

## **User Education Programmes and the Use of the Library in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University: the State of the Art**

By

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### **Abstract**

This paper sets to emphasize the user education programme and the use of the library and study skills as obtainable in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and the strong need to introduce comprehensive and systematic library instruction and user education programmes in Nigerian universities with special reference to Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The nature and challenges of user education in Chukwuemeka Ojukwu University are carefully highlighted. The article outlines the various roles that should be played by the university administrations, teaching staff, and the library professionals in making user education programmes and library instructions effective and efficient. The paper equally attempts to establish what impact a user education programme or use of library and study skills should have on student academic life and even after university education. This paper also advocates ways of making user education or use of library and study skills being taught under the General Studies Unit compulsory and examinable, and credit earning, to encourage students' active participation and seriousness. The paper equally advocates the urgent need for active support and encouragement from the faculty members and teaching staff. Finally, the paper suggests the strategies for improving upon the teaching of user education in Nigerian Universities with special attention/reference to Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University.

*Keywords:* user education programme, library instruction, Nigerian universities, university administration, university libraries, library orientation, freshmen.

### **Introduction**

Most Nigerian students enter universities without having used a library. Not only are they bewildered by the sheer size of the university library collection, but also they are usually at a loss on how to locate any material in the library. This acquisition of knowledge on how to find information or to locate any desired document for oneself is an educational experience whose value extends beyond the walls of a university. Therefore, university students must be taught by the professional librarians how to effectively use basic bibliographic tools of the library, such as the card catalogues, indexes, and abstracts, reference

books and how to conduct in-depth literature searching in undergraduate specific subject fields. Even the academic staff of the university would automatically benefit from subject bibliographic instruction in their fields by the librarians with necessary subject and bibliographic knowledge.

Adeyemi (2000) sees user education as concerned with helping readers to make the best use of a library. He maintains that this is carried out when fresh students or undergraduates are introduced into library system at the beginning of every academic year. He argues that students cannot be taught the use of library in isolation but must be trained to see it as a continuous process of education. In other words, user education should be a continuous process starting with school and public libraries and with the possibility of extension into academic and specialized libraries. No wonder the use of the library is one of the added courses as directed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) who saw the strong need for students in the universities to have a better understanding of the library and how to use it for optimal output. It is equally introduced in the universities in order to produce students who can engage in quality research and produce quality papers that are of high standard or quality. It guides the students in systematic investigation, appropriate resources to use, and to articulate their findings.

Lwehabura (1999) states that user education is a device by librarians to educate users on how to use library resources effectively. He opines that user education aims at changing an individual's behaviour and experience towards the use of library and other information sources. He posits that in many developed countries, user education and information skills are taught right from the primary school level. He, however, laments that in spite of the importance of user education, it has not been given its due recognition in many developing countries. This is why we maintain that lack of meaningful user education programmes in many developing countries have contributed to incompetence in the effective use of library resources by the students. Tiefel (1995) argues that user education teaches users how to make the most effective use of the library system. She believes that user education encompasses all activities undertaken to help students become efficient users of information, that is, how to identify their information needs and then how to find, evaluate, and select the best information to meet their needs.

There are obvious challenges facing the university system in Nigeria, namely, increasing enrolment of students, shortage of staff, frequent change in curricula, cut in finances, and information explosion. Any librarian with personal experience and contact with students would recount the following questions that students of various levels, including postgraduate students and lecturers, sometimes ask: How do I use author/title catalogue? Where can I get chemical engineering textbooks?

Therefore, it follows from such questions that there is an obvious functional defect in the methodology and content of user education programmes organized for students in many Nigerian Universities, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University inclusive. In his study, Akinyode (1992) validates this finding by acknowledging that user education is a flop in Nigerian Universities, because its impact is not evident in the day-to-day use of library resources by undergraduate and postgraduate students. In the same vein, Aguolu & Aguolu (2002) have it that Nigerian Universities have been very slow or inexplicably hesitant about accepting the responsibility for instructing students on the methods of library use beyond the traditional but superficial orientation programmes. Hence, the common practice of user education in Nigerian Universities and more specifically, in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, is to have a library orientation week programme at the end of which it is assumed that the students would have imbibed the techniques of effective use of library to last a lifetime. But the unfortunate defeat of such programme is that they only limit themselves to the orientation component of a user education programme and completely neglect the other aspect which is the instruction.

