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Spring 4-16-2022

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Okogwu, Flora Ifeoma, "The Role of Academic Libraries in Promoting Clientele Centered Services" (2022).

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). 7094.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/7094>

The Role of Academic Libraries in Promoting Clientele Centered Services

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Abstract

Academic libraries play a key role in the promotion of user centered services through the provision of information resources and services for the information needs of the library clientele. With the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the traditional library services have no place in satisfying the curiosity of the library users. Library users are gradually keeping away from the use of the library and less value are attached to the library. This paper looked at the traditional and hybrid services that are easy to access and more convenient for the library users as a way of promoting clientele centered services in academic libraries. The study recommended that academic libraries should introduce and employ strategic services in order to attract the library users to the library services.

Keywords: Academic libraries, Library, Promotion, Services, Clientele, Clientele Centered, Information and Communication Technology.

Introduction

According to Reitz (2004), a library is a collection or set of collections of books and/or other resources that are arranged and maintained for use (reading, consultation, study, research, etc). Libraries are recognized as information gateways and the hubs around which all academic activities in an academic institution revolve. The vision and mission of libraries have evolved to fulfill these new requirements as a result of the rise of Information and Communication Technology, which has positively impacted the function of institutions.

An appropriate and state-of-the-art library exists in academic institutions to support teaching, learning, and research activities. The library is a social service organization that was established primarily to address the different information demands of its clients via the provision of diverse information goods and services. Libraries in academic institutions have long been considered as essential reservoirs of important knowledge, as well as the "heart" of the academic system. To support this, Okogwu (2017) remarked that establishing an academic system without a library is a pointless attempt, given that the goal and vision of education in general will be a distant cry and illusive.

Academic libraries are libraries that serve in academic institutions. Libraries are made up of three components: users, resources, and staff. Academic libraries perform complementary functions such as assisting academic institutions, faculty, and students with their research. Teaching and learning assistance at academic institutions require resources for improved learning and research, and what good are library resources if there are no users or clients to make use of them?

In this work, the terms "clientele" and "users" are used interchangeably. Clientele in academic libraries are diverse, with various information demands. Undergraduate and postgraduate students, visiting researchers, academic staff, and other academic institution personnel are among

the library's clients. The library customer, according to Nwalo (2003), is unquestionably the most essential individual in any library setting. Similarly, Aina (2004) stated that the library user is the main point of 21st century library and information services since libraries exist primarily to fulfill the user. The user is the most important part of all sorts of libraries; without users, the existence of libraries cannot be contemplated. Rao's (2015). The users are the reason libraries exist and open their doors to the public.

Academic libraries provide intangible services that are easily accessible to information users in order to meet their information demands. Academic libraries provide services such as indexing and abstracting, current awareness, reference, selective distribution of information, referral services, reprographic services, and so on. These library services are abstract in nature and can only be sensed rather than seen. Libraries as service organizations exist to accomplish the goals of the institutions that founded them. These goals can only be met by effectively delivering information to the appropriate person at the right time. To support this claim, Achonna and Osisanwo (2014) said that efficient service delivery is achieved when the appropriate information is supplied to the right people at the right time. The terms "clientele centric" and "user focused" and "user centered" are interchangeable. The word "user-centered" refers to the notion of paying more attention to the demands of system users (Rao 2015). It refers to a concentrated way of thinking about information services and systems. Academic libraries' services in addressing users' information demands are referred to as user-centered services.

Simply put, promotion is informing users of the benefits of using the library's resources and services. Academic libraries have always provided user-centered services from the outset, as their primary aim is to address the information demands of users in their various fields of activity. With the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), library patrons

now have the capacity to obtain more online items for free or at a cheap cost, and they are more confident in using online resources. The library is no longer regarded as the exclusive or even major source of knowledge for academics (Consortium of British Libraries in the British Isles (CURL) 2006). Library patrons are steadily reducing their use of the library. Students and teachers sense less value in the library structure; libraries are no longer the hub of the information universe, which necessitates stronger promotion of clientele-centered services, according to Okogwu (2011).

Much focus has been placed on research in academic institutions, and it is incumbent on academic libraries to re-examine their role in supporting users in promoting not just traditional library services but also clientele-centered services that might aid in their research activities. Academic libraries must prioritize two fundamental tasks that are essential to providing user-centered services. They are as follows:

1. Identifying user requirements and information-seeking behavior; and
2. User orientation and providing Information Literacy (IL) to help users make the most use of the library's resources, services, and products, Rao's (2015). This growth necessitates more aggressive library measures to ensure that libraries offer clientele-centered services in order to maintain and attract more readers to the library.

