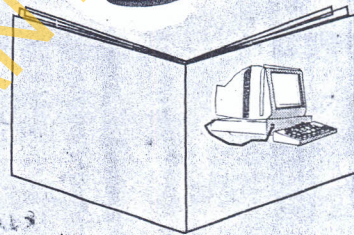


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UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

An Assessment of Newspaper Utilisation by Students in a Nigerian University

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Abstract

This paper summarises the findings on the utilisation of newspapers by undergraduate students in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Ogbomoso, Nigeria. The variables examined include sex, age, sources of information, fascinating columns, and constraints to the utilisation of newspapers in libraries. Undergraduate students (200 - 500 level) who are actual users of the newspaper reading room and who are well acquainted with the library were used for the study. The findings revealed that undergraduate students do read newspapers but not frequently. Majority of the users are satisfied with the information obtained in the newspapers. A high proportion of the students feel that the newspapers provided by the library is not enough compared to the number of users. However, the information service of the library is not effective if it does not make materials like newspapers available to users.

Introduction

Intellectual access to recorded information has, quite properly, been a major preoccupation of librarians. Its importance has been reflected in the efforts devoted to the design and creation of biographies, catalogues, classification schemes, and other devices that help establish the existence of individual documents and their relevance to specific enquiries. While newspapers are becoming increasingly recognised as important sources of information, they have been largely ignored by information specialists probably as a result of problems encountered in the collection of these periodicals. Recent activities in the information community have

began to focus upon newspapers and their worth to the researchers of both professional and amateur status. According to Upham (1988), most information specialist realise that newspapers are important although too often forgotten or ignored information resources but they must be aware that they have a real responsibility to provide access to and protection for the unique category of materials.

In Nigeria, libraries simply do not have the means, the funds and the technology to mount a coordinated programme to gain control over the nation's newspapers. However, libraries in Nigeria acquire newspapers as part of their reference collection. Newspapers lack certain characteristics of other library materials. One

characteristic that distinguishes newspapers from other library materials is their size. This factor alone usually necessitate the storage of newspapers away from library materials, as indeed does the bulk of volumes accumulated over time (Lund, 1988).

Newspapers constitute one of the most important primary research sources. Their information keeps the readers informed of current events as well as serving to educate and entertain and they are also consulted for retrospective information (Afolabi, 1991; Okoye, 1993). They are an indispensable source of history for the professional historian, for the sociologist or economist. The newspaper contain information on population, social heritage etc., and for students they are often the only research source available in some cases (Woods, 1988). Student's indulgence in extra-curricular reading of various types of materials (newspapers, magazines, novels etc.) are likely to be crucial factors in the development of good reading abilities, while absence of these may constitute an obstacle. Unoh (1975) believes a rich experimental background in reading is conducive to, or significantly related to, the development of superior reading ability. Investigating the utilisation of newspapers by students is necessary in this stage when timely and adequate information is important to the development of the nascent democratic government in place in Nigeria. This is because newspapers will pinpoint development in the society to which libraries and information services must address themselves if they are to play a useful role in the society.

However, a university library should cater for four categories of library users, which are identified as teachers, undergraduates, postgraduates and research workers. This

study focuses on the undergraduate students of the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Ogbomoso, Oyo State.

Objectives

The best way of getting to know about users and their information needs is to carry out specific users' studies. This is one of such studies carried out in LAUTECH Library to assess the reading habits of undergraduate students in Nigeria as regards to the newspaper. The survey was intended to study the use of the newspaper collection with a view to determining user satisfaction.

Therefore, this study aims to look at the following objectives:

- (a) to investigate the frequency of students utilisation of the newspapers available in the library;
- (b) to examine if the present newspaper service pattern is effective;
- (c) to investigate major constraints to the reading of newspapers; and
- (d) to establish the level of satisfaction of needs.

Review of Literature

Information about newspapers in libraries and information centres in Nigeria is very scarce. Although, there are articles about the problems of deteriorating newspapers and indexing, there are no up-to-date literature on the basic activities associated with newspapers in Nigeria. However, an academic library can not exist without other printed materials like journals, magazines, newspapers and newsletters as well as non-print media like films, tapes, records and microfilms. According to Okorafor (1991) academic library by their nature are supposed to acquire,

process into retrievable form and to make available items of information into the academic community. Therefore, newspapers as a document are set apart from other library sources of information by its transient nature. The explicit features of the newspaper, according to Martin (1988), are the news articles, editorials, vital statistics, syndicated columns, and advertising. However, the Library of Congress defines the newspaper as "A serial publication that is designed to be a primary source of written information on current events connected with public affairs which may be local, national, and/or international in scope". It contains a broad range of news on all subjects and activities and is not limited to any specific subjects as well as advertising, legal notices, vital statistics and illustrations.

