

THE USE OF KASHIM IBRAHIM LIBRARY (KIL)
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA:
CATALOGUE BY LONG VACATION TERM (LVT) STUDENTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Keeping accurate records of all the entire holdings of the library is one indispensable function of a library catalogue. But no meaningful use can be made of library materials if the catalogue, the sextant cannot pinpoint the exact position of materials within the sea of books on library shelves.

The authors studied the use of the Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Library and discovered that the general library orientation programme offered the LVT Students does not reach many of them to familiarise them with the catalogue. Consequently, a large majority of them, coupled with work pressure, do not benefit from the library as they should.

Recommendations have been made that will help alleviate ignorance on the part of the LVT Students.

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INTRODUCTION

Facilitating access to information is the main purpose of preparing a Library Catalogue. The problems of retrieving library materials required by student undergraduates, postgraduates, Faculty and even library staff have become substantial. The weavers of the catalogue have had a major concern, which is to prepare a catalogue whose users would be absolutely independent eventually. Librarians have aimed at the simplest possible filing codes - a filing order that would boost users morale and ambition to retrieve resources accurately and independently.

Despite this, it is not uncommon to find undergraduates who meet with frustrations in using the catalogue and in retrieving materials without the assistance of library staff. It is pertinent also to note the astronomical increase in the number of students who visit the library and wave aside the use of the Catalogue, the index and the stripdex only to turn to the staff desk to enquire whether a certain book exists in the library or not. Evidences abound which prove that students and researchers are generally not finding it easy to use the library properly. Studies have indicated that a large number of students do not use the catalogue as often as they should. For instance, Igbashal (1983) found that 61% of the undergraduates of the Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria used Library Catalogue only occasionally. Besides 25% never used the catalogue at all while only 12% used it often¹. Another study carried out in the U.S.A. by

Britain, et al. (1976) showed that 71% of undergraduates were not even aware of the existence of the subject catalogue, that only 25% were aware of the existence of abstracts, and 32% were aware of the existence of indexes. Out of the undergraduates who were aware of the existence of the subject catalogues, about half did not use it or had difficulty in using it².

The situation is likely to be more bizarre in case of the Long Vacation Term (LVT) students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria who study in a crash programme situation. In a bid to cover the syllabus, the LVT Programme involves extensive class and laboratory work which leaves little time for students to use the library. Moreover, some of the students are staff in Ministries and Post-primary schools where the day-to-day operations do not encourage library use. Even where libraries are used the scarcity of materials do not necessitate the use of Catalogue as retrieval devices. But if students' work requires the latest information on their subjects and produce high-quality research work then the Catalogue is one sure sextant which can help them through the sea of materials existing in a library collection.

Many researches have been carried out on the use of library in general, however, the controversy over the question of how effectively LVT students can utilise the library catalogue remains unresolved. Unless the students are well-groomed in the use of the catalogue, much time will be wasted in finding materials in the library. In such a

situation the library will not serve the purpose for which it is established. The problem to be investigated therefore centres on the use of the catalogue of the Kashim Ibrahim Library. What kind of problems do LVT students have in the use of the Catalogue? What is the extent of the problems and how do such problems arise?

The investigation is a preliminary survey which does not delve into details such as problems arising from the physical form of the Catalogue, the various forms and devices of catalogues, the interpretation of the catalogue and cataloguing practices.

METHODOLOGY

Out of the 5000 students admitted in the 1991 LVT Programmes of both the Faculty of Education and the Institute of Education of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2000 were selected to participate in the study. The subjects were selected on the basis of familiarity with the K.I.L., F.E.L. and I.E.L. Catalogues.

The K.I.L. is the main and central library of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The F.E.L. and the I.E.L. are both located within a five minutes walk of the main library. Both libraries are located within the premises of their parent institutions, that is, the Faculty of Education and the Institute of Education, respectively.

Towards the end of the 1991 contact session by which time students had settled down to serious studies, the subjects were given a questionnaire to complete. The

questionnaire consisted of 13 questions of the multiple-choice (4-options) type. The questions sought to obtain students' responses to problems on the frequency of use and difficulties encountered in the use of libraries' catalogues. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers who allowed sufficient time to respond to the questions and collected the responses on the spot.

Tallies of the responses to each question were made and percentages were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The students that participated in the study pursued a variety of disciplines, the highest percentage of them pursuing library science (23%) and the lowest percentage made up of those that pursued Maths Education (3%). Five percent (5%) of the students were doing Post-graduate studies. About two-thirds (63.5%) of them were male while about one-third (36.5%) were female. Over half of the respondents consisted of parts one (31.5%) and two (23%) students. The sample was therefore a fair representation of the whole LVT students population.

