AN INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE USAGE OF AFRICANA RESOURCES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Udensi, J. N.
Library Services Department
Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria

Abstract

In this study, thirteen first and second generation federal university libraries were studied to investigate the factors affecting the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries with a view to suggesting ways of improving usage. The population comprised of 42873 users. Descriptive survey research method was used. Questionnaires, interviews and observation checklist were administered to a sampled population of 1,974 users comprising of post graduate study lecturers, masters' and doctoral students and these constitute 10% of each group studied. The questionnaires were appropriately validated by three experts. These include one expert from test and measurement and two professional colleagues. The interview and observation checklist were used to gain more insight on some of the issues raised by the study. The mean was used to answer the research question mapped out for the study. The findings revealed that: the factors hindering usage of Africana resources include; restrictions on borrowing, poor acquisitions, poor library service, lack of staff, lack of effective use of ICT tools, lack of users' awareness of available Africana resources and lack of users' appreciation of their own culture.

Introduction

There are various concepts of Africana by different writers and organizations. Afeworki and Holley (2006) stated that Africana resources cover the study of the African continent in general including their history, politics, culture, literature, religion and economics. Some organizations see it from the point of view of the African indigenous knowledge. Okore, Ekere and Eke (2009) define it as encompassing all forms of knowledge be it technological skills, practices and beliefs that enable the community to achieve stable livelihood in the environment. Africana resources are therefore essential information sources in Nigerian academic libraries that ought to be preserved for both the present and future generation. They include written and oral information by Africans or non- Africans about Africa.

Africana resources cover subject areas of cultural anthropology, folklore, psychology, sociology, traditional medicine etc. The resources also cut across different subject formats like almanacs, charts, pictures, subject files, internet information resources, Compact Disc- Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) etc. Africana resources in the face of information technology has also expanded to include video recordings of events in African countries in filmstrips and Video Compact Disks (VCDs); South African Book Development Education Trust publications (SABDET, 2004).

However research findings have proved that the usage of the Africana is not very wide and this may have affected the extent of availability of the resources in Nigerian university libraries. No wonder a body like the South African Book Development Education in Africa (SABDET) was set up with its main theme as – Readers and libraries in Africa, (SABDET 2005). One of the major roles of an African university library should be to provide a centre for all local information, whether generated through consultancies, student research, government-generated data such as statistics and other government documents. These should form the nucleus of the materials to be included in form of abstracts, indexes, bibliographies and databases on global information arena, to this there is still a missing link.

If nothing is done about their gradual disappearance, negligence and under utilization in Nigerian university libraries, generations of Africans may not know much about the history of their origin or their cultural heritage. Studies have proved that the original documentaries on Africana resources in different subject areas are fast disappearing due to neglect by both librarians and users, Alegbeleye (1994) and (SABDET, 2005). This study therefore intends to find out the factors affecting the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries. It is expected that the study will arouse interest in the development and usage of the resources in Nigerian university libraries.

Methodology

Descriptive survey was used to carry out the study in Nigeria and it is limited to federal university libraries that have Africana collections. Eighty-nine Africana librarians in the thirteen first and second generation federal university libraries involved in the study made up the total population. They include; University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, University of Benin, Benin, University of Calabar, Calabar, University of Uyo, Uyo, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, University of Lagos, Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Ahmadu Bello university, Zaria, University of Sokoto, Sokoto, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, University of Jos, Jos and University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri. The thirteen universities were selected considering the fact that these first and second generation universities have clearly set up Africana units in their libraries. The sampled size comprised of 35 Africana librarians from the six selected universities. The sampling procedure adopted comprised of three stages. The first stage involved the selection of the federal universities whose library staff (Africana staff) will participate in the study.

The second stage involved the identification of the six universities (out of the thirteen first and second generation federal universities) selected from the six geopolitical zones for good coverage. The third stage of the sampling technique involved the identification and selection of the respondent group, (all library staff in Africana).

Librarians' Questionnaire, Observation Checklist, acquisition policies and interview Schedule directed to unit heads and Africana librarians were the instruments used to elicit answers from the respondents. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research question stated for the study. The researcher used a 4 - point rating scale and therefore, for the research question, limits of real numbers (as shown below) were used to make decision on the extent of quantity availability.

Limits of real numbers for decision on research questions-
Usage: 0.05 - 1.49 = Not Often (NO)1 .50 – 2.49 = Sparingly (S); 50 – 3.49 = Often (O); 3.50 – 4.49 = Very Often (HO).

Results

The results from the data analysis for the study are presented under this chapter. These results are presented in accordance with the research question that guided the study. The relevant data to the research question are presented in the table and analyzed and a summary of the major findings were presented thereafter.

Research Question

What are the factors affecting the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries?

Table 1 displays the results of the analysis in respect of the response of users (PG lecturers, master degree students and doctoral degree students) on the factors affecting the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries.

