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Identifying non-use of library services by faculty in a Ghanaian university

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to primarily investigate among faculty the reasons for non use of library services and resources at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the category of non users and also how to improve usage. The study adopts a descriptive survey design. Fifty-six (56) out of 1018 faculty respondents were identified as non users and this formed the basis of the study. Data was mainly collected by questionnaire. The information sources respondents mostly used included their own textbooks; Internet; electronic journals and ebooks etc. Reasons adduced for non use of library services included: no time to visit the library; no need for the library; the library is uninviting; buy my own books; and difficulty to find books in the library. It was recommended that to stem the tide of non use, the academic libraries must reinvent themselves and create room for user driven services and resources, redesign floor spaces, bridge communication gap between the library and prospective users.

Keywords- Library services, non use, low use, Ghanaian University, Academic Libraries

Introduction

Modern day social and technical problems have information needs embedded at their core. Libraries and information centers are conscious of this, determined to use all arsenal at their disposal towards performing their functions. One of those functions, lies in the need to identify their users' and their corresponding needs. At the same time libraries have another community- a community of non-users. Just as the needs of the user groups must be catered for, even so the same efforts must be extended to the non-user. As would be expected it is always the case that very often librarians forget about them and whose needs little attention is paid to. Regarding this Toner (2008) puts it "libraries are less proficient at canvassing the opinions of those who do not use their services." p 19. Non users sometimes, through no fault of theirs, are unable to patronize the services that libraries offer them. As a result some are cut off from the use of the libraries due to technology, distance, ignorance of the services, insufficient publication etc.

Libraries serve their functions more effectively when they have a fair knowledge of who their complete clientele, i.e. both user and non-user communities are. McCarthy (1994) supports this in suggesting that by studying non-use, managers might find ways to improve their service to all users. A lot of changes are taking place in the information landscape as a result of information and communication technology (ICT) which is alienating would-be users of the library from accessing the services of libraries. Toner (2008) therefore believes that libraries can maintain their relevance only when they adapt and change. The paper intimates that one way of being responsive to change is when libraries listen to the needs of those who choose not to use the services of the library.

Many prospective library clients rather rely heavily on ICT to meet their information needs. They are able to get what they need online without necessarily having to consult a librarian to help or having to come to the libraries to physically use the resources.

This study, therefore, is an attempt to investigate the non-user community of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) library system. The library system of KNUST provides several services for all the clients of the library. Observations made through discussions and interactions with some faculty members have revealed that some faculty members are not patronizing the services of the library. This revelation is what has necessitated this study.

The Context

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) succeeded the Kumasi College of Technology which was established by a Government Ordinance on 6th October, 1951. It was however, opened officially on 22nd January, 1952 with 200 Teacher Training students transferred from Achimota, to form the nucleus of the new College (KNUST, 2017).

In December 1960, the Government appointed a University Commission to advise on the future of university education in Ghana. As a result of the Commission's report, the Government then by an Act of Parliament on August 22, 1961 converted the Kumasi College of Technology into a full-fledged University (KNUST, 2017).

As the number of students and academic programs grew, the administrative structure with which the University was governed correspondingly also changed into six colleges along the lines of a new statutes promulgated in October 2004 (KNUST, 2017). The Institute of Distance Learning (IDL) was elevated in 2016 to the status of a college (KNUST, 2017).

These colleges are;

- College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR)
- College of Art and Built Environment (CABE)
- College of Engineering (CoE)
- College of Health Sciences (CHS)
- College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CoHSS)
- College of Science
- Institute of Distance Learning (IDL)

The University Library System

The KNUST library system is made up of the Main (Prempeh II) Library and six college libraries which collaborate to provide timely and relevant information resources to support teaching, learning and research in the university (KNUST, 2017).

The Library provides access to over 35,000 electronic journals from 50 academic databases and more than 100 million full text documents, bibliographic information, abstracts, book reviews etc. (KNUST, 2017). The collections cover the disciplines such as agriculture, science, health and medicine, social sciences, arts, engineering, planning and architecture (Teye, Borteye and Asare-Kyire, 2012)

Objectives

- To ascertain the sources that faculty members are using to meet their information needs
- To establish the effect of age, gender, rank and college on non-use
- To determine the IT facilities faculty members have access to.
- To find out the reasons why faculty members are not patronizing the services of the library

Significance of study

In this study, we define non user faculty members as people who, based on their schedule, are either apathetic or unable to patronize library services as frequently as other core users.

