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EFFECT OF PRE-UNIVERSITY USE ON AWARENESS OF THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY BY FRESHMEN: THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OWERRI EXPERIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

This work was designed to reveal the level of awareness of University freshmen in library use through the exposition of their previous use of the library. The purpose of their previous use, knowledge of access points and of the general essence of the library was assessed. The purpose was to generate data to equip Library Curriculum Planners in order to take every freshman into consideration in their planning. A structured questionnaire was designed and randomly distributed to 1000 new students of the Federal University of Technology (FUTO) upon registration with the University Library. Seventeen (17) states of Nigeria were represented by these students. The results showed that 78.50% of the students have used a library before coming to the University. Of these, 75.79% used school libraries, 18.85% public libraries, 2.54% academic libraries, while 0.76% and 1.01% used National and Special Libraries respectively. Out of the 215 students that had not used a library before, 75.81% had libraries of some sort in their secondary schools but they have not used them. From the awareness of the organisation of libraries used by these students had no standard systems of organisation and materials were often not processed and there were no catalogues and indexes. The work also revealed that library users had better basic knowledge of the purpose of the library than non-library users. Based on the findings, it is recommended that school librarians should embark on training and make effort to ensure that every student is registered in the library. They should liaise with school authorities through library committees for effective management of the school libraries. Academic libraries on their own part should review the Library User Education Programme to accommodate every level of fresh students entering the institution. Areas for further studies were suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Freshmen in the university environment often come with enthusiasm. The notion of moving from a low academic setting to a citadel of learning provides a sense of pride and curiosity in the minds of many. Majority await with eagerness the instructions that would lead to the actualisation of their ambitions. To some, the relationship between their brain and the university is that of the *tabularasa* and the teacher, while others are better informed of the norms and values of the university system. Mindful of this situation, the university library provides a basic orientation programme for these new students which prepares them for subsequent use of the library as soon as they start their lectures. There is often a surge of these freshmen into the library which many could be experiencing for the first time. Being intimidated by the size, the volume and the arrangement, they try to manoeuvre and hence create series of problems for the library-management. Such problems include pulling down books from the shelves, walking aimlessly in the reading room, attempting to leave the library with some books, etc.

To alleviate these problems, universities have subsumed library user education in their curricula. Though the course content of this programme is satisfactory and rewarding, the impact could not be guaranteed for every freshman. To confirm this, the level of previous awareness and use of the library by these fresh students coming from different environments has to be determined.

Library awareness and use studies have been reported in the literature and this is bedrock of user education. It is one of the best ways of diagnosing the problems of users which Grover (1993) described as being fundamental to provide service to individuals and planning information services for groups. On the face value, it can be said that freshmen in universities are information literate i.e. possessing a set of "skills and strategies which include the abilities to recognise a need for information, to retrieve the required information and to evaluate and utilise it effectively" (Amucheazi, 1998). But a close look at Doyle's (1995) explanation of information literacy as the ability to access, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources will show some of these students falling short of information literacy. This problem may not be attributed to the undergraduate-to-be's intellectual ability, but could be the result of their foundation education environment (secondary school).

Studies nationally and internationally indicate inadequate exposition of secondary students to library use. In a survey by Daniel (1998) on the state of school libraries in Nigeria (with the Federal Capital Territory as case study), it was discovered that of the 32 secondary schools sampled, only 4 have what looks like library buildings, 8 have professional librarians, 2 have chairs and tables, while most materials were obsolete and unclassified. Many of these schools converted the so-called libraries to staff rooms.

In his own finding, Ogunshye (1998) discovered that some school managements frustrated their pioneer librarians' efforts to establish reputable school libraries, thereby leaving only remnants of such school libraries in his study area. Such libraries were often starved of funds and lacked professional advice. Internationally, a similar picture is portrayed. Gorman (1995) lamented that library services in California schools and public libraries are dwindling as a result of school and library funding cuts. Dickens (1995) reported the same problem in the UK, a consequence of budget cuts and shift of management and financial responsibilities to schools. Further to the problem of finance and professional advice, are the problems of library hours, loan and request systems. Magai (1995) noted that insufficient time is made available for pupils to use the library and there is no good relationship between teachers and librarians.

