UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS INFORMATION NEEDS AND ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES:

A CASE STUDY OF COVENANT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, OTA, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study investigates information needs of students and the role of academic libraries, using Covenant University library as a case study. The investigation was based on the data generated through questionnaire, interview and library statistics to elicit information on the frequency of library use, purpose for using the library, means of locating library resources, library resources most consulted, most used library services and the problems encountered in using the services and resources in the library. The result indicated that majority of the students sometimes use the library to read for examination and to up-date knowledge; 58.94% of the students consult Online Public Access to locate library resources. The library resources most consulted by the students are the textbooks, while the most used library service is the lending service. The study recommends regular library orientation for a more effective use of OPAC and e-resources; good staff recruitment, personnel who are highly skilled and knowledgeable to understand information needs of the students; good communication between students and library staff must be encouraged in order to understand their information needs; moreover, the use of suggestion box in the library enables the students to give suggestions on how the library can serve them better. It was concluded that effective academic library information services delivery requires quality service and adequate professional strategic management. Regular survey on users and use studies would show the strengths and weaknesses in the activities of the library and assist in understanding the information needs of the students.

Keywords: STUDENTS, INFORMATION NEEDS, ACADEMIC LIBRARIES, COVENANT UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA.

Introduction

In the area of students learning, academic libraries are in the middle of a paradigm shift. In the past, academic libraries functioned primarily as information repositories, but now they are becoming a learning enterprise. The paradigm shift requires academic libraries to embed library resources and services in the teaching and learning, research and leisure activities of their institutions. Hence, Awana (2004) states that academic libraries are libraries that belong to institution of higher learning, they are found in tertiary institutions such as Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Advanced Teachers Training Colleges.

In this era of information explosion, academic libraries are no longer limited to print resources, but have extended their efforts to electronic resources, such as e-journals, e-books, library website pages and bibliographical databases. These resources are consulted by students and faculty for numerous reasons such as to prepare for examination, complete projects, up-date knowledge, for in-dept research work, updating lecture notes etc (Lawal-solarin, 2013). The use of ICT into the educational system has contributed in solving teaching and learning problems easily, rapidly and accurately.

Information services entail sourcing, gathering, organising, preserving, retrieval and dissemination of information as may be requested. Students according to Ugah (2007) have been found to be majority of library users in academic libraries. They seek information for academic excellence and future development. Akinade and Ogunyade (2002) asserted that valuable information to students contributed tremendously to their success and future development. Students according to Mabawonku (2005) seek for information in various ways, which include colleagues, the internet, library, friends, family members, etc. Therefore, this study examines how to understand students' information needs and roles of academic libraries.

Objectives of the Study

- To determine the frequency and purpose of use of library resources
- Ascertain how students locate library resources.
- To determine students satisfaction level through library resources and services most consulted.
- Identify problems encountered
- Proffer solution (s) to identified problem(s)

Review of related literature

Libraries and librarians/library staff are to make available adequate resources and services to library users. Hence, understanding students' information needs is essential to the management of libraries. Salaam and Fatokun (2010) submit that libraries acquire materials primarily to make the materials available and accessible to users. Therefore, the utility of these materials can be determined by carrying out a survey on users needs and the success in meeting them. Nwalo (2001) affirms that a library's effectiveness is measured by how well the library meets the needs of its users, relative to the library goals and objectives. Popoola (2008) submits that the information resources and services available in institutional information systems must be capable of supporting research activities among students and faculty. Nnadozie (2005) recommends adequate funding and prudent management of

available funds. He emphasized that, ''increased funding would enable libraries management to implement motivational schemes for staff, purchase current publications, acquire multimedia materials, procure other infrastructure, and working tools.''

In a study on the use of the University of Maiduguri Library Ampa (2000) discovered that majority of students did not use the library catalogue which is the index to all holdings in the library for qualitative library service. In a similar study of the University of Agriculture, Umudike, Ugah (2007), found out that students constituted majority of the library users and that nearly three quarters of them browse the shelves to locate library materials. Furthermore, he recommended intensive library orientation on the use of the catalogue as an effective tool for information retrieval. This confirms Popoola's (2001) observation that information availability does not mean accessibility and use. But in a study on the use of academic libraries: a case study of Covenant University by Iwu and Yusuf (2010) affirmed that 61.9% of students at Covenant University (CU) use OPAC to locate library resources on the shelves. Furthermore, they revealed that 88% of CU students visit the library to read for examination. In a similar study by Chikonzo and Aina (2006) the information needs at the University of Zimbabwe revealed that writing assignments and studying for tests or examination were the primary tasks for which students required information. Alison (2007) suggests continued information literacy programmes, because he found out that library users are not aware of the information resources available in libraries or they do not know how to access them.

