

# PROMOTING THE EFFECTIVE USE OF LIBRARY RESOURCES: AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXPERIENCE OF ABUBAKAR TAFEWA BALEWA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, BAUCHI, NIGERIA.

BY

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ABUBAKAR TAFEWA BALEWA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

## ABSTRACT

*Libraries acquire resources with the basic aim of making them available for users. This explains why various services have been evolved by libraries to assist users exploit their resources maximally.*

*This paper documents the services offered by the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi, Nigeria which include library orientation, user education, circulation, reference, reservation, current awareness, inter-library cooperation, computerization and effective communication links. Other services are collection development, photocopying and library regulations.*

*The paper finally concludes that the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library has made conscious efforts to offer effective services to its patrons within available resources.*

## INTRODUCTION

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi was first established as the Federal University of Technology, Bauchi in 1980. The first batch of its students, however, were admitted in October, 1981. The Federal Government of Nigeria on October 1, 1984 merged the Federal University of Technology, Bauchi (FUTB) with Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria as a cost saving measure. As a result, the FUTB was renamed Abubakar Tafawa Balewa College in honour of Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.

In January, 1988, the institution regained its autonomous status not just as a full-fledged University, but as a specialized technological institution as well. The university has the approval of the National Universities Commission to run four schools. By 1989/90 session only three of the

schools had taken off, namely: the School of Agriculture and the Agricultural Technology; the School of Engineering and Engineering Technology; and the School of Science and Science Education respectively. The fourth School, that of Environmental Technology will become operational in October, 1991.

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library here after referred to as "The Library" was established on August 1, 1981. The Library was formally opened to the public on October 19, 1981. By March, 1991, the Library consisted of 32,000 volumes of monographs and 1,082 serial titles out of which only 382 are current.

It initially occupied a temporary building of 1,007.49m<sup>2</sup>. It subsequently moved into its permanent two storey building of 2,099.50m<sup>2</sup> in April, 1990. The Library's primary objective and philosophy is to provide timely access and up-to-date science and technology information for the academic staff and students of its parent institution. The staff position of the Library during the 1990/91 session consisted of the following: 8 Librarians; 1 graduate assistant; 4 library officers; 4 secretarial and administrative staff; 35 library assistants; and 10 other supporting staff. The current staff strength is quite adequate for all categories of staff with the exception of librarians. Because it is a science and technology library it gives preference to librarians with science background whenever it comes to recruiting professionals to fill existing vacancies. Librarians with science degrees are not easy to get in Nigeria. It is because of this that the 3 vacancies for librarians have still not been filled over the years. We may have to modify this policy and consider librarians who have a working experience in science and related libraries irrespective of their subject background. The Library presently caters for a user population of 3,500.

### *Orientation Week*

The University has since 1981 instituted an orientation week for its fresh students. The orientation week takes place within the first week of the session. It is during this period that the fresh students are introduced to the various departments of the University so as to prepare them to derive the maximum benefits from the services offered by such departments.

The Library also features prominently during the orientation week. The students are first addressed by the University Librarian. Her address usually draws the students' attention to the resources and services of the Library and how they can make use of them. After the address of the University Librarian, the students undertake a guided tour of the Library and the importance and relevance of the public catalogues is explained to them. At the end of the tour they are registered formally so that they can have unhindered access to the Library during opening hours.

From experience less than 20% of the students take part in the orientation week. The main reason is that the bulk of the students would not have reported by then because of undue delay in the release of Joint Matriculation Board Admission results. It is suggested that the Library Orientation Day should be during the fourth week of the session by which time most of the fresh students would have reported. The delay will make the Library orientation more beneficial to the generality of the fresh students.

The Library does not have a formal orientation programme for the lecturers. It, however, takes lecturers, on request, round the Library especially the "Documents and Research Collection".

### *Registration of Users*

The following are the categories of users of the Library: council members; academic staff; senior technical and administrative staff; library staff and students. External users are admitted at the discretion of the University Librarian and are limited to only senior government officials, research scholars with science background and others who are duly introduced by their respective librarians.

