

## **A Survey of User Education Program for Distance Learners in Three Selected Universities in Ogun State**

by  
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### **Abstract**

This study investigates user education programme for distance learners in three selected university libraries. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Data was collected through questionnaire. A sample of 630 respondents was selected randomly from a study population of 2500 distance learners. From the number of questionnaire distributed about 604 were retrieved and 590 were found useable given a response rate of 93.7%. The findings revealed that the distance learners in the universities studied need library user education to achieve better and maximum academic result and so it should be conducted by all academic libraries. Majority of those who indicated that user education was carried out by their libraries concluded that it impacted positively on their retrieval ability. Therefore, the study recommends that user education should be upgraded into information literacy and be integrated into the curriculum so as to boost their confidence in the judicious use of library information resources which is one of the key to improve students' learning skill and academic performance. It should as well be made compulsory for all students.

### **Introduction:**

According to Edem and Lawal (1996) user education has to do with empowering the students to be able to obtain relevant information using all resources and information materials available in the library without rigor. Ibeneme (2005) refers to it as a kind of orientation given to the learner so as to acquire relevant skills and training necessary for independent use of library. Lwehabura (1999) viewed user education as an attempt to change individual behavior and experience towards the use of library and other information sources. Eadie in Ibeneme (2005) described user education as an enabler which means that it empowers students to be able to use library resources and services independently. Looking at all these definitions of user education, it can easily be concluded that user education is a kind of knowledge that is instilled in the learners so that they can acquire the necessary skills needed for exploiting the resources of the library.

Different writers/ researchers refer to library user education differently such as "library orientation", "library use instruction", "bibliographic instruction", "readers instruction", "information literacy" and "library user education." Whatever name that is given to it, the fact remains that library user education is much more than library orientation, Lwehabura (1999). Library orientation usually takes one or two days to familiarize fresh students with the library. Its aim is to create awareness on the resources and services usually given by the library so that students will know how to obtain and borrow relevant texts from the library. To put it succinctly, user education is comprehensive, it is much more than library orientation. In line with this assertion, it can be concluded that user education comprises of bibliographic instruction, library use instruction, "daily efforts by librarians" as well as library orientation programme. Students not only need knowledge on how

to obtain information they as well require knowledge on how to identify, synthesize and retrieve information from different sources available. Stevenson (1997) in Bello (2003) perceived library user education to be an important aspect of the educational process. This is so, because it is relevance in preparing students for continuing education and self development. In developed countries, user education is accorded the right priority to the extent of having it integrated into online services for distance learners whereas, in developing countries, many universities pay lip service to library user education. This means it has not been given the necessary attention it deserves.

### **Historical Background of Selected Universities and their libraries.**

The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta Ogun State was established in January, 1988. The University is located at Alabata in Abeokuta. The library has been functioning since the inception of the university. The external degree program of the institution is being run by the Institute of Human Resources and Development Program. The base for the programme is in Mawuko village, Abeokuta. Olabisi Onabanjo University formerly Ogun State University was founded in the year 1982. The university library was formerly opened to users on 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1984. The library was established to serve the entire staff and students' population and the University community where it is located. The university runs a multi campus system with each college having its own library. The central library is based in Ago-Iwoye. The objective of the library is the provision of information resources and materials to meet the requirements of staff and students and to assist the university in its own development. The external degree program in the university is being run by the Centre for Sandwich Program (CESAP).

Tai Solarin University of education is owned by Ogun state government. It is located in Ijagun via ijobu ode.

TASUED is a specialized university. It offers courses in the sciences arts, social sciences, technology, agriculture and vocational education. Its external degree programme is being run at Igbaba in Ijebu ode.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The importance of user education programme in promoting access to information as well as enabling library and information centres to achieve their specified objectives of making information available to the clientele cannot be over emphasized. In spite of its numerous advantages, user education seems to be unpopular in most tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria especially among the distance learners. The changing information environment necessitate the need for libraries to provide all users irrespective of their programme - part/full time with appropriate skills on how to access sources of information effectively. This study therefore seeks to find out the extent to which user education programme is being conducted in some selected universities and its impact on meeting their information needs for scholarly work and self development.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to determine the impact of users' education on the learner's ability to use the library and its consequent effect on retrieval capability of the student. Other subsidiary objectives are as follows:

1. To find out if distance learners are given user education by their institution's academic library.
2. To determine how user education is conducted in each institution.
3. To ascertain if users need user education from the library.
4. To ascertain whether electronic information retrieval skill is incorporated into user's education for distance learners
5. To determine if user education has impact on the ability of students to retrieve information.

