

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **The place of academic libraries in Nigerian University Education: contributing to the 'Education for All' initiative.**

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Considering the crucial role of academic libraries in the educational system of any institution, this research paper looked into the place of academic libraries in university education in Nigeria with regards to their strategic contribution to the Nigeria's 'Education for All' initiative. The objectives of the study were to find out the different services offered by the university library in support of university education; library and information resources provided by the libraries; factors that pose problems to these libraries; and strategies for enhancing these library and information services. In the descriptive survey, about 132 librarians in seven university libraries – three federal and four state universities in the South-east Nigeria were used for the study. Multiple choice questionnaires was used to collect data. 122 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled, returned and used for analysis. Data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages and presented in tables. Findings showed that most of the university libraries provided a variety of services – reference, internet, interlibrary loans in support of university education; a variety of library and information resources – textbooks, newspapers and magazines and others. Findings further showed that factors like poor funding, poor infrastructure and low level of computer literacy amongst librarians etc. posed problems while strategies like adequate funding of the libraries, training of librarians in electronic skills and improved infrastructural facilities could alleviate these problems and enhance these libraries support for the target – Education for All.

**Key words:** Academic library, university education, library and information services

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the objectives of establishing a university is to promote scholarship, research and learning in the various fields of learning. As stated in the national policy on education, one of the goals of university education is to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to become self-reliant and useful members of the society (FME, 2004). Behind the mission and vision of the university education is the university library, which is the academic library serving the university community.

Academic libraries according to Akpohonor (2005) are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes. The academic library, as Yusuf and Iwu (2010) put it, is the nerve centre or the hub around which scholarship revolves. It is an indispensable instrument for intellectual development, being a store house of information to which user (students as well as lecturers) may turn to for accessing information

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According to Nwezeh and Shabi (2011), librarians have information dissemination as their predominant function. The library has a unique position as a potential educational force in the university community of staff and students of different levels especially in this era of information communication technology which can facilitate the libraries' capability to reach out to direct users as well as remote access users.

Although students are important part of the set up of academic institutions being the major users of academic library facilities, the staff particularly the academic staff also makes maximum use of the library. Agboola and Bamigboye (2011) maintained that the quality and strength of any educational program depends on the library; not the library as a magnificent building but the use of it. Ajibero (1995) saw a university library as the heart of the university using the human and material resources at its disposal to support teaching, learning and research objectives of the institution. Professional librarians that work in the university libraries especially in this information era have always engaged themselves with the collection, organization and dissemination of information resources to support research and learning. These are resources in both print and electronic formats. That is why librarians in the university libraries are fully recognized as academic staff.

### ***Education for all initiative***

The 'Education for All' initiative in Nigeria is in line with the agreement reached at Jomtien, Thailand International Conference some years ago where governments' representatives and civil society organizations across the world gathered to deliberate on the state of education worldwide, especially in Africa and other developing nations as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declared by the United Nations-General Assembly in the late 2000.

The conference agreed that by 2015, illiteracy would be completely eradicated, with many countries attaining high standard education targets set by the United Nations. Such quality education targets did not end at the basic level but extends to secondary and tertiary levels. Besides, the planning and execution of educational programmes that will penetrate the illiterate society are carried out by those nurtured in teaching and learning by the tertiary institutions. The libraries must be there to contribute their own quota in empowering research, teaching and learning in these institutions.

### **The mission and vision of academic libraries**

The mission and vision of academic libraries in the university setting (university libraries) go in line with the objectives of the parent institution – the university.

University libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to the different categories of user – students, lecturers and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Singh and Kaur (2009) noted that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent

The university libraries in playing their supportive role to the university education provide necessary resources and services more so in this information era. These enable the libraries to meet up the needs of their teaming patrons. Such resources range from print to non-print and electronic materials in line with what Yusuf and Iwu (2010) asserted that different users of academic libraries utilize different materials provided by these libraries; such materials as reference materials, textbooks, journals, newspapers, past projects, electronic journals etc. (Nwezeh and Shabi, 2011); also resources like books, journals, newspapers, government publications, indexes and abstracts as common information materials provided and utilized by academic libraries.

### **Redefinition of academic library services sequel to the emergence of information and communication technology (ICT)**

The emergence/advent of ICT has affected the role and services of the academic libraries. As Etim (2004) noted, the rapid pace of development in the field of IT and the emergence of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the library and information science profession. There is a clear paradigm shift from manual ways of carrying out information services powered by analog data to electronic ways of accessing and retrieving information powered by electronic gadgets. ICT according to Abubakar (2011) is being introduced and included into all aspects of library services.

