

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE USE OF LIBRARY

ISBN: 978-306 03-0-9

**Edited By:
Professor R.O. Lasisi
Dr. J.O. Omoniyi**

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University of Ilorin**

First Published: 2009

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ISBN: 978-30603-0-9

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Omoniyi, Joseph, O. Ph.D: An Academic Librarian and also a part-time teacher, *Use of Library* and *Use of English*, at the University of Ilorin.

Babafemi, Grace, O. M.L.S: an Academic Librarian and a part time teacher, *Use of Library*, at the University of Ilorin.

Saka, Hassan, T. M.L.S: an Academic Librarian and a part-time teacher, *Use of Library*, at the University of Ilorin.

Saliu, Usman, A. M.L.S: is an Academic Librarian and part-time teacher, *Use of Library*, at the University of Ilorin.

Adedibu, Lydia, O. M.L.S: is an Academic Librarian at the University of Ilorin.

Fola-adio, Wahab Ph.D: an Academic Librarian and part-time teacher, *Use of Library*, at the University of Ilorin.

Kinboro, Evelyn, O. A Ph.D: is an Academic Librarian and part-time teacher, *Use of Library*, at the University of Ilorin.

Akanbi, Mohammed L. M.L.S: teaches Library and Information Science in the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Ilorin.

Alao, Isiaka, A. M.L.S: is an Academic Librarian, University of Ilorin.

Adekeye, Adeoti William, B. M.L.S: is an Academic Librarian and part-time teacher, *Use of Library*, at the University of Ilorin.

Fadayomi, Joyce, A. M.L.S: is an Academic Librarian, University of Ilorin.

Olusola, Gbolahan, M.L.S., teaches Library and Information Science in the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Ilorin.

Raheem, Muyideen, A. M.Sc. (Computer): is a System Analysts at the University of Ilorin Library.

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE LIBRARY

Joseph O. Omoniyi
Grace O. Babafemi (Mrs.)
Usman A. Saliu
Hassan T. Saka

Concepts of the Library

To the layman, the word *library* refers to a building in which books (used and unused) are kept to prevent them from being stolen or destroyed by insects, rodents, water or fire. Other people perceive the library as a building where one can go and read books for leisure or when preparing for an impending examination. The implication of these perceptions is that the library is just a storehouse of books for the purpose of reading. Contrary to this, the library is such a vital part of the education process that its roles as both a learning and information centre cannot make it just a building housing books for the purpose of consultation. Parts of what you will learn in this chapter include universally accepted meanings of the library and its primary responsibilities within the ambit of its concepts.

Meaning of Library

The origin of the meaning of the word *library* has been traced to the Latin word "*liber*" meaning "*books*". On the basis of the Latin interpretation, early professionals in library and information science came up with a definition which saw the library as a place where important records of human ideas were organized, processed and disseminated to users for the purposes of posterity and preservation from human and non-human damages. Subsequent library and information science scholars defined or explained the concept of the library based on the prevailing experiences at the time such definitions emerged.

The glossary of library terms defines the library as a collection of books and other literary materials kept for reading, study and consultation. Furthermore, the library can be a building, a room or rooms containing a collection of books for use of the public, a portion of the public, members of a society, a public institution or an establishment charged with the responsibility to consult such books. According to Olanipekun and Ifabiyi (2003), the library is a collection of information materials such as books, films, magazines, maps, manuscripts, phonograph records etc for use. Shera (1976) similarly defined the library as an organization, or a system designed to preserve and facilitate the use of graphic records. The various definitions in this paragraph perceive the library as containing information

bearing materials in different formats and manner of communication and these materials can be collected and put together in a place for purposes other than just to use them there where they are kept.

The library is perceived by Sharr (n.d.) as an organization of one or more trained people who carefully selected and organized books, periodicals and other familiar materials for the use of those who require the materials for information and knowledge acquisition. This definition emphasises the presence of librarians to select, process and manage the entire library collections. It is to be emphasized, however, that the library cannot just be a place where books are dumped on tables or shelves. Library materials have to be properly organized in a manner that will enable their users have easy access to the resources. To play its natural role of knowledge disseminator, the library assumes three vital responsibilities:

Library as a resource/information centre

The library serves as a resource centre for all its users when it provides book and non-book materials that can assist the users to learn, prepare for examinations, write projects or engage in research work. In this respect, library users should be able to go into the library and find the necessary tools required to assist in the search for knowledge. As an information centre, the library should provide opportunities whereby its users will be able to access information freely without stress. In this case, the library must be adequately equipped with information bearing resources on diverse fields of human knowledge, particularly, the materials that fall within the scope of the proprietor of the library.

