

Challenges of Students in Accessing Information in the Library: A Brief Review

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to examine the challenges that students are facing in using the library. Information retrieval skills are of paramount importance for one to be able to access information resources in different formats in the library. This paper focuses on the different challenges that the students face in accessing information in the library. The findings of the study reveal that there are challenges such as for example, lack of proper knowledge on how to use information retrieval skills, insufficient user education, lack of computer knowledge, Information Communication Technology (ICT) in accessing information in the library. The study recommended that information literacy skills training be compulsory for first year students so that they will be able to advance to higher level and become information literate. Library Education should also form part of the university curriculum. ICT specialists who are focused on library issues are of paramount importance.

INTRODUCTION

According to Hawkins (2001: 54) and Ranganathan (2015), “the rise in electronic information resources freely accessible through the internet has disrupted this relatively efficient system in a number of ways. There is no clear and defined role for libraries with regards to the selection, preservation, and provision of the digital resources accessible through the net.” Additionally, students and faculties need to learn how to evaluate these information resources, and this is far more difficult to do with resources on the Web than with those in a traditional library. Hawkins (2001: 54) and Maben (2015) further asserted that “in the past, the very fact that a book or a journal was held by a library represented a conscious set of decisions about the validity of the information. Moreover, with information on the internet the features that render the library worthwhile are not completely there. There is no arranged cataloguing, there is no dedication to preservation, and there is no backing technique to assist you to attain the complicated or misplaced resources.”

Emmanuel and Sife (2008: 140) indicated that “Recently the library has proposed a university-wide formal and systematic IL programme. The programme aims at creating awareness on a wide range of information resources; equipping users with skills for determining their information needs; providing users with the ability to locate and retrieve relevant information; enabling users to evaluate information and its sources; and facilitating users’ understanding of ethical and legal issues surrounding information use.”

According to Emmanuel and Sife (2008: 137) and Telwell (2015) “ICTs in libraries have greatly simplified acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, provision and usage of information. In some, ICTs have improved provision of library and information services by overcoming time, distance and other barrier. Despite their tremendous potential, ICTs have also brought new challenges that must be overcome in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency of libraries in developing countries.”

The introduction of new technologies has attached importance to library services by offering recent methods of gathering, storing, retrieving and providing information adding to the problems that the library already has. Lack of awareness of the library services is also identified as a challenge to the students because they need to be aware of the services so that they will be able to know and use it to their advantage (Emmanuel and Sife 2008; Anyaoku et al. 2015).

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OBSERVATIONS

Challenges

Insufficient Funds for Acquiring ICT Facilities

There are challenges to information access such as technology, literacy etc. Amuchie (2015) and SAIDE (2009) reflected some specific challenges concerning information access that there is insufficient money to conduct the programme to train registered students so as to meet their educational needs. In African universities there are also few learning resources as well as lecturers and those resources that are accessible are excessively costly to be bought by students or the universities. Moreover the access to current information made available on the internet is not smooth as a result of inadequate Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure (SAIDE 2009).

Libraries need adequate finances to attain contemporary ICT facilities such as computers, servers, scanners, photocopiers, software as well as compensating for electronic and traditional library services such as electronic journals, e-books and digital libraries. Mainly these ICT facilities and services are extremely costly and can be acquired from industrialised countries. On the other hand, experience uncovers that nearly every university library in Africa and other developing countries obtain extremely insufficient finances from their mother institutions as well as the government for promotion of their activities. The little funds received fall far below the standard costs of ICT facilities (Amuchie 2015; Mutula 2004).

Lack of Relevant ICT Knowledge

The transformations generated about by the utilization of Information Communication Technology facilities in the library services such as storing resources, retrieving and distribution of information has posed challenges to students in accessing information in the library. The usage of Information Technology in the library system requests that the students be exposed to and have ICT knowledge so as to be able to effectively use the ICT facilities to retrieve information required. Without ICT skills the students cannot retrieve information effectively. As a result the influence of ICT resources intro-

duced in library undertakings, increased the need for the students (library users) to be trained on how to manipulate them to effectively access their information needs to enable them to pursue their studies (Aliyu 2011).

Students or library users in the academic library should be both computer and information literate to successfully utilise the swiftly developing and transforming information sources. A computer literacy skill is concerned with knowing how to operate the computer; this is a skill that can be obtained through training. On the other hand, information has much to do with the efficient and effective use of information sources to obtain required information (Emmanuel and Sife 2008).

