



## **LIBRARY USER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

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**Submitted: 21/09/2023**

**Accepted: 05/10/2023**

**Published: 08/11/2023**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The paper unveiled the most of various library user education programmes that ought to be, and used for library users to make them like and use the academic library most effectively with ease and more interest. They include: library tours/visits, lectures, provision of support materials, one-to-one sessions, library orientation exercises, workshops, library week programs, provision of library guides and booklet. The discussion was presented to include academic library use and users, justification of library user education in academic libraries and factors that affect library user education programmes in academic libraries. In conclusion, the paper pointed out that library users (students and lecturers), who were unequipped with good library user education lack the capacity to utilize available academic library material resources, and recommends that library user education should be instituted and regularly or periodically be given to both the fresh and old library users to continuously arouse their interest in reading and other general benefits from the use of the library.*

**Keywords:** Library, Academic library, Use/Users, User education, Justification



### **Introduction**

Libraries and information centers all over the world are classified by their types, and they strive, providing various library and information resource materials and services to meet and satisfy their communities and users' information needs and demands accordingly. Definitions of the word or term "Library" have been made and given by different scholars including organizations, agencies and professional bodies from various conceptual perspectives and reflections over the years. As Hornby (2010) put it, a library is a building in which collections of books, tapes, newspapers, etc. are kept for people to read. Reitz (2004) put it that library, is "a collection of books and other materials organized and maintained for use (reading, consultation, study, research, etc)".

In the light and understanding of the above givens among others, it is necessary to also note that a book, or a few collections of them, and other print information materials could also be referred to or called library/libraries in singular and separate forms, even in their unorganized manner or form. In librarianship however, it is known and noted, that for any definition of the term "library" to be operationally complete and acceptable, "organization" of the material resources must be put and brought to bear, and emphasized. The "organization" of library materials makes that library to be ideal, easily accessible and useable. In all intents and purposes therefore, all definitions of the term library which do not bring in the "organization" stance of the library materials into play, are seen as not reflecting an important professional element, knowledge and touch of the complete definition of a library and the meaning thereon. Semantics should not be allowed to deceive or confuse anything if the "organization of the library materials" is left out in any definition of the word or term library.

Different types of libraries exist, function, and are identifiable. They include: the public, special, school, national and academic libraries. All the formally established types of libraries are organized and oriented for use by different categories of people and in different ways, places or environment for different purposes and aspirations. The Academic type of library is the main focus of discuss in this article. The purpose of any library irrespective of type, size, location and mother institution's mission and vision, gears towards the goal of providing relevant material resources, suitable spacious building, furniture and general conducive atmosphere for reading, sturdy, research, relaxation and recreation for the users. Academic libraries' information resource materials are carefully selected and acquired and organized for easy accessibility, retrievability and use. The uniqueness of the academic library with its material resources in the contemporary dispensation of librarianship, especially about the acquisition and organization of its information material resources and services, are carried out both manually and digitally to achieve the required academic material resources balance and use.

### **Concept of Library Education Programmes**

The place of the library in academic institutions of higher learning and businesses cannot be misplaced or replaced or over-emphasized. The library remains the hub of academic activities - (i.e. teaching, learning and research) of the university and other institutions of higher learning. It provides the needed environment and atmosphere required for the said academic activities



especially for personal/private studies. Library education programmes in the academic libraries are designed for the users generally and more especially for the new users. Olubiyo and Olubiyo (2022) define library education programmes as a well-planned programme of training and educating patrons on the skills and techniques of locating and retrieving library materials. According to Reitz (2004) it is about "all the activities involved in teaching users how to make the best possible use of library resources, facilities, and the services that go with them including formal and informal instructions delivered by a librarian or other staff member one-on-one or in a group. It also includes online tutorials, using audio-visual materials, and printed guides and pathfinders".

According to Bashorun, Omotayo and Wasiu (2020) library user education (also called library instruction or library orientation) teaches users how to make the most effective use of the library system. Library education programs to users therefore, are conscious efforts required and made, that should be regularly and/or periodically given to orientate, remind/refresh and update the library user of the ways and means to approach and get the best out of library resources and services which the library offers especially to the new users. Adindu, Achebe and Uzoechina (2020) assert that essence of user education is to acquaint the library users with different services rendered by the university libraries to its clients. These services include lending services inter-library lending; referral service, reservation services, Current Awareness Service (CAS) Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) translation service, reprographic services, among others that the users must be acquainted with through user education programme.

