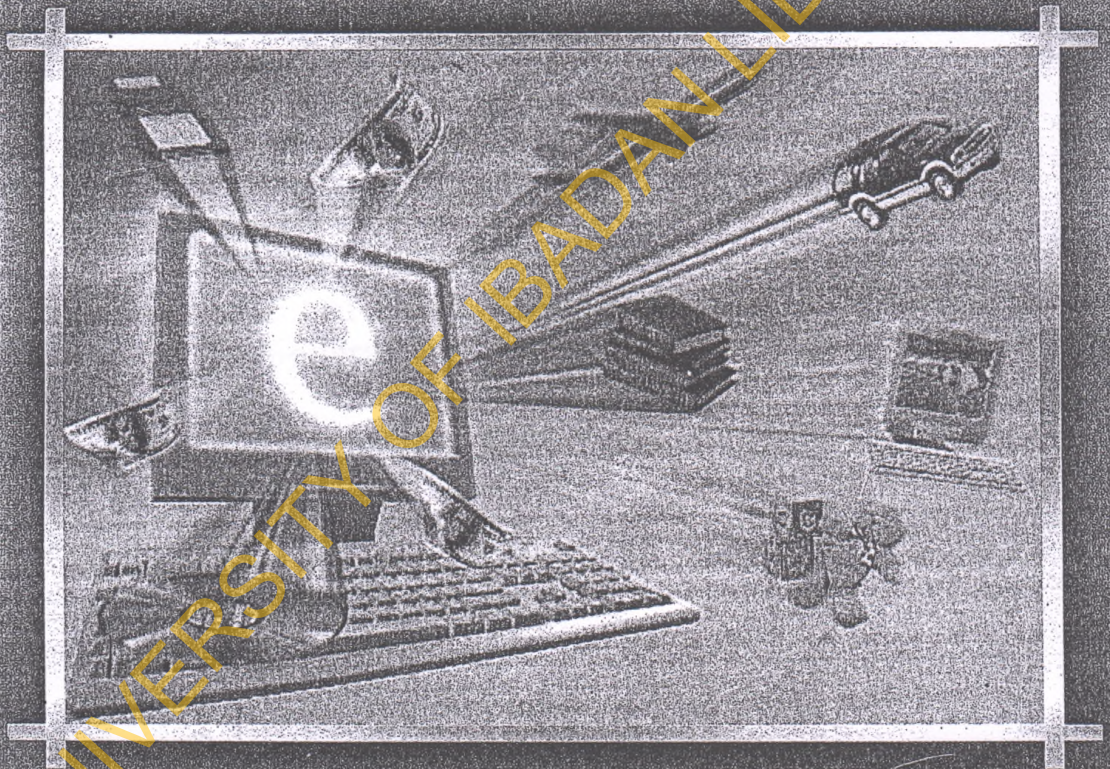


# Technology for Information Management and Service



Modern Libraries and Information Centres  
in Developing Countries

*Edited by:*

**Evarest C. Madu** *Ph.D*

# TECHNOLOGY FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND SERVICE

Modern Libraries and Information Centres in  
Developing Countries

*Edited by*

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## Planning the University Libraries for Effective Customer Services In Nigeria

*B.A. Fabunmi (Mrs.)*

### Introduction

Information is of great importance to the society. Information is essential in planning, decision-making and execution of programs. Aiyepoku (1982) describes information as being used to describe man's cumulated knowledge in all subjects, in all forms and from all sources which could help its users make rational decisions. Libraries from ages have been indispensable agents of information gathering, organization, storing, retrieval and dissemination. University scholars and some outside users depend on university libraries for acquisition of knowledge. The population of these library users is often large. Their information need is often urgent. Most university libraries are not able to satisfy library users needs, because they are not adequately planned for such. It is essential to plan library activities in such a way that will enable users to have greater satisfaction. The library is the engine room and the powerhouse where information is collected, stored, processed and retrieved for usage. According to Wilson (1972) university libraries are "the keystone of teaching and learning". It is the heart of the university and no other single non-human factor is as closely related to the quality of university education. In addition, it has been noted that a high quality education is impossible without a high quality library.

