

Availability and Use of Government Documents by Academic Staff in Library Complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

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Abstract

This study examined the availability and use of government documents by academic staff in the library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. To achieve the objective of the study, three research questions were raised and answered. The population of the study comprised all the academic staff in the twelve faculties of Ahmadu Bello University. Survey research design was employed, purposive sampling was adopted where 186 academic staff were selected and questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. The study discovers that: technical report, government gazettes, annual reports, statistical reports, law reports, bulletins among others were the types of government documents that were highly available (in hard copy format) except statistical and annual reports which are in both hard and soft copies (offline) only available in the Library Complex of A.B.U Zaria; family members/colleagues/friends and personal experience were the main sources of awareness of the academic staff. The study, therefore, recommends among others that: the library complex of A.B.U Zaria should institute current awareness service with the aim of making the academic staff aware of the availability of government documents as soon as they are acquired. The awareness can be created through mobile phone text messages, library bulletin, e-mail addresses, social media, text message. The study concludes that lack of effective awareness creation undermines the high level of use of government documents by the academic staff of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Keywords: Availability, awareness, use, government documents, academic staff

Introduction

The term “government document”, “government publication”, “official publication” or “government information” “public document” “state document” is often used synonymously because as the name implies, they can be conceived as publications that are generated whether at the Local, State, Federal and International level of government, (Mooko and Aina, 1998). Government publications are among the primary sources of information in humanities, social sciences, education,

administration, medicine etc. Such documents reveal government's philosophy and ideologies, public policy statement, statistical evidence, regulation of activities of the government ministries, departments and agencies Ajidahun (2006). Odumosu as cited in Alhassan and Abdulsalam (2013), viewed government documents as records of public authorities, be it local, state, national or multinational, usually, released for consumption by all and sundry for whatever purpose be it information, education, research, reference, evidence and recreational.

Corroborating the importance of government documents to the library users, Ola and Osagie, (2011), explained that the 'Publication Ordinance' of 1955, 1957 and 1964 of Eastern, Western and Northern regional government mandated any publisher be it private, or commercial, local, state, and federal government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to send the copies of their publications to some designated university libraries like the University college now University of Ibadan, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria for retrospective study of its policies, programmes and activities. Even though such publications are said to be valuable, it is widely believed that they are underutilized

Library users' surveys have been carried out to find out the reasons behind infrequent use of the government documents. Most of these studies on government publications have been carried out in advanced countries like United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, etc. Many reasons were advanced to explain why the underutilization of these documents. Some reasons were attributed to lack of awareness about their existence in the libraries and the perception that government does not publish any information relevant to the fields of study or research interest of users, Mooko and Aina (1998).

Problem Statement

The public is expected to have access to government information irrespective of the media such as radio, television, newspapers, government documents etc. These information media will provide the citizens the opportunity to get informed on various government policies and programmes and at the same time make inputs on government activities for the betterment of all.

However, a casual interlocution of the researchers with some of the academic staff in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria indicated that government documents in the Library complex of Ahmadu Bello University are insufficient or not available in different formats to meet their government information needs. An evidence of this is the low use of government documents by the academic staff through the statistical record of use of the documents in the documents unit in library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria from 2010-2014. According to Management Information System (2015) Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has the strength of 1,959 academic staff while on the other hand, the statistical record of use of the government documents indicated that out of 1,959 academic staff, only 108 staff used government documents in 2010, this represents 5.51 percent use of these documents), in 2011 (142 academic staff, represents 7.24 percent), 2012 (46 academic staff,

represents 2.34 percent), 2013 and 2014 (5 academic staff, represents 0.25 percent) used government documents respectively. Could it be that the academic staff are not aware of the availability of these documents? The speculation on lack of awareness may be the reason for the low use of government documents as reported by the studies of Neelameghan, (1985), Poopola (2008) and Okwor, Austin, Mole &Ihekwoba, (2015) all revealed that many library information resources and services are underutilized due to inadequacies in relation to user needs and due to poor or low level of awareness. The consequence of low use of government documents by academic staff is the low level of their participation in government policies and programmes as experts in various fields that can make inputs on government decisions, policies and programmes for the benefit of other citizens. It is on this basis that, the researchers are motivated to find out the reasons behind the above mentioned phenomenon in the library Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria library, being one of the depositories of government documents published by national and international organizations and agencies.