Okello-Obura and Ikoja-Odongo (2010) reiterated that the lack of the relevant computer knowledge and retrieval methods is what causes the challenges in most students to search and retrieve information from these electronic sources. For students to be able to effectively use the e-resources they need to undergo computer trainings in which the skills relevant to accessing electronic information resources in the library are emphasized. It is also essential to identify the computer competences that students lack to retrieve electronic information resources in the library. According to Araba and Michelle (2009), the shortcomings in the utilisation of computer-generated libraries extends from infrastructural limitations to a person's competence to transform access to information and communication technology (ICTs) into noticeable advantages in light of other environmental constraints.

In Nigerian Universities, the library and information course has been made compulsory to all the students as a strategy of subjecting the students to the library undertakings in their university library so that they will be able to explore the library resources making use of the necessary skills. The main aim of the library and information course is to develop the independent information user who will be able to have access to the library collections on their own without asking for assistance (Aliyu 2011).

Library Education

Ukonu et al. (2012) pointed out that UNESCO stated that to effectively harness the power of the new information and communication technology to improve library education in Nigeria,

the following essential conditions must be met: Students and teachers must have sufficient access to digital technologies and the internet in their classrooms, laboratories and workshops; high quality, meaningful, and culturally responsive digital content must be available for teachers and learners; and teachers must have the knowledge and skills to use the new digital tools and resources to help all students achieve high academic standards.

Lack of Information Literacy Skills

According to Ramamurthy et al. (2015) and Reitz (2004) information literacy is “the skill in finding the information one needs, including an understanding of how libraries are organised, familiarity with the resources they provide (including information formats and automated search tools) and knowledge of commonly used research techniques.” The concept also includes the skills required to critically evaluate information content and employ it effectively, as well as understanding of the technological infrastructure on which information transmission is based, including its social, political, and cultural context and impact.

Furthermore, Reitz (2004) pointed out that Information literacy is all the happenings engaged in training clients, how to make the noblest use of the library resources, services and facilities, incorporating both the prescribed and unauthorized instruction provided by a librarian or other staff member on a one-on-one basis or in a group. Use is made of electronic lectures, audio-visual materials, and written manuals and trailblazers. One of the challenges that the students have is to be information literate so that they can realize when information is required and be competent in finding, assessing and successfully utilizing the required information.

Information Retrieval Skills

Fordjour et al. (2010) revealed that the keywords, Boolean Operators and the keywords index phrase search strategies can be used by students to search and retrieve relevant information. There is also a need to improve the information search strategy skills so as to acquire information to enhance their studies. Moreover, a time limitation is also a challenge to students to retrieve sufficient information to help them in

their studies. Internet access service that is frequently disrupted is also a challenge to students’ access to needed information. While on the other hand, the shortage of library staff poses another challenge that is, the number of new students entering the universities is growing in such a way that it is difficult for the librarians to ensure that all the students attained the accurate information retrieval skills.

Furthermore, in an effort to address the problem, the University of Ghana has originated a number of information retrieval systems to assist students to access information for study purpose but unfortunately there are some grievances by most students who cannot access the existing facilities. While on the other hand some of the students are not aware of the availability of the information retrieval system. There is also the problem of the relevancy of the document retrieved for meeting the information needs of the students (Fordjour et al. 2010).

According to Jain (2008) learning commons is concerned with bringing in a service style, which transforms numerous service stations to a solitary service station in the shutdown teamwork of countless service associates, which comprises an IT technician, help desk, reference information desk, learning support services, academic services, research support, and information literacy. As a result, students without proper information retrieval skills will be unable to access all the above-mentioned services offered online.

Awareness of Information Communication Technology Facilities

Most of the Academic libraries have by now digitised nearly all of their services, and have attained a sum of Information Communication Technology resources that effectively promote the donation of information services. Nevertheless, the new technology comes along with its challenges to students associated with acquisition, preservation, maintenance as well as safety matters, clients’ trainings, lack of marketing as well as commitment among the key stakeholders. This in turn led to lack of awareness of the ICT facilities that can effectively assist students in as far as information provision is concerned. Poor marketing of the library resources and services to the students and the university community at large so as to be directly linked with

the information they need to do their work is one of the challenges facing the students in accessing information (Emmanuel and Sife 2008; Berk et al. 2007).

Ukonu et al. (2012) emphasised the major challenge affecting knowledge and use of the library such as: students are not aware of the facilities on offer and the library staff do little to inform them about them. "The real issues with technology are awareness, access, exposure and actual use" (Ukonu et al. 2012: 7).

