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Introduction

Libraries in educational institutions provide relevant information resources for teaching, learning, and research. The library of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) faces challenges in providing adequate resources and efficient services to its clientele. Educational reforms introduced in the country at the tertiary level beginning ten years ago and the collegiate system adopted by the university have brought about many changes in the academic programmes. There has also been a phenomenal growth in student numbers over the past decade. Enrollment at KNUST, for example, has more than doubled. The student population in the 1996/97 was 6,321, and by the end of 2005/2006 it had increased to 19,964, an increase of more than 200 percent. The impact on library resources includes overuse of library books and journals and the consequent deterioration of the collection.

Library orientation is both a marketing and welcoming activity and often forms part of the university's orientation programme for first year students. Fidzani (1995) outlines the objectives of orientation and user education:

- 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 material and services;
- to educate users about information sources and resources and how to exploit such resources effectively and efficiently.

Every year the KNUST Library organises user education for all new students, in the form of lectures followed by demonstrations and guided tours of the various departments in the library: Lending, Law, Photocopying, Ghana Collection, Reference and Research, the United Nations, Theses, Women's Collection, Serials, and Electronic Information. The major problem facing the library is how to organise user education more effectively given the rise in student numbers, the limited number of professional staff and the advent of electronic resources which has changed the information landscape.

This study examines the constraints facing the KNUST Library in its attempt to provide effective user education, especially in this era of increased student numbers. It takes a critical look at how user education programmes are planned, organized, and implemented at KNUST; and how information technology (IT) could lessen the burden on librarians carrying out these programmes.

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1

Literature Review

Hooks, et al. (2007), remark that, "teaching students how to use the university library resources had been a challenge for academic librarians for most of the twentieth century and has emerged as a high priority for academic librarians in the twenty-first century as well." Alimohammadi and Sajjadi (2006) add that, "library and information professionals have experienced the information seeking challenges of newcomers for many years, and have planned a wide range of instructional programmes to tackle this problem." 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-ROMs, and the Internet.

The American Library Association (1989, p. 2) defines user education as encompassing all types of activities designed to teach users about library services, facilities and organization, library resources, and search strategies. A survey of the literature reveals the importance of user education in academic libraries. It is believed that improving user's skills in exploiting library resources and services can lead to greater use of the library. According to Behrens (1993), library skills include using the catalogue and other bibliographic tools, selecting information from these resources, and physically locating them on the shelves. According to Gericke (1996), user education refers to teaching the use of libraries and information sources. It includes instruction in the use of one or more reference sources as a part of reference transactions, library use presentations, and bibliographic instruction.

Mews (1992) describes a process of broad and continuous user education that is an integral part of student learning. Ford (1994) describes the situation in South Africa, Australia, and the Netherlands, where information literacy has become part of the secondary and tertiary curriculum, and the importance of information literacy to development of individuals and societies. Foss (1994) argues for user education at all levels, beginning through advanced.

Today's students need computer literacy as a part of information literacy. Doherty, et al., (1999) discuss the problems presented by many choices and a lack of stable standards. Wooliscroft (1997, p. 7) defines "information literacy" as "the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand." Wood (1984) finds user education valuable in orienting students to the world of scholarship.

Why User Education?

Academic libraries recognize that students need to be able to obtain, use, and apply information to be successful. Organizations that offers goods or services for sale recognize the importance of making the customer aware of opportunities for spending money. Similarly, an academic library should make its users aware of the resources and services that are offered, where to find them, and how to exploit what is available.

The introduction of the collegiate system at KNUST has necessitated the introduction of enhanced user education in the university library for the following reasons:

- Emphasis on interdisciplinary research;
- Change in the system of examination from annual to semester, with emphasis on assignments, self study, etc.
- Increases in the amount of available literature;
- The absence of good libraries at the elementary and secondary school levels in the country's educational system
- Gradual introduction of computers in library processes

User Education at the KNUST Library

At KNUST Library, the user education programme is centrally coordinated at the main library by the Lending Librarian. Until 2005/2006, it had two parts: a lecture, followed by orientation/guided tours. The lecture is given by the University Librarian or her representative at the Fresh Students Orientation. The Librarian highlights the importance of the library in the university setting and discusses different information formats and how they are organized in the library. She explains library rules and regulations, opening hours, borrowing rights and procedures, and gives a brief introduction to the classification scheme.

The orientation is offered primarily to new students, but continuing students and other groups of users may be considered on request from their heads of department. 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 is to make students confident and able to ask for assistance from the library staff whenever they needed help. After the lecture, senior members of the library staff take the new students on a guided tour of the library. This includes Lending, Undergraduate, Reference and Research, Serials, Law, Photocopying, Ghana Collection, Theses, United Nations and Women's Collections, and the Electronic Information Department.

During the guided tour, library staff take groups of twenty to thirty and introduce the various service points. For example, at the Research and Reference Department, users are shown tools such as encyclopaedias, dictionaries, almanacs, yearbooks, and other technical publications. At the Electronic Information Department, users are taught how to access the Internet, subject gateways, and databases. Students are introduced to basic services such as how to use the catalogue. They are led through the borrowing procedures, and given copies of the library guide.

