Awareness and Use of Reference and Information Services amongst Library Users in University Libraries in two States in Nigeria

Kevin Okorafor[1] Ifeyinwa A. ArioIe PhD[2] Linda I. Anyalebechi
Head of Circulation Unit, Readers' Services Department, Federal Polytechnic
Nekede, Owerri kevin.okorafor2017@gmail.com, [1]
Research Department, Central Bank of Nigeria Library, Abuja, Nigeria
ifyariole2016@yahoo.com, aidprince@yahoo.com,[2]
Medical Library, College of Medicine
Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University Teaching Hospital,
Amaku, Awka, Anambra State ihechikwerelinda@gmail.com, [3]

Abstract

Purpose: *The paper examined the awareness and use of reference and information services amongst library users in University Libraries in two states in Nigeria.*

Design/methodology: *The study employed descriptive survey research method. The purposive sampling technique was used to select one hundred undergraduates from each library, giving a sample size of 400. Research results were presented using descriptive presentation tools such as tables, frequency counts and percentages*

Findings: *Majority of the participants is aware and utilized the different forms of reference and information services provided which include individual assistance from library staff, issuing of reference letter and literature search services. Fellow students, use of library courses and assistance of library staff were the predominant source through which the participants became aware of reference and information service available. Low level of awareness of the available reference and information services, non-participation of students in orientation programmes, inadequacy of reference information sources, lack of space/location of reference unit and poor communication skills of library staff were the major factors affecting the undergraduates' level of awareness and use of reference and information services. Sensitization of the students on the available reference and information services, participation of students in orientation programs, provision of reference information sources, space and electronic forms of reference services were recommended.*

Research implications: *The study indicates that digital-related reference services are not popular in the university libraries surveyed and use of library as a course has been effective in the institutions studied.*

Originality/value: *The study has a lot of implication for university libraries in Nigeria among which is the need for full integration of electronic reference services into services offered to the users.*

Keywords: *Awareness, Information Services, Library Users, Reference Services, University Libraries, Nigeria.*

Paper type: *Empirical*

Introduction

Libraries and information centers(LICs) in libraries besides meeting their constitutional role of selecting, acquiring and organizing of information resources, do provide various forms of information services to ensure that users have access to the available documents and as well meets their information needs. One of such is reference and information services. Reference and information services occupied a central position in the practice of librarianship. Reference service is one of the most demanding of the entire library services and close to the patrons (Quadri and Abiodun, 2017). Reference service refers to any form of assistance given to those seeking information, and this can either be direct or indirect, in-person or remotely, and librarians have always provided reference service in a variety of formats, ranging from fixed desk, telephone, e-mail, to more recent synchronous virtual reference (Qobose and

Mologanyi, 2015). No doubt, the fundamental role of the reference librarian is to ensure that users of the library are given the requisite assistance that will enable them to meet their needs. Reference and information services is one of the cardinal services provided in libraries and information centres. Rendering assistanc to user

Reference service is one of the services provided in libraries. It is one of the services provided through direct contact with the user except in rare cases where such can be provided using ICTs facilities without user having direct contact with the library i.e., e-reference services. The provision of reference and information services to meet the varying needs of library users remains one of the primary responsibilities of Readers' Services Department in academic libraries. Reference services refer to a variety of activities associated with personal assistance to library users including selection, liaison activities, bibliographic instruction, and the implementation of electronic products. It is any personal assistance given to a library by the reference librarian or any library staff from the library gate to the final point or retrieving required document to satisfy user's information needs within the shortest possible time (Adekunjo, 2008; Gadanga, 2013). The importance of reference and information services to Shuaibu (2011) need not be overemphasized as it occupies a central position in the practice of librarianship.

Reference services takes different forms, but central to them is the provision of assistance to individuals seeking information and this singular role which underlines the various forms has remained stable over the years (Madu, 2010). The nature of reference services by reference librarian in the 21st century Nigeria would no doubt require them to acquire ICT competencies if all they want to remain relevant in this digital age (Gama, 2012). Electronic reference service is communicating and interacting with users in virtual environments by utilizing computer and internet technology (Madukoma, 2015). The nature of reference and information services according to Gama (2012) encompasses everything that a reference librarian does to enhance access and use of information sources and or information itself by users. It ranges from building the right collections, management of the collections to the proper linking of collection with users. Most information bearing resources in print and non-print format are underutilized because of the unavailability of certain tools and

in their pursuit for information is very essential, no matter how sophisticated a user is in terms of level of education and experience. The reader needs to be assisted to have the right contact with the right book at the right time and in the right personal way (Yusuf, 2012).

devices that can facilitate full exploitation of these resources. The volume of resources available in a library has no value if users cannot access them and get their information needs satisfied (Amadi, Dike & Ossai-Onah, 2011).