In their ratings of usage of libraries, Kashim Ibrahim Library was rated first, the Faculty of Education Library second, and the Institute of Education library as the third most used libraries by students. This gave some indication of students familiarity with the three libraries and particularly the library catalogues which are the object of this study.

Students were asked how frequently they used the library. Sixty one percent (61%) indicated that they used the library daily while fourteen percent (14%) indicated its usage only on a weekly basis. A comparable percentage (16%) indicated that they used the library only when they were given assignments. This means that regular use of the library, that is, on a daily or weekly basis was made by seventy-five percent (75%) of students. The remaining one-quarter of the students body made only occasional use of the library, that is, monthly or less or when given assignments. This could be the result of a number of factors. First, is the very over-crowded curriculum of the LVT programme. Second and probably more important is that students have not inculcated the culture of library usage neither were they given proper orientation in the use of the library. Indeed when asked if they had any library orientation, only fifty-three percent (53%) responded yes, while the remaining forty-seven percent (47%) responded no. To compound the situation further, a smaller proportion of students (only 44%) indicated that they had any formal training in the use of the catalogue, and out of this, thirty-two percent (32%) found the instructions very helpful while twelve percent (12%) found the instructions helpful.

Focusing attention on students' use of catalogues in the libraries, the study sought to find out who taught them to use the catalogue. Fifty-six percent (56%) responded that they taught themselves or that their friends taught them.

The remaining forty four percent (44%) indicated that they were taught through orientation or others. This at first seems in perfect agreement with the response to the question which asked if students had any formal training on catalogue usage. But the response when looked at more closely indicated that only 22% of the 44% above mentioned orientation specifically as the vehicle of training. The remaining 22% actually indicated that "others" were instrumental to their learning the use of the catalogue. This goes to confirm the fact that the training in the use of the catalogue was not completely effective. In fact, the 22% discrepancy is, even better explained by the fact that this fraction (actually 23%) of the sample were library science students who were likely to have had some formal training in the use of the catalogue apart from orientation. The point which comes out clearly from this is that less than one quarter (22%) of the students had what could be termed "effective" orientation in the use of the library catalogue. This in turn would have very serious implications on how students use the library catalogue and their views on the usefulness of the library. It was therefore not surprising that when students were asked why they did NOT use the catalogue, seventy percent of students indicated one reason or another like 'I could locate my books easily' (41%), 'I always asked friends' (14%), 'I did not know whether there was a catalogue' (10%), 'I did know what the catalogue was' (7%). Furthermore, students were requested to indicate which

of five methods they found most useful in locating a book in the library. Only thirty-seven percent (37%) indicated that they used the library catalogue. Thirty-one percent (31%) of students went directly to the shelf; twenty-one percent (21%) "asked a library staff", while twelve percent (12%) "asked a friend". Students were finally asked to rank various pieces of information in terms of their usefulness in searching for information in the library catalogue. 'Subject' was rated the first most important information followed by 'author' and then 'title'.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective catalogue use and information retrieval by users depend on a proper understanding of the catalogue as a retrieval device. A large number of users regard the catalogue as a mere record of library materials. About seventy-five percent of LVT students sampled used the library but only sixteen percent actually used the library for the purpose of assignments. It is clear therefore, that the remaining fifty nine percent only found the library a conducive reading room, where materials are stored for posterity with some attendants to oversee them. They did not see the library as a place where organized materials with efficient retrieval device like the catalogue is available for their use. This points to the need for formal of orientation of students in the use of the catalogue. From the study, while there was evidence that some form orientation was given to LVT students, such orientation was

grossly inadequate to make any meaningful use of the catalogue possible. Thus, while fifty-three percent of respondents admitted taking orientation in the use of the library in general, fifty-six percent of them claimed they had to teach themselves the use of the catalogue or had to be taught by friends. The researchers are of the opinion that orientation in the use of the library should be re-organised with particular emphasis on the use of library catalogues in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Faculty of Education and Institute of Education libraries. More specifically, the following recommendations are put forward to rectify the problems encountered by LVT students in the use of the catalogues in the various libraries:

1. Formal orientation in the use of the library should be made compulsory during every long vacation term for new students.
2. Particular attention should be paid to teaching students the use of the library catalogue during such orientation.
3. Instruction in the use of the library should be incorporated into the LVT curriculum for all students. The coordinators of the LVT programmes should insist that students successfully undergo training in the use of library before students can graduate.
4. In order to help other students who are not pursuing formal training in librarianship prepare themselves in taking up the management of libraries in schools,

Advanced Course(s) in the use of the library should be offered to students and a graduate certificate in library science issued on successful completion of the course(s).

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