

## User Education Programme in the Faculty of Law Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka: Problems and Prospects

Oliver T. U. Onwudinjo,<sup>1</sup> Angela I. Ndanwu, Roberta N. Anwaegbu and Obianuju Nwafor- Orizu

Law Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. o.onwudinjo@unizik.edu.ng

### Abstract

*This paper determines the role of user education programme in making users particularly students, to use effectively the law library of the Faculty of law, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The law library can only achieve its objectives and functions when the required resources are well harnessed and used by the users. This is achieved through the introduction of user education programme in the curriculum of the Faculty. This programme will impart the necessary skills and knowledge in students to use the Faculty of Law library effectively. However, there are some challenges to effective user education programme, like shortness of time for instruction, apathy on the side of students, and man-power constraints. Recommendations are made on how to overcome these challenges which include training and retraining of staff in ICT and introduction of user education into the Faculty curriculum.*

**Keywords:** User Education, Faculty of Law, Law Library, Library Resources

### Introduction

User education programme is one of the ways in which new students who gained admission into the Faculty of law are taught on how best to utilize the resources of the law library. This is deemed necessary as new students could be ignorant of how to use the library, being their first visit to a University or Faculty library. The volume of materials in the library can be baffling and intimidating to them, hence they may develop phobia going to the law library. This may result in the under utilization of the library resources by students (Uchendu, 2005).

Generally, libraries in educational institutions provide relevant information resources for teaching, learning and research. Educational reforms introduced recently in the tertiary level of education and adopted by the university have brought about many challenges in the academic programmes. The Faculty of Law Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka faces challenges in providing adequate resources and efficient services to the users. Over the decade, there has been sharp increase in the student number. The students' yearly admission quota rose from eighty (80) in 1986 to one hundred and eighty (180) in 2007. The impact of this sharp rise on library resources includes overuse of library books and journals and the consequent damage and deterioration of the collections.

Orientation course is usually organized for all the first year students in the Faculty of Law. This is always a one

day affair, which is not adequate for a meaningful library user education/orientation. It is expected that during this orientation the new students would be introduced to various sections and officers of the library. They are introduced to the main reading hall and books, the serials section, reserved room, reference, bindery, e- library. They are instructed on how the library catalogues are used, arrangement of books on the shelves, and how to use reference materials.

According to Ahiauzu (2002), one of the functions of a university library is user instruction to enlighten new students particularly and new staff on the use of library facilities. She said that during the period, the various sections and officers of the library are introduced to the new staff and students. The reason, she said is to minimize the level of confusion that usually hangs over new staff and students on how to use the facilities of the library. Fidzani (1995) outlined the objectives of orientation and user education as:

- “To introduce students to facilities and resources in the library;
- To develop library skills;
- To make students independent users and learners in the library;
- To develop capabilities as self sufficient users;
- To establish the library as the centre of academic activity;
- To provide basic understanding of the library so that users can make efficient use

of library materials and services;

- To educate users about information sources and resources and how to exploit such resources effectively and efficiently.”

The library user education programme for law students is built into the Faculty's law course titled Legal Method - Law 121 and taught by a non librarian. The major problems facing the law library are how to organize user education more effectively considering the rise in students' population, the advent of electronic resources which has changed the information landscape, the little time allocated for students' orientation and library tours. Worrysome too is the inability of some university authorities to introduce library user education as a one or two unit course, which should be handled entirely by professional librarians.

