

# Use of Government Documents at the University of Ilorin Library

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## *Abstract*

*The article reports a study of the use of government publications in the University of Ilorin Library. The paper investigates the use of official publications around two questions: What categories of the collections are most heavily used and by which categories of users with the specific aim of emphasizing faculties in the University. The study reveals that statistical publications are the most frequently consulted materials and are mostly consulted by readers from the faculty of Business and Social Sciences.*

**Keywords :** *Government publications; Official publications; Use statistics; User survey; Collections*

## **Introduction**

Knowledge of use is an important part of professional management in the library. The interests that users have in various classes of government documents are highly important to them as well as to documents librarians. Libraries to varying degrees store and make accessible a broad range of federal, state and local government publications and the collections in academic libraries constitute a significant part of overall library resources. Official publications record and convey many types of information that governments collect while carrying out their functions. Such Documents are a means of public expression as well as a propagation of policies and activities of government.

## **Methodology**

The data obtained are based on the annual reports of the Documents Section of University of Ilorin Library for the past five years. Documents Request Forms filled by users of the section were examined for the period of 1997/98-2001/2002 academic year (see Appendix). The records were kept and they also appeared in the annual reports.

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## The Documents Section of University of Ilorin Library

Realizing the importance of government documents for research, the documents section at the University of Ilorin Library has continued with its goal of making both the federal, state, local and foreign government publications widely available for the use of researchers and scholars. Publications of international organisations such as those of the United Nations (UN), Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Economic Community Of West African State (ECOWAS) also are made available.

The documents collections are wholly separate from other library collections. The section has its own catalogue and a specific documents librarian. Detailed separate reference and circulation records also are kept in this section. The action records systematically the usage pattern and therefore has up-to-date records of usage. There are records of the categories of materials used and users categories who are predominantly students and researchers.

Acquisition is achieved by purchase, exchange, gifts and legal deposit. Emphasis is placed on the following classes of documents:

- Special reports - Task Forces, White papers. Commissions of inquiry
- Annual reports
- Technical reports
- Statistical reports
- Annual Estimates, Development plans
- Gazettes

Acceptance of deposit is generally indiscriminate since it is in accordance with a deposit law, but is discriminate for gifts. Purchase is an inherently selective means of collecting and the purpose is mainly to supplement acquisition by the aforementioned means. Deposit is, on the whole, an uneven method of collection. What is distributed is accepted. The deposit law in force is the Kwara State of Nigeria Edict No.5 of 1977 which took effect from May 16, 1977.

## Findings and Observation

### Users

The records kept in the Documents Section indicate the categories of users by faculties that make up the university community. Table 1 shows that the highest number of users come from the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences followed by the Faculties of Education and Arts. The totals show that users from the Faculty of Engineering and Technology are the most infrequent users of the collection; they constitute 2.6 percent of the

total number of users for the period under study.

**Table 1 Categories of Users by Faculty**

| Faculty                  | 1997/98      |      | 1998/99      |      | 1999/00      |      | 2000/01      |      | 2001/02      |      | Row Total    |      |
|--------------------------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
|                          | No. of Users | %    | No. of Users | %    | No. of Users | %    | No. of Users | %    | No. of Users | %    | No. of Users | %    |
| Agriculture              | 80           | 2.5  | 42           | 1.8  | 194          | 4    | 94           | 2    | 172          | 3.5  | 582          | 2.9  |
| Arts                     | 500          | 15.6 | 424          | 18.1 | 1081         | 22.1 | 982          | 21.1 | 790          | 16.1 | 3777         | 18.9 |
| Business & Soc. Sciences | 1532         | 47.7 | 1057         | 45.1 | 2270         | 46.4 | 2150         | 46.2 | 2282         | 46.6 | 9291         | 46.5 |
| Education                | 890          | 27.7 | 640          | 27.3 | 820          | 16.7 | 1105         | 23.8 | 1073         | 21.9 | 4528         | 22.6 |
| Engineering & Technology | 42           | 1.3  | 43           | 1.8  | 109          | 2.2  | 107          | 2.3  | 221          | 4.5  | 522          | 2.6  |
| Health Science           | 65           | 2    | 39           | 1.7  | 198          | 4    | 93           | 2    | 160          | 3.3  | 555          | 2.8  |
| Science                  | 105          | 3.2  | 100          | 4.3  | 225          | 4.6  | 121          | 2.6  | 194          | 4    | 745          | 3.7  |
| Total                    | 3214         | 100  | 2345         | 100  | 4897         | 100  | 4652         | 100  | 4892         | 100  | 20000        | 100  |

