

EXTERNAL USERS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF KENNETH DIKE LIBRARY (KDL)

Bolarinwa Morenike Adeyemi
University of Ibadan

Abstract

Though the academic library's primary mission is to serve the students, faculty and staff of its parent institution, would-be users not officially associated with the institution frequently call upon the library to provide services and/or resources. This paper attempts to examine the use of KDL resources/service by unaffiliated users, focusing on the user's affiliation, status, subject areas and geographical distribution of the users with policy statement regarding the users. For this purpose, 352 user transaction request forms during the academic year 2012 were analyzed, out of which 243 (69 percent) are undergraduates, while 21(5.9 percent) are at PhD students. Users from the University community constitute 74.4 percent of external visitors to the library. The study revealed that Kenneth Dike Library supports the community use of its resources by granting access to unaffiliated users. The study therefore recommends among other things, that, access privileges must not interfere with the library's service to its primary clientele of students, faculty and staff. Information concerning the library, particularly library use policy should be easily accessible to users who are not familiar with the library, and should be placed in strategic locations that are visible to users.

Keywords: Users, External Use of Libraries, Academic Libraries, Information Services.

Introduction

University libraries contain a wealth of information and knowledge in order to further the studies of students and faculty. The resources that are available to students and faculty are available mostly free of charge with little restrictions on use. However, there are many people in and around the university that could potentially make use of these materials. They are known as unaffiliated or external users.

Unaffiliated/external users are individuals who have no current affiliation with the campus they are consulting for information. They can be grouped into many categories: general public, government workers, employees, businesspersons, non-profit employees, high school students, students from other colleges and universities, faculty from other colleges and universities, visiting scholars, part-time and continuing education students, and family members of faculty and students.

Unaffiliated users are possibly the least regarded user population of any academic library. Contributing no tuition, their needs come after those of the enrolled students, faculty, and staff if indeed their needs are considered at all. Yet, many academic libraries serve unaffiliated users, at least through onsite use of materials, as a by-product of service to their own populations, recognizing that the library possesses resources unobtainable elsewhere.

Studies of unaffiliated users' access to academic libraries revealed that post-war population shifts, emphasis on college-preparatory work at the high school level, and an increase in the college-educated population, brought greater numbers of unaffiliated users into the library in the early century. Giving access to unaffiliated users remains a debatable topic in academic libraries in this century, because those reasons given then have been compounded by information explosion, access to higher education through distance learning, technological upsurge, proliferation of university both at the federal and state level, especially in the Nigerian situation. The policy of open door to external users in Nigerian academic libraries is similar to those in other developed world countries. This assumption was concluded after reviewing literature on services to unaffiliated users.

Literature survey

Unaffiliated users have long been an issue in the world of academic libraries. Ever since the growth of the college-aged population in the 1960s and the resultant growth in universities, and their

libraries and holdings, the resources available in the academic setting have seemed more accessible for members of the public not associated with the university. Waggoner (1964) says advocacy for free access to library services by nonaffiliated user was inspired by the 19th century public library movement that initiated the idea of free access to all. An early exploration of libraries' policies and procedures regarding nonaffiliated user services was conducted by the Ad-hoc Committee on Community Use of Academic Libraries, sponsored by the College Libraries section of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Subsequent studies over the past 40 years have offered several visions of what the ideal "condition" might be.

While some writers are in support of free access to library services for unaffiliated users as long as the access is not to the detriment of primary users, others proposed restrictive policies. Various reasons were given for the divergent views. Archie (1993) argued that, while "no one can deny that the college library's first obligation is to its own constituency, the collegiate community," it was also true that "today's college library also has an obligation to serve the community beyond its own campus." For some, the college library had a particular responsibility to professional people in the local community as it had more books and periodicals needed by such persons than any other library in the area.

In 1967, Josey opined that "the question is not whether there should be community use of academic libraries, but how it is possible to create the conditions under which there should be community use of academic libraries". Landwirth, Wilson & Dorsch (1988) reported that academic health sciences librarians feel the daily pressure of providing services not only to faculty, students, and staff of their institutions, but also to community health professionals, nonaffiliated health students, and growing numbers of concerned health consumers. Calabretta & Ross (1984) reported that 42% of their medical school library reference activity was for nonaffiliated.

