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Comparative study of students' patronage at the academic libraries of two Nigerian universities: FUTO and EEU

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Abstract This paper surveyed the users' patronage of Nigerian academic libraries at two universities: Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) and Evan Enwerem University, Owerri (EEU). Four research objectives and five research questions were formulated by the researchers. Uzoagulu's (1998) statistical formula was adopted for the stratified sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed by using tables and simple percentages. The results identified inadequate relevant current information material; a library environment not conducive to use; and inadequate reading accommodation as the major problems that hampered full patronage. The provision and acquisition of more current and relevant information materials and a comfortable and conducive reading environment would greatly improve the patronage of the libraries under study.

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Introduction

University libraries are libraries that serve the university community. Their main function is to support the teaching, learning and research activities of their parent institutions. They provide adequate and relevant information materials to all the different disciplines that are being taught in the university. The success of any library is measured by the number of users that patronize it, and by how well the services meet their needs. Therefore it would be a waste to have a good and impressive library edifice, well staffed, and stocked with relevant materials resources, but still

have low patronage. The level of patronage of libraries is dependent upon the quantity, currency, and relevance of information materials which are available to meet the needs of the patrons.

According to Nwalo (2003) the effectiveness of a library is determined by how well the library meets the users' needs relative to the library's goals and objectives. Consequently, library patrons are the best source to determine whether or not the library is playing its role satisfactorily. It is only when the patrons are satisfied that the library can be considered to meet the users' needs.

Several studies have indicated that many or most students visit the library only when they have to prepare for examinations or collect materials to do their assignments. Borko (1991) reports that reading is usually done in

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order to accomplish an academic goal such as successfully completing an examination. It has been suggested that Nigerians do not have a reading culture, which would prompt them to read either for the stake of gaining knowledge or being informed about societal issues. This explains why most university libraries are usually crowded only during examination periods. It is therefore necessary for each library to determine the extent of its patrons' use, without which the broad objectives of the parent institution will not be achieved, and the aims and objectives of the university library will not be realized.

Whereas several studies have been carried out on students' use in different institutions, the present study focuses on students' library use at Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) and Evans Enwerem University, Owerri (EEU). It is intended to compare the levels of student use and user satisfaction of the two university libraries accordingly.

Literature review

Although many people believe that library services are organized for use by the library patrons, more often than not the report from libraries is that they experience low levels of use. Branscomb (1989), after carrying out extensive work on students' use of the library, found out the major responsibility for students' use of the academic library often lay with the faculty. It is presumed that if students are given assignments regularly by the lecturers, this will mandate them to make use of the library rather than depending on the lecture notes and class work only. Other reasons exist for students to patronize the university libraries, the most commonly cited being the preparation for examinations. Olanlokun (1982) added that students use the library for classroom discussion, leisure and research. Nwosu (2001) reported that students use library materials to supplement classroom instructions and for other curricular needs such as doing assignments, writing term papers, and preparing for examinations. Onyediran-Tiding (2004), noted that the major reason why patrons visit the library is to make use of materials that are otherwise not available to them. In a similar study, Oyesiku and Oduwale (2004), found out that 80% of the respondents visit the library to read for examinations, 64% to consult the books for doing assignments, and 52% visit to borrow and return books.

Rajaram (2003) advised that in order to encourage more library use the library should strive for a more pleasant environment, especially through the library circulation staff, by maintaining cordial relationships between students and staff. Cheerful and efficient service helps to maintain good relationships and could bring popularity, prominence and prestige to the library. Zaki (1991) advised that librarians, especially reference librarians, should be diligent in discharging their duties especially during orientation because some of these students carry their limited background experience from the pre-tertiary education level into the university or other tertiary institutions. They should be given the personal assistance they need in order to effect a difference in their new environment.

Brief background information for the institutions studied

Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO)

Founded on November 28, 1980, the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) is structured to provide and promote sound basic scientific training as a foundation for the development of technology and applied science relevant for overall national development. Its academic program commenced on August 3, 1981 with 235 students. At present, it is made up of the following schools: School of Science; Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Agriculture and Agricultural Technology; Management Technology; Health Sciences and Technology; and Environmental Technology. FUTO has a total population of 18,000 students spread across 40 departments, excluding the School of Postgraduate Studies.

Evan Enwerem University (EEU)

Evan Enwerem University was established in 1981 as Imo State University with its main campus at Etiti and a campus at Aba. It moved to its permanent site at Uturu in 1986. In 1992, due to the creation of Abia State from Imo State, the University was ceded to Abia State and consequently renamed Abia State University, Uturu. The Imo State University was then transferred to Owerri. As a conventional university it has the Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Law, Social Science, and the Department of Estate Management and Quantity Survey at the Owerri Main Campus and the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Orlu. The Faculty of Engineering is scheduled to move later to Umuna, Okigwe. The University has student enrollments of about 11,700 students, out of which only 6180 are registered library users.

Study objectives, research questions and Significance

The objectives of study include

- i. To compare the extent of use of FUTO and EEU libraries by their students.
- ii. To compare the types of information resources patronized by the students in the two libraries under study.
- iii. To compare the reasons for the patronage of both libraries, and
- iv. To compare the problems encountered by the students in the use of the two libraries and to offer useful solutions to the identified problems.

The research questions are as Follows

- i. To what extent are the two libraries used by students?
- ii. What type of information resources are used in the libraries?
- iii. What are the reasons for students' use of the libraries?

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