The implication is that the affected students bring low or even lack of library skills into the university (Gorman, 1995). Gorman (1995) proposed a program with the following components: all libraries, library organisations, educators, or friends of libraries should work together to restore adequate library services to public schools: all academic libraries should develop and expand their library instruction programmes to deal with the reality of students who are sub-literate and lacking skills. On his own survey of 300 freshmen at East Carolina University, Kester (1994) discovered that with few exceptions, high school library skills instruction appears to have little carry-over or effect on students going on to college. To that effect, he noted that much needs to be done to improve the effectiveness of library and information skills instruction in secondary schools.

Mindful of this need for improvement in the developed society to aid further learning and higher education, Elaturoti (2000) proposed some of the strategies to be used in Nigeria to include:

1. Data collection on the state of school library in various states
2. Training of school library personnel
3. Acquisition of library resources materials
4. Integrating library hour on school time table
5. Promotion of library usage
6. Administration of school library through the school library committee.

While the school libraries are busy implementing these strategies to aid future undergraduates, the academic libraries could play their part by bringing the whole freshmen at par. This can only be achieved through user education and studies of this nature provide basic information of students to be taught.

From the foregoing, the present work aims at generating information on freshmen that would assist in the planning of user education. Specifically the study intends to:

- Identify the freshmen that have not used the library before entering the University
- Identify their reasons for using the library
- Identify their basic knowledge of systems of material organisation in the library

Based on the findings, recommendation will be made to various universities and other academic libraries.

HYPOTHESIS

- (1) More than 70% of the university freshmen have used the library before.
- (2) There is no significant difference between the proportion of students who have used catalogues and indexes and those who have not.

METHODOLOGY

Sample for this study was taken from the first year students (2000/2001 academic year) of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). Of the 2,745 students who matriculated, 1000 were provided with questionnaires upon registration in the library and the questionnaires were recovered as part of the library registration package. As a result, the whole questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 100%.

The questionnaire was made up of two sections – Personal data and Library usage section. Data was analysed using tables, graphs and an infernal statistical tool (t-test) (Inyama and Iheagwam 1995).

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Previous Use of Library

These first year students from various states were required to indicate their previous use of library and type of library used. Table 1 shows the disposition of fresh students' use of library according to their respective states of origin. It also reveals the types of library used by these students. The results show that 78.50% of the 100 students sampled have made use of library before. Of these, 75.79% made use of school libraries while 18.85% used public libraries. The use of academic, special and national libraries while 18.85% used public libraries. The use of academic, special and national libraries was low with values as 2.54%, 1.01% and 0.7% respectively.

The results also reveal that 70.06% of male students have previous knowledge of how to use the library while 27.38% of female belong for this category showing that more males have library experience than females.

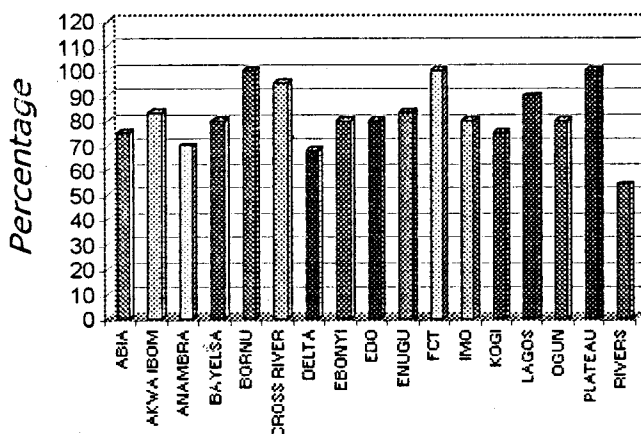


Fig. 1: Percentage of New Students who have used the library for each state sampled.

Fig. 1 shows that the percentage of students who have used the library before admission for each state is above 50%. However, there was an unusual 100% positive response for Borno, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Plateau States. Responses from all the other states ranged between 70% and 85%.

