Examining the Issues Propelling Low Patronage of University Library: The Case of Donald Ekong Library, University of Port Harcourt

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Abstract
The study assessed the issues propelling low patronage of university library. The study adopted descriptive survey. The population was registered users of 31,675 for both newly admitted and returning undergraduate students in the 2021/2022 academic session of University of Port Harcourt. 3,000 respondents were randomly sampled and 2,759 responses were garnered, indicating a 92% return rate. A structured questionnaire was designed and used for data collection. The data collected was analyzed using in frequency count, percentage, mean score (x) and standard deviation (±). The findings showed that poor-quality service, inadequate resources, currency of materials, non-availability of ICT equipment, lack awareness of library holdings, unconducive learning spaces, improper shelving of library materials, and staff incompetence accounts for low patronage of the library. Also, unattainment of library mission, poor academic performance, waste of resources, poor reading culture, and poor research output were found as effect of low patronage, and provision of current, relevant, and accurate materials as well as orientation on library use skill and survey of information needs were found as ways of improving patronage It was concluded that low patronage of university library hampers the attainment of academic objectives. It was therefore concluded that university library management should make conscious effort to improve and maintain patronage of their library information resources and services.
Keywords: University libraries, Low patronage, Information Sources, Services

1.1 Introduction

University library is an important knowledge dispensary facility that works toward the full realization of the academic vision and mission of the parent institution. The researchers had observed from statistical records of users in the Donald Ekong Library, University of Port Harcourt, that there is sharp decline in the daily patronage of the university library. Again, from the interaction with the students on the reasons why they do not patronize the library regularly, many based their reasons on the poor-quality resources and services offered to the users, while others are of the view that the resources are not adequate, current computers in the electronic section are inadequate for use.

Undoubtedly, the quality of information resources held in the University

libraries has an influence on the lecturers and students' patronage of the library services. It could be argued that the provision of quality information sources could be related to the use of library services, because quality is a decisive factor that attract users to use the library services, Ugah (2011). Ofodile and Ifijeh (2013) remarked that there would always be a correlation between quality of intellectual materials available and the quality of research and scholarship. This could be attainable if the university libraries are well-stocked with adequate and current information sources, such as, print, non-print and internet access.

It is absolutely an impossible task for lecturers to perform their duties of lecturing without having access to well-stocked library. The dynamic nature of academics is such that lecturers and students must always avail themselves the opportunities of using well-stock resourceful library in order to refresh, and get abreast with emerging trends in their area of teaching and learning. This has the support of Akobundu (2011) who asserts that teachers that are starved of current information sources would be ill-prepared to produce quality graduates as depicted by Ugah and Chiaka (2011). University library cannot be performing its roles effectively and efficiently, when its services, resources and facilities are not meeting the information needs of her users, such a library will not attain its objectives as depicted by Ogunmode and Emeahara (2010). It is on this premise that Griffiths, Johnson and Hartley (2007) avers that the satisfaction of library users in sourcing information in the university library is generally taken to be a surrogate measure of success.

In the university environment, such as, University of Port Harcourt, where academic growth, lecturers and students depend on availability, accessibility and utilization of current and relevant information sources held in the library (both physical and electronic sources). The results of the research activities by the lecturers and students are communicated to the wider audience through conference proceedings, publications in academic journals, workshops, etc. It is on this note that Odu (2017) remarked that effective utilization of library resources and services, both physical, electronic depends absolutely on the following variables; positive perception of available resources and services, level of awareness, information search skills, ICT literacy, availability of computers, availability of internet access. The study further revealed that each of these variables can, if properly harnessed, influence the extent of the utilization of the library resources and services. It is trite that if these variables are duly utilized, it will invariably influence the magnitude of utilization of library information sources and services. Where in a contrary the above-mentioned variables are not put in order, access to information sources and services will not be efficient as such capable of discouraging users from effective use of university library resources or low patronage of library resources.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the issues propelling the low patronage of university libraries. The specific objectives are:
1. to examine the reason for the low patronage of University of Port Harcourt library;
2. to determine the effect of low patronage to the management; and
3. seek for ways of improving library patronage among students and lecturers.

2.1 Literature Review

Series of studies have been carried out by library administrators, managers and librarians on the declining rate of university library resources and services. A study by Olorunsola (2009), revealed some factors that motivate readers to use the libraries. These include the size and currency of the collection, conducive learning environment, availability of Information and Communication

Technology (ICT), and well-trained and behaved staff. Okereke, Onoyeyan and Ogbuiyi (2014) in their study came up with factors that are capable of affecting adversely the use of library, to include unconducive environment and lack of written procedures and manuals that can direct non-trained library staff, the latter leading to frequent improper shelving of library materials and lack of commitment in desk work.

