

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN TEACHING LIBRARY INSTRUCTION COURSE IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES.

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ABSTRACT

The Library instruction course is aimed at teaching students the techniques of effective use of library to enable them appreciate the importance of the library. Majority of students, especially the secondary school leavers who gain admission for higher studies and who by that privileged find themselves in large libraries have difficulties in retrieving information from the library and some do not even consider the library as an important organ in the university. This is the reason why university libraries teach the Use of Library course. The teaching of the course enables new students to acquire the skills for using the library. However majority of students still find it difficult to use the library resources. This paper therefore discusses issues and challenges facing the teaching of the course. Prominent among these challenges are lack of commitment by the university management which results to inadequate funding of the course and lack of standardization in the teaching methodology of the course. The recommendations as obtained from the study includes the need for proper commitment by university management and cooperation of academic staff both from the university library and other faculties members.

Keywords: Library, University Library, Library Instruction Course.

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Introduction

A library is an institution that acquires, organize and make available to its users the recorded knowledge of man both in print and non-print media. It is an institution that manages the intellectual products that individual can gain access to readily. Bello (2003) also defined a library as a building, an instructional and self development centre, which operate as an integral part of the entire school environment.

A university library is a library that is established to support the teaching, learning, and research activities of members of the university community. The university library

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is the heart of the university. Without it academic activities of the university will not be effectively carried out. Lecturers and researchers alike cannot make in-depth research without the support of the library; students cannot do effective learning without the university library. The university library is a principal provider of scholarly information resources to the university community. Librarians work with faculties and students in the discovery, use and management of information that supports their research and learning. As a main contributor to the core functions of the university which are teaching, learning and research, the library influences the environment within which it grafts its own mission and objectives which is providing information resources to support the realization of the primary objective of the university. Considering the importance of the university library, Anafulu (1996) states that, no student, no matter how brilliant can offer to ignore the university library. Anafulu further states that those who do are invariably mediocre. Supporting this view a onetime Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Prof. S.S. Afolabi stated in an address; that "if we have no laboratories and we lack the funds to recruit staff, the enterprise of teaching in our university can continue if we had a well-stocked library". Emphatically speaking, students generally need the library to carry out various assignments.

The university library work together with other members of the institution's communities to participate in support and achievement of the educational mission of the institution by teaching the core competencies of information literacy skills. The librarian as an educator teaches library users the ability involved in identifying an information need, accessing needed information, evaluating, managing and understanding the legal, social and ethical aspects of information use. Users need this training because most students especially the new students have limited knowledge on library use. Joseph (2003) observed that because of the background of these new students in library use they are afraid to enter large libraries, and even when they do, the basic knowledge to navigate and locate information is lacking. This view corroborates that of Aguolu and Aguolu (2000) when they pointed out that freshmen got enrolled in higher institutions in Nigeria without adequate knowledge/skills in the use of library. As a matter of fact most students still leave school without developing reading habits and cannot even retrieve or use information outside the classroom. It is the goal of the university library in moving students to greater information literacy and with the dramatic increase in digital information literacy; library literacy has to be a core goal for the curriculum because the onus for information management rests squarely with each individual in ways that it has not been in the traditional paper literacy culture.

In order to facilitate the core competencies of student's library use and information literacy, the National University Commission (NUC) which is the supervisory body for all Nigerian universities made it mandatory for all universities in Nigeria to include in

their curriculum the library instruction or library literacy course which is variously referred to as the Use of Library, Information Literacy, Information Retrieval, etc. The course involves teaching students on how to find and retrieve information from the library's print resources and other electronic resources, evaluating and using the information appropriately. New students are taught the skills in accessing and using information. The aim is to familiarize the new students with library facilities and services and to teach them on how to retrieve information from the library. The content of the course include instruction on both how to evaluate information resources and how to use library resources, such as the library catalogue and other bibliographic databases, to enable them develop the techniques of independent learning. However it has been observed that majority of undergraduate students still experience difficulties in identifying, evaluating and retrieving needed information from the library even after going through the Library instruction course.

