

Professional assistance to users of information retrieval tools at the national library of Nigeria

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Benjamin U. Ugwoke*University of Nigeria, Enugu*

Abstract

The study investigated the need for professional assistance to users of information retrieval tools at the National Library of Nigeria, Enugu branch. A total of 38 (thirty-eight) users of the library were randomly selected and used for the study. It was found that most of the respondents 18(47.3%) consulted the card catalogue provided by the librarians to make location and use of information easy. This was followed by 10(26.3%) of them who made use of online databases. While 9(23.6%) of the respondents always made use of the catalogue, 11(28.9%) others sometimes did so. It was also noted that most of the respondents 27(71%) needed the help of the librarians in making effective use of the card catalogue. 13(34.2%) of the respondents agreed they needed the help of the librarians in making use of the index to journal articles and the online databases. The major problems identified in the study were the out-datedness of some of the resources 24(63.1%), lack of Internet services 24(63.1%) and lack of knowledge of how to use the card catalogue.

Keywords: Assistance, users, information, national libraries, retrieval tools, catalogue

Introduction

“I need information on development psychology”.

“Go to the catalogue”

“It will waste my time”

“It will not waste your time”

“Teach me how to use the catalogue” - (Discussion between a researcher and a librarian)

According to Olowonefa and Musa (2011), information is knowledge communicated or received in relation to a given subject. It is a class of events and it occurs because of a purpose (Agboola, 2010). It is used in settling a state of uncertainty (Aina, 2004). In every enlightened society, information is

organized in libraries on diverse subjects and it is used for the settlement of states of uncertainty, and for the purpose of development.

Ochogwu (2007) mentioned that a library is a professionally organized collection of

graphic and non-graphic materials for exploitation. The aim of establishing libraries and other information organizations in modern societies is to meet information needs of different user communities (Ochogwu, 2010).

The statements enclosed in quotation marks in the first paragraph formed a discussion between a librarian and a postgraduate student. It took place at the National Library of Nigeria Enugu Branch at the time the author visited the librarian. It shows the level librarians in the country are expected to assist users of libraries in finding information for use in solving their diverse problems. Ononogbo (1994) observed that users of libraries would continue to believe that their last hope would be to the libraries to provide them the necessary materials for their scholarship. Although many leaders in Nigeria overlook their roles in developing libraries in the country, what is clear is that effective teaching, learning, and research cannot be done without the patronage of available library and information services. Availability and use of retrieval tools in libraries encourage teaching, learning and research (Ugwuanyi and Okwor 2010). They facilitate information sourcing in libraries.

The postgraduate student in the introduction section of this paper did not know how to make use of the catalogue in sourcing information to meet his needs. However, he recognized the role of the library in his venture. The librarian had assumed her clientele should have been able to attend to his needs through the use of her conspicuously displayed catalogue. It was

observed that the professional and the non-professional elites were at parallel positions.

There was a need for professional assistance in order to bridge the gap between the views of the two personalities. The profession we are in is service – oriented (Adomi & Famola, 2012). There is no way we can separate ourselves from the people who need our attention and service.

It is recognized that availability of required information is important for effective teaching, learning, and research. Knowledge of the operation of the information retrieval tools is, however, necessary in effective library and information services. The catalogues, indexes, abstracts, online databases and the Internet are for use by both the staff and library users in sourcing information to meet needs. The problem is to what extent can the National Library users make use of the available information retrieval tools in meeting their needs?

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain the types of information retrieval tools available in the National Library of Nigeria, Enugu Branch.
2. To find out the extent to which the users of the library can make use of the retrieval tools in sourcing information unaided.
3. To identify problems associated with the location of information in the library.

Background information

The National Library of Nigeria was established among other things to provide such services as in the opinion of the Board are usually provided by national libraries of high standing, assemble, maintain and extend a collection of books, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, map, musical scores, films and recordings and other such matter as the Board considers appropriate for a library of the highest standing, establish and maintain a branch of the National Library in each state and make the facilities of the National Library available to members of the public and others on proper terms (Omolayole, 2003 cited in Adomi & Famola, 2012).

The branches of the library including the one at Enugu have as their statutory functions the issuance of International Standard Book Number (ISBN), and International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) to publishers of books and periodicals, respectively. Apart from performing these functions, the branch of the National Library at Enugu, Nigeria encourages learning and research through its services. It has the reference, serials and the administrative sections. Its card catalogue as an information retrieval tool is conspicuously displayed in the reference section.

