AVAILABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND UTILIZATION OF SERIALS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF KENNETH DIKE LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

BY

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Abstract

Paper identified problems of serials utilization in research libraries. It attempted to assets the availability and accessibility of serials in Kenneth Dike Library, for use by Post graduate students of University of Ibadan. It recommended improvement in current awareness services of the Library.

Introduction:

One of the key functions of any academic library is the provision of materials for research. There are many sources of information in the library but the most important and most current sources for research are serial publications. Anglo American Cataloguing Rule II (1988) defined a serial publication as a publication in any medium issued in successive parts bearing numerical or chronological designations and are intended to be continued indefinitely. Serials include (reports, yearbooks, etc), the journals, memoirs, proceedings, transactions, etc of societies and numbered monographic series.

In as much as serials are important, they are associated with problems too.Mullis (1992) is of the opinion that serials in the libraries have problems from conception to death.

In recent times, serials are published at a very high rate that it poses a concern to librarians and users alike. This is why Mullis (1992) says that a complaint often voiced out by librarians and

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others concerned with serials management is that there are too many of them; not only too many titles being published each year but also too many titles currently available.

Since serials are produced at a very high cost, the question one may ask; is "how many of these serials are available in the libraries where they are needed?" Even when they are available, are their accessibility and utilization guaranteed?

The availability of material in the library does not mean its accessibility and utilization. Hence it is possible that an information source may be available in the library but cannot be accessed and used by users. This is applicable to serials. Some users, especially those who are new in research work do not know how to access the needed serials; thereby forsaking their usage.

Bearing in mind the numerous problems of serial publications, it becomes necessary that serials should be properly acquired and processed for use. Hence, it is the responsibility of the serial librarian to see that serials are efficiently and effectively managed for easy accessibility and maximum utility.

The focus of this study is on the problems of serials utilization in research libraries. In other words, it is going to examine the problems that users encounter while using serials that negatively affect their usage.

Brief Profile of the University of Ibadan

University of Ibadan was established in 1948 as University College Ibadan resulting from the reports of the Asquith and the Elliot commissions, both set up in 943 to find out the possibility of establishing universities or university colleges in the common Wealth and in the West African sub region in particular. Between 1948 and 1949, it had three faculties: Arts, Science and Medicine. Currently, there is the college of medicine and eight other faculties: Arts, Science, Agriculture and Forestry, Social Science, Education, Veterinary Medicine, Technology and Law. University of Ibadan is well known for training postgraduate students. The first postgraduate degree was awarded in 1952 under the scheme of special relationship with university of London. It became an autonomous degree awarding institution in 1962. Postgraduate programmes available in the University are Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D), Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) and degree of Masters:(M.A., MSc., M.L.S.M.ED). These programmes are run on full-time and part-time basis depending on the course of study. The durations of the programmes also vary according to their nature.

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Statement of Problem

The study aims at tackling the problems users encounter in serials utilization. Some people who engage in research work do not gather enough information for their research, due to the fact that they do not consult the necessary materials that contain such information. This is peculiar with Masters Degree students who are new in the field of research. Students in the postgraduate programmes, especially those in masters degree, at University of Ibadan, do complain of difficulties in their attempt to use serials. Inability to utilize the needed serials have implications on their research. In the first place, it would affect the recency of their work since they may not use current journals. Secondly, it would lead to duplication of research since they are ignorant of what has been studied or researched. It is against this background that this study is carried out to discover those problems that negatively affect serials utilization.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the availability and accessibility of serials in Kenneth Dike Library, for use by postgraduate students of University of Ibadan.
2. To determine the extent of use of serials by postgraduate students.
3. To identify problems that militates against the use of serials in the library.

Review of Literature

Osei-Bonsu (1984) described serials as the backbone of any special, academic or research library. Based on the point of view of Osei-Bonsu, the importance of serials cannot be over emphasized. Similarly, Woodward (1991) considered serial literature as constituting a major portion of all academic libraries' collections, and typically accounts for more than half their expenditure on library materials. According to him, for many academic and research staff, the serials to which the library subscribes are the most important and useful elements of stock; while for librarians they represent materials which are expensive to acquire and difficult to manage.