### **The Academic Library, Use and Users**

Academic institutions of higher learning world over are up hailed as purveyors of knowledge as a result of the regular studies, researches, teachings and learning with other community services that take place in and around them. According to Okezie (2015), academic institutions of higher learning are knowledge factories which pursue academic excellence and intellectual transmissions from generation to generation through their prescribed functions of teaching research and public services or functions. The libraries located and found functioning in the higher institutions of learning like the universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and the likes, are classified as belonging to the academic type of libraries. By their nature, purpose and functions, they exist to provide materials resources that support the academic activities and programmes of teaching, leaning and research etc., according to the mandate of their mother/parent institution. To this understanding, their major users include: the students, lecturers, researchers (the academia) and the non-teaching staff of that academic community as the case may be. The benefits derivable from academic libraries include the consultations made of their organized material resources (reading, studying, researching, recreation, relaxation, conduciveness and other offers and services that satisfy the users' information needs).

According to Pandey (2015), the academic library is an arm and integral part of every higher institution administered to meet the information and research needs and demands of their students, faculty and staff. More so, in the organization/organigram of the university institution and administration, the library is an indispensable unit established by law. Historically academic



libraries were the natural destinations for students, faculty staff and researchers seeking for information (Ozioko, 2007). Furthermore, Ozioko asserted that academic libraries serve as the repositories for published information as well as intermediary for acquiring materials from the outside world. Conservation of existing knowledge is also one of the major functions of the academic libraries. The academic libraries play these roles by ensuring that the right information resources are acquired and utilized according to the rules. This feat of conservation and use of materials in academic libraries are extensively achieved through library user education.

### **Library User Education Programmes in Academic Libraries**

One of the major interests and concerns of librarians about libraries of all types, is how best to encourage and make users, clientele or patrons to get interested and be effective users of the numerous library and information resources materials stocked, organized and made available in the library. This interest and worry is most paramount and needful in the academic libraries. And to this challenge, academic librarians in many ways have strived and developed structured activities and programmes to encourage the higher institution's academics and community to use the library. Protuberant of the ways to draw the attention and interest of all concerned to use the academic libraries and resources is the "library user education programmes".

The origin of library user education programmes can be traced back to more than 170 years, at Harvard college in the 1820s (Abubarkar, Shuaibu & Umar, 2014). Many scholars have defined library user education (also referred to as library instruction, bibliographic instruction (BI), information literacy). Library user education is all about teaching users how to be most effective users of the library information resource materials. It encompasses all programs and activities undertaken to assist users especially the fresh students who lack or have no knowledge of how to make a good and careful use of the library and its resources. The essence of it all is how to let them know to; approach, identify/find, evaluate and pick relevant information to meet or solve respective information needs.

Babafemi (2002), Aina (2004), Yancover and Miltenoff (2004), in Oguguo, Unaegbu, Amadi and Alaehie (2019) agree that "the library provide user education in order to equip users with enough knowledge on the use of the library. This will enable the users to use the library resources effectively". Library user education is put in place to refine or redefine issues in the use of the library and services in simpler ways and means. It has therefore been expanded in meaning to include the concept of information literacy. Abraham, Ozioko and Gomina (2014) stated that, user education encompasses all library activities undertaken to help students and other users become efficient users of information, identifying information needs, finding and evaluating information materials to select the best that suits their needs.

They enumerated the following activities as means and ways to achieve user education goals; library orientation, bibliographic instructions, library instructions and information literacy. Agyen-Gyasi (2008), defined user education and programs as a process that provides a platform where librarians introduce new students and other new users to the complexities of university library facilities; familiarize users who have little or no information seeking skills at all, with a broad



range of library resources in order to develop library skills and educate them on how to find materials using library catalogues, subject indexes, CD-ROMs etc. For the older users, library user education programmes help to remind and refresh their memories over the library use and ethics they may have forgotten.