Literature review

Professional assistance to information users in libraries involves doing such things as checking the catalogues, indexes for relevant information. It entails checking abstracts, bibliographies and the Internet for relevant information. According to Moahi (2002), the

Internet, Online Public Access catalogues and the World Wide Web (WWW) are available to help researchers. Anderson and Gesin (2016) are of the view that libraries should make use of available information technologies to render services and instruction to users of information at various places and at different times. It is also their belief that librarians should be involved in teaching information literacy.

Users of many libraries in Nigeria are often referred to the card catalogues as common information retrieval tools. However, these users have right to ask for our help on how to make use of these retrieval tools. This is necessary even as the catalogue stands as an index to the library's collection (Usoro and Usanga, 2011).

The Online Public catalogues (OPACs) are very useful in sourcing information because they enable the users to search for information, records of borrowed resources and reserve materials (Onwuchekwa and Jegede, 2011). According to Oduwole and Ikhizama (2007), research is important for the growth and development of any profession. Thus, researchers move to libraries and information centers in search of knowledge for use in solving existing developmental problems.

There are electronic books, electronic journals, directories, library catalogues, dictionaries and databases on the Internet to facilitate information provision (Amen, 2007). Services of information professionals are needed to link users with the information they need through a guide on how to make

use of the keys to the locations of materials and information in libraries.

In the studies conducted by Odusanya (2001) and Adedibu (2007) on the use of catalogues by students for the purpose of locating information in Nigerian university libraries, it was found that majority of the students recognized the roles of the catalogues in quick location and use of information. In another study by Oni (2011), it was found that most of the undergraduates claimed they did not have the required knowledge of sourcing information through the use of the catalogues. Without the necessary knowledge, the students will not be able to make effective use of the catalogues in locating information in libraries.

In another study conducted by Usoro and Usanga (2011), on the use of the card catalogues in sourcing information in libraries, it was found that majority of the respondents often used them. If the catalogues are difficult to use as a result of ignorance of the procedure, library users are likely to avoid them. They will call these catalogues barriers to information retrieval (Okoro & Mbagwu, 2008).

According to Amen (2007), the National Library of Nigeria provides user education during which the students from different institutions are given library orientation. However, Eze (2004) was of the view that students need more than library orientation. He emphasized there should be lectures for the students on a shelving system, indexes, different sources of information and charging methods. Commenting on online

information library, Gbaje (2007) pointed out that library users often make use of resources effectively through directed and structured instructional activities. Ogbonyomi (2010) on the other hand, observed that indexes and abstracts are important access points to the primary literature. They help library users have easy access to current and retrospective information on a given subject. Students and indeed other library users need to be taught how to make use of abstracts and indexes to journal and newspaper articles. Knowledge of how to source information through the Internet is equally necessary to be communicated to the users.

Amen (2007) is also of the view that the major challenges facing the services of National Library of Nigeria include the presence of out dated books, and the epileptic Internet services arising from frequent electricity power failure. Ugwoke, Asogwa (2007), Okoro and Mbagwu (2008) pointed out that improper filing of the catalogue cards can lead to frustration of library users.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all researchers who made use of the available information retrieval tools in the library. However, fifty (50) copies of the questionnaire were produced and shared with the researchers on each of the working days in the month of August 2016 between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm when the library was opened for its services. 38 (76%) copies of the questionnaire were properly completed and returned. While the researcher

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participated in giving and receiving completed the questionnaire on some of the days, he also made use of the staff of the library in sharing and receiving copies of the

questionnaire given out to users of the library for completion. Tables, frequencies, and percentages were used in analyzing data collected for the study.

Findings and discussion

Table 1: demographic information of the respondents

Category of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Males	27	71
Females	11	28.9
Total	38	99.9

Table 1 showed that there were 38 respondents comprising 27 (71%) males and

11 (28.9%) females who were used for the study.

Table 2: Number of respondents who consult information retrieval tools in the library

Information retrieval tool	Frequency	Percentage
The card catalogue	18	47.3
Index to journal articles	7	18.4
Index to newspaper articles	4	10.5
Abstracts of journal articles	3	7.8
Online databases	10	26.3

A question was asked on the use of each of the above-stated retrieval tools in table 2. 18 of the respondents (47.3%) pointed out that they used the card catalogue 7(18.4%) used index to journal articles, 4(10.5%) made use

of index to newspaper articles, 3(7.8%) of them used abstracts of journal articles and 10(26.3%) of them made use of online databases.

