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Establishing a Library Liaison Programme in a Nigerian Academic Library

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Abstract

The study focuses on the need for putting in place library liaison programme in Nigerian academic library, with emphasis in the area of study. A survey method was adopted for the study, involving a sample figure of 122 members of the academic staff of the college. The Yaro Yamane formula for selecting a sample from a finite population was used. The study revealed six reasons for establishing library liaison programme in academic libraries. The study also revealed seven functions which library liaisons can perform. Six merits and six envisaged problems of the library arrangement were identified. To combat the problems associated with the library liaison programme, five strategies were revealed. They include: adequate funding of libraries to acquire information sources; engagement of more staff to reduce pressure of work in libraries; training and retraining of staff; curriculum review to accommodate more skills in ICT; and government-private partnership in the provision of ICT infrastructure. Based on the findings, six recommendations are made.

Key words: Library liaison, academic libraries

Introduction

The primary objective of any academic library is the provision of information for teaching and research. The libraries in academic institutions are, therefore, charged with the responsibility to acquire, organise, retrieve, and disseminate information for the attainment of societal developmental goals. The Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu library exists to perform the above function. This is why the library states in its mission statement that:

> *The mission of the College library is to provide improved, efficient and high standard services through the provision of standard library facilities and equipment, trained personnel and to provide current and relevant materials in various information-carrying formats for the upliftment of learning, research, and study… p1.*

In order to provide the much-needed timely and accurate information to the library clientele, academic libraries provide a myriad of services – reference, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI), and lately, library liaison services. Reference service, according to Edoka (2000), is the personal assistance given by the librarian to individuals in search of information for whatever activities deliberately designed to facilitate easy availability of information. Current awareness services, according to Keenan (1996), is a service that alerts the users to the new information likely to be of interest to them. Selective dissemination of information (SDI) is a current awareness service geared toward the individual (Rowley, 1988). It is an aspect of CAS provided with the aid of information and communications technology (ICT). Library liaison, a service lately introduced in the library to improve information access has its origin in the mid 70's (Matacio, 2002). According to Matacio (2002), a library liaison is a staff member who has been formally designated as the primary contact between the libraries and academic unit (school, department, center, programme), of a university. Unfortunately, this programme does not exist in Nigerian academic libraries.

The idea of the liaison programme was conceived out of the need to provide holistic library services to library users. This is because, apart from providing other services listed above, the liaison goes extra mile in being involved in communication; public relations and marketing; resource development; and user services, including reference and instruction for faculty and students (Matacio, 2002). There is, therefore, the need to put in place the library liaison programme in the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu to help both staff and students. That is the import of this study

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to determine the need for library liaison programme in academic libraries in Nigeria with emphasis on the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu.

The specific objectives include:

1. To determine the perceived need for library liaisons in academic libraries
2. To ascertain the functions of library liaisons
3. To ascertain the merits of the library liaison arrangement
4. To identify the envisaged problems that may affect the performance of liaison functions
5. To determine the strategies for combating the identified problems.

Significance of the Study

Staff and students, through the establishment of the library liaison programme, will be updated on the services available in the library. The parent institution would, through the activities of the library liaisons, realise the broad objectives for establishing the college library. The recommendations from the study will add to already existing knowledge in that field of study.

Conceptual Framework

The major concepts in the study are library liaison and academic libraries. They are defined thus:
A library liaison is a librarian who has been formally designated by the library to act as a contact person to student groups on campus (Swarthmore College Library, 2008). It is the desire of the Swarthmore College Library (USA) that students involved in Swarthmore's many diverse organizations become familiar with the library, the names of librarians, and the services and resources available in the library. Library liaison can also be described as the process my which librarians involve the library's clientele in the assessment and satisfaction of collection needs (Matacio, 2002). Academic libraries are those that exist in institutions of higher education such as universities, colleges of education, colleges of technology and polytechnics (Edoka, 2000).

Need for Liaison Librarians

The need for a liaison programme is based on the following reasons:

- The provision of these services will save the time of researchers as research time is scarce. It is also the view of Hamilton (1995), Kirkham (1989), and Rowley (1992).
- Even if researchers have the whole time in the world, many of them lack the competence to help themselves, as according to Kuruppu and Gruber (2006), the information-finding skills of many scholars are poor contrary to what they think of themselves.
- The study by Kurupu and Gruber (2006) also revealed that it is evident that academic communities are not fully aware of the resources and services available in the library.
- Also, the need for the library liaison services finds support in the argument that information quickly goes out-of-date. This is what Ugwuoke (2006) calls "the volatility of information". To deal with this problem, the liaison would be busy helping the researchers while the later would be busy conducting their research.
- In the area of study, that is, Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State, majority of the students lack the skill for the adequate use of the library. These students, by their lack of library use skills, disorganise the reading materials and make it difficult, if not impossible for other users to locate materials at their right positions on the shelves. Also, the virtual library project in the college library is not functional and the internet resources in the college are not properly harnessed because of epileptic supply of electricity. There is, therefore, the urgent need to put in place the liaison programme to help both staff and students. That is the import of this study.