Iyoro (2004) in his study identified accessibility as one of the pre-requisite of information use. Ugah (2007) submits that if information sources are accessible more users will make use of them. Moreover, he said library users tend to use information sources that are easily accessible. Franscotti, et al. (2007) established that the services of the library staff, introduction of better environment and availability of relevant collections will enable the student to use the library more. George et al. (2006) cited in Ossai (2009) noted that students library use pattern amongst others is influenced by the attitude of the University library staff.

Covenant University

Covenant University is a growing, dynamic vision-birthed, vision driven, private, Christian university. It is located in Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria and was founded in October 2002. At present, the university has two colleges. They are college of science and technology (CST) and college of development studies (CDS). In addition to the traditional mission of universities, which are teaching, learning, research and community service, the university also has a self-determined role of raising new generation of leaders.

The University Library

The library opens 8am-10pm on Mondays to Saturdays and on Sundays it opens at 3pm and closes at 10pm. The university library is known as Centre for Learning Resources (CLR). It has collection of 120,723 volumes of current and relevant books, 2,936 journals titles and 9 online databases which contain thousands of electronic journals and textbooks that support its mission, and needs of students and faculty staff. At present, the library has migrated from using Alice Software to Millennium which is web based. The library being an academic library is to serve students, faculty, staff and others scholars. Library orientation is conducted to 100 level students at the beginning of every session.

Methodology

The use of questionnaire, interview, and library statistics were the three methods adopted for this study. The study population comprised of 3,628 registered students of Covenant University, 280 library users; 150 (53.6%) male students and 130 (46.4%) female students were sampled using random sampling technique. The students are postgraduates and undergraduates in 200 level-500 levels. The 100 level students were excluded because the questionnaires were administered at the beginning of a new session. A total number of 280 copies of the questionnaires were completed. The library staff in all the sections (serial, circulation, Technical services, E-library, project/theses, photocopying, binding, etc) of the library were interviewed to ascertain the library services provided to students which the students rated. The Library statistics in the circulation and project sections of the library were also consulted to ascertain how students borrowed the library materials.

Research Findings and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Respondents by sex

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Male	150	53.6%
Female	130	46.4%
Total	**280**	**100**

Table 1 show that 53.6% of the respondents are male while the remaining 46.4% respondents are female. This corroborates the findings of Oyesiku and Oduwole (2004) that male students at Olabisi Onabanjo University use the library more than female students.

Table 2: Frequency of library use

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	85	30.4%
Sometimes	175	62.5%
Seldom	20	7.1%
Never	Nil	Nil
Total	**280**	**100**

Table 2 depicts that majority of the students sometimes use the library which account for 62.5% while 30.4% of them use the library very often and 7.1% seldom use the library. This shows that 30.4% of the students who use the library very often as well as the larger percentage of more than 62.5% would rely on other sources outside the library for their information needs. This corroborates Mabawonku (2005) which stated various ways students seek for information such as through colleagues, the internet, library, friends, family members etc.

Table 3: Purposes of using the Library

Purposes	Frequency	Percentage
To read for examination	50	17.9%
To up-date knowledge	50	17.9%
To consult textbooks	43	15.4%
To complete assignments	34	12%
To read Newspapers/Magazines	32	11.4%
To consult reference materials	30	10.7%
To supplement lecture notes	24	8.6%
To complete project	17	12%
Total	**280**	**100**

Table 3 reveals the various purposes of using the CU library by the students. A careful look at Table 3 reveals that to read for examination 17.9% and to up-date knowledge. 17.9% recorded the highest reasons why the students use the University library. It shows that only 17.9% have exposed themselves to optimal use of the library while another 17.9% have restricted themselves to use library to prepare for examinations. This group of students are likely to give themselves to self-declared leave from using the library once the examinations are over. This corroborate with the findings of Iwu and Yusuf (2010) that 88% of CU students visited the library to read for examination. Also, in a similar study, Chikonzo and Aina (2006) indicated that the information needs at the University of Zimbabwe reveals that writing assignments and studying for tests or examination were the primary tasks for which students required information.

Moreover, one can deduce from the table, the various means the students are using to up-date knowledge which included consulting textbooks 15.4%; reading newspapers/magazines 11.4%; consulting reference materials 10.7% etc.