Justification for the study

Plethora of studies has been carried out on use of library and library resources in a generalized approach. There seems to be little or no work carried out to examine the students' level of awareness and use of reference and information services in academic libraries. Reference services as noted by Madu (2010) which constitute the main function of the reference section of the library can be evaluated.

It is doubtful if students who used the library are fully aware and do make use of reference and information services provided by their institutional libraries. Many user studies have been conducted in the field of library and information science over the years. Most of these studies were too generic, however, with the scope of librarianship widening up every day, there is need to move from generic scope studies to micro-scope studies. It is in line with this, that the true state of reference and information services needs to be ascertained and established.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

i. to determine if students who used the library are aware of the existence of reference and information service in the selected libraries;
ii. to identify the specific forms of reference and information services mostly utilized by users of the selected libraries;
iii. to established their source of knowledge about the reference and information services provided in the selected libraries; and
iv. to identify the constraints to effective use reference and information services;

Literature Review

Adekunyo (2008) in a study on the role of interpersonal communication in reference services in selected Nigeria university libraries reveals that most of the users agreed that they

Hashimu Suleiman CLN[1]Baba S. Aduku, PhD[2]Mohammed M. Kpakiko, CLN[3]

are familiar with the services in the reference section of their libraries because these services were well communicated to them. Similarly, Ezeani (2005) revealed that 68(57%) of the respondents are aware of reference sources available in the library. This implies that a reasonable number of students of the university do not know their way around the library.

Adekunyo (2008) opined that reference librarians should as a matter of fact improve their communication skills and channel them adequately to meeting the ever increasing demand of their clientele. Madu (2010) identify information and referral services, bibliographic verification, inter-library loan and document delivery, selective dissemination of information (SDI), databases searches, research questions, information brokering as forms of reference services provided in libraries and information centres.

Amadi, Dike & Ossai-Onah (2011) in their study on students' awareness and use of indexing and abstracting services in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries reveals that Higher National Diploma (HND) students who make use of the library are aware of the existence of indexing and abstracting services. The results further pointed out that those aware of the services were able to know about it through the help or assistance of library staff. Yusuf (2012) highlighted on lack of adequate resources, lack of qualified and experience staff, and personal attitude of the librarian as part of the problems hindering effective reference services in academic library.

Ademodi (2004) concluded from his study that most of the respondents are not aware of reference services being offered in the library. The only service where awareness is increased is readers' services, the reason being that most respondents come to the library to read either their books or that of the library.

Yusuf (2012) citing Bunga & Bopp (2001) noted that reference service varies in different forms from simple such as the provision of an address or telephone number to tracking down an elusive bibliographic citation or the identification and delivery of document about a specific topic. Zainab & Gama (2012) in their study on awareness and use of internet services of the university library by undergraduate female students of Bayero University, Kano reveals that a large number of the respondents 81% (196) out of 242 respondents were aware of the existence

of the internet services facility in the university library. They attributed the high level of awareness of the existence of the facility among the respondents to faculty orientation programs as way of complementing the library orientation and friends that might have used the facility.

Quadri and Abiodun (2017) citing Achebe (2012), opined that reference and information service (RIS) is an aspect of library services in which contact between the reader and library materials which could be printed, or electronic. Madukoma (2015) concludes that electronic reference are not adequately utilized in Babcock University library due to lack of awareness of the availability of these services in the library.

Quadri and Abiodun (2017) in their study observed that reference sources available were not fully utilized by the students as most of the services were occasionally used. The barriers to effective and efficient reference and information services in Nigerian libraries as pointed out by Baro (2009) includes obsolete references sources, lack of effective library co-operation, inefficient selective dissemination of information (SDI) services in Nigerian libraries, level of computerization of library services, information literacy among library users, inability to reach-out to the non-library users in Nigerian, incompetent reference librarians in most Nigerian libraries, unreliable telecommunication infrastructure, language barriers and information hoarding tendency among Nigerians. Nnadozie & Benson (2014) in their study of students' use of reprographic services in selected academic libraries in Nigeria identified inadequate breakdown of equipment on the part of students, constant breakdown of equipment coupled with inadequate staff as the challenges of use of reprographic equipment and the services provided through these facilities.

