CATALOGUE USE STUDY IN NATIONAL MEDICAL LIBRARY (NML)

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Discusses the results of a study made at the National Medical Library, New Delhi, by four trainees in the fourth training course in health librarianship. The study involved collection of information through questionnaire, observation and interview from the catalogue users of the National Medical Library for twenty days. The information collected is analysed and presented.

INTRODUCTION

Library catalogue is a systematically arranged searchable tool containing information about the resources available in a particular library for the purpose of identifying and locating them. Among the motivating factors that prompt catalogue use studies are: (i) the possibility of improving the conventional card catalogue in terms of the needs it fulfils; (ii) understanding the behaviour of library users; (iii) in the event of the decision to computerize the catalogue, provisions of guidance to library managers to determine the time for conversion and how it should be accomplished properly; and (iv) to provide justification for the money spent on the preparation and maintenance of the catalogue in a library.

DEFINITION

Catalogue use study is the study of catalogue users rather than the catalogue itself. Randall defined catalogue use study as “an intelligent study of the patrons themselves, their mental equipment, their background and their needs”. The study is usually based on the data collected from the various users of the catalogue through questionnaire, observation and interview.

HISTORY OF CATALOGUE USE STUDIES

Catalogue use studies are not a novelty. Quite a number of studies have been reported in the literature. The earliest catalogue use study was carried out by Randall in 1930 which was published under the title “The uses of the library catalogue: A research project in the catalogues and the classifiers yearbook No.2, 1930 of the A.L.A. The literature had been growing steadily up to 1950s. Frarey, in 1953, listed 27 studies and in 1960 added 13 more studies. The major catalogue use study was undertaken by the A.L.A. in 1955-1956; popularly known as Jackson study, its results were published in 1958. During mid-1960’s three major studies were undertaken and the results published. During 1970’s, a number of studies were reported from U.K. Kirkelas[1] stated the following general objectives of catalogue use studies carried out up to 1970s:

(a) To determined what kinds of data have been accumulating from these numerous catalogue use studies.
(b) To evaluate the real or potential implication such studies have on the continuing development of the catalogue – whether in traditional card or book form or the computerized catalogue in future.

Kirkelas[1] also summarized the three important studies carried out in U.S.A.

(1) The University of Michigan study of 1967,
(2) The University of Michigan study of 1968-69, and
(3) The Yale University study of 1968-69.
The results of these studies conducted by Lipetz, Tagliacozzo and Palmer have lent support to many findings of earlier studies. At the same time, they have provided data giving new insights and leading to modification of the previous held views.

NEED FOR CATALOGUE USE STUDIES

From the above catalogue use studies it is possible to ascertain:

1. The types of users of the catalogue
2. Information seeking behaviour of the users
3. Purposes for using the catalogue
4. Types of information found in the catalogue useful for the users.
5. Performance of the catalogue.

Catalogue use studies help the library managers to improve the library cataloguing services and to increase the operational efficiency of the catalogue. Further, the study can be useful in justifying the time and money spent on the preparation and maintenance of the catalogue in a library.

NML CATALOGUE USE STUDY

This study was undertaken by four trainees in the fourth training course in partial fulfilment of their training in health science librarianship of the National Medical Library (NML).

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was concerned specifically with the utilization of the catalogue of NML by the health science professionals, particularly research workers, postgraduates, practitioners and undergraduates, etc., their background and their information seeking behaviour with regard to the catalogue. The findings were meant to improve the existing library catalogue system.

LOCATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE NML CATALOGUE

The NML catalogue is located behind the counter and the reference section in the first floor of the main hall. The catalogue represents about 70,000 books and reports and 110,000 bound volumes of periodicals available in this library. The stocks of NML are open to health science professionals all over India. The users are mostly from the health science teaching institutions and hospitals situated in Delhi. The catalogue area is a scene of activity from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the users enter to make searches of various kinds and durations, then leaving with different degrees of satisfaction. The NML catalogue is broadly divided into: (1) Books and monographs catalogue, (2) Reports catalogue, and (3) Serials catalogue.

Books and Monographs Catalogue

This is sub-divided into two portions:

1. Pre-1977: Containing material catalogued by the library before 1977, and
2. Post-1977: Containing material catalogued from 1977 to date.

This is a bipartite catalogue divided into name part and subject part. In the name catalogue, cards are filed alphabetically by authors and titles of books. In the subject catalogue, they are filed under Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and the users can have access to the required books through MeSH (subject approach).

Reports Catalogue

This is also a bipartite catalogue, i.e. entries are made under author and subject sections. Once information about the material wanted is found in the card catalogue, the call number given on the upper left hand corner of the card, including any special location such as ‘A’ for Ayurveda, ‘S’ for serials, can be noted to locate the publication.