E-library and e-resources are becoming the order of the day in library and information practice. In a nutshell, the libraries especially the academic libraries have to adapt to the e-environment in line with the indications of Kumar (2009). For the university library to be where their users are, they have to fully recognize the fact that the world is living in virtual realities as was indicated by Omekwu and Echezona (2008) where library services are in cyberspace and are not affected by opening and closing hours. Users of academic libraries now expect to be given what they need, when they need it and from which ever location they may be (Ajogboye, 2010). University libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies and e-resources necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium

initiatives (Okiy, 2005). Achieving 'education for all initiative' in Nigeria will be much more attainable when sound library and information services are provided in different institutions especially electronically. Through e-resources, education can get to people from physical as well as remote locations.

### **Factors posing problems to these Nigerian university libraries and strategies for enhancing the academic library services**

A good number of factors hinder the adequate provision of library and information services and resources by these university libraries. Government-owned university libraries according to Ifijeh (2011) are suffering from a low budgetary allocation for education. An analysis of the federal government allocation to the education sector within nine years is discouraging. Ifijeh (2011) citing Mordi (2008) indicated that between 2000 and 2008, the Nigerian Federal Government allocated an average of only 9% of its budget to education. From this meager budget, the libraries are funded. Although there has been an improvement on the budgetary allocation in recent years, it is not enough to bring about the needed transformation in the education section. That has even moved notable educational bodies to use industrial actions to draw the government's attention towards implementing policies which are easily formulated, put in paper but hardly implemented. With such low funding, universities are not able to operate libraries with first-class services. As a result, facilities and information resources are inadequate, and students use the libraries mainly for study space. Akin and Ajayi (2008) also noted that the Nigerian education sector and in particular Nigerian university libraries are yet to recover from the economic down turn of the 1980s and the subsequent impact of this is the under-funding of the university libraries. Ojuade and Ochai (2000) earlier on took note of funding as the crisis facing the Nigerian university libraries and the book industry.

If the university libraries want to meet the expectations of their clientele and the current wave of technological developments in the library and information services which will even facilitate their contribution to achieving education for all, improved funding is needed (Akin and Ajayi, 2008). Many other improvement strategies emanate from this; like automation, acquisition, installation and utilization of electronic resources and facilities including the internet, subscribing to and maintenance of access to databases in different disciplines as well as training and re-training of staff will all be facilitated when fund is adequately available. Nwezeh and Shabi (2011) recommended that in order to serve the patrons better, the university libraries should re-address the issue of library orientation for fresh men, aggressive and large scale user education, providing functional library building and making library environment

pleasant and comfortable amongst other things.

### **Statement of problem**

There is no doubt that no academic system can achieve its educational goals without sound library and information resources and services. These resources and services in the present era should extend beyond print and physically available resources to non-print, electronic and virtually available resources and services. Although most of the Nigerian university libraries are striving to provide adequate library and information resources and services to their teeming population of users more so in this information era, certain problematic factors may be posing challenges to these libraries thereby hindering their provision of library and information services. This study is meant to examine the various library and information resources and services the university libraries are supposed to provide for their clients, the problems hindering these and the strategies for overcoming the problems.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study generally is meant to delve into the place, role and contributions of academic libraries in university education system in Nigeria with particular reference to universities of the South-East geopolitical zone. Specifically, the study is meant to

1. Find out the services offered by the university academic library in support of university education.
2. Find out the library and information resources provided by the academic libraries.
3. Find out the problems encountered by these libraries in providing library and information services.
4. Identify the strategies for enhancing academic library services in support of university education.

### **Research questions**

1. What are the services offered by the university academic library in support of university education?
2. What are the library and information resources provided by the academic libraries?
3. What are the problems encountered by these libraries in providing library and information services?
4. What are the strategies for enhancing academic library services in support of university education?

### **METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 132 librarians in the

**Table 1.** Universities used for the study and their librarians.

S/N	University	No. of librarians
1	University of Nigeria Nsukka	70
2	Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU)	10
3	Enugu State University of Sc. & Tech. (ESUT)	4
4	Abia state University (ABSU)	10
5	Ebonyi state University (EBSU)	5
6	Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO)	27
7	Anambra State University	6
	Total	132

**Table 2.** Services offered by the university library in support of university education response.

S/N	Items	Adequate	%	Inadequate	%	Total	%
1	Provision of user education/orientation for staff and students	104	85	18	15	122	100
2	Reference services	110	90	12	10	122	100
3	Internet services	96	79	26	21	122	100
4	Bibliographic services	106	87	16	13	122	100
5	Access to online databases	92	75	30	25	122	100
6	Reprographic services	88	72	34	28	122	100
7	Interlibrary loan services	84	69	28	31	122	100
8	Exhibition and displays	98	80	24	20	122	100