Research Methods

The study employed descriptive survey research method. The choice for this approach was on the understanding of its economy, rapid data collection and the ability to understand the characteristics of the participants being studied. The target population was the duly registered undergraduates of the selected institutions namely: Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University (2011), Uli, both in Ananbra state. University of Nigeria (Enugu Campus) and Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

The probability sampling and non-probability sampling techniques were used. The propulsive sampling technique was used to select one hundred undergraduates from each library, giving a sample size of 400 and 400 copies of questionnaires were administered accordingly to the selected students. The research results were presented using descriptive presentation tools such as tables, frequency counts and percentages. Results were also presented graphically for clarity and better understanding.

Hashimu Suleiman CLN[1] Baba S. Aduku, PhD[2] Mohammed M. Kpakiko, CLN[3]

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Forms of reference and information services that undergraduates are aware and utilized

|	Forms of Reference Services	Frequency	Percentage
a	Current Awareness Services (CAS)	117	32.1
b	Digital Reference Services (DRF)	96	26.4
c	Issuing of Reference Letter	225	61.8
d	Selective Dissemination of Information	44	12.1
e	Literature Search Services	219	60.2
f	Individual assistance from library staff	276	75.8
g	Document Delivery Services (DDS)	11	3.0
h	Inter-Library Loan Services (LIS)	6	1.6
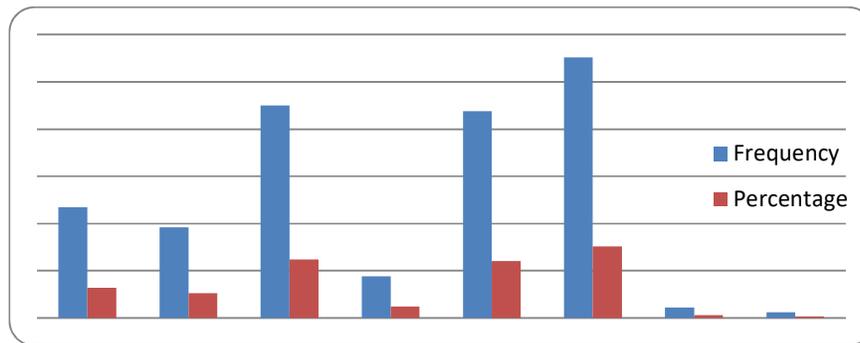
The responses as shown in table 1 shows that the forms of reference and information services utilized by the undergraduates include individual assistance from library staff (75.8%) followed by issuing of reference letters (61.8%) and literature search services (60.2%).Majority of the participants are aware and utilized the different forms of reference and information service which include individual assistance from library staff, issuing of reference letter and literature search services. There is a clear indication that electronic forms of reference services are not adequately utilized and it is in agreement with Madukoma (2015) that electronic reference services are not adequately utilized in Babcock university library and this is not unconnected with lack of awareness of available reference service. The above finding further corroborates the submission Ademola (2012) that most respondents are not aware of reference services being provided in the library. This further agrees with the revelation made by Madu (2010), when he identified information and referral services amongst others as forms of reference services provided in libraries and information centres.However, this findings show that a large number of the participants do not utilized other forms of reference and information services listed in the table.

The implication of this finding is that digital-related reference services are not popular in academic libraries, in which case, most academic libraries are yet to align with the new trends of digital-oriented electronic reference services. More so, users of academic libraries are not fully conversant with various forms of reference services provided in academic libraries.

Table 2: Source of knowledge about available forms of reference and information services

	Source of knowledge	Frequency	Percentage
a.	Through fellow students	252	69.2
b.	Library orientation	123	33.8
c.	Through assistance of library staff	205	56.3
d.	Through library guides/bulletins	54	14.8
e.	Library websites	63	17.3
f.	Use of library course	246	67.6
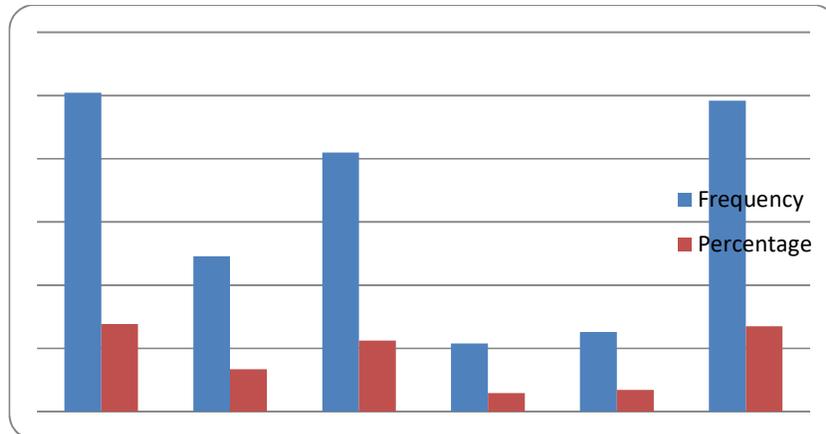
From table 2, it can been seen that majority of the participants had knowledge of the available forms of reference and information services through fellow students (69.2%), use of library course (67.6%) and through assistance of library staff (56.3%). Also, library orientation, library websites and library guides/bulletins were not popular means through which the participants had knowledge of the available forms of reference and information services. The finding therefore indicates that fellow students, use of library courses and assistance of library staff were the predominant source through which the participants became aware of reference and information service available. This is contrary to Zainab and Gama (2012), who attributed the high level of awareness of the existence of the facility among the respondents to faculty orientation programs.

