

Non Use of Academic Library Services: A Literature Review

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Abstract Pressure on university librarians to provide justification for more funds has been quite high. This pressure is compounded by the ever increasing numbers of library non users. The literature review exposes the reasons for non use of university library services as well as practical remedies that may be applied to ensure services are all encompassing and appealing to all users. Literature reviewed is particularly focused on undergraduate students who are the largest stakeholders of any university library. The paper puts the future and relevance of library services into perspective challenging librarians to be sensitive to the needs of all users.

Keywords Academic Libraries, Non Use of Academic Library Services, Academic Library Services

1. Introduction

Research has shown that there is a declining trend in library usage all over the globe and hence an increase of library non-users. This global phenomenon has been observed to include university and college libraries. This could be suggestive of increased usage of networked electronic resources or availability of alternative sources of information as majority of students regard the library as a place as opposed to being an information resource [1].

There is, therefore, need for continuous review of library services and the overall functioning of the library for it to remain a place of interest to users. This is because the bar is continually raised as improved services soon become the norm and the minimum expected. Services should be always lifted to meet the ever changing tastes and expectations of users [2].

Research on undergraduate information seeking behaviour shows most students do not use the library effectively. They showed poor information seeking habits. In a study done in University of Botswana, it was observed that though the library was very well equipped, well furnished and highly organized, undergraduates using it were very few [3].

Several explanations for this trend have been advanced by different authors as discussed in the following literature review.

1.1. Lack of Awareness, Time and Perceived Relevance

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Leading reasons for infrequent or non use of resources have been identified to include the lack of awareness, perceived lack of relevance, lack of time, distance, lack of skills in the use of electronic resources, having personal books and/or borrowing books from friends, access to the internet from home as well as borrowing from other libraries, no need and denied use [1] [4].

It is acknowledged that students were not necessarily interested in more books, instead they asked for more inductions and trainings from the library, easier online access and more staffing [1].

1.2. Internet Access

Students have admitted in the past that they hardly have any reason to borrow books as they have access to online resources [5]. Large, rich library collections only matter to the faculty and the graduate students. The undergraduates have little interest. This situation is compounded by prevailing computer technologies. Undergraduates can get enough from the web without ever visiting the library [6].

The online revolution has made lots of information so accessible that students no longer see the benefits of using the library's resources and services viz-a-viz those of other information providers. The central role of the library in the academic environment thereby becomes challenged compelling the library to learn new skills to effectively compete for the attention of its intended users [7].

1.3. Overconfidence by Students

Students may be overconfident and think they know it all. Hence they are prone to look for quick and easy solutions. This leads to them to an over reliance on search engines. This

raises a call to librarians for a complete culture change in terms of information delivery to reverse the undergraduate students' poor strategies of acquiring knowledge [8].

1.4. Students' Temperaments and Library Anxiety

It has been found that at least 75% of the undergraduate students become anxious during their initial library research experiences. They were found to describe their initial interaction with the library in terms of fear and anxiety, confusion, overwhelmed by a feeling of being lost, scared, overpowered and helpless. Multiple cases of library anxiety have been witnessed by librarians not only on first years but also by students who have been on the campus for longer periods. Students have been seen to wander in the library clearly not knowing where to get relevant materials or assistance. When students are confronted with having to use the library, many become anxious to the extent that they will look for alternatives as they are not able to approach the problem logically and efficiently, thereby hindering the effective use of library resources. Library anxiety is widespread and experienced by a majority of students and many times may lead to procrastination in seeking library services despite the knowledge that the resources are important for academic success. It is actually a common and legitimate phenomenon [9] [31].

Factors such as students' temperament and preferred learning styles might influence information seeking behaviour as well as the pressure for information. Lack of interaction between the library staff and the users is one of the major gaps. The lack of confidence about knowing how to begin research; and the lack of knowledge about how to navigate the library accompanied by feelings of inadequacy; and fear of asking for assistance are major hurdles faced by many university students. The greater the levels of unfamiliarity with the library, greater levels of anxiety among non users are bred [10] [11].