Aguolu (1983) is of the view that the university library is the most important organ in the institution. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depend largely upon the state of the health and excellence of its library. Hence, there is the need to plan university libraries in order to meet up the institutional goals. It is the responsibility of university libraries to acquire all the relevant information resources necessary for sustaining the teaching, learning, research and public service functions of the host universities. They should also ensure that

these resources are properly organized and digested to facilitate their exploitation by users.

University libraries in Nigeria today are currently facing financial crisis along with their parent institutions. This is due in most cases to the economic downturn in the country. Funding of university libraries in Nigeria is low. Even though the National University Commission (NUC) has a statutory provision that at least 10percent of every university's recurrent expenditure should be allocated to the library. However, most universities often fail to comply. Hence, the financial crisis in the university libraries. Consequently, the quality of library materials, facilities and services, have deteriorated in most cases. In older university libraries, renovation of buildings has not been carried out for many years. New buildings could not be completed or even embarked upon in newer universities. The library stock of books, journals, and other materials are inadequate and non-current.

There is shortage of manpower at various cadres. Materials for processing and organizing the collections are also inadequate and obsolete. Opportunities for continuing education of staff have diminished due to inadequate funding. Inter-library cooperation and communication have become very difficult and the dream of creating a functional national system of university libraries has not materialized. The situation explained above cannot be allowed to persist for long. Hence, the need to plan the university libraries for effective users services.

### **The problem**

This chapter examines how and why the university library has to be planned for effective customers services. Libraries are the repositories of knowledge that both learners and tutors consult for the purpose of updating their knowledge. The services ought to be suitable for the challenges. But library services in most third world universities are poorly rendered.

The following directional questions guide this discussion:

- What is planning?
- What is a library?
- What are the functions of a university library?
- What services are rendered to customers in a university library?
- What types of services do university library users expect?

- What are the major factors that inhibit services rendered by university libraries?
- How can a university library be planned for effective customer services?

### **What is planning?**

Planning is the activity concerned with developing short or long-range guides that will most optimally use the best available resources to achieve specified objectives. "To plan", according to the Oxford Dictionary is "to devise or design (something to be done, some action, some steps or decisions etc to be carried out), to arrange before hand".

According to Dror (1963), planning is:

The process of preparing a set of decisions for action in the future directed at achieving goals, by optimal means.

Branch and Robinson (1968) are of the view that:

Planning is a deliberate, organized, continuous process of identifying different elements and aspects of an organism, determining their present state and interaction, projecting them in concert through-out a period of future time, and formulating and programming a set of actions... to attain desired results.

### **What is a library?**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines library as the storehouse of knowledge. It is the repository of information and information sources. One of the major functions of the library is to collect, organize, store and disseminate information. Library is a resource centre for students, teachers, researchers and others. The library provides answers to specific and general information queries and problems.

In the library, there are written, printed, information technology and other non-book materials like periodicals, films and filmstrips, videotapes, audiotapes, microforms, study kits, atlases, calendars and other information bearing resources. The above are learning, teaching, research and academic support materials geared toward enhancing the success of individual, group, institutional and general academic and research endeavors.

There are different types of library in Nigeria as in other countries of the world. The different types represent different categories of people, professions and shades of opinion. We have the public libraries, special libraries and academic library. University libraries fall into the category of academic libraries. Academic libraries cater for the learning, teaching, research and academic needs of students, teachers, and researchers in an academic environment. They support all academic programs offered in the institution. Examples of academic libraries are college, polytechnic and university libraries.

