

Exploring Fee-Based Library Services and User Satisfaction in North-East Nigerian Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The study explored fee-based library services and user satisfaction in North-East Nigerian academic libraries. Fee-based library services refer to supplementary fee services rendered to library users by academic libraries for which patrons are required to pay a certain fee to have access to a copy of periodicals or rare resources which cannot be borrowed out of the library except through photocopying or printing services. The study was guided with three (3) objectives. The study employed primary and secondary sources of data, interview, observation and investigation for proper discussion. The study also adopted case study design to explore the variables of the study. The population covers federal university libraries in the Northeast, Nigeria. The research instrument for data collection was interview via mobile calls and observation. Total enumeration sampling technique was used. Results: The study revealed that majority of the academic library employed fee-based services in order to encourage library users' from patronizing the library resources from time to time. Others who have not deployed the strategies for now, intend to adopt the system in nearest future so as to make available the library resources to users. The adoption of this system has also clear or reduced what we called overnight loans to users. The study concluded that providing fee-based library services in academic libraries would enhance and promote library patronage by different categories of users on daily basis. This is because professional competence in librarianship, encompassing expertise in resource management, dissemination of such resources effectively and efficiently to library users will boost the image of the library to users. Based on this study, the following recommendations were made for improvement: the library management should make more efforts to increase types of fee based services that will encourage users' from patronizing the library, the institutions management in collaboration with library management should promote the level of fee based utilization so as to encourage more users' from utilizing the services and the fee based library services should be made affordable to users' most especially the students so as to satisfy their information need.

Keywords: *Application, Fee Based, Library Services, Utilization and Users Satisfaction.*

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Background to the Study

The aims of fee-based library services go hand in hand with the objectives of free library services which is to satisfy library users with information resources at the right time. The main target in both services is to satisfy user's information needs. Studies depict that user satisfaction is clearly dependent on the library resources, relevance and diversity of collections, quality of the service, physical surroundings and conduciveness of the environment, availability of Information and Communication Technology, and confidence of the library staff. User satisfaction is the backbone of any serious library and information center. When a user is satisfied with a welcoming and helpful environment, easy accessibility of resources, conducive atmosphere, friendly and knowledgeable staff, offer access to digital resources such as subscribed databases which will be renewable periodically, the user will continue patronizing the library whenever the need arises. According to Obu, and George, (2023), posited that "User satisfaction is the fulfillment that patrons have after using the library's numerous information resources and services to meet their information needs.

The library is one of the functional organs of the University charged with the responsibility of collecting, processing organizing, disseminating and securing all sources of information (print and non-print) to meet the needs of all members of the academic community (staff, students, researchers and community members). Generally, the university environment is a place where transfer of knowledge and information takes place. The achievements and goals of the universities depend to a great extent on the level of services and resources provided by the university library.

Reprographic service is one of the cardinal functions of the library and this is to make information resources available to library users, particularly when the materials cannot be borrowed out on a long term or when the student desires to have a personal copy of such materials. The main thrust of reprographic service in the library is to make information available to library patrons so as to satisfy their need. University libraries are essential component and organ of the university. It is built to satisfy the information needs of students, staff, researchers, and other users in the university's environment. In spite of the current resources stocked in the libraries, Libraries find it challenging to effectively access and reproduce the accessible resources in the library, due to either complete absence or shortage of reprographic facilities, this calls for great concern (Udochukwu, 2019). Consequently, the importance of effective reprographic facility and the need to stock library with relevant and current information resources cannot be under estimated. In view of the above, university librarians' function is to effectively provide services to meet user's information needs. However, for libraries to adequately serve its patrons there is need for librarians to explore other means of providing services and making library materials available to patrons, this can also be done through reprographic service (Achugbue, 2022).

Fee-based library services refer to supplementary fee services rendered to library users by academic libraries for which patrons are required to pay a certain fee to have access to a copy of periodicals or rare resources which cannot be borrowed out of the library except through