Functions of the Liaison

The field of library and information science is replete with literature on the functions or services provided by library liaisons. For instance, Swarthmore College Library (2008) ascribes five functions to a library liaison. These are:

- **Collection building**: He actively solicits purchase suggestions from the group he represents and tries to keep an eye open for books that might add to the library's collection.
- **Offering reference assistance**: As a liaison has a passion for information and expertise for sophisticated search and retrieval on all varieties of topics, members of the group have easy access to someone who may be able to find the answer for them.
- **Helping to arrange an exhibit in the library**: A library liaison can help with the process of requesting exhibit space for his group. An exhibit, no doubt, offers a unique opportunity to present ideas, goals and scope of his group to the campus community at large.
- **Sharing information**: As the liaison becomes more familiar with the scope and interests of his group, he will be able to pass along websites, books, journal articles, grant opportunities, etc, of

interest.

Matacio (2002) also lists four functions of a library liaison. These are: Communication and instruction (e.g. writing a feature or column for departmental newsletter); information gathering (e.g. surveying faculty research interest); collection development (e.g. informing new and continuing faculty of materials selection and acquisition procedures); programme development (e.g. establishing a research partnership with members of the liaison department).

The Merits of Liaison Services

The most frequently cited goals and purposes of the programme, according to Matacio (2002), are communication, public relations and marketing, resource development and user services (including reference and instruction for faculty and students). Other goals include facilitating access to resources, programme evaluation, accreditation support, academic committees, and job enrichment for library staff. However, the highest rated service of the programme is updating faculty on the services available in the library.

According to the Welch Medical Library (2008), the benefits of the programme include increased communication about the library resources and services; increased awareness of library resources; consistent reference content for feedback – problems, questions, etc. From the benefits highlighted above, it is known that library liaison programme is fashioned to serve the needs of both the students and the academic staff as it concerns their subject-specific information needs. Too, the programmed is akin to current awareness services (CAS) provided in libraries. However, while the librarian provides CAS to academic staff based on their known information needs, the library liaison provides information to his officially assign group, whether staff or students.

Problems with Liaison Programmes

A liaison programme is an aspect of the total package of library service. Every service has some problems associated with its provision. The library liaison programme, if introduced in Nigerian academic libraries is, therefore, likely to be associated with the following problems:

Funds: Funds are necessary for the acquisition of library resources. Scholars agree that inadequate funding is the greatest bane of academic libraries. Among them are Odeinde and Ehikhamenor (1981), Iyanda (2001), Okozor and Obidike (2005), Reyes (2006), Oladapo (2006), Adetimirin (2007), and Ugwuanyi (2008).

Work pressure: Work pressure is also fingered to be one of the problems that effect the library services. For instance, Kirkham posits that libraries are keen to provide the users with selective dissemination of information (SDI) and it helps to ensure that stock is used more effectively, but resource limitations in terms of both staff time and financial support may affect the ability to provide such services from time to time.

Inadequate knowledge of resources by librarians: This is a problem that hinders the provision of every library service. Seeker and Tedd (1998) described it as the inability on the part of librarians of being unable to know what is available, or where to find it.

Difficulty in determining the needs of users: The needs of the users can be complicated. This is why Kurupu and Gruber (2006) maintain that the measure of information needs can be complicated as it involves a cognitive process which may operate at a different level of consciousness and hence may not be clear even to the inquirer himself.

Lack of ICT culture in some academic libraries: Ikpaahindi (2006) maintains that very few Nigerian academic libraries have gone on-line. Related to the issue of lack of ICT culture, majority of the staff in academic libraries lack ICT skills. This is the view of Nwachukwu (2006), Omekwu, Agborungbe, and

John-Okekek (2006). Oladele (2008) captures it appropriately by saying that a good number of our librarians are yet to embrace the ICT culture.

Lack of ICT infrastructure: Oladele (2008) posits that for the effective use of ICT in libraries, computers and electricity must be present. He, however, notes that these minimal requirements are not present in most of our libraries. Oladapo (2006) also notes that the lack of well developed ICT infrastructure and services in libraries is a great setback in Nigeria.