### **What are the functions of a university library?**

The university library is viewed as a vital part of the university system. Aguolu (1983) identified six main functions of Nigerian universities as:

1. Conservation of knowledge;
2. Pursuit, promotion, and dissemination of knowledge through teaching;
3. Advancement of knowledge through research-pure, applied and development-oriented;
4. Provision of intellectual leadership;
5. Development of human resources for meeting manpower needs;
6. Promotion of social and economic modernization.

University libraries are set up to assist the universities to perform the above functions effectively and efficiently. Traditionally, the main function of university libraries is to support the teaching-learning process and research need of the faculty and graduate students. In order to perform this role effectively and efficiently, the librarian with recommendations from the students and faculty, acquires, organizes, stores and disseminates information.

It is generally accepted that the quality of library services depends to a large extent on the quantity and quality of its collections and the staff who provide the services. Traditionally, Nigerian university libraries built collections to meet the needs of their individual patrons. However, of recent, this pattern of collection development has been found to be unrealistic. The rate of growth of the libraries has reduced drastically as a result of the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program. The

devaluation of the naira led to high cost of library materials and equipment. Since, most of these are imported from abroad, most libraries are no longer able to buy monographs and subscribe to journals.

Said (1987) laments that university libraries which are supposed to be "store-house" of knowledge are now without up-to-date books and journals, hence they are no longer able to perform their prime function of providing materials for teaching and research. Thus making the researches that are being conducted in out-of-date. To highlight this, he quoted Oliver as saying we were appalled in recent years by the increasing isolation of teachers in African universities. Most of them have not been able to afford to buy books for many years. Young lectures are lecturing from notes which they took as students. Most senior ones feel in many instances that they could not present papers in international conferences, because they have fallen behind in their understanding of the latest research as in their own discipline.

According to Ifidon et al (2002), while the traditional functions of universities (i.e. teaching, research and public service) remained, additional functions were added. Such include:

- (a) Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of know-ledge;
- (b) provision of intellectual leadership;
- (c) manpower development;
- (d) promotion of social and economic modernization;
- (e) promotion of intra and inter-continental and international understanding.

Based on the above functions, the following objectives of their libraries were formulated:

- (1) Provision of materials for undergraduate instruction, term papers and projects as well as for supplementary reading;
- (2) Provision of materials in support of faculty, external and collaborated researches;
- (3) Provision of materials in support of post-graduate research;
- (4) Provision of expensive standard works especially in the professional disciplines;
- (5) Provision of materials for personal self-development;
- (6) Provision of specialized information on the region within which the university is situated;

- (7) Cooperation with other academic libraries, a view to developing a network of academic library resources that is at the disposal of all scholars.

### **What services are rendered to customers in a university library?**

As earlier stated, university libraries are established to support the teaching-learning process and research needs of the faculty and graduate students. Services provided include traditional ones like loan transactions, reading facilities within the library, ancillary services, such as binding and photocopying, and current awareness services like selective dissemination of information and current contents.

According to Adeyemi (1991), the major roles which the libraries must play include:

- (a) Maintenance of adequate stock- monographic and serials;
- (b) Bibliographic activities which will include:
  - (i) newspaper clippings and vertical file maintenance
  - (ii) indexing and abstracting services
  - (iii) preparation and development of reading list, select bibliographies, indexes to the collection and other reference aids and resources.
- (c) participation in national and international library co-operation, interlibrary lending, and sharing of reference services;
- (d) reliable reprographic and document-delivery services;
- (e) well trained and dedicated staff;
- (f) display and exhibitions of reference stock.

The mission of the library is to satisfy the information needs of the users. The information needs of the users are changing. For the undergraduate, the library will have to offer a range of services with emphasis on the circulation system, and efficient photocopying services.

### **What types of services do university library users expect?**

Both manual and automated services ought to be available in every university library. But users often prefer automated services,



because they have become aware of the capabilities of automated library services. Most of the Nigerian university libraries have catalogues that have grown too tall to be easily used; the number of users is so many that manual services are no longer satisfactory. In-house services have grown complex to be amenable only to automated procedures. Users are not interested in spending hours at the library looking for documents that may or may not contain needed data or information. They want remote access to content and information tailored at individual need.