Commenting on the low patronage University libraries, Abagai (2008) noted that the use of library by users and indeed their satisfaction with library services depend on availability of suitable learning materials, accommodation and competent staff in the library. The author further maintained that the main objectives of any library is to support the parent institution, an objective which is achieved through systematic acquisitions and organization of all forms of recorded and undocumented information in all fields and making such information available for use.

Ajidahn cited in Abdulsalami & Efosa (2020) depicted that technological advancement (particularly the ICT) is one of the determining factors of library patronage, that information seekers deemed it easy to access internet when they are in need of any information. It is as a result of this that Abdulsalami and Efosa (2020) remarked that if such ICT facilities are not available such library will be poorly patronized as many information seekers nowadays neglect the culture of using hard copies materials to get information of their choice.

In a study by Emorojoh cited in Abdulsalami & Efosa (2020), on the factors responsible for poor patronage of the library resources and services in Nasarawa State. The study revealed that technological advancement particularly the Information Communication Technology (ICT) has great impact on the nature of poor patronization in the school library by both staff and student of the institution. The study further revealed that

staff and students spend most of their time in searching information from the internet just for leisure and academic purpose that most of the resources as reported are not available in hard copies in the libraries thereby letting the information seekers with no option than to use of internet.

Sowele (2003) submitted that the quality of services rendered to users or readers in any library reflect the quality of the staff. The author further explained that if a library is managed by a well experienced and cultured staff, users will always be encouraged to make use of the library. Ovigue and Abdusalami (2019) remarked that user's satisfaction with the information resources, facilities and services provided by libraries irrespective of the libraries has become a melting pot of the present-day librarianship and information science.

To achieve this noble objective, Abdulsalami and Efosa (2020) documented that library must be able to give out quality information in terms of currency, relevancy, accuracy and ease of use to meet the information needs of its users, then satisfactory and services have not been rendered. In a study by Perera (2005) reported that satisfying users' needs is essential to the management of libraries, that the management staff of a library should be aware of the current needs of their users, which may vary from one library to another as well as from time to time. The author recommended that carrying out regular surveys on users' needs at regular intervals on various aspects of library usage will be an invaluable guide in determining the future directions of library developments.

Access to adequate library resources is essential to the attainment of superior academic skills, Ossom (2010). It is as a result of this that Morgan (2005) depicted that no institution in the society can achieve its solid objective without the effective information resources and services supporting such institution. To actualize this there must be

effective and reliable information flowing as opined by Abdulsalami & Efosa (2020). Ovigue and Abdulsalami (2019) canvassed in their study that apathy to use of library resources and services may not be unconnected with the plethora of information available on the internet, and other remotely accessible electronic resources, lecture notes, recommended textbooks and other educational resources hitherto being consulted in academic libraries but now available on the internet. The authors further maintained that low reading culture among Nigerians and the undergraduate students as well is another factor that may account for unimpressive use of academic/faculty libraries. The views and opinions of scholars on the low patronage of university libraries have been carefully examined and reviewed and the authors pointed one or more reasons attributing to the low patronage of the university libraries.

3.1 Methodology

Descriptive survey type of research design is adopted for this study. The population for the study was limited to a targeted population of registered users of 31,675 for both newly admitted and returning undergraduate students in the 2021/2022 academic session that makes use of Donald E.U Ekong library from which the sample population will be drawn (Source: Academic Office, 2021). 3,000 respondents were randomly sampled. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed for data collection. Three thousand questionnaire were distributed and **2,759** were returned, indicating a 92% return rate. The data collected was arranged and analyzed using in frequency count, percentage, mean score $(\bar{x})$ and standard deviation $(\pm)$.

4.1. Result and discussion

Table 1. Reasons for low patronage of University of Port Harcourt Library

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	.	Remark
1	Poor quality of service	1480(53.6)	712(25.8)	276(10.0)	291(10.05)	3.2	0.0	Agree
2	Inadequate resources	1395(50.6)	844(30.6)	249(9.0)	271(9.8)	3.2	1.0	Agree
3	Currency of materials	1691(61.3)	683(24.8)	134(4.9)	251(9.1)	3.4	.9	Agree
4	Non-availability of ICT equipment	1079(39.1)	822(29.8)	455(16.5)	403(14.6)	2.9	0.1	Agree
5	Lack of awareness of library holdings	1333(48.3)	820(29.7)	268(9.7)	338(12.3)	3.1	0.2	Agree
6	Inconducive learning spaces	1119(40.6)	902(32.7)	313(11.3)	425(15.4)	3.0	0.6	Agree
7	Improper shelving of library materials	1215(44.0)	768(27.8)	349(12.6)	427(15.5)	3.0	0.8	Agree
8	Staff incompetence	1598(57.9)	595(21.6)	189(6.9)	377(13.7)	3.2	0.6	Agree

