

## **PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF USER EDUCATION AND INFORMATION LITERACY ON THE USE OF INFORMATION RESOURCES: A NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE IN THE INFORMATION AGE.**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** The paper examine the perceptions of academicians, practitioners and users, in the field of library and information science profession with regards to the impact of user education and information literacy on the use of information resources in the information age or digital age. The paper also justifies that information professionals will be better off to discharge their role as effective information and knowledge managers in today's information environment, provided they are equipped with professional competencies through the introduction of user education and information literacy.

**Method:** Survey research method was adopted for the study, and questionnaire was the only instrument utilized for data collections. The population of the study comprises of selected academicians from library schools, selected library practitioners from academic libraries and their users.

**Results:** The findings of the study exhibited that majority of the participant demonstrate that user education and information literacy are very important activities that enhance the seeking and utilization of information resources. The findings further demonstrate that information age is characterised with the technological development as such information today comes in digital format that pause several problems with regards to the use of information resources.

**Conclusion:** The paper concludes by recommending that for library services to keep pace with the needs of the information age, libraries and library schools should employ expert and skilful academicians and practitioners who can provide user education and information literacy especially with regards to the use of electronic information resources.

### **Introduction**

Information age is characterised with dramatic changes in the development of information technology and these changes are having a considerable impact on libraries and their instruction programs. These changes have created the necessity to introduce an instruction program that will teach users on how to become more effective, efficient and independent in their information searching and seeking process. In response to this, the idea of library user education have been established and expanded from teaching tools to teaching concepts and from library instruction to information literacy and lifelong learning.

Wooliscroft (1997) states that the ever expanding volume of information available through print and digitised formats has the capacity to both stimulate and overwhelm. The digitising of information and the development of IT based tools to access, manipulate and deliver information available in electronic formats is an element of what has been called the Information Age. The 21st century is the age of ICT transformation and innovation. Information and knowledge today are created and communicated largely through teaching and research by technology. Universities and their libraries are an integral part of teaching and research. Therefore, teaching and research cannot be achieved without the use of information resources and successes to information utilization depend upon the library, and achievements in teaching and research are not possible without the library. Users should therefore be familiar with library materials and their applications. User education and information literacy are vital part of this processes. Instruction in using information resources is an important and effective aspect of user education and information literacy. Studies show that about 60% of students could not make use of reference works and that about 90% considered user education vital (Prorak, 1994: 69). Librarians can train users better and more carefully than other experts. Library user education provides a collection of skills that have a close relationship to other educational goals (Mahamadi et al 2008).

### ***Concepts of User Education and Information Literacy***

**User Education:** In a layman language, library user education (also called library instruction) teaches users how to make the most effective use of the information resources and library system. Tiefel (1995) User education encompasses all activity undertaken to help students become efficient users of information i.e., how to identify the information need and then how to find, evaluate, and select the best information to meet that need. Activities to achieve that goal include orientation sessions, workshops, handouts and course-related and course-integrated instruction. The term "library user education" has more recently been broadened to include the concept of information literacy, which will be defined later.

The term user education in libraries evolved at the end of the nineteenth century (Salony, 1995). According to Vogel (1972) cited in Atarodi, (1996) performed the first user education study. He found that, "there is always a barrier between librarians and university users (students). The library building and its different parts are barriers ... between patrons and the library". Whitaker (1976) asks two basic questions: why do some people use libraries more than others, and why is using some libraries easier than others? He indicates that the main factor affecting library use is familiarity with how the library, as a whole, can be optimally used. Users who are more familiar with library and its facilities can use them more easily. Phipps and Dickstein (1977) studied methods of user education in a library among new students and found no significant difference between the lecture method and programmed user education.

Recognition of the importance of information and library user education is found in *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* by Boyer (1987) and funded by the prestigious Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This work is especially important to libraries because it was the first major recent publication to mention and even promote library user education. Boyer states: The college library must be viewed as a vital part of the undergraduate experience.... The library staff should be considered as important to teaching as are classroom teachers.... We further recommend that every undergraduate student be introduced carefully to the full range of resources for learning on campus. 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 classes (pp. 164-65).

