# THE PROSPECTS OF FEE-BASED LIBRARY SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: FOCUS ON FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF THECHNOLOGY, MINNA, FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC BIDA AND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, MINNA.

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*Abstract*

*Sonic decades ago, libraries all over the world had depended on their parent institutions for their survival. In recent times libraries are characterized by dwindling resources as government funding has been drastically reduced. This has, in turn, affected the development of libraries and their services to the users. In order to survive the economic crunch, libraries should try and plan on the prospects of marketing their information services. It is on this note that this paper examined the funding or otherwise of some academic libraries in Niger State, Nigeria to know the prospects and future of marketing information services in these libraries. Questionnaire was used to gather information from the respondents. The paper recommends that having put libraries in expected standard, most services provided in the library should be charged.*

## Introduction

The Nigerian higher institutions are established to provide highly skilled manpower for the economy and also to provide technology needed for the development of the nation. The revised edition of the National Policy on Education (1981) describes academic institution or higher education as that which "covers the post-secondary education which is given in Universities, mono/Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology including such courses as are given by the Colleges of Education, Correspondence Course institutions and such institutions as may be allied to them." In other words, academic institutions are those institutions of higher learning that are available to all students who are interested in furthering their educational ambitions after

their secondary school education .A number of these institutions have been established in Nigeria among which are Federal University of Technology, (F.U.T.) Minna, Federal Polytechnic Bida (FPB) and College of Education (COE) Minna. Also emerging simultaneously with their parent institutions are their libraries. These are known as academic libraries because they are located in the tertiary institutions of higher learning and these libraries at the same time provide scholarly services.

The National Policy on Education (1998) in defining the objectives of higher education further emphasised that higher educational institutions should pursue these goals through:

i. *Teaching*
ii. *Research*
ii. *The dissemination of existing and new information*
iv. *The pursuit of service to the community and*
v. *Being a storehouse of knowledge*

From the above statements, there is no doubt that libraries are vital for the achievement of the goals of the higher institutions. Libraries are regarded as the heart of these institutions and without them they cannot last long (Charturved, 1994)

Furthermore, academic libraries as already pointed out are those libraries established in every tertiary institutions of learning and they are expected to support their parent institutions in achieving the teaching, research and publication objectives of the institutions. For the purpose of this study, focus is on the academic libraries of Federal University of technology Minna, Federal Polytechnic Bida and College of Education Minna. These institutions are located in Niger State, one of the states in North- Central part of Nigeria. The Federal Polytechnic Bida and College of Education Minna were founded in 1970s while Federal University of Technology Minna was founded in 1980s .

**Literature Review**

Information as generally believed is an economic resource. In most developed countries, people have long time ago started paying for information services. This practice is yet to be fully achieved in most libraries in Nigeria. Majority of the people in Nigeria still see libraries as the social service departments and as such, their information products or services should remain largely free of charge. To support this Ojedokun and Ola (1994) believed that the "fundamental principle of rendering library services free has been the vogue in librarianship for ages because library services are seen as social services such as health, education, defence and police services and these should be funded collectively." Charging fees for library services is therefore repulsive to many people who strongly feel that such services should be free. Ikhiazama and Oduwole (2000) observed that charging for services in the library usually awaken strong feelings. There is always a sharp reaction or resentment among the patrons whenever they are asked to pay for any charges in the library even if it is overdue fine. For instance, in Nigerian universities, according to Ojedokun and Ola (1994) students are generally not willing to pay for library services because they feel that education should be the responsibility of the government and therefore should be free. Similarly, marketing of library services even among the librarians is not wholly accepted. This is why Ochai, et al (2000) pointed out that, it is unrealistic to imagine that marketing as a concept has the blessing of all librarians. Frankly speaking, one thinks that a stage has reached when the concept of a free library and information services has to be re-examined. Looking at it from all angles, library services have become capital-intensive and yet the level of financial support from the funding authorities keeps on decreasing. To stress these points

further, Edoka (1991) argued that, it is perhaps not in doubt to any information professional in most libraries in Nigeria that budgetary allocations for running the libraries are grossly inadequate. While the country, he further emphasised continues to experience spiral inflationary trends, government subventions for library and information services have witnessed severe cuts. This ugly situation has come about in consequence of harsh economic realities prevailing in most African countries including Nigeria. For an effective library services to be achieved in academic libraries, there is need for the introduction of charges on some services rendered in these libraries for their survival. Dina (2003) noted that the inadequate funding of academic libraries hinders the provision of effective library services to clientele. The implication of this is that, most academic libraries cannot provide adequate services to the users due to the continuous increase of number of students in the tertiary institutions despite the dwindling fund situation facing these institutions.