Users should be given the confidence that they will access the information they seek after with sufficient ease. Interaction with librarians may help reduce library anxiety through increasing the student confidence and comprehension of the library [11].

The absence of libraries and qualified professionals in the libraries of most high schools means that most students enter the university without any knowledge of basic library skills. Transitions from secondary schools to university are challenging to some students. Students are also known to become easily overwhelmed by the size of the library. This leads to keeping off from the library. Negative perceptions are known to be influenced by the size of the library collection before launching any search. This heightens library anxiety while enhancing the feelings of discomfort in the library [11] [12].

1.5. Image of the Librarian

Other factors that have been identified to influence library use are the perceptions that users have on the library and its

staff. The librarian has most of the times been mistaken for a support staff. Users would need to be persuaded on the relevance of the library to the achievement of their goals [7].

Image has been identified as a direct motivator or de-motivator in the use or non-use of the library. It influences how clients will respond to services provided: whether they will use them fully, or partially discriminating between certain services, or will simply not use the particular service. Understanding the non users' perception of the librarian and the library has potential to radically alter the delivery of services. According to Mills and Bannister (2001), the images of a librarian and the library have been identified to influence information seeking behaviour. They recommended a study on image, as they believed that this would lead to the identification of areas where the library can focus on more to effectively market its services. They observed that through centuries of existence, the professional librarian's image has not been demonstrated as a dynamic field. Inappropriate images need to be corrected while positive ones should be strengthened.

A study conducted at University of Western Ontario to find out the reasons why users are unwilling to return to the library found the underlying problems resulting in user dissatisfaction to include negative perceptions of librarians, bypassing the reference interview, unmonitored referrals, and failure to ask follow-up questions by the staff and general disappointment with the services provided [13]. These findings also pointed to: "unapproachable busy library staff;" poor employees' behaviour and their lack of competencies as the major causes of customer dissatisfaction [11] [14].

Though the traditional image of the librarian has been transformed by information technology, it is equally noted that this does not mean that the old image is automatically discarded [10].

2. Non-User Expectations

Users place certain demands on the library system to provide them with services that will constantly ensure they are back. Library users expect to be treated like customers. To them a good library is that which offers quality services as opposed to size, staff student ratios and other parameters normally used as quality indicators [15].

There are many aspects of the academic library service provision that determine the extent to which user expectations may be met such as user friendly loan policies and procedures. They will consciously or unconsciously seek out for knowledgeable, proactive and competent staff, accessible and timely services. Students show more keenness on substance than on different formats of print and digital information resource delivery. They prefer knowledgeable and competent staff as compared to friendly staff. Students are irritated by: noisy and inappropriate study areas; inadequate collection; poorly managed information resources; unhelpful disinterested staff, slow internet and

slow response to service needs. On the other hand, access tools such as catalogues and online databases, communication services via the web site; signage and guidance tools; access to photocopiers and printers; appropriate opening hours with flexible borrowing policies and training on information literacy skills are appreciated by library patrons. Proactive partnerships between academic staff and the library on availing resources on their reading lists in the library are demanded by undergraduate users [2] [11] [15] [16].

Library usage has been observed to increase during examination seasons. This is a clear indication that libraries are more popular spaces for study than for any other purposes [17].

In view of the foregoing observations, all information users in general will opt for formats that suit them the most in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, aesthetic values, affordability, and convenience. Four determinants for sustained service use have been identified. These include: convenience, relevance, engagement (attention), and community. This is the basis on which undergraduate students pursue that which fits their learning styles to access diverse sources of information [18] [19].

2.1. Convenience

To information seekers, convenience is the complete access to resources with the least of effort expended in the exercise. People lack the patience and the time to wade through separate lists and databases. They expect a seamless access to resources [19].