Eligible users have to register formally in the Library before they can use its resources. On registration each user is given an identity card,

with his passport photograph affixed, to enable him have access to the Library collection. He is also given a "Readers Guide" since no library service is complete without its guide which provides information about its resources and the way to make the optimal use of them. Apart from external users who use the Library for reference only all other categories of users are given the required number of borrowers' tickets which ranges from a minimum of one (for junior library staff) to a maximum of six (for academic staff).

The Library has the richest collection in the whole of Bauchi State. Consequently some ineligible members of the public, especially in Bauchi metropolis, make clandestine attempts to use the Library. Antwi<sup>2</sup> has reported that such unauthorized users pose a large threat to library collections such as stealing and mutilating of materials. This basically accounts for the reason why the Library insists that all registered users should produce their library identity cards before they can enter the Library. When unauthorized users are identified by staff they are denied access to the Library. This is to ensure that only bona fide users have access to the limited collection.

It may be pertinent to state that some of our patrons, especially among the academic staff, feel irritated when they are requested by the porters to identify themselves before they are admitted to use the Library. The most effective way to prevent ineligible users from having access to a Library is first of all being able to distinguish them from the authorized and registered clientele. This is why libraries (such as academic libraries) with limited and well defined clientele should introduce identity cards for their users. Some of the users may complain but the ultimate benefit to the libraries and the users will override the inconvenience of the registered users having to identify themselves any time they would like to use libraries.

### *User Education*

An effective user education stimulates and aids users to explore and make use of library resources. Information science, which is compulsory for all second year students of the University, has since 1983 been taught by the Library. The main objective of this course is to make the students better users of the Library in particular and other information centers in general.



The course is credit earning and is added in computing the students' cumulative grades point average which ultimately affects their respective degree classifications. It is partly due to this that the students take the course seriously. The attendance rate during lectures at any given time is almost 100%. It should be mentioned that the Library keeps a record of attendance always and this also induces the students to attend lectures. The average success rate in the course now stands at 87.1% which is very encouraging. Feedback from questionnaires administered at the end of the course each year shows that the students regard the course as "relevant to their studies", vital to living in any society and enhances life-long learning by every individual".<sup>3</sup>

#### *Collection Development*

From 1981 to 1982 more than 90% of publications acquired by the Library were selected by librarians. This was largely due to the lukeworm participation in the selection process by the faculty.<sup>4</sup> The Library holds the view that an effective user oriented service is largely facilitated by a balanced and rich collection. But this objective cannot be achieved without the active involvement of users especially the lecturers.

With the approval of the Senate, the Library Collection Development Committee comprising heads of academic programmes of the University and staff of the Library was constituted in February, 1983. This Committee has remarkably aided the collection Development efforts of the Library since its inception. During the 1989/90 session the faculty's selections accounted for 79% while the balance of 21% was done by the Library.<sup>5</sup> This is a healthy development.

The University instituted the Scrub Savanna Research Project in 1986. This is a multidisciplinary research project involving all the schools of the University and the Library. The aim of the project is to study soil fertility problems, fertilizer recovery rate, nutritional analysis of plants useful to man and livestock and natural product chemistry of flora of medicinal and agricultural importance with reference to Bauchi State.<sup>6</sup>

The Library's involvement in the project is to provide bibliographical support. One concrete achievement of its participation in the project was that it was able to attract a grant of 3,000.00

pounds from the Overseas Development Administration through the British Council in 1987 to acquire relevant publications solely on scrub savanna. Availability of relevant publications is one way of promoting maximal use of resources.

#### *Circulation Service*

The circulation section consists of 27,127 volumes of books and accounts for 84.8% of the entire resources of the Library. The materials in this section may be lent out to users who have officially been given borrowers' tickets.

An academic staff can borrow a maximum of 6 books for one semester while a senior administrative/technical staff or student can borrow a maximum of 3 books for two weeks only. All users can renew books only once if these are not required by other users. This is to ensure that users do not monopolize certain books and to encourage them to consult additional texts for broad information. It also ensures that other users have access to such books.