The general format of the orientation programme offered in Nigerian Universities including Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University consists of the introduction of the University Librarian or his representative to new students, explanation of the library collection, presentation on the organizational layout of the library, guided tour of the university library in groups, distribution of written pamphlets that give details of existing library rules and regulations if available. On this note, some universities do not have up to one week orientation but a day, in which students disperse to their departments to resume normal lectures - Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University practises this one-day orientation. It should be noted that the majority of students coming into universities do not have the simplest user education before their admission. Moreover, when it is time to come for introductory talks, they seldom show up, and when they do, the interest displayed is usually very low because they believe that the library is just a custodian of materials and an environment where they can always come to read their textbooks or notebooks.

Impression from personal experiences and encounters with students of the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University suggest that the orientation programme currently run in the University does not inculcate the required knowledge of how to judiciously and effectively use the resources in the libraries as they are supposed to be used. There is no doubt that the type of user education given to the students of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu is grossly inadequate and urgently calls for attention.

Research has shown that undergraduates, and even postgraduates and lecturers, need to know how to use a library if they are going to be academically successful. Hence, without adequate training, the students would be unable to make efficient use of the information or materials available in the library. Thanks to the National Universities Commission (NUC) that made it mandatory that all professional librarians in Nigerian universities should introduce and teach the use of library and study skills to their students. These directives have not totally been put in place in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University as the lecturers in the Department of English and Literary Studies claim that they are the people to teach the course. It was in the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic sessions that the two successive General Studies Directors of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University observed the inadequacies in our students academically, especially in the effective and efficient use of the library and decided to call back the professional librarians to handle the course. Thus, the professional librarians are gradually taking over the course “Use of the Library and Study Skills,” however, under the course “Use of English and Study Skills”, and being taught for only one semester and not even the normal two semesters.

#### **Types of user education**

At this juncture, it is pertinent to discuss the two aspects or types of user education that should be taught in universities. Several authors such as Aguolu & Aguolu (2002), Adeyemi (2000), Lwehabura (1999), Edem and Lawal (1996), and Tiefel (1995) identify two types of user education as follows:

- Library orientation
- Library instruction

**Library orientation** is primarily concerned with ways of introducing the users to the general techniques of library use and services available, and the organizational layout and facilities of a particular library. It aims at creating the right kind of atmosphere for effective communication between users and librarians, as well as users and library resources or materials. This is also in order to present an image of the library as a pleasant and friendly institution where help can be obtained.

On the other hand, **library instruction** focuses on learning how to make effective and efficient use of the information resources available within specific subject disciplines for quality education and academic success. It is effective only at a time of need, and learning how to use a library is a continuous process.

#### **Importance of user education programmes in tertiary institutions**

In principle, education aims at changing an individual’s behaviour, attitude, and mental discipline towards the acquisition of desired

knowledge. User education, therefore, aims at changing the students' behaviour and experience towards the use of library and other vital information sources. Library users should be educated in searching and mastering every information source that suits their individual needs and meets their academic needs (Adeyemi, 2000).

Tiefel (1995) opines that another aspect that makes user education programme important in academic institutions is the change in education philosophy that has shifted from being teacher-centered to student or learner-centred. This philosophy is intended to encourage critical thinking and independent learning. Students are, therefore, required to undertake project work, tutorials, and seminars and long essay writing. In view of the above facts, user education programme is needed to enable students to comprehend researching, and using the wide range of information sources more effectively and efficiently, not only for passing their examinations with good grades, but also for preparing them for life-long learning. It is from such premises that the Library Association (1982) stresses the strong need for libraries to conduct user education programmes by pointing out that: the library is one of the university's largest single educational resources, and it is also a complex network of sophisticated system. Students can derive full benefit from it only if they are taught how to use it, and the literature of their parent discipline effectively.

In the same vein, Tiefel (1995) refers to the Boyer Report of 1987 which states the importance of library instruction by saying that: The university library must be viewed as a vital part of the undergraduate experience. Students should be given bibliographic instruction and be encouraged to spend at least as much time in the library using its wide range of resources as they spend in class. The library staff (librarians) should be considered as important to teaching as are classroom teachers. The report also recommends that every undergraduate be introduced carefully to the range of resources for learning on campus.

