User Education: An Essential Tool for Using Library Materials

Mshelia, H. S.
Durman, G. B.

ABSTRACT

Library User Education (also called instruction), teaches the library user how to make the most effective and efficient use of library materials/resources. User Education encompasses all activities undertaken to help students become efficient users of information. That is knowing how to identify the information need. This work discusses the significance of user education, as user education on its part, aims at changing an individual behaviour and experience towards the use of library and other information resources. It also discusses the benefits and factors that militates against full implementation of under education. User education can only be successfully carried out if there is cooperation between library officers and other key-stockholders of the library. The work conclusively recommends that user education should form a part of the school curriculum.
Keywords: User Education, Library materials, library, use guidelines

INTRODUCTION

Library User Education can be defined as a planned process and technique that is aimed at equipping library users with the basic skills to enable them optimally use resources available in a given library. It is a form of education for library users that exposes to them the correct ways of using the library for optimum result. This instructional programme could also be referred to as User Education, Library Skills, Library Instruction and Information Literacy. All these terms refer to the same concept of making library patrons learn how to make effective and efficient use of Library resources through acquisition of skills in identification, location, retrieval and exploitation of information. Feather and Sturges (1997) define user education as "a comprehensive service and process of making the user self-reliant in locating/sorting and repackaging information". Mews (1992) defines user education as "instruction given to readers to help them make the best use of library resources". Thus, both definitions stated above are putting emphasis on user education skills and knowledge in order to make the best use of library materials and resources. Aina (2004) states that the library provides user education in order to equip a user with enough knowledge on the use of library. This will enable the user to use the library resources effectively and efficiently. This is because, the library should be considered in its broad perspective. Education is a process of turning information into knowledge and skill. Education also implies the development of transferable knowledge and capabilities. It is from this point of view that Boyer (1987) observes that "an educated person is one who makes connections disciplines and ultimately relates what he or she has learned effectively

Mshelia, H. S. and Durman, G. B. are Lecturers in the Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria. E-mail: hashimabdullahi46@yahoo.com

to life situations. Agu (2006) says that the objective in giving user education/instruction/ orientation is to help the user make the best use of the overall library resources. Eder and Lawa (1996) posit that "there is need for user education programme in our institutions of learning because most institution libraries in Nigeria face the problem of information explosion as well as profuse scholarly publications, coupled with the fact that the average library users are desirous of retrieving information materials accurately within the shortest period of time. They further assert that one of the ways of stimulating the active use of books and other materials stored in our higher institution libraries is by teaching the library user how effective they can use the library, especially the fresh students. The process could be so complex that an average user may not easily comprehend with the advent of information technology. This has penetrated almost all the activities of many libraries. It is important to explain in details the workings of a library to a new user in detail. The ultimate objective is to enable the users exploit the resources of a library to the fullest, through user education. The user will be able to get any information he/she desires as well as develop the skills to use resources of the library independently. However, the more serious user requires skills and knowledge for more in-depth use of the library resources. A well-planned and executed programme of user education provides these skills and knowledge. This programme will impart skills and knowledge required to use library catalogues, to be able to locate books, pamphlets as well as use standard bibliographic references.

University of Philippines Diliman www.mainlib.upd.edu.ph/rules-use-resources points that the use of library resources shall contain such conditions as: the general reference books; theses, dissertations, and periodicals¸ reserve books, reserved books and circulation. MacOdrum Library https://library.carleton.ca/library states the following forbidden acts in the use of the Library materials:

a)   Removal of material without proper consultation of the stated procedures.
b)   Damage or mutilation of the library materials.
c)   Conciously misplacing of the library materials.
d)   Underlining or marking the materials, and
e)   The use of post –it notes, adhesives tapes, or paper clips on library materials.

Anaheim www.anaheil.net/1229/Using-Library-Materials Lost or Damage of materials attracted replacement cost of the same items and other non refundable processing fees.