Research Questions

The study answered the following questions:

1. What types of government documents are available in library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
2. In what formats are the government documents available in library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
3. What are the sources of awareness of academic staff on the availability of government documents for use in library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

Literature Review

Government documents cover an enormous range of materials and subjects, some of the types of government documents include but are not limited to the following: annual reports, technical reports, statistical reports, memoranda, monographs, government policy statement, constitution of a nation, National Development Plans, government circulars, Hansard-the main publication of the various Houses of Assembly and the National Assembly and is the most authoritative source of proceedings of the House of Assembly and published laws of the land, law report - including publications of courts laws, statutes etc.

Okwor, Asutin, Mole and Ihekwoba (2015) opined that government documents as all informative materials issued under the authority of any legislative body, executive or judicial department, ministry, bureau, agency etc and can take any forms, i.e. either in hard or softcopies including books, pamphlet, and fliers as well as non-book forms; available in compact disc, CD-ROMs and other electronic format in the library context.

From the forgoing, one can understand that government documents as library materials that inform users on government activities are of different types and formats

and not restricted to a single document or in a single format. Users can decide to use any types and format of the documents in the library in order to satisfy their government information needs.

Availability is a key factor that information seekers employ to evaluate information sources. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) availability of information sources means that information present in libraries is for immediate use. If information resources are unavailable in libraries, faculty members and students will not come to use the library resources. Poopola, (2008) opined that university libraries by their very nature expected to acquire, process information resources into retrievable form, and make available the much needed information to the academic community and the public at large who may require them for various teaching and research activities.

Awareness is the degree of having the knowledge of information sources that provide users with the information they need Angchun (2011). According to Marchionni (1995), people are more likely to consult information sources that they are aware of their availability and have had prior success using that source for a similar need in order to satisfy their information needs. The principle of least effort assumes that “information channel use is a function of user awareness.” Some studies have found that when “knowledge of a source, its contents and capabilities increase, then the use of that source tends to increase” (Case 2007).

In the same line of thought, Seaman (2002), asserted that lack of awareness contributes to low use of library resources and services. Availability of information sources does not translate to accessibility and utilization that is why Neelameghan (1985) pointed out that the scenario in many libraries in developing countries is underutilization of information resources and services, partly due to inadequacies in relation to user needs and partly due to poor awareness and user education effort. Similarly, Okwor, Asutin, Mole and Ihekwoaba (2015), argued that one reason for poor use of government publications and other materials might be attributed to a low level of awareness of their existence. Poopola (2008), studied faculty awareness and use of library information products and services in Nigerian Universities, his findings show that majority of the academic staff who had rarely used the library information products and services were not aware of it. It is through awareness that university libraries can stimulate primary demands for their information products and services. Poopola (ibid) suggested that some written correspondences meant to get the faculty members aware of the library information product and services be sent through the heads of departments who happen to be among the senior faculty members, other include library bulletin, library newsletters, user education programme, meeting/social interaction, public relations, telephone, library committee, library handbook, display list of products/services, signs/notices in the library and the like. Among all the sources of information to get users aware of the availability of information resources mentioned above, he (Poopola) reported that colleagues, personal experience, notices in the library, library correspondences were the major sources used by the faculty members in Nigerian university to get informed about the

library information products and services. From the above assertion, it can be deduced that there is relationship between the source awareness and the frequency of use of that information source.

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of all the academic staff in the twelve faculties of Ahmadu, Bello University, Zaria and the two (2) Academic Librarians that head the Documents Units (Kashim Ibrahim Library and President Kennedy Library) in the Library complex of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Record from the Ahmadu Bello University Management Information System (MIS) (2015) showed that there was 1,959 Academic staff in the twelve faculties. Purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of both the faculties and the sample size of the academic staff. Four faculties were purposively selected. The faculties selected are: Faculty of Administration: Faculty of Law; Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Social Sciences with a sample size of 184 academic staff from these four faculties. The reason for the selection of these faculties was based on the fact that even though government publications cover enormous subject areas or disciplines but are most intensely covered and concerned with subject areas in these faculties selected. Such areas include but not limited to the following: economics, politics and administration, health and statistical matters, legal matters etc. It was expected that this category of academic staff would provide adequate and relevant information based on their experiences. Two set of structured, open and closed ended questionnaires were used. The questionnaire was presented in five Likert scale point ranging from Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Strongly Disagreed, Disagreed and Undecided. The response percentage rate of 50% and above was considered acceptable and reported as the major responses of the respondents while response percentage rate of 49% and below was considered unacceptable. The data collected was analysed using appropriate statistical procedures for description (frequencies count and percentage).