Generally, users are seeking an information service that:

- is timely in its delivery, such as responding to requests for information or help desk enquiries;
- meet their needs;
- is easy to understand and use; and that
- is delivered by courteous and knowledgeable staff.

In addition, users expect the reading environment to command respect, to be conducive for study and research. They expect their libraries to be compartmentalized in a manner that eliminates noise and dust and that separates serious readers from leisure readers. They expect adequate number of seats for users. In addition, they expect good library buildings with adequate infrastructure, air-conditioned and humidity controlled. The postgraduate students expect provision of carrels. Conference and seminar rooms are also expected of our university libraries. Expansive areas for audiovisual and computer use are expected. These are unfortunately lacking in majority of Nigerian university libraries. The users expect books that are current as well as the preservation and conservation of both the current and outdated materials. The users are most of the time interested in books and journals that are current.

### **What are the major factors that inhibit services rendered by university libraries?**

Several factors tend to limit the services which are rendered by university libraries in Nigeria. Among such are finance, suitable physical structures, absence of automated services and non-availability of modern information technology. The major part of the financial support of the university libraries is derived from the government. 5% of the approved recurrent budget used to be set aside for library development. In 1993, the percentage was

increased to 10. This is because funding was one of the agreements reached in 1992 by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria. It must however be pointed out that only the Federal universities are enjoying this level of financial support. The state university libraries are not yet able to attain this standard. But even the 10% of the approved recurrent budget for federal university libraries from 1993 is already too small because of inflation and its twin sister, devaluation of the local currency have reduced the buying power of the naira. At times, the 10% is not released.

Furthermore, there is the lack of purpose-built library buildings. Their development has been uneven. For example, the first generation universities which came during the period of economic prosperity(1948-1970) have completed library buildings. Some of the second-generation universities (1971-1979) have also completed their library buildings. The situation is very bad with the third generation universities(1980-1983). Consequently, much provision was not initially made for recent technological devices. But with the advent of information technology, university librarians are now pre-occupying themselves with refurbishment which is the process of renovating existing library buildings to accommodate new trends, facilities and services.

In addition, the nature of library staff inhibits effective service. Most of the staff went through the traditional form of training. Some of them just refuse to adjust to the new situation. Their lukewarm attitudes adversely affect the services which they render.

### **How can a university library be planned for effective customer services?**

Planning is the process of preparing a set of decisions for action in the future with the intention of achieving the set goals within the limits of the available resources. Hence there is the need for proper planning of our university libraries if we are to realize an information-filled and academically rewarding university libraries.

A fore knowledge of the tastes of a consumer is a guide to the manufacturer to adjust his production processes to suit the customer as well as make more sales and profit. In the same vein when a library service, at whatever level, understands users expectations, it should adjust its services to satisfy the client. Effectively serving the user is the dream of the library profession and no risks may be too perilous to realize that dream. Few suggestions are given here to focus the attention of operators of

library services in Nigerian university libraries on what need to be done for effective customer services.

If one were to take a simplistic approach to university libraries efficiency and effectiveness, it might just be enough to suggest that the Nigerian Government should make efforts to reconstruct the battered economy. For if the economy is in good shape, foreign exchange will be readily available and there will be no need to resort to regulations involving exchange control. In such a situation, university libraries will be in a position to pay for books supplied promptly.

Furthermore, there is need for more adequate funding of our university libraries. Allocations made to them also should not lapse at the end of the financial year, because of the peculiar circumstances under which they operate, and because ordered materials coming from outside the country as they do take a long time to arrive. There is equally a need to maximize the use of funds they receive through a well-planned system of library cooperation, thus, eliminating waste and unnecessary duplication of materials and efforts.