Berk et al. (2007) stressed the importance of marketing of resources and services to make students aware of the facilities they have in the library that they can use to access information effectively. For example, the use of Podcasts can be useful in promoting local subject and research collection like for example Botswana collection is revered specifically for the researchers. These will make students, academics, and researchers aware of the services and immediately be connected to resources they need to meet their information needs for studying, lecturing and for specific research. Marketing can also comprise news and happenings that take place inside the University campus as a whole and the Library in specific. Marketing the academic library can be done through making use of library orientation and tours can be operated through video clips, consequently getting in touch with most of the students together with remote learners.

DISCUSSION

University libraries have gone through substantial transformation in the previous era. With the growing use of technology to arrange and circulate information, the computer has developed into a significant instrument for gaining access to information (Bodo 2015; MacWhinnie 2003). It is therefore understandable that as a result of the shift in the way students used to access information from the traditional libraries, they are increasingly using technology (such as the internet) to access information they need to pursue their studies. The academic libraries have tried the latest techniques of uniting information resources, technology as well as research support. This is in consistence with literature that some university libraries have adopted the new idea of information commons or a central location which provide computers, information resources in different formats as well as the staff

assistance as a strategy to beat the new challenge (MacWhinnie 2003; Mueller 2015).

As a result of the new demands on libraries, the students' access to information is now made available in a wide range of formats, including print, electronic and multimedia which calls for a pronounced need for research from librarians. For students to be able to access information they need for their academic purposes, they need the proficiency of an information specialist to effectively find the materials available and use the information they require. On the other hand, the librarian's responsibility will be progressively important when students request guidance in finding the way via the numerous levels of electronic information resources. There is also a need for training or educating students on the use of these new sources of digital information so that they become self-competent information seekers. If the students are not trained on how to be information literate, they will continue to rely on the librarians for assistance in as far as how to manage a large amount of information from different formats as well as evaluating and selecting appropriate information (Association of College and Research Libraries 2015; MacWhinnie 2003; Moyo and Mavodza 2016).

Therefore it is not surprising that Fordjour et al. (2010) and Frank and Pharo (2016) stressed that information retrieval skills training programme should form part of the curriculum and be made compulsory to all students. Emphasis was laid on the fact that the lack of information retrieval skills programme is attributed to the students 'incompetence to successfully retrieve information to do their studies and in turn lead them to poor academic performance'. As a result of information explosion that has resulted in the mass production of information this has given way to the challenges concerning the better techniques to sift, retrieve and manage this large collection of information and students end up retrieving irrelevant information.

According to Okello-Obura and Ikoja-Odon-go (2010), the question of information retrieval proficiencies, users' (students) attitudes towards e-resources as well as the strategies to improve on the electronic information sources use need to become apparent in academic libraries. It is therefore logical that with the introduction of technology in the university library, the students are faced with the challenges of lack of technical and research skills that will enable them to ac-

cess and retrieve relevant and timely information to meet their information needs (Jayasundara 2014; Toner 2008). As a result for students in the digital age to be successful in their studies they have to be able to explore the digital environment because at the university level they are expected to use the developing variety of automated resources and as a result they need to attain and rehearse the indispensable skills to manipulate them (Butler- Kiber 2013; Okell-Obura and Magara 2008).

Provision of electronic or digital reference services entails using Information Communication Technologies through which clients can pose queries and obtain responses electronically. It emerges from the study that the services normally comprises of, something like, face-to-face reference service, e-mail reference service, collaborative reference service, making use of chat expertise, connections to electronic resources as well as open access resources, questions that are often asked, response form service, question point service, as well as the collaborative reference service via library confederations (Eze and Uzoigwe 2013; Mardikian 2007).

CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the challenges that the students face in accessing information in the library. The main challenges covered were: Insufficient funds for acquiring ICT facilities; Lack of relevant ICT knowledge; Library education; Lack of Information literacy skills; Information retrieval skills; Awareness of Information Communication Technology facilities. For ease of access to information in the library which is made available in any format, the information retrieval skills are of paramount importance and as a result, for students to effectively use the university library's resources they should undergo the relevant trainings such as computer training, Information literacy training, library education, information retrieval skills training and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that information literacy skills training be compulsory for first year students so that they will be able to advance to higher level for being information literate. Library

Education should also form part of the university curriculum. ICT specialists who are focused on library issues are of paramount importance. Libraries should be funded with sufficient funds so that they will be able to attain modern Information Communication facilities.

LIMITATIONS

The libraries are not well equipped with modern facilities that will enable the library to run smooth and be able to attract students to come and use the library. Libraries are therefore not user friendly.

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