



## Article

### USER PROBLEMS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF ENUGU CAMPUS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

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#### Abstract

*Academic Libraries have primary role to provide support services to their parent institutions by providing books, journals and other material resources and services necessary for learning and research. They can only do this effectively in the present economic difficulties by providing current materials and services relevant to user needs. Failure to do this may create problems to users. The study examined such problems users encounter in making effective use of available library resources. Literatures indicate that such problems may include inadequate provision of materials resources and services, inadequate manpower and congenial reading environmental conditions. To curb this, academic libraries need to re-evaluate their resources and services, provide adequate reading spaces, and employ qualified and dedicated personnel. This is the only way to remain relevant in changing context of information and the challenges posed by modern information communication technology in meeting users' needs.*

Key words: Academic Libraries, Library resources, user problems. University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.

#### Introduction

Academic libraries exist in institutions of higher education such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and technology and research institutes. They are established to support the teaching and research activities of the parent institutions through the provision of books, journals, records, reports and other publications for the advancement of knowledge. The functions of academic libraries include:

- a. Provision of books and non-book materials required for the academic programmes of the faculties, institutes and units of the parent institutions.
- b. Provision of information resources for recreation and personal development of the clientele.

- c. Provision of reference and information services
- d. Provision of conducive reading accommodation for the users.
- e. Provision of inter-library loans and co-operation to improve user services.
- f. Provision of information communication technology devices such as telephone, e-mail, fax, computer and internet services to facilitate and enhance learning and research.
- g. Provision of skilled and dedicated personnel to enhance maximum utilization of the library facilities.
- h. Provision of reprographic services and bindery
- i. Provision of adequate security facilities to protect library materials and equipment.

### **Brief Background of the Study Area**

The Enugu Campus Library (ECL) is a branch of the Nnamdi Azikwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Enugu Campus library started in 1961 and inherited over 8,000 volumes of books from the then Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology (NCAST) Enugu branch library. The Nsukka and Enugu Campus libraries suffered serious reverses during the Nigerian civil war (1961-1970) when 50% of the stock were missing or damaged. Presently, the library has estimated stock of 80,000 volumes of books, and 5,000 volumes of local and international journals and government publications. It has a sitting capacity for 500 persons only while the numbers of registered users are rather large as presented in Table I. At the end of the civil war in 1970, the library received substantial donations of stocks and cash from the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the United Kingdom, the British Council, USAID, USIS, Ibadan University Press and numerous British, American and Canadian Universities and Corporations. The library serves five academic faculties and departments with a population of over 15,000 students. During the 2005/2006 academic year, a total of 4,724 library users registered with the library.

**Table 1: Registered Users/Readers (2001 – 2006)**

Category of Users	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Undergraduates	3,845	3,669	4,245	5,045	3,860	4,572
Post-graduates	205	117	1	237	47	118
Junior staff	4	7	8	5	5	5
Senior staff	30	9	13	10	25	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,084</b>	<b>3,802</b>	<b>4,267</b>	<b>5,297</b>	<b>3,937</b>	<b>4,724</b>

The table above indicates that undergraduate students are the main users of the library, recording 3,860 in 2005 and 4,572 in 2006. This calls for more attention to undergraduate users needs.

**Staffing:** The staff position in Enugu Library is presented below:

Professional librarians	8
Para-professionals/ Library officers	6
Library assistants	18
Supporting staff	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>

**Opening Hours:** Enugu Campus Library opens for a total of 84 hours a week during full academic session. The openings are however reduced during vacation. The opening periods are given thus.