Lenker & Kocevar-Weidinger (2010) looked at the issue from the ethical angle, "Librarianship as a practice (at least in its contemporary forms) is rooted in the idea of free, unfettered access to information for all, so it may seem counter to librarians' individual or collective instinct to say "no" to anyone; but when saying "yes" might be detrimental to the library's primary clientele." Wrestling with this dilemma can cause both policy makers and frontline staff to experience moral conflict as they are torn between the competing demands of being helpful to nonaffiliated users and maintaining an optimal level of service for students, faculty, and staff. To buttress the ethical view, Martin (1990) argued that the concept of the "primary user" is contradictory to our service ethic by saying "Given the growing importance of information in our society and our traditional belief in the values of access to information, it would be irresponsible to deny or limit their [non-primary users] assistance. Other authors believe that service to this group is an important aspect of the academic library's mission, in spite of the problems that nonaffiliated users often pose for library staff.

Though an open door policy has generally prevailed, academic librarians have not been unanimous in support of offering reference service to non-primary clientele. Studies such as those undertaken by Spencer & Dorsey (1998), and Stanley Verhoeven et al. (1996) pointed out that reference questions from unaffiliated users, particularly high school students, take a disproportionate amount of time to answer. Piternick (1975) described a detailed study of external use of reference services which led to the institution of fees and the curtailment of privileges to certain groups. Berry (1985) found that nonaffiliated users were treated differently, even though there was not an official policy to do that. Masters & Flatness (1985) offered ideas for policies limiting reference service for the secondary user. University of Technology, Sydney Library erected an access gate at its entrance to protect the rights and privileges of its users with a notion that "managing access to a university library through the installation of gates must inevitably result in a restriction of access to information for the unaffiliated community members." Others pointed out that access is a courtesy, not a right, and that charging fees is acceptable since students have to pay a fee through tuition.

Courtney (2001) identified security, impact on staff, impact on library materials, seating space, and the impact on facilities as the reasons for restrictive policies against unaffiliated users in academic libraries. Another dimension to access restriction in an academic library was the development of electronic substitutes for printed materials, which require authentication of registered users before access can be allowed. The availability of these tools attracted many more external users to academic libraries. Heath (1992) reported that California State University, Fullerton, found that 40 to 60 percent of CD-ROM workstation users during peak times were unaffiliated. The library at Texas Christian University was overrun with users seeking to use new technologies, such as CD-ROMs, a

factor in their decision to limit public access (Bobp, 1994). Many of the reasons stated below are relevant to Nigerian academic libraries and applicable in the case of Kenneth Dike Library (KDL). The reasons are summarized as follows:

- Fostering good community relations
- Honouring public obligations of tax-supported institutions
- Providing service to the local community
- Honouring obligations of a legal deposit library
- Fulfilling reciprocal agreements with other institutions
- Offering a welcoming image to aid recruitment of new students
- Enabling access to unique collections
- Mitigating inadequacy of public libraries

The KDL of University of Ibadan allows for community in-house use of some of its resources by unaffiliated users. This action corroborates H. Vail Deale (1958) views that encouraged academic libraries to contribute to good community relations by offering library privileges to the community and cooperating with local libraries by stating that "Town and gown rapport is exceedingly important in the college or university community". Waggoner (1964) favored extending some privileges to the local community when the practice does not diminish service to the library's primary clientele. University of Ibadan is a legal depository institution, hence its library allows outside users to consult the materials. A survey of private universities and colleges that are federal government depositories in the USA by Daniel Blazek (1997) revealed fairly liberal policies toward outside users, even though 70 percent said that their primary mission was to college or university clientele. The log book for external users in KDL revealed that students from federal and state government funded institutions constituted the majority of external users. Lloyd M. Jansen (1964) observed that problems arising from unrestricted service to unaffiliated users were particularly acute in urban areas. KDL is located in an urban city with a poor public library system. So in fulfilling its mission to serve local public KDL will grant access to outsiders. Many large urban university libraries consider it part of their mission to serve the needs of the local population. The geo-political zone where the University of Ibadan is located has many newly established private universities. Their students consult KDL for their information needs because these new universities' collections are still growing. David Kaser, in 1974, wrote about the recent proliferation of "universities without walls," external degree programs, and open universities whose students want to use nearby libraries. External users in Nigeria visit academic libraries for their information needs because of poor public library service as observed by Abifarin (1996) in his study of external users in an agricultural institution.