**Table 3.** Library and information resources provided by the academic libraries.

S/N	Items	Adequate	%	Inadequate	%	Total	%
1	Textbooks, E-books, journals, e-journals etc.	100	82	22	18	122	100
2	Newspapers and magazines	105	86	26	14	122	100
3	General reference materials (Encyclopedias and dictionaries)	102	84	20	16	122	100
4	CD ROM	90	74	32	26	122	100
5	Audio-visual materials	91	75	31	25	122	100
6	Computers for general use	87	71	35	29	122	100
7	Other internet resources	89	73	33	27	122	100

university libraries of seven universities – three federal and four state universities in South-East Nigeria. Due to the manageable number of the population, they were all used as the sample of the study. Multiple choice questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. While 132 copies were distributed, 122 copies (about 90%) were correctly filled, returned and used for the analysis. Data were analyzed and presented in tables using frequencies and percentages.

### Analysis of data

Table 1 shows the different universities sampled in the study and their corresponding number of librarians. University of Nigeria, Nsukka has more than half of the number of the entire librarians. The university has the biggest university library in Nigeria.

Results from Table 2 show the respondents indicated that the university libraries adequately provide these services; thus a high percentage for adequacy and low percentage for inadequacy. Such services as user education/orientation for staff and students (85%:

15%); reference services (90% adequacy and 10% inadequacy); internet services (79% for adequacy and 21% for inadequacy). Also, 87% of the respondents indicated that the libraries provided bibliographic services adequately while 13% indicated inadequate provision of such services; on access to online databases, 75% indicated adequate provision while 25% said it was inadequate; reprographic services (72% for adequate provision and 28% for inadequacy); interlibrary loan services (69% for adequacy and 31% response for inadequacy) and exhibition and display of materials with 80% response for adequate provision and 20% for inadequate provision. Even though the level of provision of these services may vary amongst libraries, these are the various services which a university library is supposed to provide for the users to support teaching learning and research in university education.

From the results of Table 3, it could be seen that the university libraries adequately provide information resources. Responses showed high percentage for adequate provision of these resources and low percentage for inadequate provision thus: textbooks, e-books, journals, e-journals (82% for adequate provision and 18% for inadequate provision); general reference materials (84% to

**Table 4.** Factors that hinder adequate provision of library and information services and resources by the university libraries to support university education.

S/N	Items	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Total	%
1	Funding	115	94	7	6	122	100
2	Poor infrastructure e.g. electronic facilities	114	93	8	7	122	100
3	Low level of computer literacy among librarians	92	75	30	25	122	100
4	Nonconductive environment	94	77	28	23	122	100
5	High cost of maintaining ICT facilities	116	95	6	5	122	100
6	Difficulties in accessing information from the internet	102	84	20	16	122	100
7	Inadequate accommodation for users	92	75	30	25	122	100

**Table 5.** Strategies for enhancing academic library services in support of university education.

S/N	Items	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Total	%
1	Adequate funding	116	95%	6	5%	122	100%
2	Improved infrastructure	117	96%	5	4%	122	100%
3	Training for librarians especially on ICT competence	112	92%	10	8%	122	100%
4	Improvement of reading environment – adequate seats	110	90%	12	10%	122	100%
5	Provision of generator as an alternative source of power supply	115	94%	7	6%	122	100%
6	University management to allow the library to control their own budget	120	98%	2	2%	122	100%
7	University libraries liaising with foreign donor agencies to enhance library services	122	100%	-	0%	122	100%

16%); newspapers/magazines (86% for adequate; 14% inadequate provision), resources in CDROM had 74% response for adequate provision and 26% for inadequate provision); audio-visual materials provision (75% for adequate and 25% for inadequate provision); provision of computers for use by the users had 71% for adequate and 29% for inadequate) and other internet resources provision had 73% for adequate and 27% for inadequate. Observations further showed that some university libraries like the federal universities do provide more adequate and current information resources than their counterparts in state universities.

Findings and results from Table 4 show most of the respondents agreed to the various factors posing problems to the provision of library and information services by university libraries to support university education hence high percentage of response agreed as against low percentage who disagreed. All the factors enumerated like poor funding (94% agreed and 6% disagreed), poor infrastructure especially electronic facilities (93% agreed and 7% disagreed); low level of computer literacy amongst librarians (75% agreed while 25% disagreed); nonconductive environment (77% agreed while 23% disagreed); high cost of maintaining ICT facilities (95% agreed while 5% disagreed) all pose problems and hinder the provision of library and information services by these university libraries. High cost of maintaining ICT facilities also entails cost of subscribing, renewing and maintaining access to online databases. Difficulties in accessing information from the internet (84% agreed while 16%), and inadequate accommodation for users (75% agreed while 25% disagreed) also hinder the university libraries' provision of services to a high extent. Further observations showed that the library environment and accommodation for users are more conducive in the federal university libraries than in their state counterparts. Also, some of the state university libraries are better off than others in their services generally.