A Brief History of the Library Instruction or Use of Library Course

The concept of library instruction course can be traced back to more than 2000 years ago. The earliest evidence of instruction of a librarian lecturing the undergraduate was found at Harvard College in the 1820's (Miller 1992). Most early academic librarians were professors with part-time library appointment who taught the use of libraries for academic purpose. Library lecture was chosen as their form of instruction by such institutions as Harvard, Indiana and Columbia Universities. Separate courses were implemented in the 1880's by Ray Davis at the University of Michigan, Azariah Root at Oberlin College. Over the next few years about seventeen institutions in the U.S.A alone adopted the instruction lecture as course. In the 1900's the library use instruction reappeared. According to Adam (1979) William Bishop and Fredrick Poole are said to have expostulated the concepts of library use instruction that are valid today and copied by many institutions. In recent years, however, it has become the subject of much activity and concern, especially in academic libraries. The names of Liouis Shores, Patricia Knapp and Thomas Kirk along with those of undergraduate colleges like Montieth, Earlham, Swarthone, Hampshire and Wabash are recorded as landmarks in the annals of library instruction. Knapp (1986) asserted that her insight and observation allowed academic librarians to move beyond the freshman orientation of 1940's and 1950's and to begin studying complex library skills and attitudes of students. Much of this renewed interest can be traced to the pioneering efforts of Patricia Knapp at Montieth College. In Nigeria, according to Nwoye and Anafulu (1973) and (1991) instructing undergraduates in the use of library commenced at University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1972. This was a formal library use course incorporated in "The use of English" without a credit load. This was however after Kashim library, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), introduced an optimal and elective course in library instruction in 1964. Other universities, like Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), University of Ilorin (Unilorin), and University of Port

Harcourt etc. followed the University of Nigeria example. Since then the programme spread to other institutions such as polytechnics and colleges of Education.

The concept of Library Instruction Course in Universities

The library instruction course is a formal instruction course on the use of library for all undergraduates, especially new students. It is aimed at developing and inculcating into students the techniques of effective library use which result in independent and life-long learning experience. The course is variously referred to as library literacy course, user education course, use of library course, information literacy course, information retrieval course, library, and information use course and many other names and titles given to it depending on individual perception and orientation. Noah (2004) opines that no matter how the course is called, the aim is to enable students appreciate the potentials stored up in library and develop skills on the use of the library for academic pursuit.

The Use of Library course is a set of instructions given to students as teachings, especially in their first year to enable them understand, appreciate, access and use the library and its resources effectively. Fjallbrant (1990) broadly defines the concept thus: the teaching of those skills that will enable students to locate and use materials effectively. And feel confident in using the library. Also its aim is to acquaint users with the use of materials in the libraries. Similarly Fleming (1990) defined library use instruction as various program of instruction, education and exploration provided by libraries to users to enable them make effective, efficient and independent use of information sources and services which these libraries provide access. Library use instruction is a method by the librarians to educate users on how to use the resources available in the library in a result oriented ways. The specific objectives of the course are:

- To make students appreciate the role of the library in the university community.
- To teach students the main components of the computer.
- To make students know the resources and search tools of the library.
- To teach students how to access retrieve and evaluate information.
- To equip students with skills that will help them manage and use online journals and other electronic resources.

Effective use of library by students is expected to be the principal objective of establishing specialized libraries in the university. A library is more than a place to read and make references. It is a place to seek information to supplement materials and knowledge already provided in the classroom. It enhances the students understanding of concepts and broadens their horizon when they regularly read and use library materials in their studies.

The Librarian as an Educator

Librarianship is a dynamic, service oriented profession which responds to all spheres of users' information needs including their needs to be educated on library use. The librarian is a person who is in charge of information collection and dissemination to library users. While an educator is someone who teaches and inculcates such special skills that are needed for performing special tasks. Rawat and Kumar (2002) defines a librarian as a person who has charge of the contents of a library, making the stock and library services available to those who need them or are entitled to them. With the advent in new technology digital, the librarian is no longer just a keeper of collections alone but also a finder, organizer and provider of digital information resources. Bradley (2003) defines educator as a special kind of teacher. The "teacher" here is not just concerned with covering the content of the curriculum as it is expected of an ordinary teacher in the normal academic system. The librarian as an educator is interested in inculcating special skills required in the use of library, which is often referred to as information literacy skills. It involves teaching library users the skills required in finding needed information, understanding the organization of library materials, recognizing the various information search tools and commonly used research techniques. The roles of the librarian as an educator include the duty to teach users how to locate and retrieve information from the library as well as how to navigate the information superhighway (internet). Librarians are faced with the responsibility of teaching users how to navigate the internet and how to evaluate the quality of information they find. The librarian teach users the various strategies to be used in identifying, locating and using information resources both in print and electronic format either off line or on-line. The Librarian as educator play important role in making students uses the library resources. They teach students on how to locate, evaluate, retrieve and use information; they also teach students the ethical aspect of information use and mis-use. Librarians as educators inculcate such special skills as information literacy skills into students rather than deliver conventional lectures. Joseph (2003) asserts that the role of librarians in developing effective use of library and research attitude in students in a dynamically changing higher education can only be achieved where the students are taught the skills to navigate, find and use information. Corroborating this view, Ezejiofor *et. al.*, (2011) posits that Librarians should be seen as educators who have important roles to play in making students master information retrieval and literacy skills. Students who possess these skills become more accurate in comprehension and more efficient in rate. On the other side students who lack these information literacy skills accepts convenient information, whether appropriate or not, at the expense of appropriate but less convenient information.