**Class of Documents**

Six categories were used in determining which types of government documents were consulted. The categories were:

- Annual reports
- Special reports - Task Forces, White papers, Commissions of inquiry
- Technical reports
- Statistical reports
- Annual Estimates, Development plans
- Gazettes

Table 2 shows the categories and number of requests made in respects of each category for the year: covered by this study. The table indicates that statistical publications constituted the largest number of 9092 which is 45.5 percent of government documents consulted by users for all the years followed by Annual Estimates and Development plans with 23.6 percent and Annual reports with 19.2 percent. Technical reports are the least used among the categories named. The total number of volumes of government documents consulted for the five years was 20,000.

This study confirms that statistical publications are the most frequently used material. Further information from the study indicates that the materials cited by researchers are predominantly Statistical Reports and Annual Reports.



**Table 2 Divisions of Documents Consulted**

| Categories   | 1997/98     |      | 1998/99     |      | 1999/00     |      | 2000/01     |      | 2001/02     |      | Row Total   |      |
|--|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
|  | No. of Vols | %    | No. of Vols | %    | No. of Vols | %    | No. of Vols | %    | No. of Vols | %    | No. of Vols | %    |
| 1. Annual report of gov. departments, agencies etc                     | 525         | 16.3 | 450         | 19.2 | 1088        | 22.2 | 990         | 1.9  | 795         | 16.3 | 3848        | 19.2 |
| 2. Special reports – Task Forces, White papers, Commissions of inquiry | 100         | 5.6  | 72          | 3    | 218         | 4.5  | 113         | 2.4  | 216         | 4.4  | 799         | 4    |
| 3. Technical reports   | 55          | 1.7  | 30          | 1.3  | 192         | 3.9  | 107         | 2.3  | 176         | 3.6  | 560         | 2.8  |
| 4. Statistical reports   | 1430        | 44.5 | 1050        | 44.8 | 2190        | 44.7 | 2180        | 46.9 | 2242        | 45.8 | 9092        | 45.5 |
| 5. Annual estimates, Development Plans                                 | 922         | 28.7 | 670         | 28.6 | 900         | 18.4 | 1075        | 23.1 | 1153        | 23.6 | 4720        | 23.6 |
| 6. Gazettes  | 60          | 1.87 | 50          | 2.1  | 200         | 4.1  | 109         | 2.3  | 190         | 32.9 | 607         | 3    |
| 7. Other (e.g. magazines)  | 42          | 1.31 | 23          | 1    | 1092        | 2.2  | 80          | 1.7  | 120         | 2.5  | 374         | 1.9  |
| Total  | 3214        | 100  | 2345        | 100  | 4897        | 100  | 4652        | 100  | 4892        | 100  | 20000       | 100  |

## Conclusion

The focus of this study has been in the categories of documents consulted and users' discipline affiliation. The study reveals that users from the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences use government documents most and that statistical reports constitute the most heavily used type of material as asserted also by Hernon (1994). This paper has revealed the pattern of the utility of the collections and that of users of the documents sections of University of Ilorin Library. Realizing the heavy use of statistical publications by social scientists, Hanson (2000) has given proposals for organising the range of statistical government materials which a good academic library should have to support social science related teaching and learning.

Little research has been carried out, most especially in developing countries to determine the extent of usage of government documents according to Johnson (1999). The servicing and use of government publications should be a concern for librarians. The author is of the opinion that documents librarians in University libraries should endeavour to acquire such publications and disseminate information therein to students and researchers. Their usage could be improved through listings, indexes and Library's Documents Title and Subject entries.

## References

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Hernon, Peter. *Use of Government Publications by Social Scientists*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1994, 173p.

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## Appendix

### University of Ilorin Library

### Documents Request

I wish to consult the following:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Volume: \_\_\_\_\_

Borrower's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty: \_\_\_\_\_

Year/Level/Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### For Official Use

Time taken: \_\_\_\_\_ Time returned: \_\_\_\_\_

Items not available: \_\_\_\_\_

Not in the Library - In the bindery -

Not on shelf - Others -

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Documents Librarian