The number of books lent to users for home use has been increasing steadily over the years. During the 1989/90 session, for example, 23,976 volumes of books were lent out representing 13.56% increase over the total loans of 21,113 volumes during the previous session. This is very significant for in 1989/90 only 1,346 out of a user population of 2,963 registered to use the Library. Majority of the potential users apparently did not register last year because of the Library's insistence that all qualified users must register and obtain identity cards before they can have access to the resources of the Library. One main reason why users borrow books from the Library may be attributed to the fact that most of them cannot afford to buy books because they are very expensive and are not even readily available. Apart from this it is only the Library that has variety of books which users can choose from.

Analysis of both loans and consulted records in 1989/90 indicated that mathematics tops the list of subjects with an average of 20% and 14.1% respectively even though this subject constitute 8.7% of the entire circulation collection. This is to be expected since all students of the University, irrespective of their subjects of specialization, take compulsory courses in mathematics. English (both language and literature) represents 10.9% of the entire collection of the Library. English,



however, accounts for a mere 4.8% and 4.10% of all loans and consultations respectively. English, which is a major component of the General Studies Programme, is compulsory for all students of the University. This is intended to increase the students' vocabulary and communication skills. The performance of the students in English examination results last semester in March, 1991 was 60.9% pass and 39.1% fail. The Library has drawn the English Department's attention to the under utilization of English collection in the library by students. The English lecturers could give the students assignments which will involve the use of the Library resources so as to increase appreciably the use of English collection in the Library.

Only academic staff have since June, 1985 been permitted to borrow back issues of serials for overnight and weekend use. This concession to academic staff was put to a greater use in 1988/89 when 218 overnight loans were made. This was 584% increase over the 32 loans recorded in the previous year.

The 1985/86 overdue records revealed that the defaulting students were holding on to very expensive books. Consequently, the Senate decided that from the 1986/87 session no student should be allowed to borrow a book worth more than N100.00. The Library has since then implemented this directive by marking the date due slips of books costing more than N100.00 "NOT TO BE BORROWED BY STUDENTS".

The Library imposes overdue fines at the rate of N0.50 per day per book. This sanction tends to discourage users from unduly keeping books beyond the officially stipulated loan period. As a policy, the University does not release the examination results of students who fail to return Library books or pay overdue fines imposed on them. Both staff and students have to obtain clearance from the Library before they can officially be released by the University.

#### *Reserved System*

The Library also operates the reserved system: At least two weeks to the beginning of every semester the Library sends out a circular to all lecturers to forward their respective lists of recommended books to the Library to be placed on reserve. Lamentably, the responses of the lecturers to such requests over the years have been

anything but encouraging. As an illustration, only 60 titles of books had so far been placed on reserve two weeks into the second semester of the 1990/91 session which began in March, 1991.

Because of the uncooperative attitude of the lecturers referred to above, the Library constantly monitors the loan records and withdraws books in circulation that are frequently requested by the users. Such books are then put on reserve.

The books on reserve are always on close access and can only be consulted in the "Reserved Room" of the Library. Each user can borrow one reserve book at a time for a maximum period of two hours. The rationale of this restriction is to promote the effective use of the materials by making it possible for all users to have access to them.

The "Reserved Room" of the Library can take a maximum of 16 users. This is obviously a very low figure. The current student population stands at 2,384. Sooner than later the Library should allow students to borrow reserved materials for use in the reference and circulation sections which have seating capacity of over 400. The maximum time limit of two hours should, however, be maintained.

#### *Reference Section*

The reference section stocks a variety of materials. These include dictionaries, handbooks, manuals, yearbooks, directories, bibliographies and encyclopedias. As a policy, the Library acquires only one copy of a reference material.

The items in the reference Section are only to be consulted by the users in the Library. Lecturers, on application, are allowed to borrow reference materials for a limited time if such materials are to be used in the laboratory or in class.