Semester (Term)

Session Time:	Monday - Friday:	8.00am - 10.00pm
	Saturday	8.00pm - 6.00pm
	Sunday	2.00pm - 6.00pm
Vacation Time:	Monday - Saturday	8.00am - 6.00pm

### **Purpose of the Study**

Users and their needs must be clearly understood in order to provide effective services. Similarly, the services provided by the libraries must be based on positive objectives and related to the needs and interest of the user community. This can be enhanced through modern information and communication technology, because access to rather than ownership of information resources is today the focus of library services. Library resources procured and services not fashioned along the current needs of the users are bound to create user problems. It is based on the above premise that the study is intended

1. To identify the problems users encounter in the use of library materials.
2. To identify the problems users encounter in the use of library facilities and services.
3. To identify the problems users encounter with the library staff.
4. To make suggestions and recommendation to ameliorate the users problem.

## **Scope of the Study**

Academic libraries in Nigeria are found in the universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, the Nigerian law schools and research institutes. This study is focused on university library with particular reference to Enugu Campus. The library located within Enugu metropolitan area is a branch of the Nnamdi Azikiwe library at Nsukka Campus. The Enugu Campus library services five academic faculties and departments with a population of over 15,000 students. The library is large enough to provide insight to user problems in an academic library.

## **Research Questions**

In pursuit of the objectives and purpose of the study, answers were sought to the following questions.

1. What are the problems users encounter in the use of library materials?
2. What are the problems users encounter in the use of library facilities and services?
3. What are the problems users encounter with the library staff?
4. What measures can be taken to ameliorate users problems in the use of the library?

## **Review of Related Literature**

Libraries generally are service institutions that hardly exist alone. Their relevance and needs therefore depend largely on the quality of service rendered to users. Libraries can effectively do this by providing relevant information available in print and non-print materials. This calls for continued user study which can be likened to market research in business. It is aimed at discovering patterns of use and level of awareness of users towards library services to determine the success or otherwise of library services and to identify the areas of improving in service delivery.

The above scenario points to Fijallbrant (1990), that libraries should aim to make all users aware of information sources available both in the library and from external sources to enable users enjoy the search for information. Similarly, Anyaoku (1994), argued that users effort at using the library are not good enough, without sufficient working knowledge of its available tools and resources, they usually end up in a feeling of frustration. Along this line (Okay 2000), clearly observed that the era when librarians simply assumed that they knew the needs of their clientele and are able to provide such needs adequately without the input of the users is over. The present day problems

created by information explosion, coupled with the need to justify appropriate use of the reduced book votes to many libraries particularly in Nigeria, demand that the necessary information resources should be acquired to meet the precise needs of users. It can therefore be deduced from the above authorities that user frustrations and problems could arise as a result of lack of knowledge of library resources and how to access and use them. This evidently will affect their quality of education. According to Joyce (2000), there is a significant and positive relationship between knowledge of library use and academic standing of the user.

In a survey study of post-graduate library users, Ezeani (2005), noted that a reasonable number of students do not know their way around the library and where to get their resources. She called for an interpretation of library resources to users to ameliorate their problems. Eze (2005) in a related study noted that library environment affects the reading desire and development of users. He pointed out that library users cannot use the library resources to their fullest when the materials have been mutilated, stolen, misplaced or where the reading environment is unconducive for the purpose for which it was designed. User problems, the above showed, could emanate from provision of or lack of resources related to user needs, inadequate guidance to available resources, lack of knowledge of how to use and access library materials, unconducive reading environment and misuse by other users.

## **Methodology**

The research method adopted in this study is a case survey. The study was conducted in March 2006 during the first semester of 2005/2006 academic session. The number of registered users/readers for the period under review is 4,724. The study population is the 400 users recorded and administered with questionnaire between the hours of 9 am-2pm the peak periods of library use by students. The sample population is the 300 users who returned their questionnaires in usable condition. This number constitutes 75% of the study population. Instruments for data collection are questionnaire, documentary sources available in the library and direct observation. The modified four-point Likert scale was used to determine the extent of response to the problems users encounter in the use of library materials, facilities and services. Data presentation is on tables while the computation is in percentage.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the problems users encounter in the use of library materials?