Information Technology in User Education

With wider Internet connectivity, educational institutions in this country are beginning to tap the opportunities offered by the information society. Currently, many e-journals and e-books are available to library users. The KNUST Library benefits from the Program for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI), initiated by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), which offers access to about 9,000 free online journals to both faculty and students. Many libraries, including KNUST, have started replacing the traditional card catalogues with Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC).

In 2006/2007, the KNUST Library introduced computers into user education, with a recorded version of the orientation programme for new students, in the form of a CD that replaces the lecture. Participants in the recorded orientation are the University Librarian and representatives from Cataloguing, Lending, Serials, and Reference and Research, Electronic Information, and Systems, and includes demonstrations of databases and other resources.

Problems

Students from some faculties and departments do not participate in user education programmes. Of more than 1,000 students from the Faculty of Social Sciences in the College of Art and Social Sciences, only 250 students attended the user education programme in 2004/2005, and only four students from the College of Engineering attended during the same period. This apathy is mainly attributed to a lack of cooperation from the university faculty and central administration. User education can only be successfully carried out if there is cooperation between the library and other key stakeholders. This requires provision of information about the curriculum so that user instruction is relevant to students' work. Faculty cooperation is also required to arrange for students to attend the course. Sometimes cooperation from the university administration and the faculties ensures that the exercise is carried out early and effectively. McCarthy (1985) says that lack of faculty cooperation from the faculty is mainly due to lecturers' own poor bibliographic skills, apprehension, and low use of the

library. It may also be because the library does not publicise its operations and services enough to convince people that the library can help them.

Presently. there are only nineteen senior staff members in the university library system, six of whom are in the college libraries. As indicated earlier, user education is centrally coordinated at the main library. This implies that only thirteen senior staff members, including the University Librarian, are involved in this important exercise at any point in time. The total enrollment for 2005/2006 was 19,964, and one can imagine the burden on twelve librarians.

Information technology also presents problems for user education. Full and effective exploitation of e-resources assumes that both library personnel and students possess computer literacy. In addition, the library should have unrestricted Internet connectivity, adequate workstations for its clientele, and access to databases online or on CD-ROM. At the moment, KNUST library has Internet connectivity and a number of computers that can be used by readers. It also has access to e-journals and other databases under the PERI and HINARI programmes, which are available for both faculty and students. There is a need to 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 faculty and students.

The user education CD-ROM has some shortcomings. It lacks practical demonstrations. For example, the discourse on the catalogue was limited to books with single authorship, and publications with joint authorship were not mentioned or explained. Moreover, there was no indication of how a book could be located in the catalogue and subsequently retrieved from the shelf. Nearly all other presenters likewise failed to explain adequately how to access available resources, although the Lending Department did provide some information on borrowing and returning books. The CD was too short for its purpose and lacking content. It should therefore not be used as a substitute for traditional user education, but only as a complement, since the practical demonstration is indispensable.

The library faces serious financial constraints and would not be in a position to sustain these services once the donor support ends. There is therefore the need to make adequate provision in the library budget to cover subscriptions to both e-journals and CD-ROM databases. The present library budget allocation does not enable it to subscribe to these resources.

Conclusion

User education is one of the important services of the KNUST library each year for new entrants into the university. It is designed to equip users with information skills that will enable them to make efficient use of library resources and services. The increase in student population, coupled with rapid advances in ICT, has necessitated changes in user education. Lectures, tour, printed guides, displays, seminars and workshops, taped slides, and applications of audio-visual methods are some techniques that are employed in user education. Some of these are very useful in teaching information skills. Librarians need to team up with other professionals to prepare audio-visual materials to supplement traditional methods of user education.

Where formal training is given, there must be enough hands-on experience. Students must be shown electronic information resources that are relevant to the subject being researched or taught. Training in using electronic information resources should be integrated into the curriculum and adapted to the abilities of users.

Since 2005/2006, the user education programme has been recorded on CD and shown to students prior to tours of the main library. Exit interviews conducted by the researcher with students who participated in the programme revealed that they have problems using the catalogue, locating books on the shelves, and going through borrowing procedures. The university library must devise other user education methods for its new users.

Recommendations

It is recommended that

- the University Librarian and library staff map out strategies for user education for the incoming students before the commencement of a new academic year.
- all professional librarians be involved in the user education programme. This will not only reduce the stress that colleagues in the Main University library go through but also make it less burdensome and more effective.
- retrain staff in the role of IT in libraries. This will enable them obtain an understanding of the technical issues, ask the right questions, and demand appropriate service from the IT team.
- train library users in the proper use of the Internet, especially in searching. This saves bandwidth and enables users to find resources more easily.
- install PDF and Acrobat software on computers in the lab to enable students and other users to read online journals and other publications
- install more workstations for CD-ROM searches in the Serials Department. This will enable the librarian to see problems occurring, prevent mishaps, and approach users who may not otherwise ask for assistance.
- provide incentive packages for professional librarians to be involved in user education. This could be in the form of an honorarium, or considered as a part-time teaching allowance as pertains with faculty.
- provide assistance for users who will potentially be affected by the new computer-oriented library system. This could be done through the preparation of a well-planned manual or handbook on computer applications in the library.

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