### **Literature Review:**

Information has become one of the nation's greatest economic resource. It can be sold, traded or even exchanged in economic terms and can as well be treated as a product or commodity or service. To buttress this, Opeke (2000) opined that information has attained a widespread acceptance as essential feature of production, consumption and exchange in recent times. Access to information remains essential to librarians and information workers whose main asset is information. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) regarded library as social institution established for the purpose of conserving knowledge, preserving human cultural heritage, providing information, undergirding and underpinning

education and research. User education could be regarded as a form of teaching and its overall effect is a thing that needed to be tested from time to time, may be in form of examination, but it is necessary to test the effort from students point of view to provide feedback that can allow for improvement when and where necessary Abiolu (2010). In his own contribution Prytherich (1990) believed that user education is programme of information provided by librarians to users to enable them make more efficient and independent use of the library stock and services.

Distance Education is an education that takes place independent of the location of an institution. Mabawonku (2004) referred to it as a kind of "formalized learning" received by students outside the campus with minimal physical contact with their teachers. Akinsola (2005) referred to distance education as formal and informal learning experiences conducted at a distance. Most universities offering distance learning christened it in different ways such as "sandwich", "distance learning", "External degree", "Part-Time degree" 'CESAP' as well as 'correspondence program'. Distance education can as well be seen as the organization and delivery of instructions to learners, who do not have on-site physical, close and immediate interactions with their teachers, (Umoru Onuka in Sote and Ajise (2010) Distance learners can be categorized into two, comprising of:

- i. Mostly youths who could not secure admission into the university due to one reason or the other and
- ii. adult learners who did not have opportunity for higher education at a stage in their life but are still interested in the pursuit of knowledge also to actualize their dreams of possessing higher educational qualifications.

This categorization was buttressed by Sote and Ajise (2010) who stressed that the inability of Nigeria's Conventional University and other forms of formal education to absorb all those seeking university admission in Nigeria gave birth to Open Distance Learning education in the country. So also, Qakisa – Makoe (2005) identified distance education as a means of providing access to education and training for those who lives in remote areas or those who are on full time employment. Whichever way it is provided, government owed it as responsibility to provide equitable access to higher education for the citizenry.

### **User Education to Distance Learners**

The rate at which information is being published is quite astronomical. Hence, it has been identified as a herculean task to retrieve information from the library without guidance from the librarians. Any educational approach that ignores the role of the library in the learning process provides a narrow and stereotype experience for learners.

Such a learning experience will fail to encourage research inquiry and jettisoned the development of knowledge, (Ajayi in Nweze 2010.) Distance learners generally are encumbered with other responsibilities apart from their studies, resulting in their not having sufficient time at their disposal to search for information. Therefore, if they are to make judicious use of their time when searching for information they need the rudiment of searching both the library catalogue and the online catalogue. In order to do so, library user education will help them to maximize their time whenever they are in need of research based information, having been equipped with adequate knowledge and tools to search for information. Osagie in Nweze (2010), gave reasons why user education is necessary for library users as thus: it promotes accessibility to resources and services in the face of astronomical growth in published literature. Lack of user education in academic library will amount to wastage of human and material resources expended on the acquisition of both print and electronic media. Above all, the paradigm shift in educational methodology has necessitated the need for user education since education for self development is being emphasised and this is realisable through participatory learning. This assertion was upheld by Olat & Lawal (1996) when they argued that freshmen in Nigerian universities do not have any background on Library and its usage thus making it a herculean task for them whenever they need to retrieve information from the library. In his own view, Lwehabura (1999), was of opinion that many students in African universities at various level of education are not familiar with a variety of information sources available within and outside the library. Summer (2006) reported that a survey conducted in America revealed that distance learners need more literature search than on-campus learners and that a faculty member complaint of having to spend so much time teaching distance learners on how to access databases on-line. This is to show that user education is highly relevant to the needs and aspiration of students generally.