**Table II: Users response to problems encountered in the use of library materials**

S/N	Nature of problems encountered by users	SA-%	A-%	SD-%	D-%
1	Lack of current text books	210(70%)	90(30%)	-	-
2	Inadequate journals and magazines	270(90%)	30(10%)	-	-
3	Lack and obsolete reference materials	240(80%)	60(20%)	-	-
4	Lack of current newspapers	30(10%)	30(10%)	180(60%)	60(20%)
5	Lack of current gazettes and other government publications.	180(60%)	120(40%)		
6	Lack of complete and current indexes, abstracts	150(50%)	150(50%)		
7	Mutilation of materials	120(40%)	150(50%)	12(4%)	18(6%)
8	Hidden/theft of materials by other users	180(60%)	120(40%)		
9	Holden materials beyond due date	135(45%)	156(52%)	3(1%)	6(2%)

**Key:** SA: Strongly Agree: A Agree SA: Strongly Disagree D-Disagree

Table II indicates that the majority of library books, journals, magazines and reference materials are either lacking, obsolete or inadequate. For text books 210 or 70% strongly agreed, 90 or 30% agreed. There was no negative response at all. Similar responses are given for gazettes and government publication 180 (60%) strongly agreed and 120 (40%) agreed; indexes and abstracts have 150 (50%) for each for strongly agreed and agreed. The implication of this is that users are faced with the problems of obsolete, lack and inadequate reading materials which certainly inhibit their studies and research in the library.

On the other hand, the responses to Newspapers provision are encouraging. 180 (60%) strongly disagreed with lack of newspapers as a problem, 60 (30%) disagreed also while 30(10%) each strongly agreed or agreed. The responses emanate from the fact that the library is current with provision of daily newspapers such as the Guardian, Vanguard and the Sun. The library should endeavour to sustain this. Mutilation of materials pose serious problems to users. To this 120(40%) strongly agreed, 153(50%) agreed. Those that disagreed are only 18 (6%) and strongly disagreed 12(4%). Similarly, hiding and theft of library materials; holding such materials beyond due date are acknowledged user problems. Hiding and theft recorded 180(60%) for strongly agreed and 120(52%) for agreed. Indeed hiding, theft and holding of library materials beyond due date constitute great problems to users as materials they require for study are not available on demand. These affect level of scholarship and output of research. It is frustrating when materials revealed available in the catalogue cannot be physically accessed. This poses problems to current awareness services. Efforts therefore need to be made to forestall mutilation, hiding, holding beyond due date and outright stealing of library materials.

**Research Question 2:** What are the problems users encounter in the use of library facilities and services?

**Table III: User response to the uses of library facilities and services**

S/N	Nature of Library Facilities and Services	SA-%	A-%	SD-%	D-%
1	Conducive reading environment	99(33%)	150(50%)	9(3%)	42(14%)
2	Opening hours	135(45%)	153(51%)	6(2%)	6(2%)
3	Lending services	240(80%)	60(20%)	Nil	Nil
	Catalogue bibliography display	210(70%)	90(30%)	Nil	Nil
4	Current awareness services (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI)	Nil	30(10%)	150(50%)	120(40%)
5	Internet-on-line facility services	180(30%)	120(40%)	Nil	Nil
6	Photocopying/Reprography	90(30%)	210(70%)	Nil	Nil
7	Inter-library services	Nil	3-( 10%)	120(40%)	150(60%)
8	Reference services	15(5%)	69(23%)	90(30%)	126(52%)
9	Bindery services	Nil	Nil	240(80%)	60(20%)
10	Provision of reading carrels and seats	18(6%)	36(12%)	126(42%)	120(40%)

Analyses of table III indicate that for the provision of conducive reading environment 98 or 33% strongly agreed 150(50%) agreed; 9 or 3% strongly disagreed and 42 or 14% agreed. The positive response of the number that agreed 150 (150%) is traceable to the resuscitated central air-conditioners in all the three floors of the library. However, the less number that strongly agreed is 99(33%) may be attributed to the fact that there is no alternative power supply in times of power failure from the national grid. The negative responses are extreme reactions that can be taken care of if alternative power supply could be put in place.