Serial Catalogue

Journals are listed alphabetically in the catalogue card kept in the cabinet placed adjacent to the book catalogue. It gives complete record of periodical holdings of the NML. Each entry in the record contains title of the journal and the specific volume(s) available along with the year(s) of publication.
METHODOLOGY

Sampling technique was employed in order to study costs and annoyance of catalogue users at reasonable levels. The desired representative sample was obtained by making careful observations of traffic in the catalogue area and by distributing questionnaires to the catalogue users. Out of the 150 questionnaires distributed, 100 were filled and returned. This random sample of 100 users was analysed and the results are presented in this study.

ANALYSIS

Catalogue Users

The actual user population of the catalogue could not be assessed, because there were approximately 1500 library users during the period of study and among them only 100 users were covered by us. The major categories of users were research scholars, practitioners, postgraduates, undergraduates, and non-medical personnel working in health science institutions. Out of the 100 catalogue users, 47 (47%) were research scholars and postgraduates; 40 (40%), practitioners; 7 (7%), teachers; 3 (3%), undergraduates; and 3 (3%) were non-medical professionals. NML being a focal point of the nation, its use by research scholars is very high.

Frequency of Catalogue Use

Out of the 100 users of the library, 29 use the catalogue frequently, 40 less frequently, 26 rarely and 5 not at all. Among them, the research scholars (14) used the catalogue most frequently. From interviews it was found that the Post-graduate students used the catalogue of NML rarely. The reason for this is that all of them belong to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), which is in the same campus and has a very big library equipped with the latest editions of textbooks and journals.

Non-use of the Catalogue

Though it was not possible to identify with exactness the non-users of the catalogue, it was found from the sample collected that 5% who did not use the catalogue stated the following reasons for not using the catalogue: (1) Nobody can understand the procedure, and (2) it is difficult to read the exact number of volume and year in the catalogue card due to bad handwriting. Enquiry from the reference section of the library revealed that most of the users came for literature search from biomedical journals and since the same are arranged alphabetically, they bypass the catalogue and get the required journal from the concerned rack.

Searches to the Catalogue

Every catalogue search is a word-matching exercise in which the user tries to match some known clues (i.e. a name or title or subject heading) against the terms used in the catalogue with a view to gaining more associated information from the catalogue cards (i.e. various bibliographic details of a book). The success or failure of a catalogue search depends on the following factors.

(1) Whether desired materials are available in the library.
(2) The clues adopted by the catalogue user for making a search.
(3) The manner in which the user applies the clues.
(4) The entries and associated information provided in the catalogue.

The information seeking behaviour of the users through the known-authors and titles is defined as known-item search. Subject approach needs no explanation. This analysis reveals that 71 (75%) users made searches through known clues and 24 (25%) through subject approach. Further analysis of the known-item searches revealed that the number of users adopting author approach (53; 56%) was higher than that of users making the title approach, (18; 19%).

The mode of approach of the user community is shown in Table 1.

It is clear from Table 1 that the author approach predominates over all other approaches. This finding tallies with the highest per-
Table 1

Types of Search vs User Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>User group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Research scholars</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Postgraduates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Non-medical professionals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance of the Catalogue

As revealed by the various groups, 78 (82%) users were successful in searching the required material through the catalogue, while 17 (28%) of them failed in this. The failures may be due to the following reasons:

1. Searching the author part without knowing the author's full name.
2. Searching the titles without knowing the title fully.
3. Searching the subject heading without knowing the related headings.
4. Deficiency of the catalogue.
5. Absence of the desired documents.

The first three reasons may be collectively called users' fault.

Bibliographic Items Found Useful

Catalogue users seek bibliographic information, such as edition, publisher's name, place of publication and date of publication as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Bibliographic element</th>
<th>No. of users finding the particular element useful</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Edition</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Publisher's name</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Place of publication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Date of publication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Editor's name</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of illustrations, number of pages, name of the series, cost of the book do not find a place in the catalogue. Interviews with the catalogue users revealed that they require information on these items very rarely.

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE USERS

The following suggestions were made by the users of the NML catalogue. These are given in order of preference; a few of them reflect deficiencies of the catalogue.

1. The catalogue should be kept up to date.
2. The journals which are available in the racks do not find a place in the serial catalogue.
3. Instructions on how to use the catalogue must find a place in the catalogue section.
4. There should be a relationship between the catalogue cards and location of racks for easy identification of books.

CONCLUSION

The survey conducted for a short period may not fully reflect the actual position with regard to the use of the catalogue of NML, since for a national focal point in health sciences more users need be taken into account for analysis. A survey covering a broader spectrum of users is necessary.

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REFERENCES