Table 4: Means of locating Library Resources

Means	Frequency	Percentage
By using Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	165	58.94%
By browsing through the shelves	50	17.86%
By seeking assistance from friends	45	16.1%
By seeking assistance from the librarians	20	7.1%
Total	**280**	**100**

Table 4 shows the various means students locate library resources. The means they disclosed for locating library resources included using online public access catalogue 58.94%, browsing through the shelves 17.86%, seeking assistance from friends 16.1%, and seeking assistance from librarians 7.1%. However, 58.94% of students' population who use OPAC which is an index to the library's holdings is reduced compared to the findings of Iwu and Yusuf (2010) that 61.9% of the students at Covenant University used OPAC to locate library resources. The library authority needs to intensify efforts to increase the level of OPAC usage to 80% or 90% in order to attain excellence.

Table 5: Library resources most consulted

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Textbooks	100	35.7%
E – Resources	80	28.6%
Project/Thesis	36	12.9%
Newspapers	25	8.9%
Reference Materials	20	7.1%
Magazines	19	6.8%
Total	**280**	**100**

Table 5 indicates that out of the library resources consulted by the students, which included Textbooks 35.7%, E-resources 28.6%, Project/thesis12.9%, use project/ Newspapers 8.9%, Reference materials 7.1% and Magazines 6.8%, textbooks are the library resources most consulted by the students, followed by e-resources 28.6%. This shows that the computer literacy level of the students is not as high as expected. In this age of information technology, one would expect the level of e-resources usage to be high. This affirms Allison (2007) findings that users are either not aware of the information resources available in the library or they do not know how to access them.

Table 6: Most Used Library Service

Library Service	Frequency	Percentage
Lending Service	93	33.2%
Internet Service	80	28.6%
Binding /Photocopy Services	70	25%
Reference Service	31	11.1%
Abstracting & Indexing Services	6	2.1%
Total	**280**	**100**

Table 6 above shows that lending service with a response 33.2% as the most used library service, while 28.6% respondents use internet service, 25% respondents use binding and photocopying services, 11.1%   respondents use reference service and 2.1% which is the lowest number of the respondents use abstracting and indexing services. This affirms Franscotti et al. (2007) which stated that the services of the library staff, introduction of better environment and availability of relevant collections will enable the students to use the library more and the library staff would be able to understand their information needs.

Table 7: Problems encountered in using library resources and its services

Problems	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Library materials do not positively impact my assignments and research	-	-
2. Electronic resources not always accessible	110	39.29%
3. Opening & Closing hours of the library not adequate	80	28.57%
4. Library services are inadequate	50	17.86%
5. No assistance from the Librarians	30	10.71%
6. I cannot locate library resources	10	3.57 %
Total	**280**	**100**

From Table 7, 39.29% respondents reported that inaccessibility of electronic resources is the most problem encountered by students in using the library resources and services, while 28.6% respondents indicated inadequate opening and closing hours of the library, 17.86% indicated that the library services are inadequate, 10.71% respondents indicated that the librarians gave them no assistance and 3.57% indicated that they could not locate library resources. According to the result presented above, inaccessibility of electronic resources by the students was the most problem encountered by students in using library resources 39.29%. This is at variance with the views of Salaam and Fatokun (2010) which stated that libraries acquire materials primarily to make them available and accessible to users. Also, Ugah (2007) submitted that if information sources are accessible more users will make use of them. Moreover, he rightly noted that library users use information resources that are easily available. Probably inaccessibility of library resources is the reason why Table 2 reveals that majority of the students do not frequently use the library resources. Finally, Popoola (2001) affirmed that information availability does not mean accessibility and use. Hence, the library authority of CU should intensify efforts to see that the purpose of acquisition of library resources is achieved. A regular survey on users and use studies is essential.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the students sometimes use the library, in order to read for examination. This has obvious implications for academic excellence and future development. CU library is an academic library. It is a service delivery organisation and must endeavour to provide quality service and adequate professional strategic management that would attract its students to use the library very often. Students are the majority library users in academic libraries and they need information for academic excellence and future development. Based on the findings, efforts are needed to increase the level of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) usage and e-resources. These are necessary for today's modern world and for the students to keep up with the rapid changes in the world. Finally, if the library staff is able to establish good student/staff relationship, library use would increase and the library staff would be able to understand their information needs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study; the following recommendations are provided:

1. It is suggested that good staff recruitment is essential. That is, personnel who are highly skilled and knowledgeable to understand information needs of library users.
2. The use of suggestion box on how the library can serve its users better is recommended.
3. Regular survey on users and use studies would assist in knowing the strengths and weaknesses in the activities of the library.
4. In addition, continued information literacy programmes, such as, teaching of the use of library course, library orientation programme etc should be held more regularly in order to impart to students more effective ways to use OPAC and e-resources.
5. Finally, good staff/student relationship should be encouraged as this would serve as a guide for library staff to know their needs.

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