Teaching Methodology, Structure and Assessment

Teaching methods are the general principles and management strategies used for instruction. It comprises of both formal and informal instruction. Studying students

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helps in directing teachers in choosing their teaching methods. Once the teacher have assessed the students, and then there is need to plan for different teaching methods. Direct instruction is the most common form of instruction used. This is the lecturing method of teaching. Many lecturers in the university use this teaching method almost exclusively, as it is considered the simplest, and one can cover large amounts of material in a short period of time. However this is not the most effective teaching method to reach all students, especially younger ones who just got admission into the university and are offering the library instruction course, who often need a more engaging, hands-on strategy in order to learn effectively. However Siddiqui (2008) identified the following teaching methods.

- Inquiry-based learning is a teaching method which is based on the scientific method; this teaching method can be used for virtually all subjects. Students practice problem solving and critical thinking skills to arrive at a conclusion. This teaching method is extremely student-centered and student-directed, and can be modified for students at any level, reaching them where they are.

Cooperative learning is another teaching method that is considered highly effective when done correctly. With cooperative learning, students are put in small groups to work together. They are usually not grouped by ability, but put in a group according to their levels. The students are then given tasks to accomplish together. Teachers may need to monitor these groups carefully, to make sure they are staying on task and that all students are participating. This form of instruction also lends itself well to differentiation, because the teacher can assign specific tasks to students at different ability.

It is often advisable to have students to really understand the teaching methods and not just memorize facts, but there are also some cases when facts need to be memorized. Facts and concepts such as the various symbols representing different subject areas may also need to be grouped or organized in order to facilitate better understanding. Teachers can use various teaching methods to help students with memorization, or they can use graphic organizers, mind maps, story webs, or other ways to represent information visually.

There are many, many more teaching methods, but these are the most common. If the librarians find the best teaching method for a particular group of students, the students are likely to learn more quickly and be more engaged. In addition, using a variety of teaching methods will keep students from being bored and help them encounter the information in new and exciting ways. Breirik and Jones(1993) opines that stakeholders in higher education must not only realized that we are dealing with a vast changing World, but must also begin to assess what we need, to prepare our

students to function effectively in this sometimes scary information age. Dugan and Hernon (2002) states that universities and universities accrediting bodies focus on learning results and outcomes rather than whether the student was comfortable during the instruction session or could hear the instructor. Traditionally libraries are more concerned about the number of students who attended the class, how effective the librarian was as a teacher, what instructional technology was available, and the content of the instruction. These measures while they may hold some personal or technical value, do not accurately measure student ability to understand the course. The key for assessment of effectiveness in teaching methods may not be descriptive inputs and outputs only. Rather, it is answering the question, what did the students learn and how do I know they learned it?

However there are confusions in the teaching methodology, structure and assessment of the course in university system in Nigeria. The reason for this confusion is lack of standardization in teaching methodologies used in the classroom. In some university the library instruction course is a non credit earning course as in the case of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Ogbomoso, while in other universities, it is a credit earning course, as in the case of University of Agriculture Abeokuta, University of Lagos and the Federal university of Petroleum Resources Effurun. Etc. Considering the variations in the teaching methodology, structure and assessment of the course, Oluwole (2008) bemoans that African university libraries still need to restructure their information literacy courses because there is no uniform method of teaching the course.

Challenges

While it appears that there is a growing awareness about the importance of library use instruction course, still the following are posed as problems against its effectiveness.

- Inadequate funding of the programme by university management.
- The use of unqualified personnel to teach the course in some universities
- Inadequate Timing of the programme delivery. The fact that library instruction course in most universities in Nigeria is within the framework of General Studies(GST) unit, makes it difficult to allot adequate time and unit to the course to enhance effective teaching and assessment.
- Inadequate staff and the cumbersome mode of access to and delivery of the programme as a result of the large number of students undertaking the course. The combination of the classes made up of various departments and faculties makes the class too large for effective teaching and assessment.

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Oluwole (2008); Oyinloye (2002) both affirmed that accommodating a large number of students in a single classroom is always a problem.

- Lack of collaboration between the library and other faculties members in the university to ensure continuity and follow -up. Elkin &Wilson cited in Nwosu, Okeke and Ogbonna (2010) have wondered why library courses are not widely borrowed in other faculties or department as it is done in other courses.
- Lack of regular evaluation, many universities despite their recognition of the importance of the course; still do not evaluate to ensure the relevance of the course to students' library needs. Adung (2012) affirmed that user education is the most neglected aspect of service in most Nigeria libraries especially academic and school libraries.
- Lack of collective curriculum for the course in all universities.
- Over concentration (on the part of Librarian) on library technical services like cataloguing and classification and shelving of books rather than information retrieval mechanism.