However, some complained of the interrupting music from the adjacent main hall, closure of the library to force users attend university functions even when not willing. In such situations, lack of alternative conducive reading rooms or classes and forceful ejection are problems users encounter which require management attention.

Opening hours of the library received very impressive responses. 135 (45%) strongly agreed for adequate opening hours, 153(51%) agreed while strongly disagreed and disagreed had 6(2%) each. The above response emanates from the fact that the library is open Monday through Sunday, morning and afternoon, for a total of 84 hours a week. This is encouraging as it will afford many users opportunity to use the library a long time after lectures. This will also eliminate idleness and promote library use and reading culture among students and other interested users.

Provision of reading carrels and seats elicited serious negative responses. 120 (40%) disagreed 126(42%) strongly disagreed while agreed had 36 (12%) and strongly disagreed had 18(6%). The reaction is not surprising following the fact that the library has a sitting capacity for 500 persons only while registered users in 2005 are 3,938 and 4,724 in 2006. The implication of this is that many users intending to use the library cannot be accommodated thereby creating user problems in terms of space. Lending services have high acceptance response of 240 (80%) strongly agreed; and 60(20%) agreed. There is no negative response for lending services. The implication of this is that lending services should be maintained to enhance good library practices and remove problems of misuse of library materials.

In the area of catalogue, bibliographic display 210(70%) strongly agreed with the provision and 90(30%) agreed. There are no negative responses. The library has large and conspicuous catalogue display of library holdings. However, the problems



hindering their effective utilization are improper filing of the catalogue cards and maintenance. This calls for more attention on the catalogue display to enhance access to materials. Shelf-guideless are labels to guide users on the contents of the shelves. Those that strongly agreed to shelf guide are 180 (60%) and agreed 120(40%). There are no negative responses. The positive responses indicate that the library shelves have adequate shelf-guides. This is impressive and calls for sustenance. Though self-guides are directional, users complained not finding what they needed on the shelves. The cause of this maybe wrong shelving by staff, theft of materials or that some students lack searching skills to locate library materials. On the other hand, responses to current awareness services (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI) are not encouraging. Those that strongly disagreed to CAS and SDI services are 150(50%), 120(40%) disagreed. 30(10%) agreed and none strongly agreed. This shows that this very important library services are not provided. Users of the library would therefore encounter problems utilizing current information disseminated through this medium of services. This will affect quality of knowledge and research output.

The provision of internet online services has 180 or 60% for strongly agreed, 120 or 40% agreed. There are no negative responses. This is because the library has cyber cafe inside that provides internet browsing. This service will eliminate the problem of low patronage to the library as users will have the convenience of browsing the internet right inside the library rather than going out to search.

Photocopying and repographic services also received positive responses. Strongly agreed has 90 or 30% and agreed 210(70%). The library provides photocopying services to augment home reading. However, some reservations were made regarding the regularity of the service as a result of power failure, machine breakdown and spare parts. Inadequate regular photocopying services create problem of misuse and sheft of library materials and create further problems of material usage. Interlibrary services have negative responses. To the provision of these services 150 or 50% disagreed, 120 or 40% strongly disagreed. Only 30 or 10% agreed. Interlibrary services help to augment users' needs by sourcing needed materials from other libraries. Non provision of these services will entail users having no choice where needed materials are not available. This creates serious user problems and may result in low patronage to the library.

References services received low responses generally. Those that disagreed to the availability of the service are 126 or 42%, strongly disagreed has 90 or 30% while agreed

69 or 23% and strongly agreed 15 or 5%. The low responses are not doubtable as references services has correlation to currency of stock, SDI and CAS, interlibrary services and Staff ability which generally were poorly responded to. The implication of this is that users may not be able to meet their needs which certainty will affect the quality of library services.