Convenience is a major aspect that influences the choice of websites arising from its ability to delivery of fast and intuitive access to information. Such ease is not being found in academic libraries, despite greatness of wealth of information resources available in these libraries. It is observed that the OPAC has failed to evolve in the same pace with charm experienced through the use of search engines such as Google and Yahoo. It is perceived as difficult to search and is a link to a different location that may demand physical movement to identify resources in case of print books. Hence the library experience needs to be web like and to be embedded in individual workflows. Libraries need to replicate this experience in order to enhance comfort, confidence and ease for users in making the choice to search for information there [7] [19].

The trend observed as a comparable increase in non-user statistics which is attributed to an increase in the use of virtual technologies being the preferred method of accessing information. Search engines have overtaken libraries due to the fact that one can access a wide range of information at one stop which is impossible to find in a single title. Earlier studies revealed that 64% of students ranked search engines as the most favourite in comparison to 24% for libraries, 30% for online libraries and 21% for personal collections [1] [8].

A study that sought to understand why students prefer online resources to the physical library revealed that libraries were frustrating especially in the use of catalogues. Other challenges identified included limited hours, distance to the library and the length of time it took for library research. To provide convenience, there is a growing focus on e-resource provision as well as the creation of a mobile library service [7] [19].

2.2. Relevance

A website that is assured of continued use is one that provides relevant content to meet user needs timely and with required depth. This also means that relevance extends beyond the provision of relevant information resources to the services provided. User needs prevail beyond provision of information resources. Diverse researchers opine that the modern academic boutique library is about creating a personalised, tailored service that values individuality and uniqueness above uniformity and consistency. In the library context this would mean the need for subject librarians to provide more personalized collection contents and services [7] [19].

Other relevant services would include e-customisation. This is the packaging of content for users by subject librarians via online creation of useful links for resources in a given subject thereby aligning resources directly to each course module. It is a form of embedded librarianship, a way to highlight to students the immediate relevance of the collection to their study needs. Library 'outposts' are also relevant in providing popular titles and core texts [7].

2.3. Engagement

Relevance is not sufficient to ensure the loyalty of clients as it can be offered by alternative services and sources. To improve the users' perception of the unique value of the library and thereby increase sustained use, engagement becomes critical. The degree of relationship determines the quantity and quality of communicated information. Creating connections with users is necessary in order to create awareness of library resources and services. This may be virtual (via use of blogs) or face to face interactions by subject librarians to provide support in terms of subject and e-resource expertise. Engagement with users can also be attained through: orientation, in-depth subject workshops, and information literacy workshops or classes [7].

2.4. Community

There is a growing tendency towards the use of academic libraries as learning spaces. It has been recognized that the success of the library should no longer be based on the number of books issued out but on the learning that results from its use and level of knowledge circulation. Recommendations have therefore been made to design library spaces to conform to respective institutional missions [32].

3. How to Reach Non Users

It has been observed that the future of libraries lies in making them a place where people want to be. University students are able to carry out extensive, high quality research without ever having to set foot in the library. Where foot traffic goes down in the library this is compensated by higher Internet usage. This gives rise to the need to design libraries to merge virtual space and physical space to create a convergent architecture. Libraries that are ranked highly by students are those which provide a welcoming environment. Students want the library to feel like a good place to be [6].

Absolute library non-users may be influenced to use libraries if certain modifications are put in place in the services offered to suit their needs [1]. Buildings have been identified as influencing use of the library services and resources through reorganization and renovation. This should be done with a view to providing a more welcoming and appealing environment as well as a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere through new facilities and services [21].

3.1. Facility Ambience

Use of library services has been found to increase as a result of improved facilities such as the layout, quality of natural lighting and quality of user work spaces. Where improvement is made usage has been found to increase as measured by gate counts, in-house collection use, and reference service use and in total circulation. Findings showed that gate counts increased after remodelling and renovation, but the addition of non-library facilities such as photocopiers did not show any increase in library use [22].

Undergraduate students are notably able to study and socialize at the same time and are equally able to work independently in social spaces while others may tend to value quiet places for individual study. Spaces are therefore recommended to be adaptable, flexible, communal and social [5] [22] [23].