Objective of the Study

University of Ibadan is a premier university established in 1948 with a total enrolment of 21,636 students during the 2012 academic year. It serves dual role of a regional site for other higher institutions in the country and the immediate community because of her rich collections which includes, manuscripts of notable people like Herbert Macaulay, Madam Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Arabic Collections and lots of Dissertations and collections acquired through legal deposit which constitute part of the nation's unique cultural resources. All these collections are rich information resources for researchers visiting the library from all walks of life.

This study attempts to examine the characteristics of the KDL external users, their patterns of usage of its resources/services, and how to offer better service to these unique users. Answers to these questions are gotten through identification of their categories, levels, basic disciplines, geographical distribution, information needs, and policy guiding their services.

Methodology

Academic research libraries have historically responded to questions from external users. Definitive data on visitors' usage is however difficult to obtain. This paper adopted reviewing individual transactions request by analyzing users' introductory letters for the year 2012. Data were extracted in regards to their institutional affiliation, status, etc. This method was considered the most feasible means of identifying users' affiliation.

Results

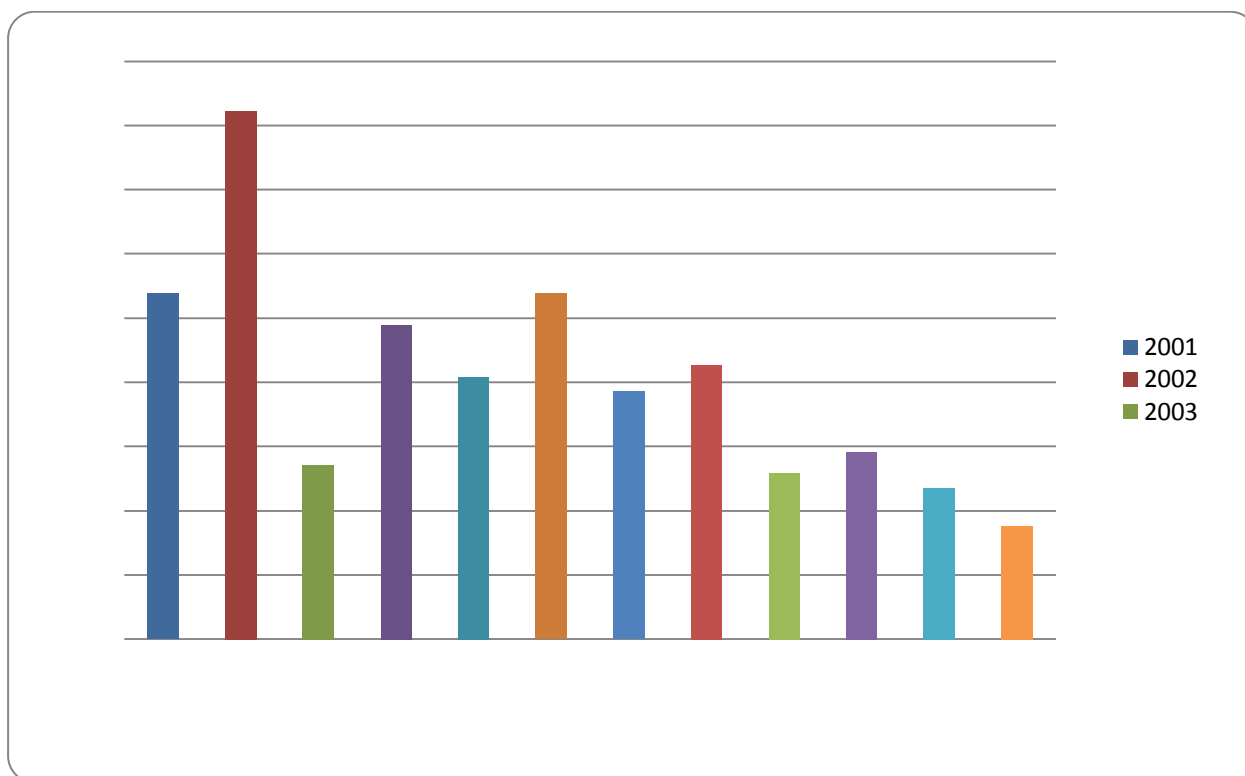


Figure 1: Yearly Statistics of External Users in Kenneth Dike Library (KDL)

Figure 1 shows the pattern of visits made by external users to KDL within the span of twelve years, between 2001 and 2012. The year 2002 recorded the highest visit count of 1645 while the year under review posts the smallest least figure.