Furthermore, Ofulue (2010) observed that the type of user education given in Nigeria university system is inadequate and not up to standard when compared to what is obtainable in developed countries of the World. This to be due to the fact that information literacy is not been given its right position in tertiary education curriculum in the whole of Africa.

The Way Forward

To curb the aforementioned challenges facing the library instruction course program there is need for explicit statement of objectives, availability of infrastructure, qualified trainers, careful choice of teaching methods and regular systematic evaluation. Library instruction courses should be integrated within the curriculum of the institution so that the contents and coverage of the programme accommodates information development, learning, teaching and research within those disciplines. It is strongly believed that information or library literacy course is best enhanced when it is integrated into the curriculum of another discipline. General education courses help students to make intellectual connections between disciplines, solve problems and think deeply, independently and critical outside their major areas of study.

Akinbola (2007) on the significance of user education recommends that, user education programme in our tertiary institutions should be overhauled to make it more standard. Adequate qualified personnel should be recruited to undertake the

teaching of the course effectively; the course should be allocated reasonable time on the time table so as to enable practical aspect taught effectively.

Badke (2007) opines that the teaching of information literacy would be more effective when it is taught as a distinct course within a major discipline. Onifade et.al (2011) supports this as they both opine that Use of Library course should be taught as a credit earning course, (a stand-alone course). On the other hand, Dadzie (2009) argue that stand-alone courses may not motivate students as they have no relevance to their assignments and research skills. Dadzie rather recommended that university management should be committed by fostering effective partnership between the library and the various faculties, as well as review the curriculum of the course to include other aspects of information literacy.

Furthermore, Rockman (2004) also gave a clear view of what an information or library literacy curriculum should entail. It should be campus-wide, problem-based, inquiry-based, and resource-based. Blakes (2013) recommended that university librarians should plan and execute programmes of continuing library instruction which will link to students' course work and assignments. Fjallbrant (1990) opines that "its culture should include teaching on the concept and value of information in learning and daily living; its (library) use as it affects lecturers and students as support to the quality of the university's product, and lifelong learning". The purpose of this is to help students in the most effective use of the library resources and services.

Recommendations

In view of the far-reaching effects of lack of knowledge and interest on the use of libraries by our students even after been taught the library instruction course, the following suggestions are made to ameliorate the challenges facing teaching effectiveness of the program.

- i. The librarian should vie for grants for library support and facilities to aid effective teaching.
- ii. It has also been observed in most universities in Nigeria that routine lectures of the Use of Library course are scheduled in the lecture time-table by people other than the librarian. The library instruction course should commence at the time the librarian's schedule permits and it should run for at least two semesters. This will provide him the time to motivate his students, create immediate and lasting impact which will automatically lead the students to learn more on how to use the library and develop an enduring culture in library use, which enhances independent and life-long learning experience.
- iii. The librarian should adopt innovative teaching methods, such as the Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI).

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- iv. Librarians also should work as a team in determining the goals, methods of teaching and the type of evaluation that will yield and the necessary information for effectiveness and revision.
- v. Nigeria University management should revise the curriculum of the library use course and its duration should be extended to ensure that all undergraduates at all level are made to offer library use related course in their various disciplines.
- vi. Librarians in our universities should be seen as stakeholders in the education and training of undergraduates. And that they have a role to play in how well these students will make meaningful use of the library even after graduation.
- vii. The library instruction course should not terminate in the classroom. It should be extended beyond the immediate classroom environment so that the students will have the opportunity of seeing what is being taught in the classroom practically in the library.
- viii. In the course of library lecture, a multimedia approach, incorporating a high level of student's activity should be used. This will enhance greater understanding and also sustain their interest during lecture.
- ix. Lecturers in the various departments should emphasize on the importance of library use to their students. They should de-emphasize the use of handouts and encourage the students to inculcate the essence of good reading habits and use of libraries. This will go a long way to revive the dead reading habits among our students.
- x. All those involved in the instructional effort of library use should embark on periodic and regular evaluation of the course, so that a wealth of knowledge concerning students; knowledge, skills, opinions and attitudes - all of which are necessary for the development of an effective library instruction course will be made for the modification of the success of the course programme.

Summary and Conclusion

It is obvious that the effective teaching of the library instruction course, requires the cooperation of academic staff both from the university library and other faculty members including the university management because, effective use of the library forms the bedrock of all other academic work and activities of students. Determining the goals of the course, examining the effectiveness of the methods used in

teaching, evaluating the course content on regular basis to ensure that it suit modern library practices and students information needs and participation is important for necessary and effective impact on the part of the students . This may be the only way to ensure success and functionality of the course.

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