From the above, it can be seen that instruction in the use of information is important, how successful have academicians and library practitioners been in developing library user education programs? Miller (1992: 140) stated that, "The concept of 'Bibliographic Instruction' appears to be one of the greatest success stories of modern American academic librarianship". However, many believe that the term and concept of library user education are not sufficient to carry the profession into the electronic age or information age and that it must be expanded into the concept of information literacy. It is possible that expanding the concept to include information literacy may make it difficult to repeat the success of library user education of the past.

**Information Literacy:** Is a term that enables people to recognize the value of information and use it to make informed choices in their personal, professional and academic lives. An information literate person can effectively accesses, evaluates, organizes, synthesizes and applies information from a variety of sources and formats in a variety of contexts. Information literacy requires an ongoing involvement in learning and in evaluating information so that life long learning is possible ([WAAL Information Literacy Committee, 1998](#)).

According to Wooliscroft (1997) Information literacy is not some entirely new phenomenon. The term "information literacy" first appeared in library literature during the 1970s and it is now sometimes wrongly employed to describe library user education and bibliographic instruction. However, information literacy programmes do a great deal more than tell how to use the Library. Information literacy is vitally tied to the strategic value and use of information. Candy (1993) states that "...information literacy is not simply a response to the demands of the information society, but an important set of intellectual accomplishments that can aid in the realisation of the 'learning society'."

Wooliscroft (1997) further stated that Information literacy is a set of skills allowing people to make the most of both formal and informal learning opportunities. The skills can be transmitted through the education system and through public libraries in their role as agencies for lifelong learning, although most current programmes appear to be within the context of tertiary education. American library Association (2006)

posited that Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information. Shapiro & Hughes (1996) define information literacy as "A new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural, and philosophical context and impact".

Briefly put, Shapiro and Hughes make the following major points in their definition:

- In its narrowest sense, information literacy includes the practical skills involved in effective use of information technology and print or electronic information resources.
- Information literacy is a new liberal art which extends beyond technical skills and is conceived as one's critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural, and even philosophical context and impact.
- The information literacy curriculum includes:
  - **Tool literacy** - The ability to use print and electronic resources including software and online resources.
  - **Resource literacy** - The ability to understand the form, format, location and methods for accessing information resources.
  - **Social-structural literacy** - Knowledge of how information is socially situated and produced. It includes understanding the scholarly publishing process.
  - **Research literacy** - The ability to understand and use information technology tools to carry out research, including the use of discipline-related software and online resources.
  - **Publishing literacy** - The ability to produce a text or multimedia report of research results.

In 1987, Kuhlthau advanced the concept of information literacy further when she included library skills and computer literacy in the definition. Kuhlthau's work pointed out the way towards the integration of information literacy with curriculum and presages, the current development of the concept of information literacy with the library media centre as the starting platform.

The concept of information literacy was advanced still further when the first meeting of the National Forum in Information Literacy (NFIL) took place on November 9, 1989. NFIL is a coalition of over 60 organizations from business, government and education, all sharing an interest in and a concern for information literacy. From the above conceptualisation of user education and Information literacy and with the tremendous production of documents, the physical organization in libraries has become very complicated. The situation has made things difficult for users to tap or use its resources effectively. The applications of new technology in information retrieval require training for users (Jain 2006). The changing pattern of education has also increased the necessity and the urgency for user education and information literacy. The use of on-line information retrieval system or electronic information resources requires a good training on the part of the users. With the increasing of databases in various disciplines, the needs for user training have become evident (Jain 2006). The main aim of the library is to satisfy the users. Like a customer, user of the library has a full right to know about the products of the library (services of library). Librarians, Programmers and Professionals should prepare audio-visual materials to meet the needs of the users (Jain, 2006).

A number of studies have concluded that library user education and information literacy can have a positive impact on the quality of user's information searching and education. For example, Breviks (1982) cited in Tiefel, (1995) exhibited that there is a significant relationship between library user education and student grades. Moreover, Prorak (1994) looks at user education for music students, and found a significant relationship between user education and student grades. In another review Parirokh (1997) looks at the role of university libraries as contributors to independent learning. The findings show a lack of awareness

by both librarians and instructors of theories and teaching methods that promote independent learning skills as well as educational environments that do not stimulate independent learning.