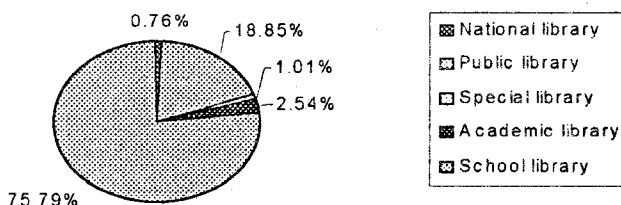


Fig. 2 Fresh students' use of different types of library

Table I: TYPE OF LIBRARY USED BY STUDENTS AND THE STATE WHERE IT IS LOCATED

STATE	PREVIOUS USE OF LIBRARY		TYPE OF LIBRARY USED					NONE OF THE ABOVE
	YES (%)	NO (%)	PUBLIC	NATIONAL	SCHOOL	ACADEMIC	SPECIAL	
ABIA	150(75.00)	50 (25.00)	20	Nil	128	-	-	2
AKWA IBOM	25 (83.00)	5 (17.00)	5	Nil	20	-	-	-
ANAMBRA	35 (70.00)	15 (30.00)	10	5	20	-	-	-
BAYELSA	8 (80.00)	2 (20.00)	2	Nil	6	-	-	-
BPRNU	2 (100.00)	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	1	-	-
CROSS RIVER	19 (95.00)	1 (5.00)	2	Nil	16	1	-	-
DELTA	15 (68.00)	7 (32.00)	8	Nil	7	-	-	-
EBONYI	12 (80.00)	3 (20.00)	10	Nil	2	-	-	-
EDO	4 (80.00)	1 (20.00)	4	Nil	Nil	-	-	-
ENUGU	25 (83.00)	5 (17.00)	5	Nil	15	3	1	1
FCT	3 (100.00)	Nil	Nil	Nil	3	-	-	-
IMO	352 (80.00)	88 (20.00)	50	1	300	1	-	-
KOGI	6 (75.00)	2 (25.00)	5	Nil	1	-	-	-
LAGOS	90 (90.00)	10 (10.00)	20	Nil	50	10	7	3

Fig. 2 reveals further the use and indirectly the importance of the different types of library in the actualisation of the educational needs of the youths in our society. The most widely used category is school libraries (75.79%), followed by Public libraries (18.85%). Libraries less widely used are the Academic (2.54%), Special (1.01%) and the least, National libraries (0.76%).

Reasons for Using the Library

Students were required to indicate their reason for using the library during their pre-university education. 41.80% indicated their use of reading personal notes. 31.72% just to borrow materials, while 5.75% and 1.47 used the library for reading newspapers and for relaxation respectively. Of all the respondents, 9.24% use the library for preparing assignments and while a negligible 0.52% use the library to search in Internet.

Availability of Library in the Students' Previous Schools

A question on the availability of a library in the students' former institution was posed to these students. Responses from library and non-library users are presented in table 2. High percentage positive responses were recorded for both male (90%) and female (89%) students with previous library use. The same trend of positive response was found in both genders among non-library users. This informs the availability of library in both male and female schools even when the students are not using it. The results obtained reveal that a negligible fraction of the respondents were from schools where only the teachers were allowed access to the library. On the other hand 42.00% and 49.79% were from institutions where students alone or students and teachers had access to the library respectively. This shows that libraries in most schools are open to most students in schools.

Table 2: Availability of library in the students' previous schools among users and non-users

Response	Previous Library Users				Non-Library Users			
	Yes		No					
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	500	90	55	9	108	72	42	28
Female	205	89	25	10	55	84	10	15

Management of School Libraries

Response on the presence of librarian in the schools whose duty is to attend to and oversee the day-to-day running of the library reveals the presence of librarians in majority of the schools. 91% indicated presence of a librarian and 2% mentioned otherwise.

Further to that 646 (82%) mentioned that the librarian teaches them the use of library, 133 (17%) do not seem to receive that training from the librarian. 60% of the students mentioned that the library is open for use any time of the day. This is followed by 24% for break time use. 13%, 2% and very negligible 1% responses were recorded for when the use of library appears in the timetable, in the evening hours, and during lesson in the library respectively.

Table 3: *System of organisation applied in the library used by the pre-university students*

METHOD OF ORGANISATION	RESPONSE	
	Number	Percentage
Subject	630	80
Class number	95	12
No idea	56	7
Author	4	1

Organisation of materials in the school library

Table 3 shows the responses of students' awareness of systems of organisation in the library, they were required to indicate the system of organisation being applied in the library they used. It reveals that 80% of the students have the library visited organised by subject. 12% agreed on having seen the class mark arrangement, 7% have no idea of any arrangement while 1% have seen author arrangement.