A plethora of studies abound on non-use in the library and information resources, (Sridhar 1994; Lubans 1970; Flowers 1995; Toner 2008; Brick 1999; Mccarthy 1994; McNicol 2004). However, several of these studies focused primarily on undergraduate students. Not much has been done about faculty members who are also very important when it comes to the use of the resources of libraries. However in Ghana, this would be the seminal work identifying this user community.

Literature review

A 'non-user' is a person who might need information in the course of his/her work, has a

staff library available to them but do not use it (Brick 1999). Sridhar (1994) explains it further by indicating that a non-user of a library is one who has the right to use the library but does not do so over a specific period. This review will therefore largely rely on the available literature which focuses on students and academic libraries.

In her study captioned “Non-use of business libraries and information services: a study of the library and information managers’ perception, experience and reaction to non-use, Brick (1999) found that non-use is widespread, and that the non-use situation is a complicated mix of non-use and unsatisfactory user behaviour.

Toner (2008) in a study about the non-use of library services by students in a UK academic library, discovered that the largest group of non-users was students who were pursuing part-time and distance learning courses. In a study titled “Comfort and convenience? Why students choose alternatives to the library,” Vondracek (2007) revealed that twenty nine percent (29 percent) of respondents in the study identified themselves as infrequent or nonusers of the physical and/or virtual library. She further suggested that per the results, the students rely on knowledgeable individuals for research assistance; and conduct the majority of their research online from home.

A number of research works on the subject matter have identified various reasons for non use of library services ie lack of awareness, time and perceived relevance Toner (2008); O’Dell and Preston (2013); access to the Internet Getland (2005); Houlihan (2005); Wilcox and Chia (2013); overconfidence by users Chen and Lin (2011); user

temperament and library anxiety Chimah, Nwajei, and Akom (2015); Mills and Bannister (2001); Nicholas et al (2015); Ansari (2009); Mellon (1986); and image of the librarian Wilcox and Chia (2013); Mills and Bannister (2001); Chimah, Nwajei, and Akom (2015); Nilsen (2006) and Su (2012).

Other authors such as, Hernon and Altman (2009) and Kiilu and Otike (2016) suggested ways through which libraries can stem the tide of nonuse. According to Hernon and Altman (2009) library users expect to be treated like customers and as such expects to be offered quality services as opposed to size. Kiilu and Otike 2016 on the other hand mentioned convenience in seeking information, relevance of content or resources to meet their information needs, sustained user engagement to close communication gap and the provision various learning spaces in the library to meet the different learning styles of the users as ways to entice users to patronize the services of the libraries. The above constitute a constraint capable of making libraries uncomfortable to some users, and thereby shying away from them.

Methodology

A quantitative approach was adopted in order to identify the nonuse of libraries resources by a section of the KNUST community. Data for this study was collected from September to December 2017 by the authors via the use of Google Forms. The questions were close-ended and required one or multiple responses from a checklist of possible replies. The questions sought information in areas such as the age, gender, rank, educational background, the college the respondents represent, the information sources

they use, the IT facilities they have access to and the reasons for the non-use of the library's resources. Respondents were asked to tick, circle or underline the most appropriate option(s). Potential respondents were identified as faculty members of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology totaling 1,018 (KNUST 2017). Copies of the questionnaire were sent out to all faculty members of KNUST electronically through email. Fifty six (56) copies of the questionnaire representing 5.5% were returned for analysis after a number of reminders. Considering the fact that this study is essentially about non users of the library's resources, this number of respondents is considered adequate by the authors in that sustained publicity and training programs embarked upon by the Library recently to promote its resources and services have increased usage and reduced non-use. This analysis is therefore based on the responses from the 56 copies of questionnaire received electronically from the respondents. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the data. The data were presented in percentages using simple tables and figures, where appropriate.

Personal/ Demographic Information of Respondents

Respondents were asked to supply information regarding their gender, age, rank and the college they represent. From the results, out of the 56 faculty members who participated in the study, 42 (75%) were males and 14 (25%) were females. Among the respondents, 14 (25%) were between the ages of 36 to 40, 12 (21.4%) were between the ages of 41 to 45 and 9 (16.1%) were between the ages of 46 to 50. Seven (7) representing 12.5% were in the age range of 31 to 35 and 56 to 60 respectively. Five (5) representing 8.9% were in

the age range of 51 to 55 and 2 (3.6%) in the age range of 25 to 30. Thirty three (33) of the respondents representing 58.9% were Lecturers/Research Fellows, 17 (30.4%) were Senior Lecturers/Senior Research Fellows, 5 (8.9%) were Assistant Lecturers/Assistant Research Fellows, 14 (7.8%) and finally 1 (1.8%) was an Associate Professor. The College of Art and Built Environment had 13 respondents representing 23.2%. This was followed by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences with 12 representing 21.4%. The College of Science recorded 10 representing 17.9%. The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, College of Engineering and College of Health Sciences recorded 9 (16.1%), 7 (12.5%), and 5 (8.9%) respectively.