Library as a storehouse of information

The library is a storehouse of information when it is stocked with a collection of written, printed, graphic and visual materials that are organized for the use of the clientele. Materials are usually arranged in the library according to a standard set plan so that users can find it easy to retrieve information from the items. As a physical plant dedicated to storage of information materials, the library assumes the role of a workshop where people can seek information and acquire knowledge. In doing so, the library will be helping to share or transmit other people's experiences by reading through their thoughts which are contained either in book or non-book form.

Library as a house of collections

The responsibility of the library is to develop its collection of varied materials in the reference, reserved, open shelves, audio visual, serials and documents sections. These collections, which have been carefully selected to meet the peculiar needs of users, however, differ from one library type to the other. This is because libraries are set up to serve different set of people either in an academic environment, in the research setting, in the public, school or special contexts. The collection in each of the groups must be relevant to the needs of the users.

Types and functions of library

A modern library has different materials on diverse disciplines in its stock. It also offers a wide range of services to different categories of library users. On the basis of its stock, services and users, the library has been categorized into different types by various scholars. The following are the kinds of libraries that exist now:

Academic library: An academic library is a library that is found in tertiary institutions of learning: the university, the polytechnic and the college of education. Academic libraries usually acquire materials and design services to meet the curriculum of their respective parent institutions. That is, a typical academic library acquires books, journals and other non-book materials and also offers services that are required to support the academic, research and recreational needs of its primary clientele, the students, the academic and non-teaching staff while interested members of the larger community can also be permitted to use the library facilities.

Academic libraries differ from one institution to the other in terms of users, materials, and sundry considerations. However, all academic libraries irrespective of the type of institution in which they are located perform similar basic functions to facilitate the realization of the goals and objectives of their parent institutions. For instance, the University of Ilorin Library performs the under listed functions similar to what other academic libraries in Nigeria do:

1. It selects and acquires books and materials through purchases, gifts, exchanges, and legal deposits.
2. It prepares these materials for the use of students, lecturers, faculties, and others who require them e.g. cataloguing/ classification, filing, stamping, pasting, and lettering etc.
3. It makes these materials easily accessible physically through the provision of catalogues, indexes, bibliographies lists etc.
4. It allows materials from its general collection and the reserve collection to circulate among the users.
5. It offers reference services to its clientele.
6. It conducts user education and orientation activities for its users
7. It lends out materials to users directly or through inter-library loans
8. It provides adequate and comfortable physical facilities for private or general study
9. It makes bibliographical searches through the computer possible for its users; hence, terminals are usually provided so that students can make their own searches.
10. It administers the total library programmes, including budget preparation, organization and supervision of various library activities; it also ensures the maintenance of library building and equipment

School library: This refers to the library in the primary, secondary and equivalent school environment. The school library usually stocks a collection

of books and other materials (e.g. globe, wall charts, maps, atlases) and organizes them in a spacious room(s) for the use of both teachers and students of the owner school.

The school library provides relevant materials to enable students and pupils improve on their academic standard. It makes materials available to complement the teaching activities of teachers and also to enhance the achievement of the goals and objectives of the school. It puts in place activities and resources capable of developing and sustaining the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning independently in the students/pupils. It offers students/pupils opportunities for creating and using information obtained from library resources to acquire knowledge, to enhance understanding and sharpen their imaginative power. It supports students/pupils in learning and acquiring practical skills required to evaluate information and become sensitive to the modes of communication within the community. The school library also assists students/pupils to recognize information in books and other library resources.

Public library: As the name implies, a public library is a library that is established by government to serve all categories of people in the society. A public library can be established by the Federal Government (e.g. the National Library of Nigeria), the State Government (e.g. Kwara State Library) or the Local Government. While the library established by the Federal Government is usually cited in the Federal Capital and in the State headquarters, the state government and local government own libraries are located in the states capital and local governments' headquarters respectively.

The public library stocks books and other resources on diverse human knowledge for the use of members of the community where the library is located. A public library often has a section meant for children and another part for the adult users. Public utilities such as conference facilities, restaurant, café, viewing rooms and media section can be found in a large public library. Part of the functions of a public library is to promote mobile library services for people in the rural communities. It performs this role by using mobile vehicles to move library materials to the people. It also preserves the cultural monuments and even artifacts of a people by stocking the people's indigenous literature and audio-visual materials about the people.

Research library: This is a type of library that is found in the research institutes such as ARMTI Ilorin, FIRO Lagos, IITA Ibadan and MILLS Ilorin etc. A research library is usually set up by the parent institute. It acquires resources that are meant to reflect the peculiar programme of the institute. The primary users of the research libraries are members or patrons of the Institutes, researchers who have particular interest in the subject field(s) covered by the programmes of the institute can also use the research library.