On the use made of catalogues and indexes, only 195 (25%) indicated having used the catalogue or index before, 589 (75%) have not used them before. Various reasons were given for not using these access points, 188% indicated that they have not seen any before, 21% mentioned lack of knowledge on how to use; 47% indicated the absence of these in their library. 61% of this group is ignorant of what the catalogues and indexes are.

General Knowledge of library aims and objectives

The respondents were required to indicate the purpose of the library. Both the previous users of the library and non-users responded to this. Fig. 3 shows that the greatest percentage response of previous library users is 21% (i.e. using the library for borrowing of Books, Journals, Newspapers, Films and Tapes). This is followed by 17% for research work; reading personal books and library books have equal response of 15% respectively. There is gradual decrease in percentage response, as students tend to explain the purpose of library away from the generalised aim. Three striking purposes given by this group of respondents are 0.3% for meeting friends. 4% for storage of materials, and 0.1% for borrowing the web. Also, 0.2% of the group (previous users) maintains that library is used for conducting lessons.

used for research (Fig. 3). It is also worth noting that items a-e have no place in the non-users response though available in the other group. This could be attributed to the latter's exposure to the library and its facilities.

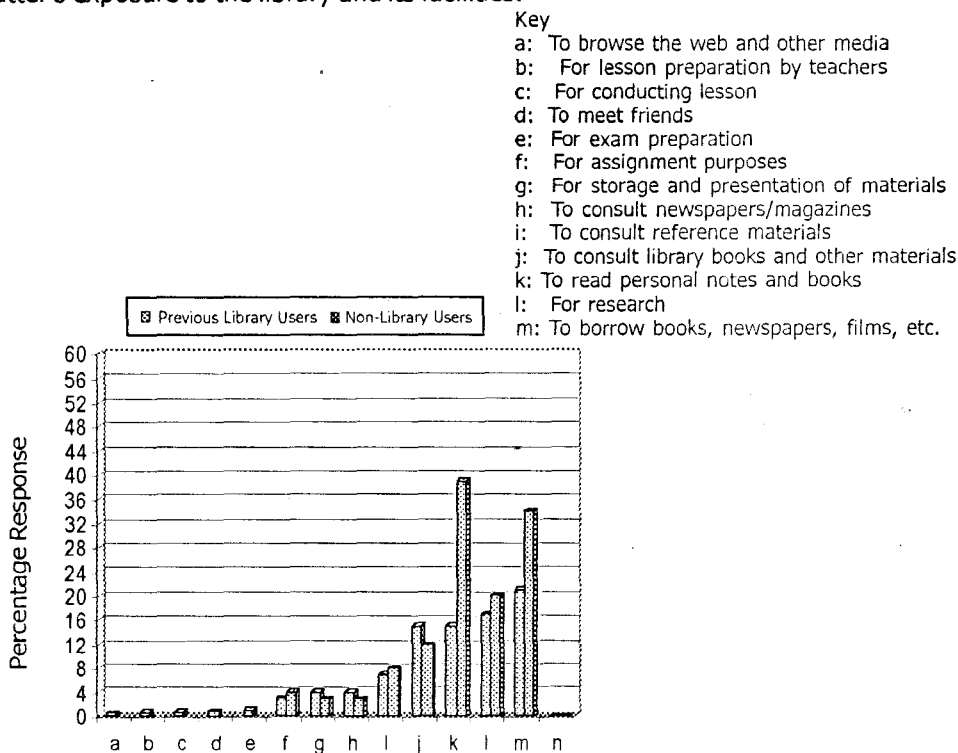


Fig. 3: Purpose of the Library as shown by Library and non-Library Users

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: More than 70% of the university freshmen have used the library before. From the calculation, $Z = 7.9$. Hence, $Z = 7.9 > Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.65$, we reject H_0 and accept H_1 . These imply that at 5% level, at 705 and above have made use of the library before entering the university.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the proportion of students who have made use of library catalogues and indexes and those who have not. From the analysis, $Z = -8.0$. Since $Z = -8.0 < -Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.95$ at significant level, we reject the hypotheses. Hence $H_1 : P_1 \neq P_2$ holds. There is a difference in the number of freshmen who have used the catalogue and indexes before and those have not.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the analyses indicate evidence that confirm hypothesis 1 that first year university students are not novices in the use of library despite their states of origin. Majority have used a variety of libraries, the school and public libraries being