N = 2,759

The result showed that all the listed areas were strongly agreed with by the respondents as they all obtained mean scores which cluster around 3 representing "Strongly agreed" in the order of poor-quality service (3.2), inadequate resources (3.2), currency of materials (3.4), non-availability of ICT equipment (2.9), lack awareness of library holdings (3.1), inconducive learning spaces (3.0), improper shelving of library materials (3.0), and staff incompetence (3.2). Hence, all the listed above are reasons for low patronage of University of Port Harcourt library as adduced by the respondents. According to Olorunsola (2009), some factors that motivate readers to use the libraries include the size and currency of the collection, conducive learning environment, availability of Information and

Communication Technology (ICT), and well-trained and behaved staff. Additionally, Okereke, Onoyeyan and Ogbuiyi (2014) stated that such issues as unconducive environment and lack of written procedures

and manuals that can direct non-trained library staff, the latter leading to frequent improper shelving of library materials and lack of commitment in desk work adversely affect the use of library.

Table 2. Effect of low patronage of library

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	±	Remark
1	Unattainment of library mission	1866(67.6)	536(19.4)	134(4.9)	223(8.1)	3.5	.9	Agree
2	Poor academic performance	1234(44.7)	852(30.9)	306(11.1)	367(13.3)	3.1	0.1	Agree
3	Waste of resources	1161(42.1)	759(27.5)	489(17.7)	350(12.7)	3.0	0.5	Agree
4	Poor reading culture	776(28.1)	558(20.2)	759(27.5)	666(24.1)	2.5	0.3	Agree
5	Poor research output	1073(38.9)	886(32.1)	447(16.2)	353(12.8)	3.0	0.2	Agree

N = 2,759

The result on Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that low patronage of university library incurs negative impacts as the items listed. The item 1 (Unattainment of library mission) obtained a means score of 3.5, item 2 (poor academic performance) 3.1, item 3 (waste of resources) 3.0, item 4 (poor reading culture) 2.5, and item 5 (poor research output) 3.0. The result is in consonant with the assertion of Ugah and Chiaka (2011) that university library cannot be performing its

roles effectively and efficiently, when its services, resources and facilities are not meeting the information needs of her users, such a library will not attain its objectives as depicted. Hence, it is premised on such finding that the satisfaction of users with the library services and resources is the determinant of the success of every university library management (Griffiths, Johnson & Hartley, 2007).

Table 3. Ways of improving library patronage

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	±	Remark
1	Provision of current materials	742(26.9)	811(29.4)	371(13.4)	835(30.3)	2.6	0.2	Agree
2	Provision of relevant materials	668(24.2)	915(33.2)	397(14.4)	779(28.2)	2.5	0.3	Agree
3	Provision of accurate materials	449(16.3)	1746(63.3)	444(16.1)	120(4.3)	3.3	0.1	Agree
4	Orientation on library use skill	358(13.0)	1224(44.4)	897(32.5)	280(10.1)	3.0	1.0	Agree
5	Survey of users' information need	453(16.4)	1451(52.6)	641(23.2)	214(7.8)	3.1	1.1	Agree

N = 2,759

The result from the study revealed that out of the five items listed, three yielded high mean scores of between 3.1 and 3.3 (items 5 – survey of users' information need, item 4 – orientation on library use skill, and item 3 – provision of accurate materials). While items

1 and 2 (provision of current materials and provision of relevant materials). These indicated that the respondents quite agree with the listed items as ways of improving library patronage. This finding had it that the listed 5-items are going to help improve patronage in

university library. Accordingly, to achieve the noble objective of the library in providing information for teaching, learning and research activities, Abdulsalami and Efosa (2020) averred that library must be able to give out quality information in terms of currency, relevancy, accuracy and ease of use to meet the information needs of its users.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The library is the hub of teaching, learning, and research in the university environment. However, in most cases, the library witnesses under-utilization of the resources provided to aid in the pursuit of the academic objectives of the university community members. This is the concern of this study. The findings exposed that such issues as order of poor-quality service, inadequate resources, currency of materials, non-availability of ICT equipment, lack awareness of library holdings, inconducive learning spaces, improper shelving of library materials, and staff incompetence constitute reasons for low patronage of the library. In the same vein, it was found that low patronage of university library incurs unattainment of library mission, poor academic performance, waste of resources, poor reading culture, and poor research output. Also, ways of improving patronage were elucidated as provision of current, relevant, and accurate materials as well as orientation on library use skill and survey of information needs. From these findings, it was concluded that low patronage of university library could act as a clog in the wheels of academic progress and hamper the attainment of academic objectives. It was therefore concluded that university library management should make conscious effort to improve and maintain patronage of their library information resources and services.

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