In Nigeria, little had been done on the bibliographic control of newspapers because it is a very difficult task and the resources to be used are also limited. The volatile nature of nearly every aspect of the format that is frequency, size, publisher, place of publication and, most importantly the title makes the creation of reliable bibliographic record a risky venture (Upham, 1988). The key to successful utilisation of newspaper lies in indexing the contents. Soper (1988) pointed out that the principles and technology of indexing are the same for all types of material, although newspapers require some special considerations.

With the increasing immediacy of news in the modern environment and the growing complexity of current affairs, with the emphasis on recent issue not dealt with by other sources makes the library newspaper reference service a unique one. However, awareness, availability, accessibility, relevance, and need are some of the factors that determine whether a newspaper like any other information

commodity will be used (Oyovwerotu, 1996). The under-utilisation of library holdings and facilities is undoubtedly due as much to the fact that users are unaware of the facilities offered by libraries as to the fact that libraries do not have a precise knowledge to prepare their reports, courses of study and to know the results of research on new developments and the progress that have been made. The library newspaper collection and sources relies for its information perhaps too heavily, on press cutting, on news and script indexes, pamphlets, press agency messages, and in a support role of reference books.

LAUTECH Newspaper Collection

The library subscribes to two daily newspapers: The Guardian and Nigerian Tribune, and one weekly news magazine that is TELL magazine. All newspapers that come into the library are captioned while emphasis is placed on Science, Technology & Engineering, Health & Medicine, Environmental Studies, Computer Science, Agriculture and Education. This is to enable easy access to such materials by users in accordance to their area of interest and the philosophy of the University.

LAUTECH Library has a special reading-room for newspapers that can contain a total of twenty-five readers at once for the sole purpose of reading the newspapers.

Methodology

A library user study may be defined as any study relating to library use, in any or all of its aspects. In this connection, the following categories of user studies may be distinguished: studies aimed at determining the overall pattern of interaction with the user community, without reference to any particular mode of information reception by users. Secondly, studies that assess the use of a given

information source, such as books and periodical publications - generally known as user studies and thirdly, studies that determine the information flow pattern in the system of communicating knowledge. This study falls into the second category, which aims to assess the use of newspapers by a particular group in the university, that is undergraduate students. The technique used to obtain a meaningful data for this study was a simple survey. The study consists of two hundred and forty undergraduate students who are regular users of the library. The undergraduate students (200-500 level) are actual users of the newspaper reading room and are well acquainted with the library. While 100 level students were left out of the study because they were yet to get used to the university system. The questionnaire was distributed according to the faculties in the university,

which includes Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Environmental Science and Faculty of Agricultural Sciences. The survey instrument used was a validated questionnaire aimed at eliciting data on how the students utilise newspapers in their university library. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: section 1 includes the student demographic information while section II includes questions on the utilisation of the newspapers available in the library by undergraduate students. The results of the study were analysed using percentages, tables and bar charts.

Findings and Discussion

A total of 175 questionnaire were returned out of the 240 questionnaire distributed in the survey, there was a response rate of 73%. The demographic distribution of the returned questionnaire is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Faculty		
Engineering	45	26
Agriculture	44	25
Environmental Science	41	23
	45	25
Gender		
Male	121	69.1
Female	54	30.9
Age Group		
16-20	62	35.4
21 - 25	64	36.4
26-30	33	18.8
31-above	16	9.4

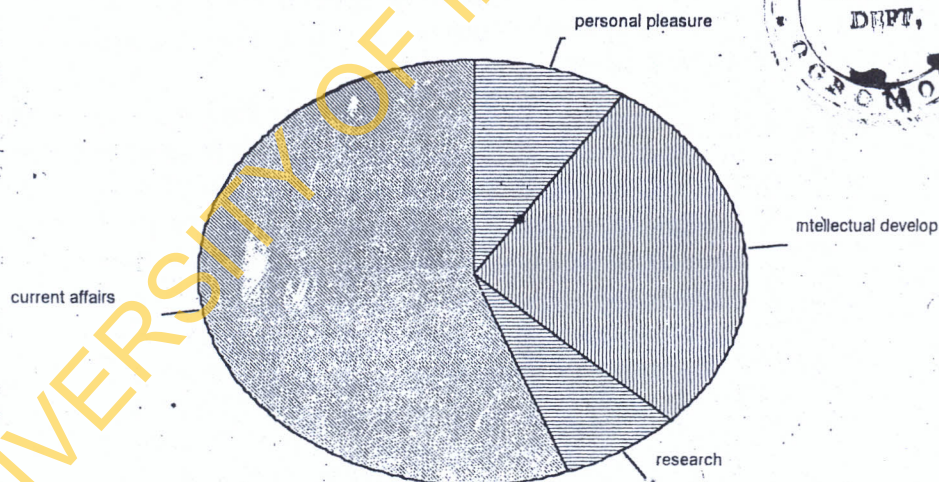
The distribution of LAUTECH students who participated in the study is shown in the table above. However, the findings in Table 1 indicates that a high proportion of male users 121 (69.1%) use the newspaper reading room than the female users, 54 (30.9%). This could be attributed to the fact that more male students visit the newspaper reading room to read newspapers than female students. The distribution of the respondents by age reveals that 126 or 71.8% of LAUTECH undergraduate students who read newspapers in the library is less than 26 years old.