photocopying or printing services. Student can also make photocopy of their lecture note in this unit at cheaper rate in order to encourage their patronage to the library. These services include; photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges (Owolabi, Abdullahi, Agboola, & Ogungbade, 2024). These services provide benefits such as access to rare or exclusive materials, extended borrowing periods, personalized research assistance, and enhanced study space. It is an information service provided by a library or information agents in exchange for monetary payment. In other words, fee-based library service is a type of service that provides access to specialized information resources, services, and facilities for patrons who are ready to pay for a fee. Akinde, and, Chukwuemeka, (2019) posited that “fee-based library services refer to services and products rendered by the library to her clientele in exchange for financial benefits”. This means that services that are included in the type of fee-based service can only be accessed and utilized by paying a specific fee. This kind of library service gives an increased ability to serve large users' satisfaction with the services they render and this is made possible with resource sharing. Fee-based library services is an attempt made by libraries to market, in exchange for money, the services rendered to their users. It can boost multi-sources of financial avenues in the library and information centers. It seems to be the only solution to the financial difficulties that constrain academic libraries from effective and efficient service delivery. It is a fact that libraries receive many requests for specific services from users based on their needs. The number of users who have limited time, knowledge, and access to the use of services in the library makes this service a solution to their problems. According to Zumairotus, and Mecca (2022), fee-based service is a service with a fee that is provided by several libraries in which the types of fee-based services can only be accessed and utilized by paying a specified fee.

User satisfaction can be described as the users' feelings after using reprographic resources of the library and services, along with their willingness to return when in need of such services. When users are not satisfied with the library services such as printing, photocopying, binding, scanning and hosting events of academic activities, they may likely have low interest in patronizing the library for academic purposes. User satisfaction is an exercise that entails assessing the quality of library services or resources so as to determine whether it meets the user's expectations and needs or not (Boakye, Boakye, & Adjei, 2022). User satisfaction can be view as “the feelings the users get after using fee-based services, and the decision made by the library user to either come back to the library next time they have fee-based needs or not to come back. An academic library mainly exists to satisfy users with the information needs and other services like fee-based services, thus user satisfaction is very pivotal in justifying the continued existence of the library and the need to commit more resources and services to the library. The mission of the library is to provide quality services to its users and therefore, the librarian, need to improve the quality of their services and information resources to satisfy the information needs of users. As such, library need to have a better understanding of user expectations and their specific demands so as to avail relevant resources that will meet the need of the users. Library can achieve its mission only when it can meet users' expectations and also satisfy their information needs. Users' satisfaction would motivate users from using

the services of the library over and over again, and even recommending it to others. As a result, user satisfaction may be deemed as a more reliable and perhaps, the best measure for ascertaining library efficiency and effectiveness (Amarasekara & Marasinghe, 2020).

Users' satisfaction can be achieved with various range of services, including photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students, overdue charges and institutional repositories. Additionally, there are supplementary services available, such as recreational amenities like a coffee shop, designated areas for reading magazines, and catering services that could also boost user satisfaction in patronizing the library. According to Shahzad and Khan (2023), another library service that could meet users' satisfaction is the provision of high-speed internet for efficient access to information as the government could not meet the demands of the users in regards to internet services. Libraries serve as the heart of universities, supporting all the programs with resources and services. The responsibility of university libraries is to cater for the needs of students, lecturers, and researchers. They should provide scholarly materials and reprographic services that align with the institution's mission, vision and academic needs to enhance teaching and learning process. Thus, the role of the university library is to offer users with information and services that fulfil their academic needs. Users' satisfaction is regarded as the means which users determine whether a resource or services meet the required needs and expectations of their academic activities. If the resources or services do not meet their needs or expectations, it is therefore assumed that they are dissatisfied with the resources or services. Users' satisfaction with the library resources and services is a way in which users judge the adequacy of the library resources and services rendered to them and also know if their expectations are provided to them or not. Library user satisfaction implies how users feel after using the available services like photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students, overdue charges and their willingness to return to the library when next they need information resources or services (Anmol & Muhammad, 2021). The level of using the library depends on users' satisfaction with the available information resources and services rendered to them in regards to their teaching and learning process.

Service quality and user's satisfaction, though are distinct, closely related concepts, and an examination of service quality does not necessarily encompass an evaluation of users' satisfaction, and vice versa. When considering service quality as a strategic planning tool, it involves identifying the attributes that users' associate with in an ideal library and the expectations deemed essential by the library to fulfill. The conventional method of gauging users' satisfaction is through gap analysis. On the other hand, users' satisfaction is a measure of how customers perceive the delivery of services and any potential shortcomings at a given moment. Assessing customer satisfaction is crucial as a management tool and can be done efficiently and inexpensively (Mendoza, 2024). Effective library services help greatly in the achievement of the library aims and objectives. These services involve the total support provided by the library to its users. It is also seen as the exertion made by the library staff to endeavor the available, accessible and utilization of library resources to users. In other words,

library services remain an essential work to the actualization of educational goals (Okwu, & Chineme, 2021).