### Literature Review

Many scholars have made contributions on user education and its usefulness in learning and research. Contributing to this, Alimohammadi and Sajjadi (2006) note that library and information science professionals have experienced the information seeking challenges of new comers for many years, and they have planned a wide range of instructional programmes to tackle this problem. Hooks (2007) opines that teaching students how to use the university library resources had been a great challenge to academic librarians for most of the twentieth century and has emerged as a high priority for academic librarians in this twenty-first century as well. Knowing how to use a library is an essential part of the education for life process, it helps a student to acquire the knowledge and skill he needs to become an independent user of the library and in preparing the student for a continuing self-education after completing his formal education (Akinyode, 1994). According to Agyen-Gyasi (2008), user education provides a platform where librarians introduce new students 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-ROM's and the Internet. Allen (as cited in Uhegbu, 2007) views user education as a tool to create love for books and information among people. It enables users to understand the pattern of resource arrangement in the library, literature search, retrieval mechanism and enquiry approaches. He believes that user education is the only panacea for overcoming the inherent difficulties in library use especially those students or staff using the library facilities for the first time.

Muogilim (1998) describes user education as a process by which library patrons acquire more effective and efficient methods of utilizing library resources and information through the acquisition of skills in identification, location, search, retrieval and exploitation of information. He also stated that the usefulness of user education is to provide the students with capacity of researching a given problem, obtaining and assessing relevant information and presenting their findings in a competent manner which is acceptable to his professional peers. Library resources can never be exploited unless users of the library have the skills for utilizing knowledge contained in books and other related media in the library. Eadie (as cited in Uhegbu, 2007) views user education in terms of its components. The components are: offering bibliographic tours of the library; giving bibliographic workshops on library resources; providing audio-visual or video-taped instruction in library use; and publication programme.

**Processes of User Education:** The library can achieve the goals of user education only when the materials are utilized fully by the clients. Such effective user education can be achieved through the following processes namely: library orientation, library tours, bibliographic instructions, library rules and regulations, user awareness, lectures, and demonstration/practicals

**Library Orientation:** Orientation is an introduction of a person to a new environment where he finds himself. The Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1988) edition defines orientation as make oneself familiar with a situation, determine how one stands in relation to one's surroundings”. User education can be carried out to acquaint new users with the information resources within a library and how to exploit them. The orientation is offered primarily to new students, but old students and other users may be considered on request. During orientation, the librarians try to present an image of the library as a pleasant, friendly institution where help can be obtained. The goal of the orientation process according to Agyen-Gyasi (2008) is to make students confident and able to ask for assistance from the library staff whenever they need help. Lecture is given by the Law Librarian or his representative at the Faculty Fresh Students Orientation Programme. During the lecture, the Law Librarian highlights the importance of the law library in the Faculty setting and discusses different information resources, formats and how they are organized in the library. Library rules and regulations, opening hours, classification scheme, borrowing rights, photocopying services, retrieval method, internet access, reference search, use of reserved area, past

students projects, how to handle books with care, penalties for offences committed in the library, are explained to the students.

**Library Tours:** A library tour involves taking new students/users around the library facilities, during which they will be shown the various sections of the library, introduced to the staff in various sections and the staff explaining to them the work and routines of their various sections. According to Uhegbu (2007), a library tour exposes users to the layout of a library but does not inculcate library skills in them. The Law Librarian and senior members of the law library staff take the new students on a guided tour of the library. They are shown different sections and services which include the reference, serials, theses, photocopying, e-library, catalogues, reserved book room, text book section, general reading section, bindery, conveniences, security checks, porters' desk. The students are taken in groups because of their large number and shown the practical aspects of information retrieval through the use of catalogue. At the e-library section, they are taught how to access the Internet, using online gateways and repositories, including various databases by the professional librarian in-charge.

**Library Rules and Regulations:** The rules and regulations governing the use of the library are taught to new students. This is to enable a good reading atmosphere and a reduction in the crimes against the library. They are instructed on how to use and handle books with care, not to eat in the library, to remain silent in the library, not to steal or mutilate library books, not to wear shoes with hard soles, not to make or receive phone calls, not to mark on the books, not to "dog-ear" the pages of books, not to re-shelve or hide books, etc.

**User Awareness:** This type of user education does not occur always. It is mainly to make users become aware or informed of what the library has in terms of new acquisition, new rules and regulations, new opening and closing hours, temporary closure of the library, etc. These user awareness activities can be implemented through the use of memoranda, library bulletins, circulars, notices, etc.

