Effectiveness of Reference Services in Providing Students' Information Needs in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Zainab Mohammed Abdullahi & Wavi Pur Mamza

Abstract

The main purpose of establishing library in any academic environment is to serve as the information centre to the community of users. But many have failed to serve this purpose after spending lots of money due to some reason and the other. This survey study is aimed at assessing Effectiveness of Reference Services in Providing Students' Information Needs in Some Selected Tertiary Institutions in Borno State. The main objectives of the study were to : ascertain students' level of' utilization of reference section; availability of reference resources; types of reference services; users' level of satisfaction with information and, problems inhibiting users from being satisfied with references services.. The study used survey method where questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. A total of One hundred and fifty (150) of students was used as population for the study - fifty from College of Agriculture Maiduguri, Ramat Polytechnic Maiduguri and College of Education Maiduguri. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that: there is a high level of utilization of reference section by the students; there are inadequate Reference Librarians where "Book – Materials" constitutes the bulk of the information resources in Libraries; Referral Service, Current Awareness Services and Inter-Library lending constitutes the bulk of reference services provided in Libraries; the mostly use reference resources for "Assignment / Exams" and "Research/Project" purposes. Reference services provided by libraries were "poor" and, Lack of e-resources, irrelevance of the available information resources and lack of qualified reference Librarians constitutes the bulk of the problems inhibiting students' satisfaction with reference resources of Libraries in Tertiary Institutions in Borno State. The study recommends among other things: Effort should be geared toward recruiting more professional Librarians and the provision of current information technologies facilities such computers and internet facilities such that students can be linked to the world of information; the Libraries should organize training for the reference librarians on how best to better serve the community of users.

Key words: reference sources, information needs, reference services, current awareness

Introduction

Reference service is an integral part of any library aimed at educating users on the use of reference materials to help them get factual information at the possible best way and at the right time. The kind and nature of reference services largely depends on the curriculum of the institution's research programme available, teaching method and the objective of the institution (Katz, 1997). Selection of information resources in this area should therefore, be based on scope and definition of materials and provision of essential services such as inter-library lending, formal instruction on how to use library materials, supervision and preparation of abstracts and index, etc. Libraries are no longer passive and archival institutions, but are effective service institutions. The responsibilities of libraries go beyond gathering and organizing books and journals but should include an active role in disseminating information. These services will help in the reference section's procedures as well as the type of materials to select and how best to answer users' queries. Martins (2009) in his article"Societal Transformation and Reference Services in the Academic Library", emphasized on the importance and relevance of reference services in academic libraries. It is true that academic institutions are generally research oriented; they need reference resources for fact findings and research purposes. Such collections should be considerably strong in terms of quality and quantity and, up to date consisting of the most authoritative works in the major schools and knowledge guided by criteria for selection.

The purpose of reference service as a unit in a library is to maximize the utilization of graphic records and these services ranges from a minimal aid to maximum level to library clienteles in answering questions. But basically there are three level of services that user might likely receive from reference unit, that is, conservative level - pointing to where the reference material may be found; moderate level – teaching the user how to use the reference resources and, liberal – providing the resources or even the answer to the user because of the librarian's

passion for work. Aina (2004) stressed that; reference unit is the only unit in the library that establishes direct personal contact between the resources and user in search of answer to immediate questions.

Unlike other library materials, Reference resource/Books are so special in the sense that they contain facts that have been brought together from many sources and are always organized for easy and quick use. Lawal, Kereuwen and Edem (2008) further emphasized that reference books are not read from cover to cover but are used as sources of finding precise information. Considering the nature of these resources, the need for persons/Librarians who have the passion for humanity service is very important if only the patrons/clienteles could make good use of these rich resources It is very unfortunate that some materials lose their bindery gums on the shelves to silver fish and other insects without been consulted. Reference service is a direct contact between the right reader and the right material and at the right time in the right personal way. Mohamed (2012) while quoting Ranganathan pointed out that, establishing such a contact is an effective method of discharging the function of converting the potential user to habitual user. Emphases is placed much on establishing personal contact with individual users as the best way of enabling them have access to the documents to meet their information needs. He also suggested that, for reference service to be up and doing, libraries have to play a key role in providing information services in anticipation of user needs. Such services include various forms of current awareness and selective dissemination of information services aimed at keeping the users abreast of the latest developments in their areas of interest.