The library has different divisions which work differently but collectively in serving the university community. With all the resources and services in the library, fee-based services could attract users from patronizing the library most especially photocopying of rare and periodic library materials. The library has seemingly become more or less a reading room where they go to read than were they go to acquire information and knowledge. The reason could be as a result of the lack of proper organization of these resources. When library resources are not properly organized, or access may not be facilitated; thus, also affecting use of materials available in the library. Therefore, there is need to explore the extent of fee-based services. This need arose with the aim of identifying problems and preferring solutions in academic libraries. The researcher through preliminary observation shows that, most of the libraries under study apply fee-based services in order to attract users' and increase patronage. It seems like the library users are not satisfy with the library services as a result of low level of fee-based services which could help users' have access to rare and periodical library materials.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher through preliminary observation in the north-east academic libraries revealed that, academic libraries appear to face with challenges of poor funding to enhance fee based services, maintenance of facilities used for fee based, leading to serving low satisfaction, outdated information resources and services, inadequate utilization of fee based services which directly or indirectly appear to affect services such as photocopying, printing, access to internet, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges. It is against this background that the research embarked on this study titled " Exploring the Potential of Fee-Based Library Services, Utilization and User Satisfaction in Academic Libraries in North-East, Nigeria

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to determine:

1. Types of fee-based library services available in academic libraries in North East, Nigeria
2. Utilization of fee-based library services in academic libraries in North East, Nigeria
3. User satisfaction with fee-based library services in academic libraries in North East, Nigeria

Literature Review

Libraries play a crucial role in providing services and information resources. The types of fee-based library services are photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded material, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges. Study by Kaishe-Mulungu, Lwehabura, and Angello (2024) on the level of user satisfaction with library services in Tanzania revealed that, reprographic unit provide services like photocopying, printing and time for internet access so as to satisfy the need of library users. But these

university libraries in Tanzania lack sufficient fee-based services, facilities, and resources to meet the needs of their users. The study employed descriptive survey design. The objective of the study specifically is, to determine the existing library services provision in the selected universities, to determine the extent of users' satisfaction with library services, and to examine the influence of library service provision on user satisfaction. The sample size was 397 respondents, who were academic staff, library staff and students from five selected universities, selected through simple random sampling as per Israel (1992) sample determination table, and 68 key informants, who were heads of university departments, were selected through purposive sampling. Both qualitative and quantitative information were collected using questionnaires and interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, while the qualitative were analysed through content analysis. The results indicated that the primary services provided by libraries were circulation (22.2%), internet (15.6%) and reference services (14.9%). Furthermore, the study found that the satisfaction levels were statistically significant at 5% and 1% levels of significance. The majority of respondents (53%) rated the service quality in terms of information availability as high. The study also revealed that library service provision significantly influenced user satisfaction. These results imply that respondents were satisfied with library services. However, there are some challenges, such as internet connectivity, institutional repository and secretarial services, which were recommended for improvement.

Study conducted by Akinde and Chukwueke (2019) on the effects of fee-based services on library service delivery in federal university libraries using the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Library, Umudike as a focal point. The study was guided by four (4) research objectives. It adopted a survey design with a population of fifty-three (53) library staff from the university. The complete census sampling technique was adopted which implies the use of the entire population as respondents. A checklist and researcher-made questionnaire were the instruments for data collection. Hence, fifty-three copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. All the copies administered were retrieved giving a response rate of 100%. Data was analyzed using simple percentages, frequency counts, and mean scores, as well as presented in frequency tables. Furthermore, a criterion means of 2.50 was adopted to ascertain the level of agreement or disagreement of item statements. The study found out that the library studied adopted few fee-based services, more of free-based services, and total absence of some of the library services investigated. The study revealed that although only few fee-based library services were adopted, it has numerous effects on the federal university library such as generation of additional income, increases library services, goodwill and patronage among other numerous positive effects. The study also found out challenges of poor planning/pricing policy, absence of quality services, and gross resistance of the concept of fee-based services as among the challenges facing fee-based library services and its effectiveness in federal university libraries. Based on the findings, the study recommends efforts to make the prices for fee-based services affordable, strong relationship between the library and its users, provision of relevant library services and introduction of digitized services as means to further strengthen fee-based library services and make it effective in federal university libraries, in order to engender the desired delivery.

