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## **Student Librarian Work Study Programmes in Academic Libraries: An Appraisal**

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### **Introduction**

Since the founding of the University of Ibadan in 1948 by the colonial government as the premier Nigerian university, there has been an increasing demand for university education, but the investment of the government has not matched this demand. This is confirmed by Oyewole (2008) who observes that higher education in Nigeria is under strain, and many young Nigerians who ought to benefit from higher education do not have access to it. Higher education institutions have yet to find solutions to the severe financial crisis that has affected the higher education system.

Obafemi Awolowo University was among the six second generation universities in 1962 but was later taken over by the federal government. There were third and fourth generation universities established in 1977 and 1983 respectively, before the coming of private universities. Today, there are 27 federal, 33 state, and 34 private universities in Nigeria. (Okebukola 2008).

The student librarian work study programme began in the late 90s when the economy of the nation started dwindling. There was an acute shortage of staff to work in academic library, and students could no longer cope with their studies because of financial problems, while university enrolment kept increasing. The idea of engaging students in the Work Study Programme in the university library was devised, and today has gained more ground because other units of the university has also embraced the programme. The whole programme is now administrated by the Division of Students Affairs. Many students who might have withdrawn from the university, have maintained themselves through this programme and completed their studies.

The programme is opened to all students in all 13 faculties of the university, both male and female. In order not to defeat the purpose of students coming to the university exceptions were made: only parts 2-3 in social sciences and Humanities are allowed to participate, in Sciences, Technology, Law, Agriculture, Pharmacy and Health Sciences faculties, Parts 2-4 are allowed. Part (year) one students are not allowed because they are still new in the system and they have not completed the Library Instruction Programme where students are taught how to use the library effectively, and final year students are not allowed because they are busy with various projects.

## Introduction of the Work Study Programme

Academic staff recruitment and retention is an emerging problem in tertiary education in Nigeria and many parts of Africa (Mihyo, 2008). Brain drain and aging faculty are affecting the staff situation in tertiary institutions, and Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library is not left out. Various universities are developing programmes to convert brain-drain to brain gain. The birth of this programme is part of that effort. Reasons for the programme include:

- Student enrolment in the University is increasing every session.
- Staff strength is dwindling
- Indigent students on the campus are on the increase due to economic downturn of the nation.
- Demand for books in the reading rooms is becoming heavier.
- Library Assistants alone cannot cope with shelving and shelf-reading of the used books in reading rooms of the library.
- Most courses in the university are now library-based.
- Our library collections are in closed stacks for safety.
- The few librarians on ground are heavily loaded with maintaining the library catalogues and databases, core reference services, compiling bibliographies for users, and managing special collections.
- The number of library assistants giving page services cannot match the increasing student population. Hence the need to engage the services of student librarian work study programme

Before their employment, the student librarians were screened, and subjected to written and oral tests based on what they were taught in LIB001. The tests are an attempt to find the best students, who want to work diligently as well as earn money. In addition to tests, students involved in the programme bring a letter of identification from the head of their department, a photocopy of student identification card, and their lecture timetable to the programme coordinator before they are selected.

The objectives of the student work study programme include:

- To assist indigent students to meet their financial needs while in the university.
- To alleviate staff shortages, especially in the Circulation and Reference sections.
- To encourage reading and good study habits by bringing students closer to library resources.

## History

The Obafemi Awolowo University began as a University of Ife, established by a bill passed at the Western Regional House of Assembly at Ibadan, Nigerian on 8th June 1961. It was official opened in September 1962 with 190 foundation students and a team of 64 academic staff. The University had to be accommodated temporarily on the campus of the former Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology at Ibadan. Ibadan was probably the only city in Western Region with facilities for such an institution. Academic programmes were established in five faculties: agriculture, arts, science, social sciences, and law, as well as the Institute of African Studies. With these, it was possible for the university of Ife to commence teaching in October 1962, not at Ile-Ife but at Ibadan, where it was destined to stay for the subsequent four years.

In 1966, a governing council was inaugurated and a new Vice-Chancellor was installed on the 1st of March of that year, and that marked the beginning of a remarkable phase that lasted till 1975. The federal government was funding university education adequately and the Vice Chancellor was committed to the development of the university. The university moved from its temporary campus in Ibadan to the permanent site at Ile-Ife in 1967. There was also physical expansion which included development of post-graduate studies, staff training, hiring more Nigerian staff, expansion of student enrolment, the development of research activities, and expansion of the library.