Nwagha (1983) said that the advancement of science depends to a large extent on the accumulation of past findings, and every scientist builds on the knowledge of other scientists. This has to do with use. The accessibility of scholarly journals determines the extent of their use. Faluwoye (1995) opined that use by the reader is the ultimate objective of the acquisition and processing of serials in a library. He emphasized the fact that only if use is intensive and takes place

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under optimal conditions can all the efforts and funds be justified that are spent on the acquisition of serials.

In a journal usage study undertaken at Hyderabad University Library, Venkataramana and Predeep (1996) demonstrated how such studies aided the retention of core journals and enabled new journals to be acquired by substituting them for less used title. Similarly, Satyanarayana (1993) surveyed faculty members' use of Andhra University library, India; and used it to determine the use made of periodicals in the Library. He however suggested some methods to enhance use of periodicals, such as location of the periodical section on the ground floor for convenience of users, introduction of current awareness service and adoption of marketing approach.

Certain problems confront accessibility and use of serials in different libraries. For example, Mullis (1992) says that there are problems of accessibility of the collection to the user, dissemination of information, circulation and awareness. Nwagha (1983) opined that there is a fairly good intellectual access to scientific journals available in Nigeria, but laments that not as much effort has been put into ensuring that researchers and other users also have physical access to the publications that are available in the country. Inman (1983) concluded that poor access to major international publications has serious implications for the research efforts of scientists in the third world countries. Examining barriers to the accessibility of journal, Nwagha (1983) identified lack of coordination as one of the major barriers. She was of the opinion that administrative policies often stand between available scientific and technical information and its potential users.

Methodology

The population of the study was 1,827 masters degree students of eight faculties of the University.

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select three faculties-Arts, science and social sciences; bearing in mind their disciplines. Faculty of Arts with two hundred and seventeen (217) students was chosen as a representative of arts and the humanities, while faculty of science with two hundred and eight (208) students was chosen to represent science and technology, and the faculty of social sciences with two hundred and seventy-five (275) students was chosen to represent other disciplines; making it a total of 700 students as the sample size.

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Thirty percent (30%) of the sample size was taken which is two hundred and ten (210). Hence, two hundred and ten (210) copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents; out of which one hundred and fifty-seven (157) were returned.

Scope and Limitation

The study covers only the masters degree students that make use of the University Library. It excludes other postgraduate students of the University. It examined the problems that they encounter while using serials in the library.

Data Analysis

Simple percentages were used for data analysis. In assessing the rate of serials utilization by masters degree students, respondents were asked questions based on this and the following response was got. Table I shows the frequency with which the respondents used the serials section of the library. As many as 105 or 67% of the respondents visited the serials section occasionally, 51 or 32% visited it regularly while only one or 1% visited it daily.

Table 1: Frequency of use of serials in academic libraries

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Daily	1	1
Regularly	51	32
Occasionally	105	67
	157	100

People could use the serials section for various reasons. In terms of determining the purpose for visiting the section, majority of the respondents indicated that they visited the serials section for research and reference purposes, as shown on table 2. On the other hand, some of them visited the section for prescribed reading or pre-lecture reading.

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Table 2: Purpose of visiting the Library

Purpose of visit	No. Respondents	Percentage
For research and Reference	102	64.97
For recommended reading	25	15.92
For pre-lecture reading	1	0.64
For research, reference and pre-lecture reading	23	14.65
For research, reference, recommended and pre-lecture reading	6	3.82
	157	100

In order to assess how often the serials collection meets users' needs, respondents were asked to indicate their opinions. Their responses revealed that the serials collection occasionally met their needs. This was represented by 103 or 68.67% of the respondents. A sizeable number, 33 or 22% said that their needs were rarely met. However, one respondent or 0.66% indicated that his needs were never met. See table 3

Table 3: Satisfaction in using the Library

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage
Always	33	22
Occasionally	103	68.67
Rarely	13	8.67
Never	1	0.66
	150	100

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It was necessary to seek the postgraduate students opinions on the nature of materials that constituted the serials holdings in terms of current and back issues. The figures on table 4 show that 100 or 67.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that it contained both current and back issues of serials.