Findings and Discussion

A total of one hundred and eighty-four (184) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the academic staff, out of which 155 (84.2%) were duly completed, returned and found useful. While 2 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the heads of Documents Units of Library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. All the 2 copies (100%) were duly completed and returned.

Types of Government Documents Available in the Library Complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

With the aid of list of various types of government documents provided, respondents (Heads of Document Units) were asked to indicate the number of copies of the documents available for use, where government documents were not available in the library complex, the respondents indicated not available. Their responses presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Types of Government Documents Available in the Library Complex of A.B.U Zaria

S/N	Types of Government Documents	Availability	
		No. of copies Available	Not Available
1	Statutes	56	
2	Law Reports	1008	
3	Government policy documents	45	
4	Commission or Committee of inquiry reports	25	
5	Population census reports	20	
6	Monographs	40	
7	Budget or speech documents	80	
8	State/National/International Electoral Commission Electoral Guidelines and Election Results	8	
9	Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria	43	
10	Memos		×
11	Publication of Educational Institutions	416	
12	National Development Plans	8	
13	Hansard (Records of Parliamentary Debates)	5	
14	News Letters	603	
15	Correspondences between arms/levels of government		×
16	Minutes of Meetings of MDAs		×
17	Government Circulars	25	
18	Government Gazettes	672	
19	Technical Reports	85	
20	Annual Reports	87	
21	Statistical Reports	327	
22	In-house journals	49	
23	Bulletins	1125	

Source: Field Survey, 2016

KEY: ×= Government documents not available

Table 1 indicates that government gazettes, bulletins, annual reports, law reports, newsletters, statistical reports, and publication of educational institutions are the types of government documents that were highly available, followed by government policy documents, technical reports, budget or speech document, statutes, in-house journals, monographs, population census reports, commission or committee of enquiry reports and government circulars the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The types of government documents with least multiple numbers of copies available were State/National/International electoral commission electoral guidelines and election results, Hansard (Records of Parliamentary Debates) and national development plans. The only documents not available were Minutes of Meetings of MDAs, Memos, and Correspondences between arms/levels of government. Because of the fact that the researcher personally visited the two documents units, administered the questionnaire and glance over some of these documents. This means that the library complex of A.B.U Zaria is up to its task of meeting the demands of information needs of its customer by making available the needed information as opined by Popular (2008) that university libraries by their nature are expected to acquire and process information resources into retrievable form, and make available the much needed information to the academic community and the public at large who may require them for various teaching, research and other purposes.

Formats of Government Documents Available in the Library Complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Respondents (Heads of Documents Units) were asked to indicate the formats of government documents available in the Library Complex of A.B.U Zaria. Format here means hard and soft copies. Hard copies mean government documents available in printed form while soft copies were grouped into two: offline and online. Online government documents are documents digitized and made available in the library website to be accessed anytime and anywhere by the customers. While offline government documents are documents available in any electronic storage device such as Compact Disc, Compact Disk Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) to be accessed in the library. Table 2 shows the responses of the respondents.

Table 2: Formats of Government Documents Available

S/N	Types of Government Documents	Formats of Government Documents Available			
		hard copies available	soft copies available	Offline	Online
1	Status	✓	×	×	×
2	Law Reports.	✓	×	×	×
3	Annual reports	✓	✓	✓	×
4	Newsletters	✓	×	×	×
5	Statistical reports	✓	✓	✓	×
6	In-house Journals	✓	×	×	×
7	Commission or Committee of Inquiry Report	✓	×	×	×
8	Government gazettes	✓	×	×	×
9	Government circulars	✓	×	×	×
10	Technical Reports	✓	×	×	×
11	Memos	×	×	×	×
12	State/National/International Electoral Commission Electoral Guidelines/Election Results	✓	×	×	×
13	Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria	✓	×	×	×
14	Population census reports	✓	×	×	×
15	Publications of Educational Institutions	✓	×	×	×
16	National Development Plans	✓	×	×	×
17	Handsads (Records of parliamentary debate)	✓	×	×	×
18	Budget/Speech documents	✓	×	×	×
19	Minute of Meetings of MDAs	×	×	×	×
20	Government Policy documents	✓	×	×	×
21	Correspondences between arms/level of government.	×	×	×	×
22	Monographs	✓	×	×	×
23	Bulletins	✓	×	×	×