Clarke (1999) reviews the development of user education within the context of arguments for and against it. Library orientation tours and different approaches to them are described, as well as the development of undergraduate and postgraduate programs of user education. Yu (2003) explored how Taiwanese college and technical institution libraries familiarize users with library facilities and information resources. The most common programs are basic introduction to library services, OPAC instruction, searching tools, Internet instruction, CD-ROMs, databases and electronic journals, and audio and video materials. And recently Mohammadi et al (2008) examine the student's perception on the impact of user education on the use of reference resources, their students indicated that there is a significant difference among gathered data and it indicates that students count user education as a requirement. It is apparent that, the rate of students' familiarity and proficiency to acquire information from reference works is in 21.6% much and very much, in 43% medium, in 30% little and very little. Their Findings also show that 40.6% of students believed that it should be performed by one of the professors in their special courses, while 39.1% of them believed in one of the professors in Librarianship department, and finally 19.5% believed that it should be done by a librarian.

In summary, library user education and information literacy can encompass a broad range of activities. Their need and importance have received increasing recognition to which librarians have responded with considerable success. There is some concern whether this success can be continued to encompass the broader concept of information literacy. It has been said that you will be mentally more powerful if you concentrate on how to find knowledge rather than try to remember everything you have learned. It is widely recognized that the ability to use information is extremely important in today's society and will continue to become more so.

**Methodology**

This study is a descriptive survey. The population of the study comprises the academicians, library practitioners and users of three federal universities in northern Nigeria. About 300 participants have participated in the study. Information was gathered using a questionnaire. Data analysis includes simple descriptive statistics.

**Results of the Study**

In this research, 300 questionnaires were distributed among the participants but only 282 (94%) questionnaires were returned. About 39.36% of the respondents were users of the library, while 28.72 % were academicians in the field of library and information profession and remaining 31.91% were academic library practitioners.

**Table 1: Respondents Rate**

Respondents	Number	Percent
Academicians	81	28.72
Practitioners	90	31.91
Users	111	39.36
Total	282	100

Among these respondents 74.82% were male and only 25.17% were female as indicated in table 2

**Table 2: Gender**

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	189	74.82
Female	93	25.17
Total	282	100

**Table 3: Internet use for access to information resources**

Respondents	Internet Usage			
	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Users	34	30.6%	77	69.4%
Academicians	27	33.3%	54	66.7%
Practitioners	43	47.8%	47	52.2%

Respondents were asked whether they used the Internet in accessing information resources. Less than half of the respondents indicated that they used the Internet to access information resources. On the other hand more than half of the respondents indicated that they don't use the Internet. The study shows that more librarians utilized the Internet than the academicians and the users. All the respondents expressed their desire to utilize the Internet more in their information search process. The researcher observed that the cost and lack of conveniences of the Internet accessibilities has reduced the use and patronage by the respondents and this led to the short time in the practical use of the Internet facilities. Another factor that hinders the effective use of the Internet is the slow speed of the Internet connection this situation has made the respondents understudy to be patronizing commercial internet cafes as against that of the university.

**Table 4: Training on the Use of the Internet to access information resources**

Respondents	Training on the Internet use			
	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Users	28	25.2%	83	74.8%
Academicians	21	25.9%	60	74.1%
Practitioners	45	50%	45	50%

The above table shows that majority of the respondents reported that they had no training on the use of the Internet. The reason for not having the training was attributed to the reason that the Universities had not encouraged training on the use of Internet in their campuses. On the other hand of the remaining respondents indicated that they had training on the use of the Internet. This shows that majority of the respondents with training on the use of the Internet acquired it by self initiatives only some practitioners indicated that their libraries use to send them for a short training on the use of Information technology or organise an in house training for them.