Ifidon and Nwalo (2003) equally expressed that, charging for library services is not a new idea in the developed countries of the world because people usually based their work on information. Dina (2003) in corroboration stated that despite the fact that revenue generating falls outside the primary function of academic or any other type of libraries, it has become necessary to embark on it to help lessen the problem of poor funding to some extent in Nigerian academic libraries. This therefore, will go a long way to sustain ing academic libraries in Nigeria.

**Statement of the problem**

Libraries as information centres are expected to provide quality and timely information services to their users but most academic libraries are finding it difficult to

fulfil this role due to inadequate funding. The subvention given to most academic libraries is not even enough to purchase essential library materials such as books and journals yet the library is being pressurized to provide specialized services such as Selective Dissemination of Information (S.D.I.), indexing and abstracting services as well as Internet services, etc. It has therefore become necessary for academic libraries in Nigeria to look for alternative ways of sustaining themselves and staying relevant in their communities.

**Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are to:

i. *determine whether fee should be charged for library and information services in academic libraries in Niger State, Nigeria;*
ii. *determine the types of services that should be charged for in these libraries; find out the strategies for marketing library services in these academic libraries.*

**Methodology**

A survey research design was considered adequate for this study. The instruments used were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was divided into three parts in order to illicit necessary information from the librarians and library officers in the libraries under study. Thirty (30) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which twenty-four (24) of them were returned and were found adequate for the study. This however represents 80% of the distributed questionnaire which is on the high side. Data collected were analyzed by simple descriptive method and the results were tabulated. Apart from the questionnaire the researcher equally interviewed the heads of these academic libraries for secondary data.

**Data analysis and discussions**

**Table 1: Distribution of libraries and their funding bodies**

| Names of libraries | Locations | State | Years of establishment | Funding bodies |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| FUT Minna Library | Minna | Niger | 1984 | Federal Govt. |
| Federal Poly Bida L library | Bida | Niger | 1978 | Federal Govt. |
| College of Education Minna library | Minna | Niger | 1975 | Niger State Govt |

Table 1 reveals that none of the libraries has existed for less than twenty three years therefore they are not new in the field of librarianship. It is expected that their roles in supporting the learning, teaching and research objectives of their parent institutions should be appreciated and should be well funded. From Table 1 it was revealed that these libraries rely solely on their parent institutions for funding. The implication of this is that if the parent institutions are not properly funded the libraries would be affected too.

Attempt was made in the questionnaire to find out whether the academic libraries are adequately funded. All the respondents admitted that their libraries are not adequately funded. This confirmed Edoka (1991) and Dina (2003) studies that revealed that academic libraries in Nigeria are inadequately funded.

The questionnaire further sought to find out the alternative ways of funding the academic libraries. 20 (83.3%) of the respondents as indicated in Table 2 admitted that the managements of academic libraries should be more political and lobby their parent institutions in order to attract the administration's attentions to their libraries. 10(41.6) of the respondents indicated that the heads of academic libraries should appeal to philanthropists for assistance while 6 of them indicated that the managements of

academic libraries should try and generate funds within the libraries. The responses have shown that librarians themselves are not really considering the idea of marketing library services as the best way to attract more funds to the libraries. This however confirmed the findings of Ochai, et al (2000) which stated that marketing library services is yet to receive the blessings of the librarians in Nigeria.