**Lectures:** A good number of universities have introduced the Use of Library as a course into their curricula. They are called various names like Use of Library, Use of English, Library Instruction, Bibliographic Instruction, Outreach User Education, Study Skills, Readers Advisory Services, Information Use, etc. In Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, it is called Use of English. It is a 2 credit unit course with the Use of Library built into the course. Librarians handle

the aspect of use of library while other lecturers handle the Use of English proper. The lecture is structured to teach students among others the use of catalogue, bibliographies and reference services. Usually this programme is fraught with problems like large number of students. This may make practical evaluation of users and teaching method impossible.

**Demonstration:** This is a more practical approach to user education than the lecture approach. Demonstration can take two approaches. Users can be taken around the library and introduced to the retrieval tools like the catalogue, indexes, etc. On the other side, demonstration can be done by the use of slides, audio visuals, tapes, videos and films, etc. Demonstration brings user and information retrieval tools into close contact thereby eliminating imagination by users of what those tools look like.

**Problems:** User education programme has the following problems

**Apathy on the Side of Users:** It is a common practice to see some students either absenting themselves from participation or participating without full concentration in the user education programme. This results in some percentage of the students not benefitting fully from the useful exercise.

**Time:** The time allotted to this programme is usually very short. It is so short that lecturers or instructors cannot use it to cover the programme adequately. This results in students graduating without knowing how to make good use of the reference materials or retrieve books in their field from the shelves (Uchendu, 2005).

**Man-Power:** Presently, there are only two professional librarians in the Faculty of Law library and such number cannot cope effectively with the user education programme in the Faculty. For a meaningful user education programme to be established, there should be adequate man-power to be able to give users effective guides and instructions on the best ways to access the library.

**Internet Accessibility:** Though at present the Faculty of Law e-library has more than 50 computers for accessing the internet, but the manpower needed to assist the users access the internet is not adequate. The e-library has access to the following databases: Heinonline, Lexis Nexis, West Law and Law Pavilion, but there is still restricted internet connectivity and

inadequate workstations for the users. There is urgent need to train and retrain staff in modern computer literacy so that they can use these skills in their day to day operations in the library, as well as in educating both the Faculty and students (Agyen-Gyasi, 2008).

**Provision of Library Guides:** The importance of library guides to the library users cannot be over-emphasized. Guides are importantly needed to direct users to where they can locate materials on the shelves. Library guides are the keys to the collections of every library, and should be prepared in such a way that they should be able to take the users directly to the needed resources. In the absence of a good library guide, users may not be effectively exposed to the resources of the library

**Shortage of User Education Books:** There is almost absence of current text books and journals on user education programme. As a result, students depend solely on resource materials or monographs provided by the instructors.

**Recommendations:** The following recommendations are made:

- Efforts should be made to introduce library user education directly into the curriculum of Law Faculty as a separate course for first year students.
- More professional librarians should be involved in teaching library user education as a separate course.
- Efforts should be made for the Law Librarian and law library staff to organize for user education programme early before the commencement of a new academic session.
- Staff should be trained and retrained in ICT and Internet especially in information searching. This saves bandwidth and enables users to find resources more easily.
- Teaching honorarium should be paid to the professional librarians involved in teaching library user education.
- Necessary assistance should always be provided to users (especially new users) in the use of computers.
- It is recommended that all the methods of user education programme be used complementarily as no one type of method may achieve one hundred percent success.

## Conclusion

User education, whether achieved through orientation, tour, bibliographic guide, user awareness, lectures or

demonstration is an essential mechanism for ensuring effective library and information use. User education is one of the important programmes conducted by Nnamdi Azikiwe University Law Library for new students that are admitted into the faculty yearly. It is aimed at equipping the users with information skills that will enable them to make efficient and effective use of the law library resources and services. One method of user education may not be adequate to achieve a hundred percent success therefore, it is imperative to combine different methods.

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