by HND students. These students must have taken the course “Use of Library” on two occasion’s i.e. at the ND and HND levels, yet they lack the basic skills to use the library. This is unfortunate. It shows that majority of them were only interested in passing the course rather than acquiring the required knowledge for life application. This brings to question the overall competences of these students, some of whom are about to be graduated into the labour market. It also cast some doubts on the effectiveness of teaching method(s) employed, by handlers of the course “Use of Library”. However, the findings are corroborated in Clifford and Zaccus (2015).

Inability to locate materials could be due to a number of factors: Lack of diligent search by students, mishelving by mistake or mischief or the item might be out on loan or being used within the library at the time of search.

Table 4 brought to the fore, strategies towards enhanced catalogue use by HND students. These are: a more pragmatic user education, regular shelving and shelf-reading by library staff, providing assistance to catalogue users, provision of guide to use of catalogue as well as organizing workshops on use of catalogue from time to time. Ebiwolale (2010) and Clifford and Zaccus (2015) averred earlier that high quality and practical-oriented user education were panacea to problems encountered by students in the use of library catalogue. They also supported the preparation and display of guide for users as well as regular workshop. Regular shelving would minimize incidences of missing books indicated on catalogue. This would reduce users’ frustration. Given the critical role of the catalogue in information retrieval, one or two library staff could be assigned to assist users in their search. This would lead to creating and sustaining users’ interest in the library.

Conclusion

The library catalogue is undoubtedly one of the most critical resources of any library, being the key to the holdings of the library. Effective use of the library is dependent upon sound organization and adequate skill in the use of the catalogue. Unfortunately, the study reveals an unacceptable knowledge and patronage of library catalogue by HND students who are almost diplomats in their various fields of study. Graduating from the polytechnic and remaining destitute of information literacy skill leaves much to be desired. More worrisome is the fact that the course “Use of library” are offered at all levels of the
polytechnic programmes. If HND students cannot demonstrate knowledge of catalogue use after offering and passing relevant courses, it cast doubt on all other knowledge they have supposedly acquired.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made, consequent upon the findings in the study:

1. Coordinators of the course “Use of Library” should review their teaching method to make it more practical as against the current emphasis on theory.
2. Shelving and shelf-reading should be carried out on regular basis to minimize users’ frustration over lack of materials indicated in the catalogue to be on the shelves.
3. Library help should be assigned to assist users in the use of catalogue.
4. A Step by step guide on the use of library catalogue should be prepared and hung strategically for users.
5. Regular workshop on effective use of catalogue should be organized for users, particularly HND students.

References