### **Challenges facing user education programme and the teaching of Use of the Library and Study Skills in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University**

Adeyemi (2000) maintains that the problems of user education programme in Nigerian universities, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu inclusive, stem from the background of library services in Nigeria. In the university libraries, an information service, of which library services are a part, has no solid base. At various school levels, the literature indicates the nearest absence of libraries, reading materials and qualified staff to provide effective and efficient library services. Nlayidozi (1984) summarizes this situation by noting that ... most students come from rural environment with poor learning facilities which do not include the library as an integral part of learning experience. At least, where libraries

exist, they are quiet rooms for study, frequently poorly staffed with materials either outdated or not related to the curriculum.

Again, lack of commitment from the library and institutional administrations, poor co-operation from the faculty and department, lack of adequate planning and insufficient evaluation studies are some of the challenges experienced in user education. Other factors are lack of adequate funding and failure of the libraries to plan, prepare, implement, and evaluate carefully their instruction programmes.

Specifically, the challenges being faced in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University with regard to user education programme are many as follows:

- lack of recognition of the importance of library in the life of a student by both the university administration and the faculty.
- unnecessary struggle by the English lecturers to teach “Use of the Library and Study Skills.”
- unnecessary infusion of “Use of the Library and Study Skills” and “Use of English and Study Skills” in the curriculum of the university
- the Use of the Library and Study Skills is being taught only in the first semester of a session
- general lack of knowledge of the importance of library by the university community
- negligence by students and staff and so on.
- lack of co-ordination by the coordinators especially of the GS 101 Use of English and Study Skills who usually emerge from the Department of English Language and Literary Studies.

Furthermore, Alemna (1990) and Zaki (1991) note that the inadequacies of user education in African universities stem from the two most popular programmes which do not constitute the necessary skills required for effective use of library resources. They also point at the insufficient time spent for introducing library resources, bad timing of orientation, lack of students’ motivation, and large number of students for a single group being given the orientation as among the weakness of the user education programme in African Universities.

In line with the above argument, Edem and Lawal (1996) summarize the challenges of user education as follows:

- scarcity of funds
- paucity of professional librarians
- lack of faculty cooperation

- poor or non-integration of user education in the university curriculum
- students' inability to use resources of the library
- poor time allocation for teaching and practical work
- lack of theory and methodology
- poor evaluation methods in many Nigerian universities, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu inclusive.

Having seen the problems associated with user education programmes in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, this study would not be complete if we do not delve into the ways of finding lasting solutions to the problems and suggest ways for improvement.

### **Strategies for improving user education programme in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University**

In assessing suggestions on how to improve user education programme, Edem and Lawal (1996) assert that:

- ❖ Qualified personnel should be recruited for effective teaching of the programme. They further suggest that where such personnel are not available or found, part-time professional librarians should be employed, and that such tutors should be given adequate remunerations as motivational incentive.
- ❖ Adequate time for teaching and practical work should be allocated for the course. Time should be properly allocated for theory and valuable practical sessions. Importantly, the course should be a compulsory credit earning course if it has to be taken seriously by students.
- ❖ As the custodian of all academic and non-academic activities of the university, the university administration has to strongly recognize the importance of the library as “the heart of the university” in supporting the academic activities of the university. The university administration should also recognize the essential roles that can be played by user education for students' effective learning and quality education. It should therefore play a supportive role for all members to be taken by various organs in the process of introducing and strengthening user education programmes. One important aspect that needs support from the university administration is the proper integration of user education programmes into the university curriculum and making it a *compulsory* and *examinable* component of the curriculum as pointed out by some authors above.
- ❖ Since user education programme is essentially a library-based

activity, professional librarians must be able to persuade the teaching staff and the entire university community that the educated person needs to possess an understanding of the structure and value of knowledge. This means convincing them of the value of user education. This would be achieved by building and developing a close partnership with other teaching staff for every step taken in introducing user education programmes.

- ❖ The teaching staff can positively influence the success of user education. The reason is that they have a powerful influence on students' behaviour. However, it is pertinent to state that the roles required for the teaching staff can only be achieved if teachers recognize their importance and are ready to participate in facilitating such programmes.
- ❖ Furthermore, academic librarians must strive to have impact on the curricula of their institutions, and therefore, become more assertive and political in their actions. This can be achieved in several ways among which are:
  - Appointment to curriculum committees
  - Appointment as coordinators of GS courses especially that of the Use of the Library and Study Skills.
  - Meeting with individual faculty members
  - Meeting with the administration, deans, and heads of department
- ❖ Moreso, a situation where most institutions embed their library instruction or user education in the course "Use of English" is not only despicable but ineffective and should not be allowed.
- ❖ Also, the increase in complexity of the information environment requires that librarians should be proactive and not reactive in teaching information skills. Librarians should maximize the use of technology to teach more skills to greater members of library users. The emphasis would be on problem-solving and on obtaining and accessing information. The user education programmes would need to provide students and faculty with basic, intermediate and advanced guidance in use of the library.
- ❖ Measuring the immense benefits of the use of library or user education, the authors also see the urgent need for part-time students of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University to benefit from the "Use of the Library and Study Skills." This would surely improve their research attitude or behaviour, hence, research productivity and quality. After all, they are part and parcel of the university community.