The findings also implied that use of library as a course has been effective in the institutions studied; however there is still need for improvement. Furthermore, the libraries studied have not been maximizing the potentials in using library websites as tool for promoting reference and information services.

Table 3: Factors affecting undergraduate level of awareness and use of references and information services

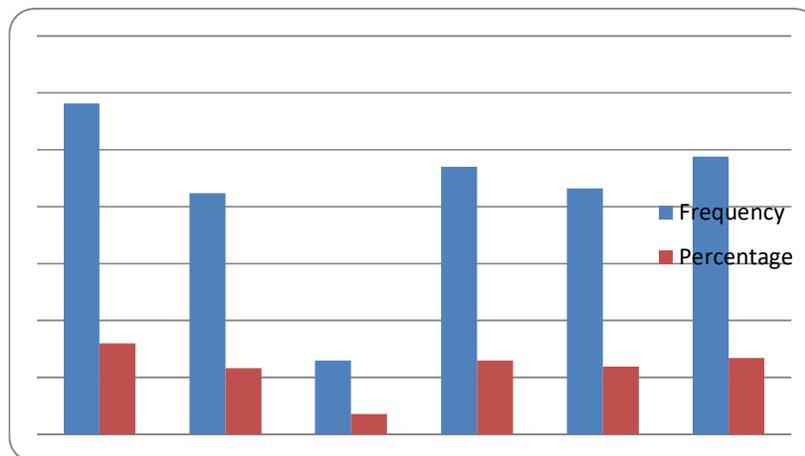|	Factors affecting undergraduate level of awareness and use of references and information services	Frequency	Percentage
a.	Low level of awareness of available reference and information services	291	79.9
b.	Poor communication skills of library staff	212	58.2
c	Incompetency of library staff	65	17.9
d	Inadequacy of reference information sources	235	64.6
e.	Lack of space/location of reference unit	216	59.3
f.	Non-participation of students in orientation programs	244	67

Table 3 shows the factors affecting the level of awareness and use of reference and information services among undergraduates.A total of 291 (79.9%) of the participants thinks low level of awareness of the available reference and information services is a factor, this is followed by non-participation of students in orientation programs (67%), inadequacy of reference information sources (64.6%), lack of space/location of reference unit (59.3%) and poor communication skills of library staff (58.2%).

The findings therefore revealed that low level of awareness of the available reference and information services, non-participation of students in orientation programmes, inadequacy of reference information sources, lack of space/location of reference unit and poor communication skills of library staff are the major factors affecting the undergraduates' level of awareness and use of reference and information services. This finding however, contradicts the submissions of Baro (2009), where he pointed incompetent reference librarians in most Nigerian libraries among others as barriers to effective and efficient reference and information services in Nigerian libraries.

The implication of this finding is that incompetency of library staff is not seen as a challenge to the students, which means that library staff in the studied institutions are competent to some extent. It is quite disheartening that fellow students could admit that non-participation of students in orientation programme is a challenge. It thus implies that libraries should intensified effort to ensure that students participate actively in the orientation programme organized for them.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the findings it could be concluded that most undergraduate are not aware of reference and information services provided in university libraries. The few students aware of references and information services provided had the knowledge of the existence of these services majorly through fellow students, use of library course and through the assistance of library staff. This implies that orientation programme has not been effective or is being, underutilized in the studied institution. More so, the factors identified to affect undergraduate level of awareness of use of reference and

information service should be of concern to stakeholders in the delivery of library and information services to users.