Information Sources Used

This question sought to investigate the sources of information the respondents used for their teaching, learning and research activities. Multiple responses were accepted from respondents. Sixteen (16) respondents representing 28.6% indicated that they use their own textbooks, 15(26.8%) use the Internet as their information source, 10(17.9%) used a combination of the Internet, electronic journals and ebooks and 7(12.5%) relied on electronic journals as their information source. Very few responses were recorded for the use of ebooks, friend’s book and photocopies.

Table 1 presents the sources of information used by the respondents.

Table 1: Information Sources Used

	Frequency	Percent
Own textbooks	16	28.6
Internet	15	26.8
Internet, Electronic journals and Ebooks	10	17.9
Electronic journals	7	12.5

Ebooks	4	7.1
Friend's books	2	3.6
Photocopies	2	3.6
Total	56	100

Source: Field work, 2017

Access to IT Facilities

Access to and use of IT facilities today determines, to a large extent, the type of information sources faculty members will resort to use. IT facilities make it possible for anyone with the right training to get equally good information on the Internet to meet his/her needs. This question, therefore, required respondents to indicate the IT facilities they have access to. As many as 17 respondents representing 30.4% mentioned that they have PC's in their offices, 12 (21.4%) have access wireless laptops, 10(17.9%) have access to both PC's in their offices and wireless laptops and 9(16.1%) have their own PC's at home. Low responses were recorded for the access to Andriod/ I-phones and public library.