- ❖ The library should advertise its activities and services to the university community. This would keep them abreast of the development within the library.
- ❖ The usual orientation exercise for fresh students should be organized more elaborately in order to ensure that the academic advantages derivable from the proper use of the library are driven home to them.
- ❖ It is very pertinent to note that the relevance of making user education *compulsory* and *examinable* is echoed by Nedosa (1991) who observed that Nigerian students are examination-oriented.
- ❖ Thus, unless the programme is credit earning, there would be for a long time the problem of poor attendance, he maintains. In view of the above, Adeyemi (2000) advocates that the involvement of faculty members who are in position to exert enormous influence on students' attitude is of important concern. He posits that without the active support and encouragement of faculty members, students would not actively use the library or pay very serious attention to library use. Similarly, the teaching staff should involve the professional librarians right from the curriculum or course planning stages to ensure effective provision of learning materials and user education programmes.

In conclusion, one other way of remedying the current defects is to introduce a three-year library instruction programme, which would go beyond the usual Freshmen Orientation Week and be self-paced with emphasis on the individual student. Its implementation could be in three *phases* such as:

- ❖ **Phase I** of the programme should be planned to acquaint the first year students with the physical layout of the library indicating the general location of all major resources housed. They should also be introduced to the rules and regulations on library usage as well as to the library staff at the reference and circulation desks. The thrust of this phase is generally to provide information on the “why,” “what,” and “who,” of the library rather on how to use it.
- ❖ **Phase II** should begin in the last semester of the students' second or third year in the university. The focus here should be on methodical instruction on the use of library. Detailed instruction should be given on the use of card catalogues, and especially the subject catalogues. Other areas that should be covered include filing rules, periodicals, indexes, abstracts,

selected reference works and reference sources.

- ❖ **Phase III** instruction should be for the final year, that is 400-Level students and above. It would be a continuation of phase II but geared towards the needs of advanced students. The commencement of the phase is the period when students are at the peak of their needs for advanced reference tools to facilitate independent study and preparation of the terminal and research papers. It is, therefore, essential at this stage to emphasize the use of specialized reference tools in their major fields or areas, as well as the required knowledge for research into interdisciplinary areas.

### **Recommendations**

Libraries have long been recognized as the “hearts” of their institutions. University libraries are solely established in the universities to meet the information needs of the members of the community. This indicates that students, lecturers, and other users within the parent institution should be able to get the required information resources from these libraries as they fulfil their mission of supporting the educational objectives of their parent bodies, which include teaching, learning, research and cultural development. This study is an effort to fill the gap in understanding the importance of the use of the library and user education in the university by students for effective use of the library. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and academic quality of the students in the conduct of their research:

1. Adequate time for teaching and practical work should be allocated for user education programme in the university system.
2. The university administration should, as a matter of urgency, recognize the importance of the library in supporting the academic activities of the university and the positive impact of the use of library to the students.
3. Integration of user education programme and library instruction into the university curriculum and making it compulsory and examinable component of the curriculum and as credit earning course.
4. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University should not embed/subsume its library instruction or user education programmes under the course “Use of English” (It should have its own credit unit for students to participate actively).
5. The strong need for cooperation and joint efforts of the academic staff and academic librarians.
6. The strong need to urgently involve the part-time and JUPEB

students of COOU to benefit from the ample advantages of the course “Use of Library and Study Skills.”

7. If these are religiously applied in COOU, they will go a long way towards fulfilling the students’ academic dreams of life-long learning, research quality and productivity.
8. The library should advertise its activities and services to the university community.
9. It should be noted clearly that if the above facts are met, there would be a wonderful bridge of gap in the wheel of progress in the teaching of user education programmes/library instruction in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University.
10. The three phases suggested by the authors to cushion the defects through the introduction of a three-year library instruction programme should be strictly and religiously followed.

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