A reference librarian is always at post to help users and he is expected to assist them make use of relevant publications in the Library. When the need arises he also directs users to the resources of other libraries. It is pertinent to mention that not many reference enquiries are received by the Library. Only a total of 42 such enquiries were made in 1988/89 and 1989/90 respectively. It is possible that most of the users are not aware that the reference librarian can assist them to deal with their enquiries. One of the reasons may be



due to the fact that the reference librarian is not easily accessible to users. His office is adjacent to the reference stacks and it is expected that users would consult him from there. Ideally the reference desk should be placed at a strategic position so that users can effectively interact with the reference librarian.

#### *Photocopying Services*

The Library has introduced photocopying service since November, 1981. The primary aim of this service is to encourage users to make photocopies of library materials especially those not in circulation within the copyright law. This is also intended to discourage unscrupulous users from stealing or mutilating library materials. It is in realization of this objective that the Library gives a discount of 50% on library materials photocopied.

The photocopying service is well patronised by users. The number of photocopies made in 1989/90 was 27,470 which is an increase of 66.8% over the figure for the preceding year. Most of the library materials that are photocopied by users are reserved materials and journals which are ordinarily not lent out. Thus the photocopying service also promotes the effective use of the library materials.

#### *Inter-Library Cooperation*

The Library supplements its resources and facilities with those of other libraries. It obtains publications, through inter-library lending, from nearby libraries for interested academic staff of the University. The libraries patronised are those of University of Jos and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Because of the risk involved in sending books through the post, the Library always arranges to collect and return materials from other libraries in person. This method is expensive and has thus reduced the efficacy of obtaining relevant publications through inter-library lending. This explains why by March, 1991 not more than 60 volumes of books had been received under inter-library lending.

Photocopying is a very important aspect of inter-library cooperation and it is in fact considered by some librarians as an extension of inter-lending. It is regarded as a substitute for

book loans because it saves the scarce materials from getting lost in transit while it at the same time maximizes the use of the collection<sup>8</sup>. The library has, since its inception, been modestly acquiring photocopies of titles held by other libraries for its interested clientele. Notable among these libraries are the British Lending Library, and the Institute of Agricultural Research Library, Zaria. For example, in 1988/89 and 1989/90 the Library received a total of 67 photocopies of journal articles for its lecturers from the British Lending Library.

The Library also encourages its registered patrons to make direct use of other libraries. The Library therefore gives introduction letters to interested patrons to facilitate their using the resources of such libraries. Our patrons are advised to forward the titles they consult in other libraries to the Library to enable the Library acquire such materials. This is to ensure that more facilities are available for the use by the clientele of the Library at a later period. Available records show that in 1989/90 the Library granted reading and reference concessions to 38 external users while it introduced 18 of its users to other libraries.

#### *Current Awareness*

Current awareness is a system for notifying current documents to users of libraries and information services e.g. bulletin, indexing and selective dissemination of information.<sup>9</sup> The Library also uses this system to assist its users in meeting their information needs.

The Library publishes a "Library Bulletin" which is a quarterly publication of acquisitions. The first issue was published in December, 1981. Initially each lecturer of the University was given a copy of the bulletin as and when it was published. To reduce cost of production, circulation of the bulletin has since 1986/87 been limited to library committee members, schools and programmes. Programmes are required to circulate their copies among staff while copies are also made available in the Library for reference.

Experience has shown that lecturers have been making use of the "Library Bulletin". Some of them are able to use it to identify relevant titles without their having to visit the Library. In fact a



number of them do send their messengers to borrow such titles on their behalf in the Library with their borrowers' tickets.

The Library displays new additions in the "Reference Section" which is accessible to all users. The purpose of this is to draw users attention to these materials with the view to encouraging them to use such items when they are finally integrated into the general collection.

In 1984, Antwi<sup>10</sup> produced an annotated bibliography of reference materials in science and technology in the Library. Nwali<sup>11</sup> later in 1989 produced abstracts of biological science monographic titles in the Library. These two bibliographical tools greatly assisted users in exploring the relevant resources in the Library.