Conceptual Clarification

Clientele / User centered

In librarianship, the terms "clientele" and "users" are used interchangeably. User-centered is equivalent with user-centric or user-focused. The libraries designed their operations to satisfy the information demands of their patrons. According to Rao (2015), user-centric libraries are those that are planned/designed with the goal of serving the users' information needs/requirements as

best as possible. Academic libraries, being an essential component of the parent institution that formed them, have the primary goal of satisfying the information requirements of library users and members of the community.

According to Morris (1994), the notion of user-centered library services is often addressed in library literature as an antidote to a systems-centered approach. The author underlined the need of a theoretical and conceptual foundation for guiding the creation of a user-centered service. Morris (1994) also remarked that Dervin and others have contributed some insights into the nature of information and information seeking that might serve as a conceptual foundation for understanding how our thinking must alter in order to produce user-centered services. Morris' research implies that a new understanding of information may be used to reconsider and potentially restructure the library's mission, traditional service delivery, system design, and service assessment. Some psychological principles are given as a tool for improving our knowledge of how to build user-centered services.

Concept of Promotion

Promotion is fundamentally the process of informing or persuading customers about what you do and what you can do. According to Nicholas (1998), the benefits of promoting library services include: increased patronage and effective exploitation of library resources, greater organizational value, client education, and changed views. To broaden its service area, the library has branches, electronic access, library friends, and so on. Promotion entails using persuasive information regarding general information services and delivering this information to potential clients in target market segments. Publicity, public relations, personal representatives, advertising, and sales promotion are the five types of promotion. Building client connections,

branding and repackaging of information resources, marketing library services, marketing strategy, and planning are all key principles in librarianship.

The role of academic library (Traditional Library Services and Products)

In the library, the terms services and products are used interchangeably. They are a series of actions that libraries carry out in order to meet the information needs of its patrons. In order to promote client-centered services, academic libraries must provide library and information services that allow libraries to meet customers' information demands. Tella (etal) (2009) quoted Kothari as saying that libraries, particularly academic libraries, should provide the facilities and services required for the success of all formal programs of instruction, open the door to the world that lies beyond the boundaries of one field of study, and bring information materials, students, and scholars together in conditions that encourage reading for pleasure, self-discovery, personal growth, and the sharpening of intellectual curiosity. Aina (2004) and Popoola (2008) highlighted the following services as being unique to academic libraries:

- Lending services: This is a critical service offered by university libraries. This is a service that allows users to borrow library materials for a limited time. Books, journals, CD-ROMs, audiovisual materials, slides, videotapes, and projectors are examples of such materials. Lending services are critical for promoting equal and fair access to information materials.
- Inter-library loan and document delivery service: This is a service in which a library borrows a material from another library on behalf of its client that is not available in its own library. The lending library provides replacement materials for the original resources.
- Reservation service: This is a system in which a library reserves materials that are heavily used, few, and rare. This is necessary in order for users to consult such information resources.

- Provision of sitting and study facilities: Libraries are typically supposed to provide adequate seating and study facilities to their users so that they can consult and read information resources that are relevant to them. Additionally, study carrels should be supplied for researchers.
- Reference service: Providing reference service is a critical feature of any library. Users have a variety of information demands that they would like a librarian to assist them with. Users can request reference inquiries through the reference service.
- Exhibitions and displays: This service is used to promote the library's many products and services. This is accomplished by presenting such materials on display stands, display boards, and so on. Library materials on a topic of public interest, for example, could be shown.
- Library publications: Libraries are expected to publish publications that will help users navigate the library's products, services, and facilities. These publications should contain up-to-date and correct information about the library.
- User education: Users are supposed to receive user education from the library. This is done so that they can provide users with sufficient understanding about how to use the library. When consumers are educated on how to utilize the library, they will be able to use it successfully and efficiently. Through user education, the user will be able to obtain any information he or she desires while also learning the ability to use the library's resources independently. This could be accomplished through one-on-one sessions, library orientation tours, and classroom education.
- Selective information dissemination: This is a personalized service that provides users with information to support their research, teaching, and learning activities.
- Referral service: In this case, a reader may be routed to another library or other source of information. Professional groups, research institutes, and individual specialists are examples of venues where users could be referred.