Table 3: The frequency of consulting the information retrieval tools without the help of librarians

Information retrieval tool	Frequency	Number	Percentage
1. The card catalogue	(a) Always	9	23.6
	(b) Sometimes	11	28.9
	(c) Never	8	21
2. Index to journal articles	(a) Always	4	10.5
	(b) Sometimes	5	13.1
	(c) Never	4	10.5
3. Index to newspaper articles	(a) Always	5	13.1

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	(b) Sometimes	3	7.8
	(c) Never	3	7.8
4. Abstracts of journal articles	(a) Always	3	7.8
	(b) Sometimes	7	18.4
	(c) Never	7	18.4
5. Online databases	(a) Always	8	21
	(b) Sometimes	4	10.5
	(c) Never	7	18.4

Table 3 was on a question which centered on how frequency they made use of the information retrieval tools without the help of the librarians. 9(23.6%) of the respondents used the card catalogue, 11(28.9%) opens sometimes did likewise, but 8(21%) of the never used the card

catalogue. In fact, from this table 3, one can deduce that the respondents did not bother much about consulting the available information retrieval tools as the starting points for information sourcing in the library. This could have arisen for ignorance of both their values and how to use them.

Table 4: Help need of the respondents in the use of the information retrieval tools

Information Retrieval Tool	Frequency	Percentage
The card catalogue	27	71
Index to journal articles	13	34.2
Index to newspaper articles	8	21
Online databases	13	34.2

In table 4, the respondents where asked to indicate each of the information retrieval tools they needed the help of the librarians. 27(71%) of them needed the help of the librarians on how to make effective use of the card catalogue in locating information

from the library. 13(34.2%) need the help of the librarians on the use of the index to the journal articles and online databases, while 8(21%) needed the help of the librarians on the use of the index to the newspaper articles, and journal abstracts.

Table 5: Problems encountered in locating information in the library

S/No	Problem	Frequency	Percentage
a.	You do not know how to make use of the card catalogue	16	42.1
b.	Difficult in linking information from the catalogue with positions of the resources on the shelves.	14	36.8
c.	No knowledge of how to use the index to newspaper articles.	10	26.3
d.	Always need the help of the librarians	6	15.8
e.	Some books are not at their proper positions on the shelves.	13	10.3

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f.	Some of the books are out-dated	24	63.1
g.	Journals of your subject area are few.	16	42.1
h.	Journals in your subject area are scattered.	8	21.
i.	Index to newspaper articles is not easy to use.	9	23.6
j.	Bound volumes of available newspapers are not where their index is kept.	5	13.1
k.	Internet services not always available	24	63.1

It can be inferred from table 5 that the major problems encountered by the respondents were the availability of some out-dated books 24(63.1%), and unsatisfactory Internet services 24(63.1%). Other highlighted problems were lack of knowledge of how to make use of the card catalogue – 16(42.1%), insufficient journals in some important subject areas, 16(42.1%), and difficulty in linking information obtained from the card catalogue with the positions of resources on the shelves, 14(36.8%).

The need of information makes researchers visit libraries and information centers. They know that information is produced and packaged in various formats to meet information needs of members of the user community (Ochogwu, 2007).

From table 1, we can see that majority of the respondents were males. It shows us that men are still at the forefront of finding, solutions to societal problems through libraries and information centers. The findings in tables 2 and 3 show that the card catalogue was the highest used of all the available information retrieval tools in the library.

However, it was not regularly consulted by the majority of the respondents. Lack of

knowledge of how to make effective use of this important tool can make users of the library move straight to the shelves while looking for information without firm checking the catalogue. The card catalogue and online databases have been noted in the study as recognized information retrieval tools for accessing local and external resources.

The study has also shown that majority of the respondents need to be taught how to make effective use of the card catalogue in sourcing their information. According to Eze (2004), the teaching should be more than what is obtainable through library orientation. It might take the form of one-or-two-day workshops on the role of information and information sourcing in libraries. It will take care of the problems of not knowing how to use the catalogue and indexes in locating available useful information. Up-to-date in information delivery services of the library as we can see from table 5, requires serious attention of the management and the government. Maintenance of constant Internet services and provision of an adequate number of new books and journals require the regular provision of a reasonable amount of money by the government-in-charge of the library.

Conclusion and recommendations

Researchers have an interest in making use of the library, but they lack knowledge of how to make effective use of the information retrieval tools. Thus, they need professional assistance of the librarians in making use of the tools. They also need new information resources for research in their subject areas. To this end the following recommendations could suffice:

1. More new books and journals should be provided for the users.
2. The librarians should organize workshops for their clientele on the use of the information retrieval tools.
3. All the existing indexes and abstracts should be made known to the researchers.
4. There should be an improvement on the library's ventilation.
5. Provision of a functional standby power generating plant will motivate researchers to use the library.
6. Users of the library will appreciate the provision of effective Internet services.

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About the author:

Dr. Benjamin U. Ugwoke is with the medical library, college of medicine, university of Nigeria Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu, Nigeria. He can be reached via benugwoke@yahoo.com.