The research library also renders selective dissemination of information service to its users; it prepares readers' profile and listing of specific subjects that are of interest to the users as new materials come into the library.

Special library: This kind of the library can be found in the school for the physically challenged, organizations, government agencies and individuals. According to Issa (2003), a special library is set up by business, professional and religious organizations with the primary purpose of serving the companies or groups that establish it. Special libraries keep books in specialized disciplines. They also keep extensive files of unpublished research reports, journals, manuscripts, newspaper clippings and government or corporate reports. Special libraries have staff with specialized training to be able to serve specialized body of users. The special library is remarkable in the provision of individualized services which reflect the purpose of their existence. Consequently, it is said that a special library often goes to offices or laboratories of its users rather than waiting passively for the users to come to it. That is, the special library essentially operates proactively, rather than retroactively, by anticipating users' needs and making provisions to meet the needs well in advance. Sopolu Library, Ikenne (owned by Chief Obafemi Awolowo) and Afolayan Memorial Library, Iludun Oro, are just a few examples of a special library.

The Rise of Nigerian libraries

The foundation of modern library in the world can be traced to antiquity when writing in different forms was developed at various times by the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Pergamums, the Romans, the Chinese and the Europeans respectively. From the classical period to the modern times, intellectual, literary and, indeed, learning centres were established in various cities of the world. Those centres facilitated the rise of different kinds of libraries to serve as repositories of written documents such as pictogram, cuneiform, hieroglyph, papyrus, manuscripts and books. The invention of printing in the fifth century, of course, facilitated rapid development and spread of libraries across the world. There was inestimable increase in the supply of books and diffusion of knowledge. Writers and scholars were able to produce and disseminate literature in diverse fields of knowledge. The number of people who wished to pursue learning continued to increase while libraries kept on increasing in number and size to accommodate the massive literature that was being printed and published.

The foundation of modern libraries in Nigeria was laid in the 19th century when the European colonialists came with their education, religion and form of administration. The earliest types of libraries were special libraries that the colonial masters established to support activities in government departments, vicarages and research institutes. For example, the law library was established in 1900 to conserve colonial legal documents;

the Lagos Medical Research Institute Library was established in 1909 to support research on tropical diseases. Today, special libraries, school libraries, research libraries and polytechnic, college of education and university libraries can be found all over the nook and crannies of the country to serve the interest of the parent institutions.

Apart from the contributions of the colonialists and home governments to library development in Nigeria, the contributions of some notable foreign and indigenous individuals also facilitated the rise and spread of libraries in Nigeria. For example, Henry Carr established the largest personal library which later formed part of the collections of University College Library, Ibadan in 1948. Herbert Macaulay- the father of Nigerian nationalism was an acknowledged pamphleteer whose personal collections served as a vital nucleus of University College Library collections. Tom Jones' personal library was so rich in government documents that it later constituted the reference section of Lagos Library, the first public library to be established in Nigeria.

William John Harris from New Zealand was the first (University) Librarian of the University College, Ibadan when the institution started academic activities in 1948. In 1959, he founded a library school, The Institute of Librarianship- at the University of Ibadan. Popularly acknowledged as the father of librarianship in Nigeria, John Harris actually set the pace and raised modern university library system in Nigeria to an enviable high standard. Shopolu library was a private library owned by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Sited in Ikenne the country home of Awolowo, it consisted of large collections of books, journals and manuscripts on diverse fields of knowledge, particularly, Politics, Law, Economics, Religions and Commerce. The library was later willed as a Reference Library to the then Ogun State University which greatly boosted its library collections.

The contributions of some national and international corporate organization libraries played vital roles to the rise and spread of modern libraries in Nigeria. The Carnegie Corporation in New York gave financial grant for the setting up of the Lagos Library in 1932 and also for the purchase of public, school and college library books as well as for developing regional libraries and reading rooms in different parts of the country. The recommendations of Ibadan UNESCO seminar in 1953 served as the foundation for the establishment of the National Library of Nigeria in 1962. The activities of the Ford Foundation resulted in the early take off of the National Library of Nigeria in 1962 and the conversion of all Federal Government Libraries in Lagos into branches of the National Library. Today, the National Library can be found in almost all the states capital. The establishment of state libraries in each state capital was a product of concerted efforts which the National Library of Nigeria inherited from the Carnegie Corporation and Ford Foundations. The indigenous Lambo Foundation endowed a large collection of medical and medical related books, journals and non-print materials to the University of Ilorin library to enrich its medical collections.

Library development in academic institutions accompanied the founding of the parent institutions. The worth of any school of learning is determined by its library. This is why it is important for stakeholders in the education sector to ensure that academic institutions maintain libraries of enviable standard capable of helping the institutions achieve the purposes for which they are established.

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