The years 1975-1987 saw the transition to a Federal University status. In August 1975, the university was taken over by the Federal Military Government. The governing council was dissolved and a provisional council was constituted in its place. The name of the institution was changed in May 1987 from University of Ife to Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, after the demise of the elder statesman, to immortalize his name and show appreciation for his contribution as one of the founding fathers of the university. (Omosini and Adediran 1988).

### The University Library System

The university library system comprises a central library with two main buildings of north and south wings. The library system began with the central library in 1968, with a nucleus of 40,000 volumes (30,000 books and 10,000 periodicals) transferred from the temporary site at Ibadan to the University of Ife. At first, the library was housed in temporary cramped quarters which were ill-equipped for the requirements of university library.

According to Omosini and Adediran (1988), by 1972, the library contained 60,000 bound volumes, and was subscribing to 27,000 serial publications. An important acquisition in that year was the Africana Collection. Special attention was paid to research needs of the academic community as reflected by the expansion of the range of abstracts and indexes and the acquisition of primary source materials from both within and outside Nigeria. The number of librarians increased from three to seventeen and the number of volumes reached 135,000 by the end of 1973/74 academic session.

The south wing of the library was capable of accommodating 250,000 volumes and to seat 800 readers. The north wing had a capacity for 500,000 volumes and about 1,500 seats, and was commissioned in 1983. As at the time of this study, the library collections have gone up to almost 700,000 book volumes and more than 2,000 journal subscriptions, with a seating capacity of more 2,500. The library is now ICT compliant with books barcoded, OPAC facilities, and OCLC database at the courtesy of Carnegie Foundation of United States of America.

### Methodology

For this study, the authors explored both primary and secondary sources of information. Interviews were used to elicit information from student circulation and reference librarians and some former beneficiaries of the programme. The secondary sources were the monthly statistical records of the circulation section from 2004/2005 to 2007/08, which were used to determine the number of books borrowed, consulted, and shelved, daily head count, and numbers of students employed per session and the remuneration paid to them.

### Circulation Records

Session	Readers (Head Count)	Books borrowed/Consulted	Book shelved	No. of Students employed
2004/2005	210,000	142,000	138,000	14
2005/2006	265,000	155,100	151,000	11
2006/2007	281,200	186,050	177,200	10
2007/08	309,000	250,000	248,112	22

The table shows the library statistical records from 2004/05 to 2007/08. This table reveals that there is a progressive increase in number of readers and number of books borrowed and consulted, and a yearly increase in the number of books shelved. The number of students who applied for the work study programme is unstable. The reason deduced from the students interviewed was low pay. There is heavy

demand on library resources, and in 2007/08 more students participated un the programme because of an increase in remuneration.



Loan Desk Activities



**Students waiting for membership renewal**

### **Challenges**

The library is facing some peculiar challenges that is making frantic efforts to solve. There is a need to review the remuneration package for the Programme because N 50.00 (USD 0.50) per hour is not commensurate with reality. Sometimes students complain of changes in their class timetable clashing with stipulated working hours in the library. Some hide in the stacks to do their private reading when they are supposed to be working. A few have been caught in acts of mischief, e.g., hiding relevant books for their own use. Retaining students is difficult, and students pull out of the programme at short notice, especially when they are not remunerated adequately (Kanyengo, 2008). There is little or no stability, as students pull out of the programme when pressured by their academic work. The library had a bad experience in 2006/2007 session, when about a quarter of the students withdrew in the second semester. As a result, more students were hired in 2007/2008. Prospects

The programme has served as advertising for the library. A lot of students do not believe the library has relevant books and facilities to help them in their studies. Many participants have become friends of the library. A few have come back to seek employment after graduation. A number also asked for reference letters from the library. A few have indicated their willingness to pursue a degree in library studies and become practicing librarians. The library has benefited from student labour because it has relieved and complemented the workforce of the library. The interviews showed that those who participated in the programme earned good grades, an indication that the programme contributed to their academic pursuits. As the programme evolves, it will help library staff to improve our overall engagement with students, and offer a new way of understanding their needs. They can also potentially play a wider role as library advocates amongst the whole student population.

## Conclusion

This work study programme has had success despite its challenges. The idea of student librarians should be encouraged, and library management should allocate more money for this programme. More students should be employed, since it assists them financially and academically. The work study programme can be regarded as a mutual benefit for both libraries and students. It is a good strategy for academic libraries to adopt to enable them to overcome financial obstacles while continuing to offer an effective service that meets the information needs of their staff and students.

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