**Table 2: Alternative sources of funding**

| Options | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|
| Lobbying | 20 |
| Appeal to philanthropists | 10 |
| Generating fund internally | 6 |

The questionnaire also investigated to determine the type of services the academic libraries should charge for. The respondents were allowed to indicate as many options as possible. It was revealed in Table 3 that photocopying and internet services, users' registration services and reference services should attract more charges than other library services. This could be because the users derive a lot of current information through internet services. Although some of the services as indicated by the respondents are not provided in these libraries, Table 3 revealed that virtually all kinds of library services could be marketed.

**Table 3: Services that can generate income**

| Services | Number of Respondents | |
|---|---|---|
| Internet services | 12 | 50% |
| Photocopying services | 12 | 50% |
| Users' Registration services | 12 | 50% |
| Reference services | 12 | 50% |
| Consultancy services | 5 | 20.8% |
| Binding services | 11 | 45.8 |
| Interlibrary loan services | 9 | 37.5% |
| Selective Dissemination of inf. (SDI) | 9 | 37.5% |
| Current content services | 7 | 29.2 |
| Abstracting and Indexing | 5 | 20.8% |
| Bibliographic compilation | 10 | 41.6% |
| Online searching | 4 | 16.6% |
| Computer printing | 2 | 8.3% |
| Current Awareness Services(C.A.S.) | 9 | 37.5% |

Analysis of the question on the strategies for marketing library services showed that, for effective marketing of library services libraries should embark on enlightenment campaign, create an attractive library environment, improve staff/user relationship, introduce Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in the libraries as well as provide in-house motivation for the library staff. The respondents selected as many options as they could. Creating an attractive library environment, provision of in-house motivation for the staff as well as introduction of enlightenment campaign options ranked highest as indicated in Table 4. The implication of this is that, library services might have to be redefined where necessary and more attractive services should be

adopted by the academic libraries. Presently, information is stored in hard and soft copy formats. Libraries especially the academic libraries are expected to provide various sources of information formats in order to satisfy the information needs of the users with minimal efforts. Thus, the ICT facilities are necessary in the academic libraries so as to enhance the library services and also face the challenges of information revolution in the society.

**Table 4: Strategies for marketing library services**

| Opinions | Number of Respondents | |
|---|---|---|
| Enlightenment campaign | 20 | 83.3% |
| Creating an attractive library environment | 24 | 100% |
| Improving staff/user relationship | 10 | 41.6% |
| Introduction of ICT facilities | 15 | 62.5% |
| Provision of in-house motivation for the staff. | 24 | 100% |

## Conclusion

One can therefore conclude by arguing that there is a great prospect in introducing fees in library services in academic libraries in Niger State, Nigeria in order to ensure their existence in the present economic crunch. Generally, academic libraries have been exploring alternative ways of providing library services to the users. Nevertheless, as information continues to increase and users' needs are becoming sophisticated in the face of dwindling library fund, the academic libraries will have no choice than to introduce price on their services. Information as a vital commodity should no longer be retrieved free of charge. Advanced countries like America and Britain have been practicing fee-

based information services. The third world countries such as Nigeria should endeavour to join in this new race of marketing library services in order to effectively compete in the electronic information market. Since it is always difficult to move from a free service to libray based services charge, one would not therefore expect a non resistance situation. However, this will require proper planning and careful implementation. Academic libraries would therefore have to package their services in a more attractive way and also create an enabling environment in which users will be willing to pay for the services rendered in the libraries. When this is fully achieved, it will go a long way in reducing the stress of constant lack of fund always observed in most Nigerian academic libraries and most importantly enhance the image of the libraries and their services in the society.

**Recommendations**

i. Academic libraries in Niger State should introduce fee on their library services to sustain and improve their services in the face of dwindling fund.

ii. The management of academic libraries in Niger State as a matter of necessity should acquire and install Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in their libraries so as to boost their services which would in turn generate some revenue.

iii. The academic libraries under study should provide adequate and current library materials such as books, monographs, newspapers and journals so as to encourage the users to pay some amount for their services.

iv. There is also the need for the academic libraries under study to employ qualified personnel to provide library services to users and at the same time maintain cordial staff/user relationship in the library.

v. The library management of academic libraries in Niger State should endeavour to give their staff marketing orientation so as to enable them market their library services.

V i. Finally, in fixing the prices on library services in these academic libraries under study users' pockets should be put into consideration.

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