In a nutshell the analysis shows that in general more practitioners had training on the Internet use than the academicians and the users. Training is a very significant factor in the use of the Internet, when considering that good skills lead to the efficient use of the Internet (with less cost in time and money.) and yield greater productivity. Training in the use of the Internet is very important for the respondents, therefore those who do not have the training on the Internet use and manipulation may not use it effectively. Therefore, training can enhances Internet searching skills and lack of basic and required skills to handle computers generally exposes respondents' deficiency in effective Internet use particularly in relation to application beyond email. Some of the respondents want know how they can do better information searching on the Internet for the betterment of their needed daily research and academic activities. In a nut shell many found this training useful though some of the academicians were of the view that they may not have time to undergo training due to their various engagements and other academic activities.

**Table 5: The importance of user education and information literacy on the use of information resource**

Participants	Very Much	Much	Medium	Little	Very Little	Un answered
Academicians	31(38.27%)	27(33.33%)	16(19.75%)	5(6.17%)	2(2.47%)	-
Practitioners	39(43.33%)	27(30%)	11(12.22%)	10(11.11%)	3(3.33%)	-
Users	40(36.2%)	34(30.6%)	17(15.4%)	6(5.6%)	4(3.1%)	10(9%)

From the table 5, above shows that, more than three quarters of the participants thought that user education and information literacy on the use information resource was important. As such effort should be geared by the university authorities, library authorities and the government in general to provide adequate

and enabling environment that will incorporate user education and information literacy as part of the university curriculum and teaching courses. This will invariably boost the skills of users' searching for information and will lead to the effective use of information resources. This finding corroborates with Roma Harris, in a survey of different types of library staff, found that while academic librarians were convinced of the need for user education, special librarians were generally opposed to the concept and public librarians were ambivalent. One public librarian commented, "Many patrons like to be informed so that they will bring more skill to their next library visit. However, just as many patrons are not interested in how the library works; they just want the information. I equate this to me and the grocery store: I want to know where the cat food is, not why or how the store decided to put it there" (Harris, 1992, p.254).

**Table 6: The best person to offer user education and information literacy programme to make use of information resources**

S/No.	Instructors	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Academicians in library and information science	128	45.39
2	Consultants	35	12.41
3	Librarian	99	35.10
4	Unanswered	20	7.09
5	Total	282	100

From the table above, indicated that majority of the respondents 128(45.39%) prepared academicians from the field of library and information science to offer user education and information literacy programmes on the use of information resources. Followed by Librarians with 99(35.10%). This shows that academicians and librarians may have better knowledge and expertise to deliver the programmes than the consultants. Coupled with teaching and training has become a food for thought in their daily affairs.

**Table 7: Ways for offering user education and Information literacy programmes in using reference resources**

Ways	Level						
	Very much	Much	Medium	Little	Very little	Un answered	Total
Providing leaflets or pamphlets	80	69	40	37	27	29	282
Providing Video tapes	69	61	81	38	12	21	282
Holding workshops or educational seminars	107	72	45	19	15	24	282
Using professional librarian in the library	139	92	12	9	3	27	282
Offering user education and information literacy as a course in the curriculum of the library schools	151	73	27	16	5	10	282

Table 7, shows that majority of the respondents felt that offering user education and information literacy in the curriculum of library school is the most important and was the best method of user education. This is because creating consciousness of the programmes to future practicing librarians will make them to prepare for the challenges they may encounter with their users who may have little or skills to use the information resources. Nearly half of the respondents found using professional librarians in the library as another alternative way to offer user education and information literacy. Followed by holding lectures, workshops and educational seminars. Providing leaflets or pamphlets, and video also have some impact on user education and information literacy.

**Table 8: the Impact of user education and information literacy on information resources**

Impact	Level					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Not Agree	Strongly not agree	
User education and information literacy will enhance user's searching ability.	103	89	43	25	22	282
User education and information literacy can make users to locate information resources easily.	101	70	56	28	27	282
User education and information literacy will make user to become less interested in the size of library collections and more concerned about the timeliness of document delivery.	25	39	48	56	114	282
User education and information literacy programme can make Libraries to be more access oriented and less size oriented.	168	82	22	6	4	282
User education and information literacy programme will lead to the use of new electronic formats, and applying critical thinking to information.	143	80	24	27	8	282
User education and information literacy programme can provide users with basic, intermediate, and advanced guidance in use of the information resources and library use.	170	89	18	23	-	282
User education and information literacy programme can enable users to become more independent in information search and use	143	80	8	27	24	282
User education and information literacy programme will make Librarians to become more proactive and less reactive in discharging their services.	25	43	103	89	22	282
User education and information literacy programme Libraries will be required to offer more and better user services.	114	39	48	56	25	282