Fee-based library services are of significant in enhancing user satisfaction within libraries can be encapsulated as Tailored Services for Specific Needs. Fee-based libraries services have the capacity to provide specialized services customized to the requirements of their paying patrons, encompassing personalized research assistance, document delivery, or instructional workshops. According to Ejezie and Okeke (2021) conducted research on fee-based library services: availability, extent of use, and impediments in federal academic libraries in south east Nigeria. The work revealed that the high extent, federal academic libraries in South East Nigeria uses fee-based library services in the forms of: Sale of Discarded Books, Membership fees for Primary Users; Membership fees for non-library members; Renting out Conference Hall/ Meeting Room; Document supply from other Libraries/ Inter library Loan; Sale of Library Publications; and Issuing Audio Visual and other Non-book Materials. This implies that their extent of use of fee-based library services is quite impressive and should be sustained, if not improved. Librarians and libraries must examine more variables and avenues which determine the extent of usage of fee-based library services.

Agustine and Rejeki (2021) conducted a study on the effect of fee-based information on library services the study made mentioned that previously libraries are free places for those who want to share information or get the information they need. The collections provided by the library are diverse but sometimes they are still limited, as happened in the UPN Veteran Yogyakarta library. Starting from the large number of mineral engineering students who complained about the lack of information resources in the form of maps to support their learning activities, the library collaborated with Bakosurtanal or the National Survey and Mapping Coordinating Board to organize special outlets for maps and atlases placed in libraries. The existence of map outlets in libraries is clearly ambivalent with the concept of libraries as service institutions that provide free information. This is not a mistake, considering that the maps that are traded in the library are topographic maps that display some of the natural and man-made elements in the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. This is a non-loanable learning support tool. With the fee-based information in the library, we can know that the library is a developing organism, where the library must readily meet the needs of users, even if it is fee-based information. Although, librarians toward users have been ambivalent, that on the one hand, librarians are philosophically committed to freedom of access to information; on the other, practical considerations often force academic libraries to limit access and services to external users, librarian must still be able to provide the best service for users.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher developed a theory of Fee Based Library Services in order to explain the application, utilization and users' satisfaction on fee-based services. The theory postulated that fee-based services in the library context, is the demand for financial payment for services and resources offered to users. For decades, the issue of charging fees for library services (photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded material, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges) and information resources has been a subject of debate among information professionals. Akinde and Chukwueke

(2019) are of the view that libraries should offer free services. The library shall in principle be free of charge, but can academic library maintain their services effectively without fee based certainly no. Therefore, there is the need for fee-based services in the library. Information is more than a commodity; wide access to information can empower citizens and therefore be a method of wealth distribution.

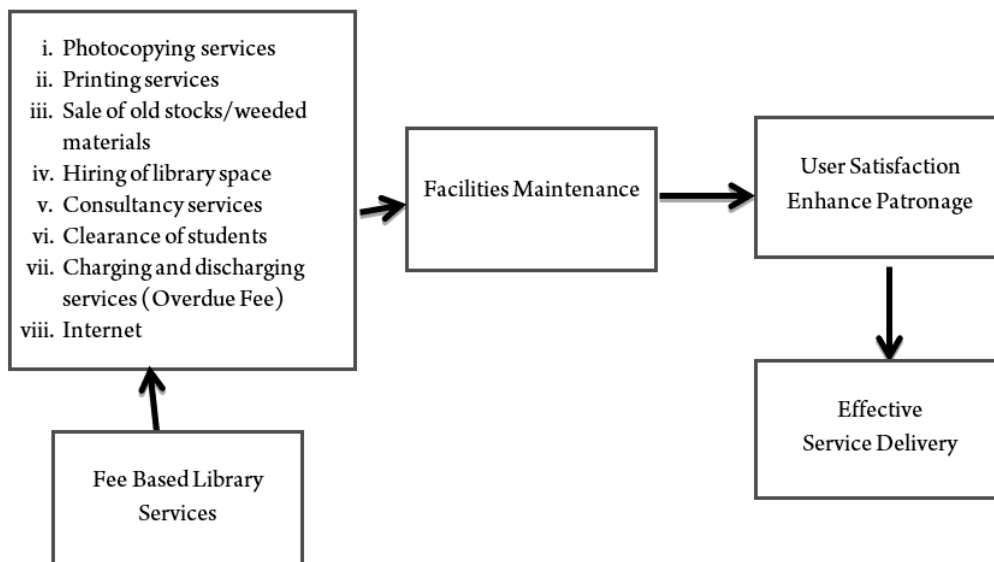


Fig 1: Theory of Fee-Based Library Services by Agboola, B. (2025)