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the analyses indicate evidence that confirm hypothesis 1 that first year university students are not novices in the use of library despite their states of origin. Majority have used a variety of libraries, the school and public libraries being the most widely used. This shows the importance of school and public libraries in the education of youths and the need for government to pay attention to their development. The inability to use the Academic, National and Special libraries extensively could be attributed to restriction on their use and their specialised locations. Given this situation, especially as it affects the use of academic libraries, it is evident that most first year university students have not been fully acquainted with the use of academic libraries which they would be exposed to in the university. The availability of school libraries in the secondary schools attended by these students explains why majority of them have used this particular type of library extensively.

The presence of school librarians who teach these students the use of library has not made much positive impact on the students. Their inability to use the catalogues and indexes shows their limited knowledge of the library access points. This agrees with the findings of Kester (1994) that only limited school library skills are carried over by students to college. The claim by 60% of the respondents that libraries are open for anytime appear erroneous since most school libraries are observed to close during school over at 2.15 p, daily. However, some schools with boarding facilities could open the library till evening. This is contrary to Magai (1995) comment that insufficient time is available for students to use school library.

The unclassified nature of the school materials (at least using the conventional system) products of which are catalogues and indexes confirms the inefficiency and poor management of these libraries. This could also be attributed to lack of knowledge of the importance of cataloguing and classification, and facilities of the library. Some librarians may not also have the adequate training in librarianship.

The level of awareness of the purpose of the library was observed to be low for non-library users but expectedly high for library users. Non-library users have limited knowledge of the essence of library. This implies that educators in the area of library use should draw curricula, which will not only expose the users to the roles of academic library in knowledge acquisition. Only then can the proper utilisation of the library be effected.

Apart from the traditional use made of the library, very few of the previous library users show evidence of using the library for other purposes like searching the Internet. Student should not be denied this facility. Rather, it should be provided and others exposed to it. It is an area that all libraries should explore for the improvement of their services and generation of funds, especially now that the library funding is limited and marketing library services, is a topical issue. The use of library as a dating point is a crucial

problem. This could be attributed to poor management/surveillance, or the problems of modern technology. This behaviour should be monitored closely and discouraged in order to uphold the aims and objectives of the library. Using the school library as classroom shows the low level of school library development in Nigeria, and insensitivity in the secondary schools. The situation if allowed to continue, will continue to slow down the development of that particular class of libraries and deny the users the opportunity of using the library when needed. From the results of this study, if nothing is done, university freshmen will always come to the academic environment with poor library use knowledge.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, it is inferred that majority of freshmen undergraduate have used various types of libraries with the school libraries being the most widely used. Very many of them have school libraries, which are open to every member of the school community most of the time. Despite its availability, some students do not use the library and thus have very shallow knowledge of the purpose of the library before entering the university, confirming the proposition of Gorman (1995). In spite of the presence of school librarians who teach the use of library and take care of the library, many school libraries have not adopted a standard classification system; rather materials are arranged according to the school subjects. As a result of this, many of freshmen are ignorant of the nature and use made of catalogues and indexes.

Having examined the situation and position of fresh university students' vis-à-vis their knowledge of library and its facilities, it is recommended that:

1. All school librarians should undergo training on library and information services so as to be better equipped in providing a proper background for future undergraduates.
2. School librarians should liaise with school managements and ensure that every Junior Secondary School I (JSS I) students register with the library upon admission in the school. The "use of library" lessons should be introduced in JSS I time tables at least for two terms.
3. Secondary schools should be encouraged to give students challenging assignments, which will encourage them to use and explore the library facilities.
4. Library Use Education that will include library tours should be introduced during the students first semester before they will be allowed to use the library.

This study having exposed some of the library knowledge and ability, which undergraduates bring into the university from secondary school, is expected to be a stepping-stone to other works on this subject. Such works could include: identifying the full nature and types of facilities these students were exposed to in the secondary school; the services rendered to these students, etc.

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