The students were asked if the newspaper service pattern is effective in LAUTECH Library. Majority of the students disagreed, 97 (55.4%) while 78 (44.6%) agreed. When interviewed, some of the students that disagreed responded that stale (a day old)

newspapers were sometimes given to them. In addition, this is due to the fact that the newspapers were may not arrive on time.

The respondents were asked about the major reasons why they consult newspapers in the library. As represented Figure 1 below, 95 (55.4%) responded that they consult newspapers in order to get acquainted with current affairs especially now that the country is in a democratic dispensation. Moreover, the newspapers will give actual accounts of events happening in the society compared to when there was a military regime. Some of the respondents, 46 (28%) read newspapers for intellectual development, 16 (9.1%) to achieve personal pleasure and 13 (7.4%) to get materials for research and assignments.

Figure 1: Reasons for consulting newspapers



According to this survey, none of the respondent had ever browsed the Internet to go through any of their favourite newspapers. The respondents when interviewed indicated that they were not aware that newspapers could be browsed through the net while some others stated that browsing the newspapers

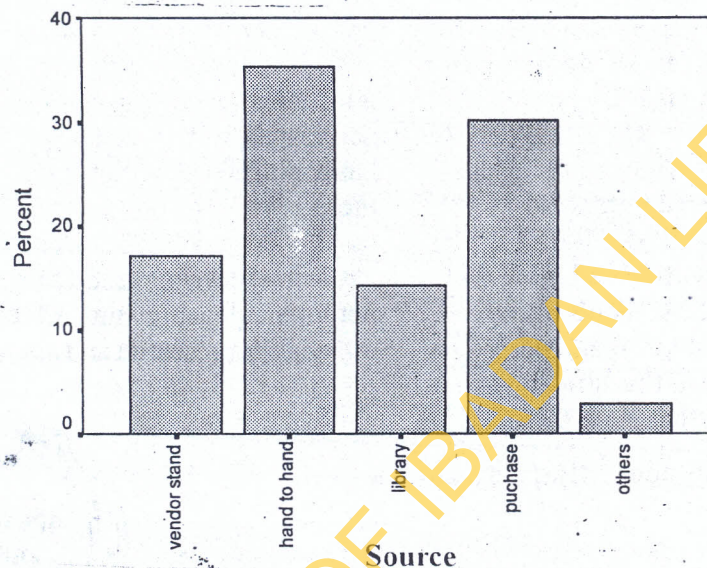
on the Internet is more expensive than coming to the library to read the newspapers.

Apart from the library, the respondents were asked to indicate other sources where they get their newspapers as represented by Figure II. Many of the respondents, 62 (35.4%) stated that they get the newspapers from friends around. This means they collect

from others around them who might have borrowed from other people, 53 (30.3%) respondents purchased the newspapers, 30 (17.1%) of the respondents stand at vendors stall to read the newspapers while 25

(14.3%) stated that the only place where they get the newspapers is the library. While other respondents, 5 (2.9%) listed other sources e.g. reading the newspapers in their parents office.

Figure II: Source of getting newspapers



The respondents were asked to indicate their views on the conduciveness of the newspaper reading room in LAUTECH Library. While 93 (51.1%) see the reading room as conducive, 82 (46.9%) does not agree. This means that some of the students do not see the reading room as been conducive despite the fact that the newspaper reading room has a spacious environment with comfortable chairs.

The respondents were asked to indicated the most fascinating aspect of the newspaper,

Table II below shows that most of the students 56 (32%) prefer educational features in newspapers while 49 (28%) finds news article more fascinating. These choices are not surprising since student's activities are educational and they also need information about things happening around them. 31 (17.7%) respondents enjoy the entertainment column, 19 (10.9%) prefer reading cartoons, 13 (17.4%) enjoy the editorials, while 4 (2.3%) and 3 (1.7%) prefer advertisement and the financial column respectively.