From the above, majority of the respondents indicated that user education and information literacy will have a great impact on the use of information resources, this is because the response rate shows that more than two third of the respondent agree with the view that User education and information literacy will enhance user's searching ability. In addition to this more than half of the respondents also indicated that User education and information literacy could make users to locate information resources easily. Almost all the respondents also agree that User education and information literacy programmes can provide users with basic, intermediate and advanced guidance in the use of information resources and library use. Not only that the findings also show that the respondents quite agree that User education and information literacy programmes can make Libraries to be more access oriented and less size oriented.

This shows that, user education and information literacy has become a weapon that will fight against the ineptitude of users and academicians not to effectively use the information resource. As such there is the need for the governments, Universities and libraries to effectively and efficiently devise a way in which user education and information literacy can become part and parcel of library operations and also incorporate in

the curriculum of the library schools. This will build a good relationship between the users and information resource as it will pave way the effective utilization of the resources especially those in the electronic format that information age come with.

### ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

User education and information literacy aims to equip users with the needed skills to enable them to make use of libraries and their resources in a user-friendly manner. User education often includes library orientation, induction and information skills training Gulati and Roshan (2000). Hence it is the duty of both the academicians and practitioners in the field of library and information science to

- Use wide variety of methods to help users in information skills through lectures, practical 'hands-on' sessions, workbooks, printed guides, videos, and demonstrations;
- Adopt approaches to user education which can reach non traditional students such as part-time and distance learners through information technology support via computer mediated communication;
- Use the web for teaching through linking to ready-made training packages or developing in-house products;
- Use computer-assisted learning (CAL) and hypertext in creating flexible learning packages for developing web library guides (Rhodes 2000).

Libraries must focus on access, not ownership, with more emphasis on delivery. Libraries must implement different forms of measurement. Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education (National Governors' Association, 1986) examines how higher education outcomes are measured. The report states that measurement can no longer be by numbers of books in libraries or equipment in laboratories: student learning and performance must become the means of measurement (Rader & Coons, 1992, p. 110).

Libraries should attach more importance to locating and obtaining information and less to where the information is housed this can only be achieved through the programme of user education and information literacy. Users will become less interested in the size of library collections and more concerned about the timeliness of document delivery. Libraries will be more access oriented and less size oriented. Libraries can no longer rely on the supposition that they are "good" for society and therefore deserving of support. Libraries will have to prove their value to users with emphasis on delivery of information rather than warehousing: the focus will need to be on output and not assets. With the help of user education and information literacy users will no longer be satisfied with finding just citations to information; they will (and even now do) want the information itself. So far, technology has enabled us to do the same things we have always done, only better. In the Information Age the concept of literacy needs to be expanded to embrace information literacy. The ability to view information in its widest context, to determine needs, and then locate, evaluate, organise and apply it are key skills. Librarians are well placed to have a key role in information literacy programmes as tutors and teachers of both non-curricular and curricular papers as well as providing knowledge of and access to the world of information (not just the resources found in or through the library) and to apply high level evaluative skills to these resources.

In this way librarians can certainly enhance the relevance of our profession but the main purpose is to communicate skills, to perform well professionally, and to offer services of excellence to the users. These professional skills have now become highly desirable life skills for the users and essential to information seeking and use. Librarians are not only openers of doors and gateways to information; but they are also key enablers, able to empower our users to become more self-sufficient in developing information gathering and evaluating skills which will assist others to be well resourced for changing life circumstances. Lastly, for library services to keep pace with the users needs, libraries should employ expert and skillful librarians who can provide user education and information literacy programme. Librarians should offer user education and information literacy programme to faculty, and provide them with instructional material to present to students. Feedback from respondents indicates that offering user education and information literacy in the curriculum of library school is the most important and was the best method of user education. Respondent's feedback also indicates that major changes should be made to user education and information



literacy programs, and that instruction in the library's and library school's "public services" should be obligatory.

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