Creating a customer driven library requires a complete reassessment of library priorities and achieving these priorities will in turn require a complete reassessment of staff resources. By focusing on the needs of their customers, libraries can create an environment that is not only physically inviting but also intellectually stimulating. Libraries that are prospering are reportedly deliberately evolving rapidly to keep pace with their universities and societies.

3.2. Access and Navigational Tools

Librarians are the designers of the floor plans of the libraries they manage and are therefore familiar with the sections; however, users may be challenged in identifying different sections. This may take them some time before getting what they want. A visit to the library may be very exhausting for them. Many times the librarians are unaware of this. Unknown to the librarians is that it almost takes a masters degree to find a book, only librarians and researchers are well versed in discovering resources. Even where

undergraduates may identify books from the catalogue frustrations mount when they cannot locate books on shelves. Users and non-users of academic libraries would wish that locations and call numbers should be viewed together on the OPAC. Non-users tend to be inclined to resources convenient to them [19] [23].

Digital information is reported by librarians to be preferred by the students because of easy access and convenience while smart phones are perceived to be the students' most important tool. First year preferences when asked to indicate their preferences preferred print. E-resources only become more important when students are informed that they can access them from anywhere anytime where the resources provided are free, useful, and convenient [24].

3.3. Infrastructure and Layout

Environmental ambience is considered important. This includes anything that may impact any of the five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. It includes landscape, architecture, interior layout and decor; lighting, air quality and temperatures, and human relationships and interactions. In order to draw users to the library, librarians have been advised to look at their environments as new comers would noting that this would lead to reduced levels of stress and anxiety. This is because:

'Colours, window view, room design, artificial lighting, and sun shine into the room, views of nature, noise levels, harmony and balance in layout manipulated aesthetically can reduce stress while stimulating imagination.' [5].

Placing of art or posters on the walls was suggested to have an impact on client numbers visiting the library. Any comfort enhancing facility is found to be welcome by students. Furniture where they can stretch out is a positive for them. It is necessary to adopt a friendlier design to enhance visibility and appear more open to receiving students as well as changing the perception of students on the library as an inviting place ready to serve them. Of importance to users is the liberty to eat and drink as they study [5] [6] [25].

Improved infrastructure such as clean lavatories and private study rooms are to be preferred instead of carrels as the library is a favourable place to meet and talk with friends. At the same time some students would want to read without distractions [5] [16].

3.4. Mobile Reference Services

To counter anxiety, the University of West Indies has a Research Rescue reference service in the halls of residence to assist the students at least one week in a semester. In this program, the library sets a base in the halls of residence and becomes proactive at meeting the students at their points of need. The week selected falls when students are working on assignments and would therefore welcome suggestions on how to proceed with ease. This gives students assurance that they have a librarian they can consult for personalized services even in the library [11].

3.5. Information Technologies

Students rely a lot on Google and Yahoo and other search engines. This places a need to improve training on the use of e-resources. The need for merging both the traditional knowledge resources with new and emerging information technologies is most appropriately fulfilled by the library which has the advantage of being an academic central meeting point [5] [16].

3.6. Information Resources

In a study done in the University of Botswana, undergraduate students were found to prefer lecture notes and handouts and were found to enjoy information seeking from: an electronic environment; finding information quickly and easily, finding interesting related articles as well as online browsing for relevant articles and finding that librarians are very pleasant and helpful when asked for assistance [3].

The central location of the library promotes the use of its services and collection. The library should acquire more multiple copies of documents with those of latest editions receiving greater preference [6].

To improve convenience for undergraduates, more investment in online e-resources and mobile services would be necessary. Of equal importance is to make resources easier to navigate and to provide a seamless resource discovery. There is need for information resources to be offered in multiple delivery strategies to meet the different needs of users in different situations as 'one size does not fit all' [7] [19].