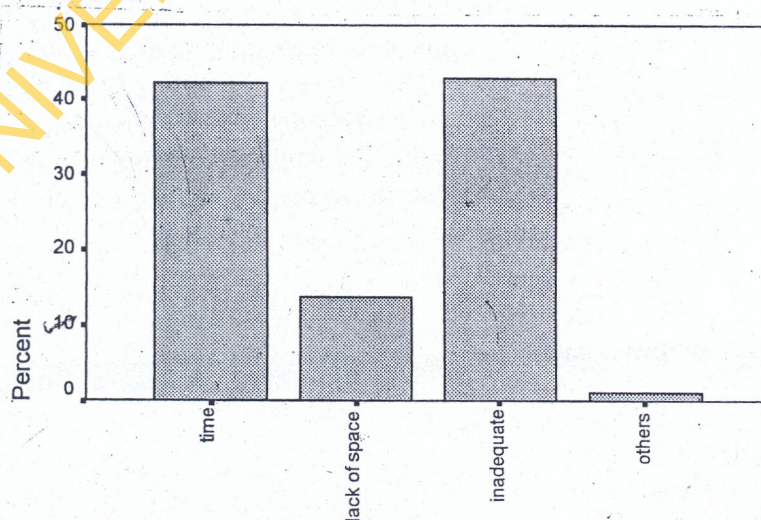
Table II: Fascinating Column in Newspapers

Fascinating column	Frequency	Percent
Educational features	56	32
News events	49	28
Entertainment	31	17.7
Cartoons	19	10.9
Editorials	13	7.4
Advertisements	4	2.3
Financial column	3	1.7

This study investigated the frequency of students using the newspaper reading room. It was discovered that 112 (64%) of the respondents read newspapers in the library occasionally. While 31 (17.7%) come on a weekly basis, 24 (14.3%) on daily basis and 7 (4%) when they feel like. This reveals that most undergraduate students do not visit the library frequently to read newspapers on a daily basis. This could be attributed to the constraints listed below by the students in Figure III. Most of the constraint encountered

by students (42.%) are due to the fact that the newspapers are not enough. This means they have to wait for others to finish reading before they can read. Some of the respondents (42.3%) also indicated that they do not have enough time to come to the library to read newspapers everyday while 24 (13.7%) feels that the sitting space in the newspaper reading room is not adequate. The result also shows that 2 (1.1%) respondents who are female students feel shy sitting with boys because there are more male students in the newspaper reading room.

Figure III: Constraints to Reading Newspaper



Constraints to Reading Newspaper

However, the respondents were asked to make recommendations for the future improvement of the newspaper services in the LAUTECH Library. Here are some of their recommendations:

“Enough newspapers should be given to students so that they do not destroy them because 5 or 6 students read one newspaper at once”.

“More chairs should be provided to accommodate more students”.

“Make it possible to have five or more copies of each newspaper at the reading room”.

Educative newspaper clippings should be pasted on the library notice board”.

It is interesting to note that the above listed recommendations are conditions that can be achieved by any library. Nevertheless, under strict economic adversity it may be difficult. For example, having newspaper clippings and providing five copies of each daily newspaper. However, photocopies could be made of such captions instead of clippings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this survey provides some evidence about the utilisation of newspapers by undergraduate students in LAUTECH Library. Through reading can not be said to be a way of life for most Nigerians, the value of books and periodicals has been recognised and appreciated. Yet, this level of appreciation has not fully permeated the whole society (Ogunrombi and Adio, 1995). This study discovered that the newspapers' users in LAUTECH Library could be divided into two categories: those who read newspapers sporadically to meet their needs as they arise constitute the majority and those who uses the information services frequently. Though it is difficult to quantify utilisation even when

libraries try do document references and circulation services. Therefore, newspapers can be ascertained to be useful when they are properly utilised. As discovered in this study undergraduate students in LAUTECH do utilise this service but not on a frequent basis. However, the under-utilisation of library holdings and facilities is undoubtedly due to the fact that some users are unaware of the facilities offered by the library. Newspapers can be a great help to getting information to people. Information satisfaction, according to Lee and Pow (1996) is affected by the quality of information that is attributed by availability, timeliness, precisions, reliability, completeness etc. Therefore, the user expectation on the quality of information is demonstrated by his or her preferred information characteristics. University libraries in Nigeria should plan for the future supply of adequate number of newspapers for its library users. The result of this study is however, very useful in planning for the future organisation of newspaper services and to redesign how newspapers will be acquired in such a manner that library users in Nigeria will be satisfied despite the financial constraints faced by most libraries in Nigeria. It is however important for library managers of serial collections to appreciate what can be done to manage or positively influence the way library users find library and information services applicable to their daily routines.

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