Strategies for combating the envisaged problems: Every problem on earth has a solution. On the problem of funding, Igbo and Dike (2006) suggest that the academic libraries should get their grants directly from the government. By so doing, according to them, the librarians become directly accountable for library funds. They also argue that the agreement reached between the government and the Academic staff union of universities (ASUU) on the allocation of 10% of the university grant for library services be implemented without interruption. The issue of work pressure can be solved by engaging more hands in the library now that there are many library schools churning out library graduates by the day. On the problem of inadequate knowledge of the resources by some librarians and the issue of difficulty in determining the needs of users, Attama (2005) recommends that the personnel of the libraries need adequate training for them to perform efficiently. He concludes by saying that librarians should be sent regularly to in-service courses to keep abreast with the expanding frontiers of knowledge and the latest means of accessing and delivering information. Echezona (2005) suggests that the skills of library staff should be updated to enable them help patrons.

On lack of ICT culture and infrastructure, Ikpaahindi (2006) is of the opinion that librarians and information scientists should endeavour to know the worth of using computer, how to operate it and how to apply it to whatever jobs that are assigned to them to accomplish. He further suggests that the curriculum of the students offering library science studies, Archival studies and Information Science generally in the tertiary institutions should be reviewed in line with the modern trend in ICT. On infrastructure, Okore (2005) advises government to intensify efforts at making Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) and Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) more efficient. Ikpaahindi (2006) asserts that the longevity of the life span of computers hinges on constant supply electricity. Oladele (2008) caps it all by saying that, at the corporate level, individual library management must make conscious efforts to develop its ICT infrastructure.

Research Design

A survey research design was used for the study as, according to Ofo (1994), a survey research generally collects data from a defined population to describe the present condition of the population using the variables under study. Surveys are either sample or census. In a sample survey, a section of the population is studied through simple random or stratified random sampling. In census, the whole population is studied. The former was used for the study.

Area of Study

The area of study is Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Population and Sample

The population of study comprised the 176 members of the academic staff of the college and a sample population of 122. the sample size was based on the Yaro Yamane formular for selecting a sample from a finite population. The formular is stated thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size

N is the finite population

E is the level of significance (or level of tolerable error, usually 5%)

I is a unity (i.e. a constant).

Sampling Technique
The members of the academic staff were selected through stratified random sampling thus:

	Schools	**Population**	**Sample**
1	School of Education	40	28
2	School of Languages	30	21
3	School of Vocational Education	32	22
4	School of Sciences	52	36
5	School of Arts & Social Sciences	22	15
	Total	**176**	**122**

Distribution and Return of Data Instrument:

Out of the 122 sampled, 120 (i.e. 98%) returned the questionnaire.

Analysis of Data

The data collected from the research instrument was analysed using the mean scores after being treated to a Likert Scale of four points. Comparing the mean scores with the computed mean, an item in the questionnaire is said to be favourable if equal or more than the criteria mean. Conversely, if the computed mean is less than the criteria mean, it was regarded as unfavourable.

Table 1: The perceived need for library liaisons in academic libraries include:

		SA	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**X**	**Decision**
(a)	The Programme is capable of saving users' time	75	35	10	0	3.6	Accept
(b)	Many researchers lack the skills for information search	70	45	5	0	3.5	Accept
(c)	The programme can alert users to the existing resources and services in the library	65	45	5	5	3.4	Accept
(d)	The programme is needed as information quickly goes out of date	48	62	7	3	3.3	Accept
(e)	Can alert users to new services and resources in the library	47	59	4	10	3.2	Accept
(f)	Has the potential to complement other sources of information available to users	47	50	10	13	3.1	Accept

It is noted from Table 1 that the most favoured need for putting in place the library liaison program is the need to save the time of the users while the least is the complementing of other sources of information available to the users. With a high level of acceptance in each case, all the six reasons for establishing library liaison programme in academic libraries are upheld. These findings are corroborated by Rowley (1992), Kirkham (1989), Hamilton (1995), Kurupu and Gruber (2006), and Ugwuoke (2006).