Source: Field Survey, 2016

KEY: ✓=Formats of government documents available, ×= Government documents not available in any format

Table 2, shows the formats of documents available in the library complex of A.B.U Zaria. From the table, it was discovered that all the types of government documents available were in hardcopy except statistical and annual reports which were in both hard and soft copies (offline). The implication of this finding is that since only few government documents are in soft copies (offline only), the users will not have access to the government documents anywhere and anytime when there is need for that. This finding is in partial agreement with the submission of Okwor, Asutin, Mole and Ihekwoba (2015), all they opined that government documents as all informative materials issued under the authority of any legislative body, executive or judicial department, ministry, bureau, agency etc and can take any forms, i.e. either in hard or softcopies including books, pamphlet, and fliers as well as non-book forms; available in compact disc, CD ROMs and other electronic format in the library context Sources of Awareness of the Academic Staff on the Availability of Government Documents in the Library Complex of A.B.U Zaria.

Academic staff were asked to indicate the sources through which they get aware of the availability of government documents in the studied library. Below is the table indicating their responses.

Table 3: Sources of Awareness of the Availability of Government Documents

S/N	Sources of Awareness	SA		A		D		SD		U		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through my Head of Department	40	2.58	36	22.6	50	32.3	30	19.4	0	0.0	155	100
2.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through my friends/colleagues family members	90	58.1	55	35.5	1	0.6	7	4.5	2	1.3	155	100
3.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through the library bulletin	35	22.6	20	12.9	60	38.7	37	23.9	3	1.9	155	100
4.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through library user education programme	37	23.9	21	13.5	65	41.9	32	20.6	0	0.0	155	100
5.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through the library news letters	20	12.9	15	9.7	75	48.4	40	25.8	5	3.2	1.55	100
6.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through telephone from the library	10	6.5	2.5	16.1	54	34.8	62	40.0	4	2.6	155	100
7.	I get aware of the availability of government documents through personal experience	50	32.2	90	58.1	0	0.0	8	5.2	7	4.5	155	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2016

Key: SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, D = Disagreed, SD = Strongly Disagreed, U = Undecided

Table 3 reveals that 90(58.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they got aware of the availability of government documents in library complex of A.B.U Zaria through personal experience, friends, colleagues, family members. The predominance of personal experience and friends/colleague/family members might be due to their close and frequent contact with each other. This finding agrees with the report of Popoola (2008) that faculty members in the Nigeria universities get aware of the availability of library information product and services through friends, colleagues and personal experience. These sources were grouped and called “informal” or “traditional” sources of awareness. The implication of this finding is that the traditional or informal sources of awareness may not well inform the academic staff the different types of government documents available in the library. This means that the university library may likely not to achieve its goal of disseminating information on government policies, programmes and activities. However, the lowest score constituted 1(0.6%) of the respondents who disagreed that he/she got aware of the availability of government in the library complex of A.B.U Zaria through friends/ colleagues/family members.

Summary of Findings

1. The types of government documents available in library complex of ABU Zaria were government gazettes, annual reports, statistical reports, law reports, national development plans, reports of commissions or committees, population census reports, monographs and the like.
2. The study revealed that all the government documents were in hard copy format except statistical and annual reports which were in both hard and soft copies (offline) only.
3. The sources of awareness of academic staff on the availability of government documents in library complex of A.B.U Zaria were personal experience and friends/colleagues/family members.

Conclusion

Arising from the findings of this study, it was concluded that the library complex of A.B.U Zaria has different types of government documents for its users. However, lack of effective awareness creation undermines the high level of use of these documents by the academic staff of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. There is need for the library complex of A.B.U Zaria to improve on its government document collections by providing more documents like memos,

national development plans, Hansard (Records of Parliamentary Debates) and correspondences between arms and levels of government. This will make government documents more sufficient.

2. The library should also make effort to digitize the available government documents, make them available on its website and make the academic staff to make use of either soft or hard copies format.
3. The Library Complex of ABU Zaria should institute current awareness service with the aim of making the academic staff aware of any available government document acquired. This awareness can be created through mobile phone text messages, library bulletin, social interaction, display list of library products, social media, e-mail addresses etc.

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