Recommendation

In line with the factors identified to be contributing to the undergraduates' level of awareness and use of reference and information services, the followings are hereby recommended:

1. *Sensitization of the students on the available reference and information services*: reference librarians in collaboration with library management should ensure that intensive sensitization of undergraduates is carried out. This will help to ensure that the students are fully aware of the available forms of reference and information services provided in the various libraries. To this effect, various platforms such as orientation, library tours and guides should be maximally utilized as channels for increasing the undergraduates' level of awareness of available reference and information services. Also, the library website which is part of the institutions portal should also be used as means of sensitizing the students.

2. *Participation of students in orientation programs*: Efforts should be made to ensure that students see participation in orientation programmes as compulsory and a necessity.Policies should be put in place to ensure that students' registration process is deemed incomplete without evidence of participation in orientation programmes. This will help solve the problem of students' non-participation in orientation programmes and also increase their level of awareness about available reference and information services.

3. *Provision of reference information sources*: reference services is an integral component of library services provided in academic libraries, therefore reference librarians should ensure that adequate reference information sources are provided to meet the needs of students.

4. *Provision of space and electronic forms of reference services:* Space has always been a problem in most academic libraries in Nigeria considering the increase in the intake of students in tertiary institution.

However, this issue can be addressed through the expansion of library spaces to accommodate more students; alternative to this is the integration of electronic forms of reference and information services. With e-services provided, students can easily stay in the comfort of their classrooms/hostels and access these services with their devices such as laptops, ipads and smartphones.

Reference

Amadi, E.I., Dike. C.A. & Ossai-Onah, O.V. (2012). Evaluation of students' awareness and use of indexing and abstracting services in Nigerian polytechnic libraries: The case of Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Library. *Jewel Journal of Librarianship*, Vol. 3, 51-59.

Adekunjo, A.O. (2008). The role of interpersonal communication in reference services in selected Nigerian university libraries. *Communicate,* 10 (2), 23 – 34.

Ademodi, D.J. (2004). Students' awareness of reference service in Adekunle Ajasin University library, Akungba, Akoko. *Owena Journal of Library and Information Science*, 1(1), 1 – 12.

Ademola. K. M (2012) the role of reference Librarian in the Academic in Nigeria.The Librarian and information Manager, 5(1) 101-113

Baro, E.E. (2009). Barriers to effective and efficient reference and information services in Nigerian Libraries. *Communicate: Journal of Library and Information Science,* 11 (2), 11-24.

Ezeani, C.N. (2005). Re-engineering reference services to meet ICT demands of PG students: The case of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*, Coal City Libraries*, 2 (1&2), 100 – 112.

Gadanga, A.T. (2013). Reference services in information and communication technology (ICT) era: Current trends and challenges.*Benue Journal of Library, Management and Information Science (BJLMIS)*, 3 (2), 57 – 64.

.

Gama, U.G. (2012). Who is an ideal reference librarian.*Jewel Journal of Librarianship*, vol. 4,9 – 16.

Madu, E.C. (2010). *Reference Services in Libraries and Information Centres in the 21st century.* In: E.C. Madu & Ezeani, C.N. (eds.). Modern Library and Information science for information professionals in Africa. Ibadan: Textlinks Publishers, pp.47-77.

Madukoma, E. (2015). Users' perception of electronic reference services in Babcock University, Ilishan-Remi, Ogun State, Nigeria. Available online:http://library.ifla.org/1302/1/s012-madukoma-en.pdf,

Nnadozie, C.O. & Benson, O.V. (2004). Students' use of reprographic services in selected academic libraries in Nigeria.*Communicate: Journal of Library and Information Science* 16 (2), 101 - 114.

Qobose, E. & Mologanyi, B. (2015). Evaluating virtual reference at University of Botswana Library: a case study of Question point. Available online at:https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/reference-and-information-services/publications/qobose_-_-en.pdf

Quadri, R. F. & Abiodun, O. S. (2017). Availability and use of reference sources and services to federal polytechnic offa students, Kwara State. SCIRE Journal of Information Science and Systems Science. Available online at http://www.scirea.org/journal/ISSS

Shuaibu, U. (2011). Reference and information service as the heart of librarianship: a case study of Gombe State university library.*Jewel Journal of Librarianship,* vol. 3, 18 – 24.

Yusuf, A.B. (2012). Reference services in academic libraries. *Jewel Journal of Librarianship*, vol. 4, pp. 43 – 48.

Zainab, M.I. & Gama, U.G. (2012). Awareness and use of Internet Services of the University Library by Undergraduate female students of Bayero University Kano. *Jewel Journal of Librarianship,* Vol. 4, 78-84