Table 2: The functions of the library liaison include:

		SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
a	Link between the main library and academic departments	48	60	12	0	3.3	Accept
b	Deeply involved in collection development	60	60	0	0	3.5	Accept
c	Compiles relevant bibliographies for researchers	60	48	12	0	3.4	Accept
d	Offers reference assistance	44	68	4	4	3.3	Accept
e	Helps researchers to improve their information-seeking skills	68	48	4	0	3.5	Accept
f	Consulted if discipline specific help is needed in finding information	80	40	0	0	3.7	Accept
g	Provides individualised instruction for liaison department	48	62	6	4	3.3	Accept

From Table 2 above, academic staff members accepted that it is the duty of the liaison to perform the functions listed a-g, the highest rated function being that he is consulted if discipline specific help is needed in finding information while the least are that he is a link between the main library and academic department, offers reference assistance, and provides individualised instruction for liaison departments. These findings are corroborated by the assertions of Swarthmore College Library (2008), Matacio (2002) and the Weltch Medical Library (2008).

Table 3: The merits of library liaison include:

		SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
a	Effective marketing of new services and resources in the library	68	40	12	0	3.5	Accept
b	Increased awareness of library resources and services	60	48	12	0	3.4	Accept
c	Constantly keeps researchers up-to-date in their field of study	48	60	4	8	3.2	Accept
d	Improvement on researchers' lack of skill in information search	52	52	16	0	3.3	Accept
e	Effective reference service	48	50	12	10	3.1	Accept
f	Effective referral service	40	65	10	5	3.0	Accept

From Table 3, the highest favoured merit from the list is effective marketing of new services and resources in the library while the least rated is effective referral service. These findings also agree with the views of Matacio (2002), and the Weltch Medical Library.

Table 4: The envisaged problems of library liaison programme are:

		SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
a	Lack of fund to acquire enough/library resources	70	50	0	0	3.6	Accept
b	Inadequate knowledge of the available sources on the part of librarians	65	45	5	5	3.4	Accept
c	Pressure of work experienced by the librarians	48	62	8	2	3.3	Accept
d	Difficulty in determining the needs of the users	60	48	8	4	3.4	Accept
e	Lack of ICT culture in some libraries	70	45	5	0	3.5	Accept
f	Lack of ICT infrastructure	60	47	8	5	3.4	Accept

In Table 4, among the envisaged six problems of the library liaison arrangement, the staff rated lack of fund to acquire enough library resources as the greatest while the pressure of work was rated the least

problem. These findings are reinforced by the views of Lyanda (2001), Okozor and Obidike (2005), Reyes (2006), Oladapo (2006), Adetimirin (2007, Ugwuanyi (2008), Kirkham (1989), Secker and Tedd (1998), Kurupu and Gruber (2006), Ikpaahindi (2006, Omeku and others (2006), Oladele (2008), and Oladapo (2006).

Table 5: Strategies for combating the problems associated with library liaison programme include:

		SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
a	Adequate funding to acquire information sources	67	42	8	3	3.4	Accept
b	Employment of more staff to reduce pressure of work	60	45	15	0	3.4	Accept
c	Training and retraining of staff	70	30	20	10	3.5	Accept
d	Curriculum review to accommodate more ICT skills	65	48	5	2	3.5	accept
e	Government-private partnership in the provision of ICT infrastructure	64	36	15	5	3.3	accept

Lastly, it is noted in Table 5 that the least rated strategy to combat the problems associated with library liaison programme is government-private partnership in the provision of ICT infrastructure while the highest rated strategies are training and retraining of staff, and curriculum review to accommodate more skills in ICT. The assertions by Attama (2005), Echezona (2005), Ikpaahindi (2006), Okore (2005) and Oladele (2008) are in tandem with the findings above.

Summary and Conclusion

From the study, academic staff of the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu agreed that the library liaison should perform the seven functions outlined above. The merits of this programme are: effective marketing of resources; increased awareness of library resources; keeping researchers up-to-date in their field of study; improving researchers' information searching skills; effective reference and referral services. Envisaged problems include: lack of fund to acquire information-bearing resources; inadequate knowledge of the available resources on the part of librarians; pressure of work; difficulty in determining the needs of users; and lack of ICT culture and infrastructure.

To combat these problems, the study revealed the following: adequate funding to acquire information sources; engagement of more staff to reduce the pressure of work; training and retraining of staff, curriculum review to accommodate more skills in ICT; and government-private partnership in the provision of ICT infrastructure. To be able to provide all these requires both political and financial will on the part of the academic library stakeholders. After all, a gem cannot be polished without friction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Academic libraries should, as a matter of urgency, put in place library liaison programme.
- Academic libraries should be well funded in order to be well positioned to acquire adequate information-bearing sources.
- Academic libraries should computerise their operations so that users should have open access to computerised databases.
- Library and Information Science curriculum should be reviewed to accommodate more skills in ICT.
- Library staff should be constantly trained in the use of ICT to perform library tasks.
- The government, through the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), should generate and distribute more electricity needed by the communications industry.

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