The fee-based library services model provides a diagrammatic view of how fee generated from photocopying, printing, internet, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges can be used in maintaining facilities as well as information resources in the library. The effectiveness of these services would also attract users from patronizing the library efficiently. In some cases, library users go out of the library to photocopy or print resources retrieved from the library. If these users are willing to pay for these products outside the library confines, then they will also be willing to pay in the library especially if they are offered superior and wider services in cheaper rate. In view of these developments, there is need for librarians to re-examine their strategies and develop new initiatives to remain relevant providers of information. Fee-based library services can be one of such strategies of responding to these inevitable changes.

Lack of funds is at the root of these problems. The library is traditionally regarded as a social service provider on free of charge to her target audience. Most libraries depend on subventions from their parent institutions and grants from enabling bodies to meet their overhead cost and to embellish their collections. The dwindling finances have led to inability of some libraries to sustain their services and institute new programmes. The impact of dwindling finances is largely felt in this era of ICTs where service provision requires recurrent spending for maintenance of equipment and updating of electronic resources. There is also

reduction in international assistance by donor agencies. In Africa, these agencies played important roles in building and renewing the collection of many libraries. The twin problems of dwindling subventions and realities of current developments in the information scene as call for reevaluation of free services in library and information centers. Libraries need to seek alternative sources of funding in order to keep afloat.

This model is found relevant to the study as fee-based library services relates to one of the variables of the study as the services will also improve service delivery to library users. The acceptance of fee-based services and its utilization by library staff would fasten, ease, promote and enhance library activities. This model is chosen and relevant to the study because it focuses on the fee-based services such as photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges which are part of the services to be considered in this study. Thus, this model believes that providing these services to library users will attract more patronage to the library and improve quality of service delivery to users.

Methodology

The study also adopted case study design to explore the variables of the study. The study employed primary and secondary sources of data, interview, observation and investigation for proper discussion. The population covers the six (6) federal university libraries established before 2014 in the Northeast, Nigeria. Total enumeration sampling technique was used. The research instrument for data collection was interview via mobile calls and observation. The application of services like photocopying, printing, sale of old stocks/weeded materials, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges would encourage users from patronizing the library from time to time. Satisfaction of User is a critical measure of success for libraries in educational institutions. Satisfaction hinges on the quality of service provided, which is influenced by the availability of resources, quality services that will attract the users, the competence of library personnel, and the overall service experience. Ensuring that libraries meet the required needs of users in a modern technological way so as to encourage their patronage to the library.

Discussion

The study revealed that majority of the academic library employed fee-based services in order to encourage library users' from patronizing the library resources from time to time. Others who have not deployed the strategies for now, intend to adopt the system in nearest future so as to make available the library resources to users. The adoption of this system has also clear or reduced what we called overnight loans to users. Especially, users' that assimilate fast at late hours of the day, when the library is about to be closed, such user can easily photocopy the portion or pages he/she needed that is if the resources are rare collection which are meant not to be borrowed out. The fee-based library services adopted by academic libraries are; photocopying, printing, hiring of library space, consultancy services, clearance of students and overdue charges which facilitate adequate response to the needs of library users. The utilization of these services has been contributing immensely to the users' satisfaction in academic libraries.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to ascertain whether fee-based library services could meet user's satisfaction or not and also attract them from utilizing the library. The result revealed that the cheap rate of printing and photocopying in the library attract more users to the library on daily basis. Therefore, the study concluded that providing fee-based library services in academic libraries would enhance and promote library patronage by different categories of users on daily basis. This is because professional competence in librarianship, encompassing expertise in resource management, dissemination of such resources effectively and efficiently to library users will boost the image of the library to users. A conducive library environment, a well-maintained collection, and efficient staff are pivotal in fostering user satisfaction. Quality fee-based library service is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of library services and ensuring that users remain content with their library experiences. Resource availability and quality services are essential for user satisfaction, with regular library use indicating contentment by library users.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations were made for improvement:

1. The library management should make more efforts to increase types of fee-based services that will encourage users' from patronizing the library
2. The institutions management in collaboration with library management should promote the level of fee-based utilization so as to encourage more users' from utilizing the services.
3. The fee-based library services should be made affordable to users' most especially the students so as to satisfy their information need.

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