Undergraduates recommend the inclusion of keywords for all books in the OPAC; universal catalogue for all information resources; better hyperlink; virtual reference service; and roaming reference staff moving about the library to provide assistance to users [19].

There are, reportedly, too many choices for students to make but they are often unclear about what they need or what the resources contain. Students have suggested that lecture notes can be availed online via the library web site while audio and power point formats can be availed from the reserve sections of the library [5].

3.7. Rules and Regulations

Relaxation of restrictive rules especially those prohibiting food and drink in the library can affect student numbers coming into the library in a big way [6]. Unlimited photocopying services should be allowed especially from the encyclopaedias [16].

3.8. Training of Staff

It has been recommended that the library staff should be sufficiently skilled to assist users in accessing information resources. There is need for greater emphasis in the training on communication and interpersonal skills for librarians and attention to social dynamics of the user community to increase understanding as well as reduce librarian versus

user frustration [9] [16].

It has been observed that half of all patrons leave the library without obtaining the book they are seeking. It has also been found that 65% of the users would not take the trouble to make any enquiries from the librarian because they felt that the librarian was too busy; or felt that their questions were too basic; or had experienced dissatisfaction in an earlier encounter with a librarian [9].

4. User Education Programs

The goal of user education programs is to ensure more effectiveness in information access and utilisation by users. These programs provide students and other users with skills and support to overcome anxiety and frustration that is often experienced. User education programs must also take into cognisance that it is the information user who ultimately decides on the available resources to use to solve and meet their information needs. Programs adopted need to be appealing, understandable and accessible to users [8], [27] [28].

4.1. Library Orientation

Orientation programs are designed to help students adjust to university life. These are guided tours through the library where students are introduced to services provided and how to access databases, use of library resource catalogues, shelves arrangements, opening hours, how to borrow books and reading areas. They also include speeches by librarians during the university wide orientations. The tours are popular orientation instruments meant to familiarize the students with university life as well as prepare them for research. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and that gaining clarity in their career goals will enable them to be more alert to the information resources provided by the library. The library tours explain what, why and how students will benefit by using the library resources in their education. These are organized in small groups of about 15 to 50 students. Each group takes about 25 to 45 minutes of the guided tour around the library. Every group comes in at some interval depending on the respective library [27] [28] [29] [11].

Some authors are of the view that library orientations are the least effective way to teach though the most predominant method of introducing students to the library. Orientations have, however brief, been reported to reduce student anxiety [27].

4.2. Information Literacy Programs

Academic librarians have resulted to offering information literacy to help readers navigate the diverse information landscape. In recognizing that students have an independent active learning behaviour, Problem Based Learning has become the trend in enhancing information literacy. Through this the students acquire critical knowledge, problem solving skills, and self- directed learning strategies. Library

designers should consider the different learning strategies used by the undergraduate students to ensure continued relevance. Students must be able to select from among various formats using criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency, and aesthetic value. While information literacy programs are integrated into the curriculum, other orientation services such as availing a guide for use and evaluation of library resources are provided by the library reference services. It has also been found that bibliographic instruction and student orientation are found to be more useful when they are related to the program [5] [8].

Information Literacy curriculum provides a foundation to recognize and understand an information need or problem; discern the appropriate sources to satisfy the information need or problem; evaluate, synthesize, and apply the information as it applies to the need or problem; discern when enough information has been gathered to satisfy the need or problem; and use information technology appropriately [26] [30].

4.3. Competitions and Games

Competing groups are used in orientation by some university libraries. Students are expected to go to different locations in the library and complete certain assignments. Learning is puzzle solving, exploration and experimentation [27].

4.4. E-Mail Alerts

It is noted that 65% of students become aware of e-books available in the library through e-mail notifications by the librarians [24].

5. Conclusions

It is unlikely that any library can cope with the speed with which information is being generated. In view of this, there is need for the academic library to shield its clients from information overload while being careful not to compromise on the quality of services provided. New ways of information delivery must therefore be devised to ensure that respective university libraries achieve their mandate especially with regard to research and learning.

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