Behaviours in the Library: Cambridge University (2012) states desirable user behaviours which include:

i.   Maintaining of absolute silence,
ii.   Reader Cards must be forwarded or can duly check by the assigned staff
iii.   Very portable devices as computer or mobile phones are allow in the library provided that they are silent when in use.
iv.   Distractive materials to readers are not allowed.
v.   Personal effects are to be kept outside in an assigned place
vi.   The library has right to check any object brought into the library buildings
vii.   Smoking is not allowed within any part of the library premises.

viii.   Water may be taken provided that it is well covered and

ix.   Staff of the library can stop any action which can affect the safety, well-being or security of the either readers of the staff of the library.

Significance of User Education

Academic libraries recognizes students need to be able to use and apply information to be successful, and as such, the academic libraries should make their users aware of the resources and services that are offered, where to find them and how to exploit what is available. To understand the significance of user education, its publication coupled with the fact that average library users are desirous of retrieving information materials accurately within the shortest period of time. Ury (1991) observes that "user education provides a useful structured access to select high information resources within a given subject area in continuing education and professional development". According to Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Handbook (2004), Chicago, explains that,

> *User education forms the basis for life-long learning which is common to all disciplines, to all learning enlightenments and to all levels of education. It also enables learners to master content and extend their investigations and become self-desired and assume greater control over their own learning.*

Tie Fel (1995) refers to the Boyer's report (1987) stressing that the college library must be viewed as a vital part of the undergraduate experience; students should be given biographic instructions and be encouraged to spend at least much time in the library, seeing its wide range of resources as they spend in class. Mugyabus (1999) believes that "user education on its part, aims at changing the individuals behaviour and experience towards the use of library and other information resources. Evere (1992) remarks that, it makes students to be aware of information resources available in the libraries. Clarke (1999) opines that for users to be aware of, and to exploit effectively the resources, their need, must be complete in library user skills. Such exercises enable the librarian to orient library clientele to the physical facilities, the services and the various professional personnel of the library. The learning experience here will enable library patrons to conveniently locate all the facilities of the library with ease, "user education would therefore, make library users to be independent and efficient in their search for materials to satisfy their information needs". As an inspirational and information link between the "book" and the users, it is essential for a new user desirable for an experienced one and prepares the user for self-evaluation. Furthermore, user education helps the user to be aware of reference tools, in the library especially in this era of information and communication technology (ICT), which are wonderful instruments of high value that patrons in academic environment could find very useful in their research and current awareness for teaching aids, the awareness, exploitation profiles and document profiles and formulating research expression are also enhanced. User orientation, according to Udoumoh (2005), includes tours, guides, aides and notice; why library instructions include literature and skills. Instructions involve instructions of research student and faculty to the location of essential area of resources, basic elements of using library and services provided by the library. On the other hand,

library instruction is said to be an umbrella term incorporating study skills, learning skills, communication skills as well as library skills. These skills and knowledge are provided by a well-planned and executed programme, that is what user is all about.

Benefits of User Education

User education has the capability to provide the user with the following:
i.   It makes the user master the skills and be competent in library use.
ii.   User education exposes the user to the organization structure of the library resources thus, enhancing effective use of the library.
iii.   It stimulates better interest in the use of the library.
iv.   It helps to save time of the user and the librarian, therefore, fulfilling one of the five laws of Ranganathan's service on library services.
v.   User education helps reduce the friction that always arises between the user and library staff, often time leading to communication breakdown.
vi.   It enables the user depend less on the library or library staff, since he has become educated and independent in the use of library resources.
vii.   User education encourages independent research.
viii.   It enables the users to be introduced to the rules and regulations governing the conduct of activities in the library. Above all, the librarian is allowed time to concentrate on technical service delivery.

These benefits confirm the assertion of Edoka (2000), that orientation to the library is the introduction of students and faculty to the library, to location of essential areas of resources, basic elements of using the library and services provided by the library.