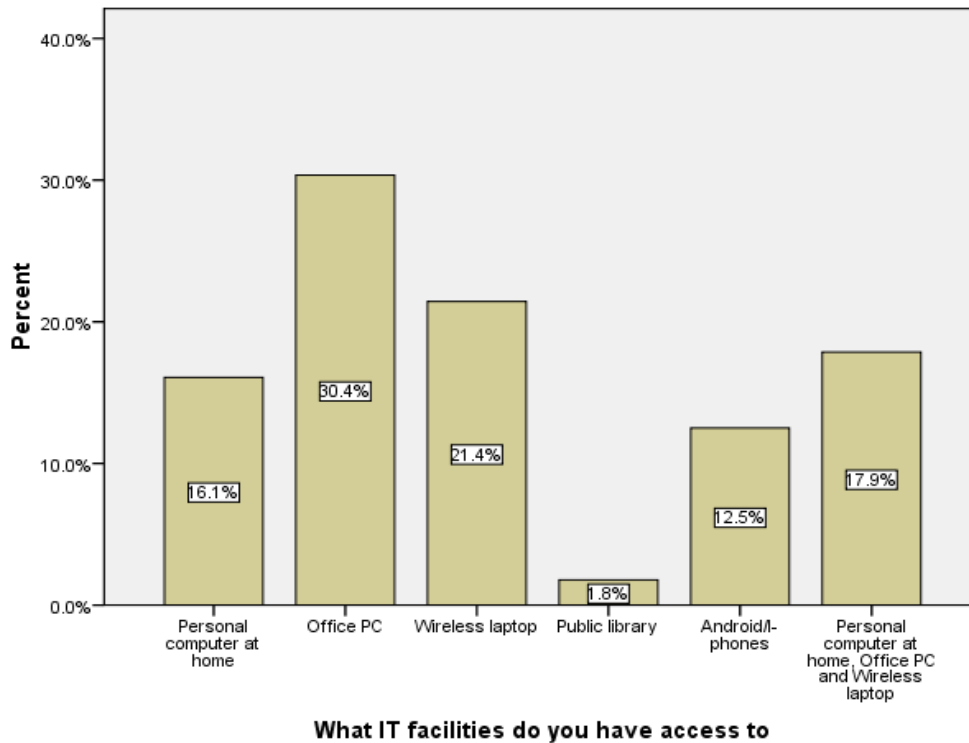
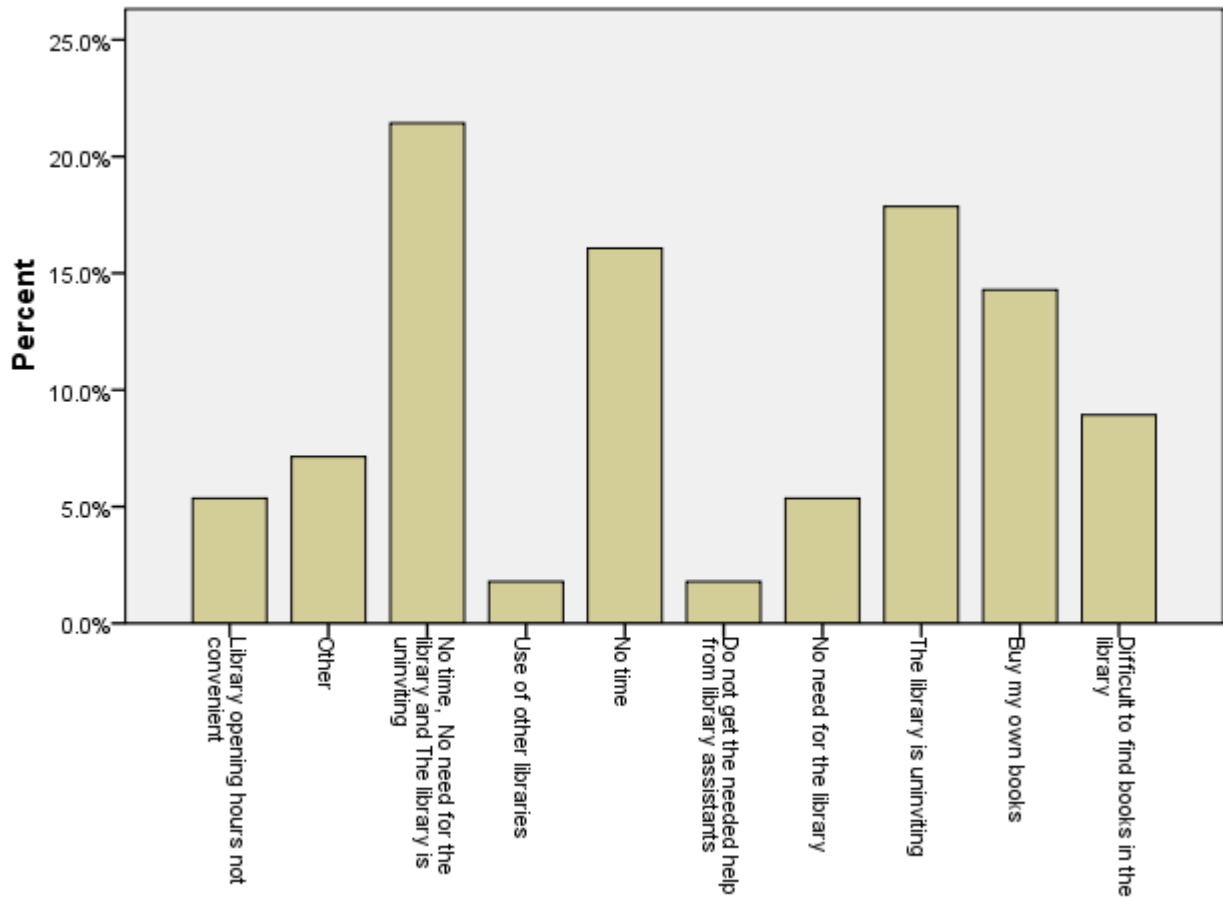


Figure 1: Access to IT Facilities

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Reasons for the Non-use of Library Services

Respondents were asked to select as many as applicable from multiple options the reasons why they do not patronize the services of the Library. No time, no need for library and the library is uninviting recorded the highest percentage of 21.4. This was followed by those who mentioned that the library is uninviting 10 (17.9%), no time 9 (16.1%), buy my own books 8 (14.3%) and difficult to find books in the library 5(8.9%). The rest of the responses can be seen in Figure 2 below.