Using information and communication technology for information retrievals requires students to be ICT compliant so that they will be able to exploit the resources globally. However, it has been noted that even

the internet is full of garbage. This means that a learner must be able to use various strategies to retrieve needed information or be able to sift out the information needed from the mass of inconsequential. Also, Lwehabura (1999) stated the fact that the paradigm shift in the philosophy of education has made education to become learner centered. Education today is expected to develop critical thinking and independent learning among students. This boils down to the fact that students must learn to do it by themselves through seminars, assignments, projects and long essay. The achievement of this requires effective use of the library which can only be premised on effective and efficient user education. Use of library is an important aspect of lifelong education. The way and manner user education is being handled in our various universities leaves much to be desired. User education should comprise of bibliographic instruction, library orientation and information literacy. It should be integrated into the curriculum so as to achieve maximum result. A comprehensive library user education calls for the formation of better collaboration among faculties and the library. It is only then that its effect will become highly noticeable in the academic achievement of students.

#### **Methodology:**

The study adopted a survey research method. A self-designed questionnaire was used in collecting data from the students. The study was carried out in three selected institutions namely; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Federal university of Agriculture Abeokuta and Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-ode. A sample of 630 respondents was selected from about 2500 population respectively through random sampling. A total of 630 questionnaire were distributed out of which 604 copies were retrieved while 590 questionnaires were found usable giving a response rate of 93.7%. Descriptive statistics was used in analyzing the data collected. This involved the use of tables, frequencies and percentages.

#### **Data Analysis:**

A total of 248 of the respondents were male while 342 were females. The age range of the respondents fall between 16-35 years.

**Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate**

Library	Questionnaire Distributed	No Retrieved	No Found Useable	Response Rate
TASUED	210	200	196	93.4
FUNNAB	200	194	190	95.
OOU	220	210	204	97.2
TOTAL	630	604	590	93.7

**Table 2: Population of Study**

Institutions	Sex	Frequency	Percentage
TASUED	Male	95	48.5
	Female	101	51.5
	Total	196	100
FUNAAB	Male	80	42.1
	Female	110	57.9
	Total	190	100
OOU	Male	99	48.5
	Female	105	51.5
	Total	204	100

**Table 3. Availability of User Education**

Institutions library.	Availability		Not available	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
TASUED	158	80.6	38	19.4
FUNAAB	160	84.2	30	15.8
OOU	14	6.9	190	93.1

**Table 4. Methods of conducting User education.**

METHODS	TASUED		FUNAAB		OOU	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
One day orientation	150	76.5	70	36.8	10	4.9
Two days orientation	40	20.4	120	63.2	-	-
Course earning unit	-	-	-	-	-	-
Part of GNS	-	-	-	-	30	14.7
No library user education	06	3.1	-	-	164	80.4
Total	196	100	190	100	204	100

A total of 630 questionnaires were distributed to respondents out of which 604 were retrieved and 590 considered useable. Table 2 showed that 274 respondents were males while 316 were female.

Out of the three Universities surveyed it is only at FUNAAB that user education was given to external degree students with 84.2% percent response. At OOU the respondents indicated that they were not given user education by the library likewise at TASUED. This is a

reflection that user education is not given a pride of place in new intake orientation in the institutions.

Table 4 indicated that library education in these institutions is mostly conducted through one day and two days orientation respectively while majority of the respondents at OOU (80.4) indicated that there was no library user education given to the distance learning students.

Table 5: Need for User Education in Distance Learning.

Institutions	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Neutral	%
TASUED	126	64.3	30	15.3	40	20.4
FUNAAB	123	64.8	40	21.1	27	14.2
OOU	133	65.2	30	14.7	41	20.1

Table 6: Incorporation of ICT into User Education for DLS.