- Translation service: There are some publications written in foreign languages other than English. Library users might desire such publications. It is important for libraries to provide access to such publications to users who need them. This service is very important in libraries that users are science inclined.
- Abstracting and indexing services: It is the function of the library to publish serial publications that evaluate the contents of a wide variety of periodicals and other titles relevant to common disciplines on a continual basis. These publications could be printed or electronic.
- Consultancy services. This is another another vital service that librarians provide to users in order to provide high-level professional guidance. Such services could be found in the fields of information technology and e-learning. The role of consultancy is to consult and advise users on a variety of issues relating to their information needs. It is also to ensure the robust delivery of existing services, to enable innovation in service delivery, to develop a clear understanding of user needs, to focus on providing quality services to users, and to facilitate the flow of information to internal and external users.

Another vital service that libraries provide to their patrons is current awareness. A current awareness service is a mechanism by which academic libraries provide relevant information about freshly released items that can be made available to their users. Through current awareness services, academic libraries encourage their users to establish good habits of keeping track on newly published literature. Agu (2006), p.121. Damas (2011), on the other hand, emphasized that for several generations, university libraries were primarily concerned with the role of their buildings as entrances to information, both print and subsequently digital. He stated that libraries are reinventing their services as a learning, cultural, and intellectual community institution.

Clientele Centered services

Clientele-centered services are iterative services in which the providers focus on the users and their convenience in providing such services. Academic libraries launched new products and services in order to educate and maintain positive connections with their diverse customers. Among these services are the introduction of a current awareness service; exhibition and display, selective dissemination of information; bulletin boards; complaints/suggestion boxes, a clientele education course, an electronic billboard, audio-visual services, and online dissemination of information through internet technology by creating links for current information on the library portal. Displays that are eye-catching, interactive websites, aggressive advocacy, advertising, direct marketing, book sales, friends' groups, contests, good media relations, public presentations, and other innovative technologies. Knowledgeable and motivated staff members are also excellent promotion tools for persuading library consumers.

Academic libraries must provide services that are comfortable, accessible, and effectively and efficiently address the information demands of customers in order to effectively promote patron focused services. This could be accomplished by offering the following user-centered services.

- e-library services include online and offline access to digital information resources, database searching, electronic reference, public relations, library promotion and marketing, and online circulation activities such as electronic reserves.

• The Information Literacy Programme (Bruce 2003) defines information literacy as the ability to access, assess, organize, and apply information in order to learn, problem solve, and make decisions in formal and informal learning environments, at work, at home, and in educational settings.

- customer services and queries

- and online access to library catalogue,
- databases and the internet.

Strategies employ by Academic libraries to Promote Clientele Centered Services

In addition to typical library services, libraries use techniques to promote clientele-centered services, such as academic departments providing a series of orientation sessions for new students. The instructions include using a computer to search the Online Public Access Catalogue for literature (OPAC). It will allow them to alleviate the worries they were already harboring by allowing them to use the library computers to identify, access, and sift both Print Information Resources (PIRs) and Electronic Information Resources (EIRs), noted Ahiazu (2012). This can be repeated until they are comfortable with the method in order to create independent literature search and study abilities that will assist them in developing a greater intellectual capacity that will aid them throughout their education.

Furthermore, Ahiazu (2012) emphasized the importance of the library organizing regular Information Literacy (IL) education and basic computer hands-on skills for library customers as frequently as possible. The training can take place in a classroom or online, but it must be interactive and include the use of sound, graphic illustrations, and written lecture notes. Because ICT-driven change is all about us (Harcombe and Lusher, 1998), Boff and Singer (2003) give further recommendations for librarians.

...must be willing and able to assess and alter the reference area, the collections, policies, methods, attitudes, or anything else in order to offer the most effective and

appropriate services possible. Although this type of librarian is user-centered rather than library centered, an agile librarian would not be a radical departure from the past.

Academic libraries should also offer targeted and current awareness services aimed at bringing customers closer to the library through the use of information and communication technologies. Libraries should implement e-CAS, e-SDI, and other technologies aimed at offering library services to clients from the convenience of their homes and offices, rather than requiring them to physically visit the library. Abubakar stated that with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the role and position of libraries has shifted from a traditional information environment to an e-environment (2011). Similarly, Adeogun (2004) stated that libraries must reconsider their services and create more flexible and user-centered services that will enable quick, convenient, rapid, and expanded access to valuable information resources that are boundless, virtual, multi-media as well as timeless to meet the information needs of users.

Conclusion

Academic libraries should provide hybrid services to their users. Hybrid services should be introduced as alternative variations of the traditional library services. The hybrid services provide the following e-library services: online/offline access to digital information resources, database searching, electronic reference, public relations service, library promotion and marketing, online circulation activities such as electronic reserve, e-publishing, information literacy programme, user services and queries and online access to library catalogue, databases and the internet. The 21st century library, staying relevant to the users is everyone's job.

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