According to Harrold (1996), library user education programme is seen as a programme of information packaged and made available by libraries (librarians) for users to enable them make more efficient independent and sustained use of the library's stock and services. Some user education programs high-lighted and the various methods of imparting the skills according to Harold (1996) include library tours/visits, lecture exercises, provision of support materials, one-to-one session, library orientation, workshops, library week programmes, and library guides booklet

#### *Library Tour/Visit*

Library tour/visits, is a deliberately organized and guided walk through a library to unveil the stock of its information resource materials and other facilities. It is usually conducted by librarians or library assistants, purposely to acquaint new users to the location of services and resources. During the tour, the new users have the opportunity to ask questions as things are explained out to them. According to Reitz (2004), "some libraries have installed online library tours on their Web sites, which include clickable floor plans linked to photographs and descriptive text".

#### *Lecture Exercises*

This includes lessons or tutorials expositions and explanations of the modus operandi of the academic libraries, by way of teaching and/or lecture approaches and methods. Use of library education was found very important and was since integrated into the academic curriculum of most if not all the higher institutions and taught as a regular and separate course of the general studies departments, and this is deliberately left in the hands of the academic librarians to teach being the professionals. This assignment and duty has also given the librarians more opportunity to further expound the gospel of the use of the library and its material resources. This lecture duty and assignment exercise, are propagated still by giving out prepared notes or hand-outs which the new user/student may refer to from time to time. In such lecture exercises questions and issues of interest about the use of the library are clarified.

#### *Provision of Support Materials*

Support materials for library user education, are not necessarily text books and the likes, they usually include ephemeral material documents which their format, content, shape or size etc. can be changed or altered from time to time, to make them more current and relevant. In other words, they are up dates of ideas and developments about how best library and library information materials are organized, used, including services rendered in the academic library. They are brought to bear because they are of technical value and precision with simple and appropriated library language and terms used, which are easily comprehended. They are used in combination with other relevant materials, to assisting and guiding the students and other users of the library. They may include library guides, flyers, turned out and shared out to users especially the new



users. They are so useful during library campaigns. In some cases, they are used to capture the dos and don'ts, and may also carry the latest number of materials received or acquired in the library concerned. They help to create and increase awareness to the users of the library. Support materials indeed are quite simple and assistive in giving library user education in academic libraries.

*One-to-one or one-on-one Session*

This is a library user education pattern that simultaneously takes place when and if new users individually, or a few of them collectively, come or visit the library for specific or general inquiry about the library operations and services. This development often takes place, in the reference section of the library. It is another sort of library user education, which the opportunity is used to interact and inculcate to the users the forms of query or inquiry which the new users pose, and to which the librarians can provide answers. In this one-on-one scenario, the librarian then, takes his/her time to expound and educate the new users of what the library is all about, how it operates and the step by step manner and approach to get about whatever the issues or matter is which the users ought to know. This program and approach is also referred to as, or synonymous with one-to-one library user education.

*Library Orientation*

This is another programme of library user education, which usually occurs or takes place when a new set of student/library users are admitted for studies into a higher institution of learning. The dictionary gives definitions of the word "orientation". The one adopted for the purpose of this article, is that orientation is "training or information that are given before starting anew course or job". Orientation in any business is used to point to the directions to which a course or programs should face and go step by step with the underlying observations and punctuations according to laid down principles for successful results. The academic library being the hub of teaching, learning, studies and research activities in institutions of higher learning, it becomes just and proper to deliberately organize and give library orientation to the new students before their full academic businesses commences, so that they will make the most effective use of the library.

Library user education (Orientation) in academic libraries as a matter of program and routine is deliberately integrated and left to be undertaken or handled by the academic librarians of that particular institution of higher learning. Library orientation is a vital part of the general orientation organized by the authorities/management of that particular institution of higher learning for its new students. Library orientation for new users is brief but quite all-encompassing of the position and place of the library in the academic lives of the students and other members of the university community, concerning how the library information materials are organized and retrieved for general good academic performance and success. The opening hours of the library, inquiry steps or procedures, conduct expected of the users (i.e. the dos and don'ts), in and around of the library and its material resources are made known. Library orientation can also be called or referred to as bibliographic instruction (BI), Library information literacy, library instruction and life-long learning. (Reitz, 2004).