Users’ transaction logs revealed that a total of 352 external users’ visited KDL requesting information resources and using other services between January and December 2012. Analyzed data shows that the users were from the university community (Table 1).

Table 1 – Affiliations of External Users

Category	No of users	(%)
Academic		
State University	130	(36.9)
Private University	49	(13.9)
Federal University	72	(20.5)
Open University	11	(3.1)
Polytechnics/Colleges of Education	18	(5.2)
Request from U.I Employees Family	29	(8.2)
Others	43	(12.2)
Total	352	(100)

Users from State Government owned University constituted the highest number of visitors with 36.9 percent (130). This was expected because of factor such as poor funding of the newly established schools. Users from federal universities constituted 20.5 percent, while 12.2 percent were clientele from government departments and individuals who had specific information needs such as historical and scientific materials also make use of Kenneth Dike Library. Some users sought space for preparation of professional examinations while others wanted to keep busy during holiday breaks or strikes at their institutions. Students from Open University were the least external users recording 3.1 percent. Table 2 shows the number of users from the academic category, according to their level of education.

Table 2 University Status of External Users

Academic level	No of Users	(Percentage)
Final year undergraduates	243	(69)
M.Sc.	40	(11.4)
Ph.D.	21	(6)
Diploma	18	(5.1)
Others	30	(8.5)
Total	352	(100)

In 2012 prospective graduates who were writing their final projects constituted the highest number of users (69%). They sought past project works which guided them in the choice of topics and in writing literature review for their project works. Some of the students visit the library based on the advice of their faculty instructors. Users' information needs were satisfied through resources such as past projects, textbooks and other books in the library. University of Ibadan is a post-graduate university and 20 percent of post-graduate students from this study were from other institutions in Nigeria. This group constituted another level of academics that visit KDL breath of collections, which contributes in tremendous ways to the literature search needs of the users. They required comprehensive literature from varied information resources which enabled them to present qualitative research work.

Geographical Distribution of Users

The University of Ibadan is located in the South Western part of Nigeria. Nevertheless, external users came from all parts of the country, even as far as overseas, to make use of KDL resources. Table 3 below shows the data on users from various states during the period of study.

Table 3 - State -Wide Distribution of External Users

States	No of Users
Northern Nigeria	11
Eastern Nigeria	6
North Central	24
Abuja	6
Edo State	3
Western Nigeria	
▪ Ogun State	78
▪ Oyo State	98
▪ Ondo State	25
▪ Ekiti State	28
▪ Osun State	51
▪ Lagos State	19
▪ Canada	1
▪ U.S.A	1
▪ Britain	1
Total	352

Geographical proximity played a major factor in attracting external users from the western part of the country as seen in the table above. Oyo State recorded the highest number of users with 98 while Ogun State followed with 78 users. This frequency from Ogun State is not surprising because the state has the highest number of post-secondary institutions in the country. Users from other states also visited KDL for their literature search needs. Students of States and Private Universities are significantly high for reasons of proximity and paucity of resources in the universities. This category of users comes mainly from Olabisi Onabanjo University, Tai Solarin University of Education, Babcock Adventist University, Redeemers University, Osun State University, Ajayi Crowther University, Ladoko Akintola University, Adekunle Ajasin University and Joseph Ayo Babalola University.

Subjects Used by External Users

Subjects requested of external users were diverse as table 4 displayed below, illustrates. The analysis of one year of user data revealed that the subject areas covered about 31 fields. English Language/Linguistics and History/ International Relations were the most sought after subjects, recording 81 and 40 requests respectively. KDL has vast collection of information resources in these fields because Faculty of Arts is the oldest faculty which was created during the foundation year of the university. So these areas are more robust because they have more developed collections. Users sought resources from new subject areas such as social work, criminology/security studies and tourism. Business administration and law recorded the fewest requests.