Institution	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Neutral	%
TASUED	148	75.5	14	7.1	34	17.4
FUNAAB	140	73.7	16	8.4	34	17.9
OOU	153	75	35	17.2	16	7.8

Table: 7 Impact of user education on information retrieval

Institution	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Undecided	%
TASUED	120	61.2	65	33.2	15	7.6
FUNAAB	148	77.9	21	11.1	21	11.1
OOU	110	79	70	34.32	24	11.8

This table showed that majority of the students in the selected universities considered user education as highly important for their education.

As a result of the emergence of ICT, majority of the respondents from the respective selected institutions indicted the need for the inclusion of ICT in user education. While TASUED had a response rate of 148 (75.5%), FUNAAB had 140 (73.7%) and OOU Table 6 showed that respondents agreed that user education conducted by library has a positive impact on their ability to retrieve needed information U 153 (75%) respectively.

### Discussion of Findings:

From the findings of this study, user education for distance learners has not been given the right priority it deserves. This findings support the assertion of Kooganuramoth (2008) who was of the opinion that quality of library resources usage will depend on the user education and training given by librarians. He suggested that libraries should be involved more in tutoring users be it in structure teaching or through informal way. New students must be exposed to user education because it is through this that the librarian will be able to create awareness of library in the freshmem so that they can fully exploit its benefits. A situation where students were not given user education does not augur well for the education of the students.

It is hightime user education is integrated into the curriculum so that students can consider it as one of the courses they must offer and pass before graduation. Doing this will make students lifelong learners, for the right foundation for future learning would have been

laid. This is because the user education that will be offered would be comprehensive enough in exposing the students to electronic resources . User education should be taught in a way that from the scratch, students would be on top of information access physically from the library and from Internet without assistance. This will boost their confidence in their studies and enhance their ability as independent learners. It will equally reduce the number of students that drop out from the program. User education should comprise of bibliographic instruction, library orientation and information literacy. It must be all encompassing. Its integration into the curriculum would bring about the achievement of maximum result in students' use of library and its information reasources. This assertion is corroborated by Abiolu (2010) that user education is a course designed for freshmen and women in Nigerian universities.

A comprehensive library user education calls for the formation of better collaboration among teaching faculties and the library. It is only then, that its effect will become highly noticeable in the academic achievement of students particularly. However, the relevance of user studies such as this to the educational attainment of students is unquestionable. Many reseachers have affirmed that user education enable students to make judicious use of library resources at their disposal and this will impact positively on students academic performance. Palsan in Etim, (2002) submitted that interacting with the library system improves students learning skills and academic performance. Infact, integration of user education or information literacy into the curriculum calls for better collaboration between the library and faculty. Heller- Ross (2010) solidified this earlier submission when she opined that creative partnership between librarian and the faculty enhances

library research which will hitherto results in information literate students. The librarian must be able to have input in relevant areas in any course that is being taught right from the planning stage.

#### **Conclusion:**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is that need to empower our students to be self reliant most especially in accessing information at anytime anywhere. They should be expert in information use as well. So, any institution that is not doing so is leaving a critical gap in the education of the students. This study reveals that external degree students from the selected universities are not very well exposed to user education even though some acknowledge that they were briefly introduced, majority of the student indicated that they were not given user orientation by the library. User education sometimes referred to as bibliographic instruction is a needed tool in this era of paradigm shift in education which emphasised self learning/independent learning. Library user education should be revisited most especially in institutions where it is not taught as it relates to external degree students so as not to jeopardise their future academic enterprise.

#### **Recommendations:**

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. User education should be upgraded into information literacy programme if the students were to develop lifelong learning habits.
2. User education should be made compulsory for external students.
3. The library should rigorously encourage external students to develop their ict potentials.
4. Library user education should be taught by professionals unlike where it is being taught as aspect of GNS by non library professionals.
5. Faculty should work hand in hand with the library to ensure that the students get the best opportunity to acquire necessary competence in library use.

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