### *Workshops*

Organized workshops are other forms of library user education. It is usually brief, intensive, practical and interactive in nature. This is adopted and organized by librarians in academic libraries to explain things and issues out for the benefit of all invited participants and other. Librarians in academic libraries put up workshops as a forum for people who should, and are expected to be interested in learning about the library and the organization of its resources to have the practical experience in the organization and use of basic techniques, systems and methods etc. of the library. Workshops are usually for a short term practical and interactive sessions of learning that usually takes not less than one-week duration. Duration of workshops however, is determined by the level and capacity of participants attending and purpose the workshop is meant to achieve. In academic libraries, workshops of the nature and type discussed are organized for the purposes of exposing and enlightening both new and other users of the libraries.

### *Library Week Programmes*

This refers to a whole week, set aside and dense with outlined daily programme of activities organized by academic libraries for the purposes of reviving, refreshing and up-dating the library users on new developments, trends and the general benefits of liking the library and using it to get their information needs and demands. The activities of the library week programmes involves; lectures, talks, exhibitions, campaigns, awareness creation, processions (carnivals) within and around the academic libraries' community (i.e. the campus or campuses of the institution as the case may be). Each day of the week has its fixed and timed activities outlined or highlighted on the library week flyers designed for the week's program.

In some cases, library week programs as a means of library user education, are carried or advertised on radio, the newspapers and television channels. Library week programs are generally made open to all and sundry who care and qualify to use the library, and by implication, even those who do not care to use the library are being lured or compelled to come. The target users particularly are the students, lecturers, researchers, other staff of the institution's community and interested outsiders as well. Prominent and reputable librarians and other academics are specially invited to give inciting talks/lectures on the use of the library and benefits derivable.

The librarians thus use the week long program to revive and refresh the users, and attract more users who also should be made to understand that libraries do not serve academic purposes alone, but can offer materials of leisure, recreation and relaxation as the case may be. The library week programs are great events if and when well organized. It projects or re-projects all the library activities and services obtainable. Through library week program or campaigns, many users are drawn and the old users are encouraged. The library ethics and etiquettes are re-echoed. General up-dates on library issues and developments are given and expounded.

### *Library Guides*

Every academic library prepares and documents its own rules and regulations that guide the



users of the library. It contains and covers in brief, all the bits that new or fresh student library users ought to know to help them navigate the library. The information supplied in the library guide booklet includes: the library opening and closing hours, the library days of operations, the various departments of the library and functions, the systems and organization of the library stock etc. This library booklet is quite an invaluable material to the fresh students and serves a great deal as library user education stuff. In most academic libraries, it is always up-dated and given to the fresh students and every other users as they register for the library use and services.

#### **Justification for Library User Education Programmes in Academic Libraries**

With the definitions of the academic library as already proffered above in this article, any doubts regarding their justification in academic libraries programs should not be. The general purpose is to acquaint, intimate and familiarize the library user, with the overall academic library environment, the materials in stock, including their organization, and the entire ethics and etiquette of the library profession and operations for the general good of the library users. Succinctly put, wherever and whenever library user education is up hailed and given, it goes to:

1. makes a great difference in how people (users) handle and use the library information materials. In other words, library user education guides and directs the library users in the ways, means, and manners which impacts positively and effectively in the life-long conduct and patterns of the library user's approach about the library usage.
2. what they are doing not by chance, but a major responsibility and a deliberate call of duty and which cannot be delegated to non-professionals. The positive impacts which include discipline that the library user education impresses on the library users, justifies the place, importance, relevance and general efforts of the academic librarians who design and propagate library user education among other programs to sensitize the users and give them the right directions.
3. bring about time consciousness to both the librarians and users, given that library programs and services have time frames. Library user education as Abraham, Ozioko and Gomina (2014) put it, encompasses all activities undertaken to help students and other users become efficient and effective users of information and who by that very fact can identify information need, find information according to need, evaluate and select the best information to meet that need.
4. teach users how to make the most effective use of library resources. It provides a platform where librarians introduce new students/users to the complexities of academic library facilities; familiarize users who have little or no ideas of information seeking skills at all with a broad range of library resources in order to develop library skills and how to find materials using library catalogues, subject indexes etc.
5. Present day academic libraries collect, organize and preserve knowledge based information using traditional and electronic (digital) methods and formats, and there is the need for students and other users to be able to access these information resource materials accordingly regarding need. Thus library user education and information literacy to users go





a long way to settle these all. The overall justification for library user education, in the academic libraries, is the conscious and careful import to the users, of the rich information and knowledge contents and awareness of the entire ethics/etiquettes of the academic libraries and to bring them about into the consciousness of the users of the academic libraries as they relate to both the librarians and the users respectively.