Table 4: Subjects Requested by External Users

Subjects	No of Users
English language/Linguistics	81
History/International Relation	40
Education	28
Economics	16
Mass Communication	14
Philosophy	13
Religious Studies	11
Tourism	9
Theology	7
Political Science	7
Agriculture	7
Criminology/Security studies	6
Psychology/Guidance & counseling	6
Mathematics/Statistics/Computer	6
Natural/Biological Sciences	6
Social work	5
Technology	4
Business Administration	3
Law	3

Kenneth Dike Library Use Policy

External users from other institutions who want to make use of KDL's resources are guided by the Library Use Policy that grants the privilege to access the building, to browse and consult on-site, reading space and reproduction of materials. External users were denied borrowing privilege. Reproductions of materials are guided by copyright law. External users are expected to come with a letter of introduction from their institution or employer testifying they are either students or employees, while an individual comes with an attestation statement from a recognized person in the society. For security reasons photo identification is also required. After consideration, special readers' tickets are issued to those users who want to make use of the library resources for a longer period, between three to six months.

Dissertations, Theses, Projects, Journals, circulating books, Africana materials are the major information sources sought by categories of users. All these information resources are housed in the main library except the final year projects that are kept in the faculty libraries. The library has not carried out any feedback programme to measure users' satisfaction which is a necessary measuring tool for better service.

Discussion

University of Ibadan Library grants unaffiliated users access to its resources and services, thereby fulfilling the "town and gown rapport mission," though the statistics show reduction in patronage. Frequent unaffiliated users' were students from other colleges or universities, which sought resources in various disciplines. The subject area mostly consulted were humanities while law was the least, this might be so because this study focused on the external users that visit the main library (KDL). The library system of the university is made up of KDL, Latunde Odeku Medical Library, 26 Faculty, Departmental and Institute Libraries.

Undergraduates from other institutions constituted 69 percent of total external users of KDL, while doctoral students are few in number (6 percent). Users that were not institution based also visited the library for personal information needs. For geographical distribution, users came from the six geopolitical zones of the country. Proximity made the southwest zones contribute the most (84 percent) users from the total sampled population.

While state and private institutions formed the bulk of KDL's external users, requests also came from federal universities. The three main recurrent ones were the University of Ilorin, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and the University of Lagos.

Conclusion

Literature has shown nearly the same results that academic libraries were allowing use of materials in-house, but with restrictions when necessary. KDL is a significant resource centre for users' beyond its institutional boundaries. This study of external users has resulted in understanding the extent, level, subject background and implications of such users for library management. This study is vital in the context of the development of information resources, services and policies, and making library use more meaningful for researchers. External users would always come to the library for many reasons, such as: proximity of the college and university libraries, viable collections, lack of public libraries and increased demand from distance education programs.

Attending to external users' needs in an academic library is an inevitable service that cannot be wished away, so the task before librarians is how best to serve these potentially competing populations without jeopardizing the rights of primary users. With this in mind, the author offers these recommendations.

Recommendations

Access privileges must not interfere with the library's service to its primary clientele of students, faculty, and staff.

All staff should be made aware of what the policies of external users are, and should be informed of any changes to the policies.

If libraries are going to continue giving unaffiliated users certain privileges, these privileges should be made known, and the ones that they don't have should be explicitly stated as well. Information concerning the library visited should be easily accessible to users who are not familiar with it, and should be placed in locations that are visible to users.

Library managers should pay serious consideration to security issues. Library staff and security personnel must be vigilant against theft and losses. Since these categories of user do not have borrowing rights, out of desperation, they can pilfer rare, unique and expensive resources. The ideal policy for nonaffiliated users should be written out and it should serve as a set of conditions that will shape the library's obligations.

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About the Author

Bolarinwa Morenike Adeyemi (bolamadeyemi@gmail.com) is a Principal Librarian. She holds a B.Ed. (Hons.) in Education and Master Degree in Library and Information Studies, University of Ibadan. She is also a Certified Librarian of Nigeria (CLN). Currently she is in-charge of the Reader's Services Division of Kenneth Dike Library.