Table 1: Mean of the response of users (PG lecturers, master degree students and doctoral degree students) on the factors affecting the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries

Items	Master Students	PhD Students	PG Lecturer	Total	Decision
	$\overline{X}$	$\overline{X}$	$\overline{X}$	$\overline{X}$	
1. Restriction on borrowing limit use of Africana resources	3.00	3.03	3.24	3.07	ME
2. Poor acquisition makes access to Africana resources very difficult	2.88	2.73	3.00	2.86	ME
3. Poor library services discourage use of Africana resources	2.87	2.72	2.76	2.82	ME
4. The staff in Africana are insufficient to render adequate library services	2.55	2.52	2.73	2.60	ME
5. Africana unit is not comfortable for reading	2.30	2.20	2.55	2.36	LE
6. Africana staff are not helpful to users	2.29	2.24	2.28	2.28	LE
7. The location of Africana collection limit use	2.54	2.29	2.46	2.49	LE
8. ICT tools are not effectively applied in accessing Africana resources	2.80	2.59	2.82	2.78	ME
9. Uses are not aware of resources available in Africana	2.73	2.70	2.73	2.73	ME
10. Africana collections fail to meet the information needs of users	2.52	2.38	2.49	2.49	LE
11. Many Africans do not value their own culture	2.61	2.31	2.47	2.53	ME
12. The organization of Africana is poor	2.51	2.21	2.32	2.32	ME
Overall	2.63	2.49	2.65	2.62	ME

Where 'ME'=Moderate extent, 'LE'=Low extent

Table 1 shows the mean of the response of users PG lectures, masters and doctoral degree students) on factors affecting usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries. The table also shows the total response of the users combined. The users agreed that items such as; restriction on borrowing limit use of Africana resources, poor acquisition make access to Africana resources very difficult, poor library services discourage use of Africana resources, the staff in Africana are insufficient to render adequate library services, ICT tools are not effectively applied in accessing Africana resources, users are not aware of resources available in Africana and many Africans do not value their own culture (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 11) are factors affecting the usage of Africana resources in the Nigerian university libraries with the mean of (3.07, 2.86, 2.82, 2.82, 2.60, 2.78, 2.73, and 2.53) respectively. The users disagreed with items such as Africana unit is not comfortable for reading, Africana staff are not helpful to users, the location of Africana collection limit use, Africana collection fail to meet the needs of users and the organization of Africana is poor, (5, 6, 7, 10 and 12) as factors affecting the usage of Africana resources with the mean of (2.36, 2.28, 2.49, 2.49 and 2.32) respectively. However the factors affecting usage vary from user to user. For instance in item 7 (the location of Africana collection limit use), masters students agreed that the location of Africana collections limit the use of Africana while the doctoral degree and lecturers disagreed on the items. The mean responses also revealed that the three groups agreed that restrictions on borrowing limit use of Africana resources, poor acquisition makes access to Africana resources very difficult and that poor library services discourage use of Africana resources. They however disagreed that Africana staff are not helpful to users. The table shows that there is a general weakness in the different groups' agreement or disagreement of all the factors raised as can be seen in the overall responses of masters' students (2.63), Ph.D (2.49) and Pg lecturers (2.65).

To add to these factors, the Africana librarians interviewed were of the view that lack of a separate index for Africana, lack of an up-to-date catalogue for Africana and where it exists, it is normally fragmented, affect the usage of Africana. For instance, the researcher's observation showed that in Ahmadu Bello university library, part of Africana catalogue is upstairs and some are downstairs in the library building. All these affect the usage of the resources in the libraries. Some of them are also of the opinion that lack of tools for using the resources, lack of open access, the poor location of the resources and lack of adequate staff are also factors that affect the usage of the resources in university libraries.

Summary of Finding

The study revealed that poor library services, lack of staff, lack of effective use of ICT tools, lack of users' awareness of available Africana resources and lack of appreciation for their own culture are the factors that hinder the use of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries. However, restrictions on the borrowing of Africana resources, poor library services and poor Africana acquisitions are the strongest factors expressed by the respondents that hinder usage of Africana in Nigerian university libraries. But generally, Africana resources are not adequately utilized in Nigerian university libraries.

Discussion of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

As can be seen from table above, all the respondents (PG lecturers, masters and doctoral degree students) agreed that; restrictions on borrowing limit use of Africana, poor acquisitions (low availability of the resources) make access to Africana very difficult. Poor library services discourage use of Africana resources. The staff in Africana are insufficient to render adequate library services, ICT tools are not effectively applied in accessing Africana resources, users are not aware of resources available in Africana and many Africans do not value their own culture. The users however disagreed that Africana unit is not comfortable for reading, Africana staff are not helpful to users, the location of Africana collection limit use, Africana collection fail to meet the information needs of users and the organization of Africana is poor as factors militating against the use of Africana resources in university libraries. It is also striking that the respondents disagreed with some of the speculations of the researcher which include that the Africana is not well located in the libraries and poor organization of the resources as factors militating against the usage of the resources. However these agreements and disagreements vary from one user to another. While some masters and Ph.D degree, students agreed that Africana unit is not comfortable for reading, PG lecturers said that the Africana unit is comfortable for reading.