Bindery services were also negatively responded to. Those that disagreed are 60(20%) and strongly disagreed 240 or 80%. That is to say bindery services do not exist in the library.

The user problem associated with non provision of this service is that when such support services are not rendered revenue from this point is lost which would have been used to support other areas.

**Question 3:** What are the problems users encounter with library staff

**Table IV: User response to the problems encountered with library staff.**

S/N	Nature of Problem	SA-%	A-%	SD-%	D-%
1	Adequate staff	-	-	180(60%)	120(40%)
2	Regularity at service points	90(30%)	120(51%)	120(40%)	90(30%)
3	Promptness to service delivery	75(21%)	123(41%)	150(50%)	120(40%)
4	Knowledge of user information needs	-	96(32%)	129(43%)	75(25%)

**Key:** SA: Strongly agree: A agree SA: strongly Disagree D-Disagree

Analyses of table IV show that for adequate staff all responses are on the negative. Strongly disagree has 180 or 60% while disagreed has 120 or 40%. The implication is that the library lack adequate staff to cover service points to users.

Regularity of staff at service points is generally negative. Responses for agreed have only 90 (30%), strongly disagree 120 (40%): and disagreed 90(30%). Where there is inadequate staff obviously regularity at service point cannot be achieved. The implication of this is that more hands are required to all service areas or points. Again, promptness of staff at delivery services has negative responses. Strongly disagreed have 123 (41%) disagree 102(34%). Only 75 (25%) responded adequate. Responses, here are similar to the above. However, users complained of staff delaying in attending to

them. This lack of promptness by staff to attend to the needs of users should be discouraged through closer supervision. Again, inadequate staff at all levels could account for this. Further negative responses are elicited for staff knowledge of user information needs. Responses for strongly disagreed have 129 or 43%, disagreed 75 or 25% while only 96 or 32% agreed. This problem may have arisen from the fact that most staff employed got in irregularly without being tested at interviews. Another likely cause is the fact that some staff are not dedicated to duty and lack training on the job rather there is rush to acquire certificates for promotion at the expense of the job.

## **Findings**

The study following the research questions, responses and analyses reveals the following problems encountered by users at Enugu Campus library.

1. Most textbooks, journals, reference materials, gazettes are obsolete and in incomplete sets. There are also the findings that hiding of materials, holding beyond due date and mutilation cause problems to users in using the materials for study, research and reference.
2. The conducive reading environment of the library is interrupted by noise from the adjoining main hall usually used for social functions; lack of alternative-power supply for the library and incessant closure of the library to force students out to attend university functions disrupt readers' attention.
3. Opening hours of the library was found adequate but is usually truncated by power failure especially in the night.
4. Improper filing of cards in the catalogue cabinets create problem of access and utilization of needed materials.
5. The numbers of registered users highly outnumber reading spaces.  
At examinations and peak periods, many users do not have places to read.
6. References services, current awareness services and selective dissemination of information in the library are not encouraging as a means of improved library services. There is need to improve these areas.
7. The provision of internet facilities in the library has helped to improve information needs thereby alleviating user problems.
8. Photocopying facilities need to be adequately serviced to maintain regular services to users. Also, there is no bindery as a support services and source of revenue to the library.
9. The library has inadequate staff that affects negatively their regularity at services points and promptness to service delivery.

10. Most of the staff respond poorly to user information needs. This may be attributed to lack of knowledge of the required material sources, training and devotion to duty.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Improvement of library and information service delivery in academic libraries call for provision of current print and non-print materials in addition to the provision of adequate and conducive reading environment, maintenance of existing information service facilities and support systems. Above all trained, qualified and dedicated personnel must be ensured at all times to improve user services. This is the only way for academic libraries to remain relevant in the era of changing and challenging ICT facilities in information packaging and delivery.

In conclusion, many academic libraries are trying their best in the provision of library services in the midst of harsh economies and poor funding. However, adoption of the recommendations above will place the libraries better than they are presently in library and information services to teaming users.

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