An abstracting service based on the current serials received in the Library commenced in 1987. However, since 1988, instead of abstracts, indexes of articles in current journals received are sent to the academic patrons based on their subject profiles gathered by the Library. Feedback received from the lecturers indicated that they found the indexing service valuable. This service partly accounts for the 685% increase in the over-night serials borrowing by academic staff who now are more aware of articles available in current journals in the Library<sup>12</sup>.

#### *Library Computerization*

The Library formally commenced computerization of its resources in October, 1990. By March 1991, the computerization of the following records had almost been accomplished:

- (i) Serials List;
- (ii) Bauchiana List;
- (iii) World Bank Loan Acquisitions List

The Library has submitted an interim report on the above to both Senate and the Research Committee of the University. This is to avail staff of the above facilities since "the cardinal aim of the computerization programme is to offer user oriented service which is quick, reliable and efficient".<sup>13</sup> The final lists when completed will also be circulated to the Library's exchange partners to facilitate inter-library cooperation.

#### *Communication with Users*

The Library maintains formal links with users through their membership of the Library Committee and the Collection Development Committee. Both the faculty and students are represented on these committees. The committees have been assisting the library to improve on its resources and facilities so that ultimately users needs can be met satisfactorily.

There is a suggestion box located conspicuously at the issue desk. Users make use of this facility to draw the Library's attention on the need to improve on its services where necessary. For example, it was through the feedback from users via the suggestion box that the library reduced the photocopying rate from N0.80 to N0.50 in October, 1990. This reduction immediately increased the volume of Library materials photocopied by users. This is an indication of extensive use of Library resources initiated by users themselves.

The Library maintains cordial relations with users. Library staff are under instruction to be courteous to all categories of users at all times. It was through such a rapport with users that a student voluntarily alerted the Library about stolen library books he found in the hostel. This tip off eventually enabled the library to recover ten stolen books from the culprit<sup>14</sup>.

All the sections of the Library have been labelled to enable users find their way with the minimum of assistance from staff. The stacks have also been appropriately labelled with shelf-guides to assist users locate and retrieve publications of interest to them. The Library has both an author/title and subject catalogues. These have been conspicuously located in the bibliography hall of the Library. These catalogues afford adequate access points to collections and are regularly consulted by the users.

#### *Library Regulations*

The Library has regulations to guide its patrons in the use of its resources. The regulations basically focus on how to take care of library property and the respective sanctions that may be imposed in default. These regulations aim at protecting the materials and ultimately promoting their maximal use.

The regulations are documented in the "Readers Guide" a copy of which is given to every user when he formally registers with the Library. On

the whole the users have been keeping to laid down regulations. Those who disregard library regulations are promptly dealt with appropriately.

### Conclusion

The Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University recognizes the vital role played by a well funded and well stocked library towards the realization of the university's corporate objectives as a scientific and technological institution. It is against this background that the University has consistently been allocating the 8% of its financial provision to the Library in line with the National Universities Commission, Lagos budget allocation formula<sup>15</sup>. In absolute terms, however, this seemingly generous proportion of the budgetary allocation to the Library falls far below its funding requirements. This is due to the fact that the University itself, like other Nigerian universities, has been underfunded by the Government since 1983 as a result of the economic recession in the country.

The availability of adequate and relevant resources is a sine qua non for effective use of a library. It is because of insufficient funds that the Library has not been able to equip its Audio Visual Section. The Library, for example, lacks a microfilm/microfiche reader and because of this it has not been able to acquire back sets of its core journal titles from 1975 to 1980 as planned.


In spite of insufficient funds, as pointed above, the Library has made conscious efforts at promoting the effective service to its clientele. On the whole, the generality of its users have been very cooperative in using the available resources in the Library.

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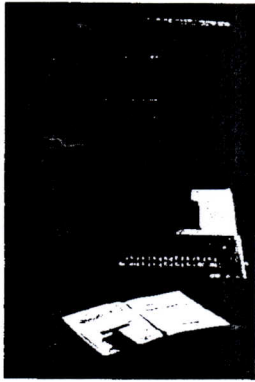


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