Problems Militating Against Full Implementation of User Education

User education can only be successfully carried out if there is cooperation between the library and other key stakeholders. These problems include:
a)   Students from some schools and departments do not participate in user education programmes in Polytechnics.
b)   Inability to make user education credit earning course in the Polytechnics.
c)   Lack of maintaining standard curriculum for user education in all institutions of higher learning.
        The problems listed above requires serious attention on the part of our education planners, if the full role of our libraries is to be appreciated and its resources effectively utilized. This therefore underscores the importance of the library as a major organ for information and knowledge dissemination complementing and supplementing the teacher and research activities in any institution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

User education is one of the important services of the library each year for new entrances, it is designed to equip user with the information skills that will enable them to make efficient

use of library resources and services. Although user education is developing day-by-day, yet certain issues are yet to be resolved to enable its full appreciation and implementation. These grey area attitudes of users towards the library as a resort; the attitude of the departments towards the programme; assessment of needs of the library users in our institution libraries.

i. User education should be made credit-earning course in tertiary institutions.

ii. User education should form a part of the school curriculum.

iii. All professional librarians should be involved in the user education programme.

iv. The tertiary institution librarians and library staff should map out strategies for user education for the incoming students before the commencement of a new academic year.

REFERENCES

ACRL (2004). *Competency Standard for Higher Education.* Chicago: America Library Association, Information Literacy.

Agu, P. C. (2006). *User and Services of Academic Libraries.* In Exere F. C. (ed.) *Administration of Academic Libraries: A Book of Reading.* Enugu: Uco-Academic Publishers 91 – 97p.

Aina, L. O. (2004). *Library and Information Science Text for Africa.* Ibadan: Third World Information Services Ltd.

Boyer, E. L. (1987). *College: the Undergraduate Experience in America.* New York: Harper and Row.

Clarke, S. O. (1999). *Fundamentals of Library Sciences.* Lagos: Functions Publishing Company.

Chopra, H. R. (2001). User Education: Training the Libraries to use New Technologies in Developing Countries. Paper Presented at the 67th IFLA Council and General Conference on August 16, 25: 1 – 5.

Edoka, B. E. (2000). *Introduction to Library Science.* Onitsha: Palma Publishing Links Company.

Edem, U. S. and **Lawal, O. O.** (1996). Towards Improved User Education Programme in Nigerian University Libraries. *African Journal of Library, Arrives and Information Science,* 6(1) 31-36.

Ekere, F. C. (1992). The Role of Polytechnic Libraries in Institution Development. In Report of Proceedings of the First Workshop on Effective Management of Polytechnic Libraries Resources for Polytechnic Libraries in Nigeria, NBTE: 45 – 48.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (1989). *National Policy on Education.* Lagos: NERD, p. 28.

Feather, J. and **Sturges, P.** (1997). *International Encyclopedia of Library Science.* Routhedge.

Mews, H. C. (1992). *Reader Instruction Colleges and Universities: An Introductory Handbook.* London: Bindley.

Mugyabuso, J. F. L. (1999). User Education and Information Skills: A Need for a Systematic Programme in African University Libraries. *Journal Library Archival and Information Science*, 9 (20), 129-141.

University of Minnesota (Nd). Libraries: Permissions to use Library Materials. Available online at https://ww.lib.umn.edu/...libpermission. Date accessed 23rd November 2015

Tiefel, V. (1995). Library User Education: Examine its Past Projecting its Future. *Library Trends,* 44(2), 18-38.

Ury, C. J. (1996). Prepping for College School Journal, Vol. 42(1):48.

Udoumoh, C. N. (2005). Information user Education: Sine Qua non for Effective Utilization of Information Resources in Academic Libraries. *Journal of Research and Development in Education,* 3(1), 29-34.

www.anaheil.net/1229/Using-Library-Materials, Using Library Materials/Anaheim, CA – Official Website. Anaheim, Read about library cards, loan periods, renewals, fees and loss of damaged materials. Date accessed 23rd November 2015.

www.mainlib.upd.edu.ph/rules-use-resources, Use of Library Resources/University Library, University of Philippine. Date accessed 23rd November 2015.

Using the Library – Rules – Cambridge University Library *www.lib.cam.ac.uk/usingthelibrary/ rules.html*, date accessed 23rd November 2015.

https://library.carleton.ca/library Use of Library Materials/MacOdrum Library, date accessed 23rd November 2015.