Table 4: Currency of Serials holdings

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Both current and back issues	100	67.6
Only current issues	7	4.7
Only back issues	41	27
	148	100

The accessibility of a library material to a large extent determines its utilization. In order to determine the accessibility of serials to users, respondents were asked to rate the ease with which they accessed serials in the library. Their responses are given on table 5. According to the table, only 9 or 5.8% gave the impression that it was very easy to access serials in the library. In the same vein, 70 or 45.5% of the respondents affirmed easy accessibility of serials, whereas, 75 or 48.7% said it was no easy to access serials in the library.

Table 5: Accessibility of serials to users

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Very easy	9	5.8
Easy	70	45.5
Not easy	75	48.7
	154	100

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The above table shows that a good number of respondents do not access serials easily in the library. The implication of this is that such number of users did not utilize serials since they hardly had access to them.

In terms of current awareness services, the study revealed that 54 or 35.5% of the respondents said that current awareness services were provided in the library, while 98 or 64.5% were of the opinion that no current awareness service was provided. What this means is that 64.5% of the· respondents did not know when new serials come into the library. The effect of this is none utilization, since one can only use what he or she is aware of. See table 6

Table 6: Provision of current awareness services.

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	54	35.5
No	98	64.5
	152	100

Serials are library materials that are associated with a lot of problems. This is why Mullis (1992) stated that serials in libraries have problems from conception to

death. It is in the light of this that the respondents were asked to identify problems they encounter in using serials in the library. They identified various problems as categorized on table 7. It can be deduced from the table that the most predominant problems masters degree students encountered were problems associated with location, accessibility and availability of serials.

Table 7: Problems encountered in serials section.

Nature of problem	No. of respondents	Percentage
Location, accessibility and availability.	58	46.4
Lighting/ventilation	13	10.4

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Organization/arrangement	25	20
Obsolesce of serials	9	7.2
Staff related problems	8	6.4
Other problems	12	9.6
	125	100

The study revealed that although 67% of the respondents used the serials collection occasionally, 64.97% used it for research and reference purposes; and 68.67% indicated that their needs were occasionally met in the serials collection, while the needs of 8.67% of the respondents were rarely met. The question one may want to ask is "why is it that the needs of such a percentage were not always met". This could be attributed to problems prevalent in the serials section. One of such problems was inaccessibility of serials to users. The study showed that 48.7 of the respondents did not access serials easily in the library. This implies that since they could not access serials, they did not equally use them.

Since serials are encumbered with a lot of problems, a good number of the respondents identified problems associated with location, accessibility and availability as the most predominant problems masters degree students encounter in their use of serial

In terms of current awareness services, a high percentage of the respondents indicated that current awareness services were not carried out in the library. The fact hat 64% of the respondents were of the opinion that current awareness services were ot done in the library is an indication of their ignorance of the existence of such services. These problems in no doubt hamper the use of serials by masters degree students of Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan.

Conclusion and Recommendation

One may think that once a library endeavours to acquire serial publications, their utilization will not be a problem. This study has proved otherwise. From the result of the study, it was obvious that many of the respondents occasionally used serials in the library. This was largely due to the fact that their needs were occasionally met. The inability of the serials to meet their needs in return depended on the inaccessibility of the materials. The effect of this is low or none utilization.

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Ignorance of the existence of current awareness services has hampered maximum utilization of serials as well. The problems of location, inaccessibility and availability were also identified as among the problems that made for poor utilization of the serial publications in the library. Again, the study revealed the need for user-oriented programmes for masters degree students.

It is in the light of these problems that more user-oriented programmes are recommended. The user-oriented programmes should be in the form of user education for serials.

The library should also improve on and increase the number of current awareness services done in the library, so that the users will know when new serials are purchased in the library

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