Some of the masters' students also agreed that the location of Africana resources limit its use, the doctoral students and the PG lecturers disagreed to this. It is however clear from the findings of this research that the factors that the users agreed upon actually restrict the use of Africana resources in the university libraries. It is equally striking and worthy of note that restrictions on the borrowing of Africana resources, poor acquisitions in Africana resources, poor library services in Africana and ICT tool not effectively applied in accessing Africana resources

were very outstanding as can be seen on the table. But concerning the agreement on closed access as one of the factors hindering access of the resources, the researcher is very skeptical on the issue considering the nature of the Africana resources. If an open access is allowed, it may lead to plagiarism (especially theses), theft and mutilation of the resources which most often will be very difficult or impossible to replace.

On the issue of restriction of access of Africana resources to users, majority of the librarians interviewed were of the view that closed access of Africana is one of the factors hindering the usage of the resources but also stated the consequences of this as above. One of the librarians stated clearly that users should be allowed semi open access whereby the users can go in to the shelves to take what they want because the Africana shelves are always dark and the Africana staff are not adequate to effectively and efficiently render such help to the users. The agreement of low availability as one of the factors militating against the usage of Africana resources confirmed the assertions of Schmdt (1995), Etounga-Manguelle (1998), and Afeworki and Holley (2006) that the availability of works on Africa is not encouraging in African universities. Thus, Okore, Ekere and Eke (2009) therefore suggested ways of increasing the quantity of the resources such as collecting, preserving the resources among others. The respondents' agreement on poor library services as one of the factors responsible for poor usage is consistent with the assertion of Edoka (2002) and Udensi (2002) that poor library services and inadequate library staff are the cause of inadequate use of library resources (of which Africana is a part) in the university libraries in Nigeria. The respondents also agreed that lack of computer tools affect usage of the resources confirming Davison's (2004) assertion and the opinion of the Africana librarians interviewed that there are not yet indexes exclusive to Africana. The lack of ICT tools for sourcing and retrieving information in Africana identified by the respondents is consistent with the observations of the researcher in course of collecting data for this research. The observation showed that only two libraries were using ICT tools to retrieve Africana resources, the others were still in the process of implementation and some still in this process have rendered some ICT tools bought for this obsolete.

One other factor pointed out by the respondents as being responsible for inadequate use of Africana resources is also in consonance with findings of Schmdt (1995) that Africans do not have much interest in the development of their resources. If they do, they will show interest in developing the collection. To buttress this further, Serageldin (1998) observed that Africa will lose her soul if she renounces the unique cultural features that set her apart and that are being

eroded daily by foreign culture. The finding also confirmed the negligence in use of and in the collection of the resources by Africans themselves as observed by Afigbo (1990) when he took a tour of African universities in the United States of America.

The information theory of use developed by Shannon and Weaver in1949 states that, the freedom to choose an information resource such as Africana is in the hands of the user (Nwachukwu, 2008). This is a further support of the need to pay attention to the findings of this research on the factors that militate against the usage of Africana resources. The theory emphasized that information is a measure of one's freedom of choice. In other words, the choice or the use of an information resource like the Africana is the exercising of one's freedom of choice. Therefore the rate and the amount of the usage of an information resource like the Africana depend on the interest of the user. So every effort must be made by the libraries and the librarians to alleviate the factors that militate against the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the findings of the research are made:

1. There should be increased funds for the management of the library so as to accommodate increase purchase of more Africana resources, taking care of currency of the resources, different formats and subject areas in Nigerian university libraries. This will consequently increase usage.

2. The library management should vigorously pursue the establishment of different marketing or awareness strategies so as to create awareness of the usefulness of Africana resources in university libraries in Nigeria. This will go a long way in changing the perception of users about the resources thereby increase the usage of the resources by both the Arts and Science users. It will also make users to be aware of the Africana resources that are available in the library.

3. The University librarians should endeavor to use qualified and experienced professions as unit heads in the Africana units and also that adequate library staff should be sent to the units so as to increase users' assistance in the retrieval of information.

4. The Africana unit should be equipped with ICT information retrieval tools and Africana staff should be trained and retrained in the knowledge and use of ICT in the Africana unit.

5.   New arrivals in Africana should be displayed at strategic places so as to attract more users to the use of the resources.

6.   The reading environment in the Africana unit should be made more comfortable by providing better chairs and reading tables and by also installing air conditioners in the units.

7.   Semi open access should be considered for the Africana resources. It is a situation where users are allowed to retrieve what they want as it is done with the other books. They are however not allowed to borrow the resources out but are allowed to photocopy in the Africana unit only and every Africana unit should be provided with photocopiers.

8.   The factors that limit usage of the resources (found out by this study) should be avoided.

Conclusion

The amount of the usage of an information resource like the Africana depends on the interest of the user. So every effort must be made by the libraries and the librarians to alleviate the factors that militate against the usage of Africana resources in Nigerian university libraries. Such factors according to the findings of this study include; poor library services, lack of professional staff, lack of effective use of ICT tools, lack of users awareness of available resources etc.

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