Reasons for non use of the library services

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Discussion

Gender was significant in the study. As the data shows the male category dominated with as much as 75%. What this means is that more men are not using the library and its services than women. Again more than half (62.5%) of the respondents are from age of 25-45. This is worrying in the sense that this age bracket ideally should be the ones to be interested in using the resources of the Library because they are young in their teaching careers as university lecturers. Despite this worrying sign these number should also not surprise many because these age bracket are likely to use the Internet for their needs than older faculty members. In terms of the information sources they relied on for their day to

day information needs, the study revealed that cumulatively more than half (55.4%) of the respondents relied on their own textbooks and the use of the Internet. It appears these groups of non-users were quite comfortable with the use of their own textbooks and the Internet than using the resources of the library be it print or electronic resources to meet their information needs. The availability of IT facilities for the respondents explains why they did not use the resources of the library. Cumulatively more than half (51.8%) of the respondents have PC's in their offices and also have access wireless laptops. This means that in the comfort of their homes or offices they can search for the information they need on the Internet to help meet their information need.

Conclusion

On the whole myriad of factors played a role in the patronage of the library and its services by faculty of the KNUST. While these reasons may sound strong, we believe the recommendations below would go a long way to sway them back into using these services.

Recommendation

Several reasons accounted for non-use of library services by faculty of KNUST. The data suggest providing a means of access to library materials has the potential to sway the non-user community into accepting to start using library services. As such it is incumbent on the library to resort to all available means necessary to provide adequate publicity on access to library resources. This is important because prospective users of the resources may have a particular means of access that is familiar or easy to them. Some of the means to reach out to users are library websites, leaflets, brochures, email messaging,

launch events, library notice boards, flyers, bookmarks, library orientation, periodic workshops, personal contact etc. In addition, access information provided through these means must be simple, precise and concise. Publicity bridges the gap between ignorance and knowledge of the available resources.

Contemporary library practice is tilting towards creating an attractive and inviting atmosphere in which services and resources are user driven. Libraries are therefore undergoing redesigning of floor places and services that seek to provide much socialization and interaction among users and relaxing of some rigid traditional library rules to allow for more freedom and informal learning experiences.

Access challenges can be addressed through training. Training could be hands-on or a self-tutorial materials accessible manually or online. Training must be tailored purposely to address the user's difficulties. Whilst the library constitutes a bridge or link to services and resources, the process to achieve this should not be made too difficult. Online training materials should be complemented or supplemented by support services that can promote regular or periodic interactions between library staff and clients to address user concerns e.g. email inquiry, chat with a librarian, social media.

Again approach to information access has changed so much since technology became a part of the process, i.e. from manual to technology based. Information seekers today will need to be efficient in order to take advantage of modern technology. This knowledge, although universal, is still catching up with some section of the research community in Ghana. Atiso (2017) and Bossaller & Atiso (2015) reports that a section of the research

community in Ghana were limited in ICT prowess, and this hampered them from accessing some databases. These studies recommended continuous training to sharpen the skills of researchers to access information, a similar feat could be extended to the KNUST research community.

Library conditions have a role to play in attracting users. As a result unfavorable library opening hours for instance can be dealt with by extending opening hours or where appropriate run 24-hour service. Whichever way, the library management would have to contend with both the cost and human resource implications. Extended opening hours makes it flexible to all users to use the library at their convenience. However, for library services and resources which could be accessed from a remote location without having to be physically present at the library, provision must be made for such opportunities.

Improvement through a well organized and interactive website. Website provides an interface to interact with library resources and services as though you are directly engaged by the library staff. Websites also serves, among others, as publicity tool to attract users and as channel of establishing and building a relationship between the library and the users.

It is a known fact that, in the face of limited funds, it is just difficult for libraries to meet the resource needs of all users. This notwithstanding a library collection as much as possible must try to cater for the information needs of all prospective users, irrespective of whether they are in the minority or majority or whether the resources are expensive. This could be done by needs prioritization and judicious use of the limited funds.

Usability and Human Computer Interaction

To reach the aforementioned objectives, another way to turn to is usability and human computer interaction (HCI) research and its implication for the user, especially in the contemporary computer driven environment. Usability assesses the ease of use of and electronic product. Nielson (1994) disclosed that a user interface design has the capacity to attract or repel a user website. Logically he suggests a periodic usability testing of each user group in order to be abreast with different user designs. We believe when this kind of training is extended to users, chances are that most non library users could be attracted to use library facilities.

Future Study

This study is significant in identifying a “forgotten” community. This groups cuts across all sections of the Ghanaian community. Other studies might consider looking at this community by age, gender and other variables other than faculty. This has the potential to unravel details that might help librarians formulate policies than can help them accept and use library services.

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