Results from Table 5 indicate that all the strategies enhance the university libraries' provision of library and information services and resources to a very high extent thus; adequate funding (95%

agreed while 5% disagreed), improved infrastructure (96% agreed while 4% disagreed); training of librarians especially on ICT competences (92% agreed while 8% disagreed); improvement of reading environment (90% agreed while 10% disagreed); provision of generator as an alternative power supply (94% agreed while 6% disagreed), university management allowing the library to control their own separate budget (98% agreed while 2% disagreed), and these libraries liaising with foreign donor agencies (100% agreed).

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from the study show that the university libraries in Nigeria provide a variety of services to support university education thereby contributing their own quota in the 'education for all' initiative. This is in line with the assertions of Nwezeh and Shabi (2011) that the philosophy of librarianship is based on the concept of service and provision of relevant materials for users; the library being in a unique position as a potential educational force. For this the university libraries provide a variety of services to meet up their main purpose which Aina (2004) said is to support the objectives of an institution in the areas of learning, teaching, research and service. The services provided by these libraries encompass not only manual and traditional but has been made for easy and fast delivery through electronic library. Just as Etim (2004) noted, the rapid pace of development in the field of information technology and the emergence of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the library and information

science profession. There is a clear paradigm shift from manual ways of carrying out information services powered by analog data to electronic ways of accessing and retrieving information powered by electronic gadgets. Also, Omekwu and Echezona (2008) supported this when they stressed that library services are in cyberspace and are not affected by opening and closing hours.

Further findings also indicated that the academic libraries provide a variety of information and reading resources in traditional, print and electronic formats in support of teaching, learning and research in the universities. This is in line with what Okiy (2005) asserted, that university libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies and e-resources necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiatives. Thus achieving 'education for all initiative' in Nigeria will be much attainable through e-resources and education can get to people from physical as well as remote locations.

Also, findings revealed that certain factors pose problems to these academic libraries, such factor as poor funding of the libraries and others which bear on it – poor infrastructure (especially electronic facilities) and high cost of maintaining the facilities. This is in line with what Ojuade and Ochai (2000), Akin and Ajayi (2008) as well as Ifijeh (2011) stressed that poor funding of the library in particular and the educational sector in general affect the provision of library and information services adversely. It is when the library is well funded that acquisition of adequate infrastructural facilities, information resources, conducive environment and accommodation as well as training and retraining of the staff will be made possible.

It was also revealed that certain strategies could be used to curb the ensuing problems thereby enhancing the academic library services and resources provision and general service delivery. Such strategies were found to range from improved funding of the libraries in particular and the educational sector at large and allowing the library to control their own budget, improved infrastructure, training and retraining of staff to making the library building and accommodation more conducive for users. Akin and Ajayi (2008) maintained that there must be the need for improved funding for these libraries. Many other improvement strategies emanate from this; like automation, acquisition, installation and utilization of electronic resources and facilities including the internet, standard library buildings, subscribing to and maintenance of access to databases in different disciplines as well as training and re-training of staff will all be facilitated when fund is adequately available. Nwezeh and Shabi (2011) recommended that in order to serve the patrons better, the university libraries should re-address the issue of library orientation for fresh men, aggressive and large scale user education, providing functional library building and making library environment pleasant and comfortable

amongst other things.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The university library with its resources and services is at the heart of the university educational system. Without sound and adequate provision of library and information services, the core objectives of the university; teaching, learning and research may not be realized. Although the university libraries are supposed to provide a variety of adequate library and information resources and services, certain factors such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructural facilities and skills etc. pose problems to these libraries in the Nigerian setting. Certain strategies as adequate funding which will facilitate a lot of things, training and retraining of librarians etc. could help to curb these problems and enhance the provision of information services and resources by the academic libraries.

It is therefore recommended that the government and governing bodies of the universities should readdress the issue of funding and library budgets since a lot of improvements depend on funds available and how they are managed. The librarians and library managements on their own should seek best practices as obtainable in more advanced places so as to provide quality library and information services and resources to the contemporary users in line with the current trend of this information era. All these will enable the university library in particular and the university system generally to contribute their own quota in the attainment of the goal of 'education for all'.

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