According to Keenan and Johnston (2000), ethics are "code of conduct that should guide or govern the activity of a particular professional groups"; while Reitz, (2004), talks about **code of ethics** in librarianship as a set of standards governing the conduct and judgment of librarians, library staff, and other information professionals and invariably their clientele over their works and services. The example is the *ALA Code of Ethics which* sets the standards for equitable access, intellectual freedom, confidentiality, respect for intellectual property rights, excellence, accuracy, integrity, impartiality, courtesy, and respect for colleagues and library patrons.

#### **Factors Affecting Library User Education in Academic Libraries**

Nonetheless, the application of library user education to propagate effective and efficient knowledge in the use of academic libraries, a number of factors are still pointed out to be inhibiting or affecting library user education in academic libraries. They include:

1. **Lack of seriousness and commitment:** This happens on both the sides of the students/users and the librarians/management of the academic libraries. The students/users refuse and reject to show up for library user education program and tutorials in the belief they can do without any library user education especially in this era of handy electronic devices. Also, the authorities may be unwilling to provide the required support for library user education for the library. Thus the academic librarians who are the givers of library user education get demoralized.
2. **Large student/users population/Lack of facilities:** The number of the students/users has been on the increase, against existing facilities. They include lack of like large classroom halls or auditorium, seats, loud speakers etc. for the library user education class program. The environmental conduciveness generally required to propagate library user education in academic libraries are abysmally inadequate and unfriendly. The students/users of the academic libraries as it stands require all the above stated equipment and even more, which are not available or quite inadequate.
3. **Inadequate Time/Low Credit Unit Allocation:** Another factor affecting library user education is that of inadequate time/credit unit allocated for it. Students/users will be more serious and responsive to library user education if the one credit unit that has been the case is increased. Also, the allocated time period for library user education is short and inadequate. Cognizance should be taken of the fact that library user education in academic libraries is taught using both tutorial and practical approaches. The classroom is usually congested with overwhelming crowd of the students' population.
4. **Poor Funding:** No program or project strives without proper funding. Obviously there is inadequate or absolute no funds allocated to run library user education programs adequately any more. Library user education is broad and holistic, and should not be seen as a simple



program to be handled carelessly. It requires planning, and adequate funds should be mapped out extensively. Solution to these inhibiting factors to library user education programs in academic libraries lies on adequately addressing the stated militating problems with passion and applying for serious financial support to make library user education programs in academic libraries worthwhile. All stakeholders individually and collectively should be involved.

### **Conclusion**

Library users (students, lecturers and others), who are unequipped with good library user education lack the capacity to utilize available academic library or school learning materials resources. Also, in situations of independent work or study, the student/user will be lost and floating without any direction. This invariably results in waste of time and achieving little or nothing. Thus, the ability to effectively use library materials is a function of the general library user education given to the student/user early enough. Students/users that were attentive to instructions during library user education programs, are permanently equipped with unflinching compass to navigate the big and deep sea of knowledge and information in the academic sea which the academic library represent. In all academic libraries generally, library user education is a dynamic tool and means for changing students/users' behaviors towards utilization of academic library resources. There is every need for library user education in academic libraries because, for students to engage and carry out independent studies, they should be acquainted and equipped with that ability. It is with it and by it that the students/users be able to learn on their own.

### **Recommendations**

1. There should be adequate budget provisions for regular and/or periodic library user education programs in the academic libraries.
2. Academic library staffers should be poised and ready to guide and give user education to library users especially the one-on-one approach and pattern.
3. Adequate funds should always be reserved for the up keep (i.e. general development) of the library internal and external environment for the required conduciveness for reading, studies and research which the library stands and is equipped for.

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