In addition, many libraries have suffered heavy losses and heartless mutilation of library materials in recent times partly on account of insensitivity on the part of library users and partly because of scarcity of books in the market, such losses become very unbearable in the face of difficulties encountered in buying new books or replacing lost or mutilated ones. The library authorities must adopt measures, which are calculated to minimize the incidence of such losses. A closed access system can be introduced in Nigerian university libraries. Imposition of a closed access system will protect the library materials from avoidable losses or mutilation and guarantee the survival of the collections.

The prevalence of dust, insects and uncongenial environmental conditions is not conducive to the preservation, good health and survival of recorded communications. From my own observation, Nigerian university libraries are not paying sufficient attention if any to book hygiene. Air-conditioning plants in their buildings breakdown very often, action is hardly taken to ensure that library staff handle books and other library materials with the care that they deserve. There is the need for librarians to pay greater attention to the preservation aspects of their mission.

Policies and procedures that do not bring the best out of professional staff in an economic and frugal manner must be revised if effective customer services are to be achieved.

University libraries in Nigeria must embrace the electronic and technological innovations that may be available in that era. There is the need to adopt the new information technologies in order to enhance their service capabilities.

Another suggestion hinges on cooperation and collaboration on the part of the libraries. In many parts of the world, university libraries are forming networks, cooperating in the interest of their users. Nigeria universities can come under a system of some sort. When resources are pooled together, there is improvement in service capability. The libraries must ensure that the users are aware of the library resources and how to use them. Users must be made aware and taught how to use computer to access library resources.

In addition, library buildings and the reading environment must be conducive for learning. These include carrels, conference rooms, air conditioners, and carpeted floors to eliminate noise that emanates from human and materials traffic. Attention should also be paid to buildings that provide different exit and entrance points for serious and less serious readers.

Another point centers on user education programs. Admittedly, there are user education programs in Nigerian university libraries. These are largely at two levels: orientation for new student users of libraries and or information services and a course in information retrieval (or use of library) for undergraduate students. In most universities, the latter is an examinable course and students who pass it earn credit units. Equally lacking is user education program for postgraduate students and academic staff on the same footing as for undergraduate students. Libraries need to have staff that is competent enough to train users in the use of the audiovisual equipment. Academic staff and postgraduate students should be trained in the full exploitation of the resources of the library. Thus, there is the need for each university library to have an education unit for the purpose of training users in the full exploitation of the resources of the library. Brochures or manuals describing library resources and how they can be exploited must be provided up to date in the libraries for the benefit of users. From time to time, users should be made aware of new and other sources of information by the user education unit of the library.

Finally, user services can be improved through the provision of translation services. It has been pointed out that human knowledge, especially scientific and technical knowledge is documented in varying number of languages. The only way to take advantage of

the information available is through a form of translating to the language that is understood by the users.

Clearly laid out sequences of books, journals and special collections, unambiguous and up-to-date signposting, study areas encompassing quiet study, group work and IT facilities, good quality illumination and ventilation, circulation and access space into and throughout the collections and around the circulation counter, access arrangements for disabled customers, the general level of decoration and flooring, all these need careful consideration.

A well-laid out library with friendly well-informed staff goes a substantial way towards providing customer satisfaction, but if customers cannot gain access when they need it or feel insecure in the general environment, then opportunities have been lost and the potential for complaints opens up.

### **Conclusion**

The library is the main organ that can assist the university to achieve its goals. To enable the library to perform this function effectively, it has to be planned for effective customer services to be achieved. It should provide information to support all key operators such as acquisitions, circulation control and serials management. This will enable the users to find information they want quickly and easily.

Also, users needs are diverse, and satisfying them a daunting task. But the dream of every librarian is to satisfy the user. Nigerian university library services should be planned to cater for the present and future user needs demand and expectations. User awareness increasing and his needs have become more pressing, while his supplies are declining. Satisfying him is the only reason why the libraries exist in the first instance. No sacrifice can be too much to achieve this. Thus, the need to plan the university libraries for effective customer services in Nigeria.

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