The researchers want a situation where collections do not have to be wasted without being fully utilized by the students and staff in addressing their information needs. The need to improve library services for better use by the patrons with the aim of enabling the parent institutions achieves their objectives is the main purpose for this study.

Literature Review

Lots have been said by various researchers like Martins (2009) and Mohamed (2012) on references services and utilization of resources in Academic Libraries and most of which gave declining statements on the users of reference services. The extent of utilization of library and its resources depends on the relevance, comprehensiveness and, scope of the library collection. Martins, (2009) in his argument toward improvement on the utilization of reference services noted that, there should be provision of computer and internet services and, a periodic formal interaction with the users. Patitungkho and Deshpande (2011) study on "Pattern of Students' Use of College Library" shows that, almost 60% of the students do not borrow resources at all while 20% of the users only enter to read notes. To also reverse the dwindling state of reference services, Academic reference librarians must transform their approach (Martins, 2009) if only reference resources and services would be effective and efficient.

Availability of reference resources such as computer, internet, sound and film projectors, CD-ROM, microfilm and, photocopying machines have to be made available only if users' satisfaction could be achieved (Amen,2007). Academic librarian should consider teachers' recommended titles for those needed by students for special objectives and reference purpose. Poor quality of resources have negative effects on reference service to users and most Academic libraries within this region have limited access to modern Information and Communication Technology Facilities and this makes it difficult for teachers and students to keep abreast with current developments in their academic lines. The existing interest of the reference librarians is important in relation to the quality of service their libraries render to the users. Personal attention is at the very heart of the reference desk, and the goal of the information literacy is to create confidence in information consumers (Unomah, 2006). It is equally important to adequately stock library with relevant resources and all possible means

through which access to library resources will be guaranteed. Technological developments have affected not only the formats and sources of the information, but has also affected how and where to provide library services. Libraries and their resources have partially moved to the virtual world of the Internet. As a result, library users can access the resources from outside the physical library, (Mohamed, 2012).

It is obvious that, there is the need to induce high staff morale, reasonable workplace and, user friendly environment as a matter of urgency to enhance quality reference services without which there will be no proper utilization of the library resources. This is because, decrease in utilization of reference resources was as a result of non-availability of the required books, library catalogue and, out-dated materials. Amen (2007) assert that, library patrons often have needs that books will not meet noting that information and referral services help people obtain relevant and accurate information to meet specific needs. Libraries should provide user education as this will equip users with enough knowledge in the use of library resources effectively and efficiently (Aina, 2004). Odeinde, (2007) equally noted that, selective dissemination of information services motivate researchers' minds and knowledge skills toward providing quality and current awareness literature.

Darman (2012) in his study on "Needs for Improved School Libraries in Northern States of Nigeria" lamented that, one problem area that has not been adequately addressed is lack of standard library in the Northern States. Problems associated with this include inadequate indigenous literature, inexperience and untrained library staff and, lack of incorporation of library science in the school curriculum. Commenting on inadequate resources in our library, Usman (2005) stated that, "Where libraries are established, they are not supplied with books, not even daily newspapers are seen there". Inadequacy or non-availability of resources deter both staff and students from using reference resources leading to frustration of information seekers. The issue of non-availability of resources have been confirmed in the Nigerian

Academic libraries by Ugah (2008) who uncovered that, availability and accessibility of information resources in libraries have relationship between the availability of information resources and the use of library resources. While considering selection of books for libraries, Aguolu (1983) maintained that "consideration should be given to book budgets because the amount of money available will determine the quantities of resources the library can afford.

Users' satisfaction can only be achieved when there is an innate expression of contentment by the library users or patrons especially when their needs are adequately met by the library's offerings (Applegate, 1997). The level at which library users' needs are fulfilled or met with the available services and information resources of a given library is termed as users' satisfaction (Haruna, 2002). It is regarded as a function of availability, accessibility and, relevance. It is not enough that the information resources are made available to the users in the library, but the resources should be relevant to the users' needs at that particular time.

Unomah, (2006) study on "Students' Utilization of Academic Libraries in Nigeria" revealed that, a good number of students do not use library resources for various reasons like lack of library orientation, lack of faculty cooperation and lack of conducive library atmosphere. Some libraries only have one professional staff while some have none at all and without this, resources of such libraries cannot be built and effectively utilized. One of the general phenomena affecting libraries is under-funding and this is inhibiting libraries to cater for their teeming users. This is also not unconnected with the fact that the society is changing technologically and any library that does not move along with such changes will risk the needs of its users. Odeinde (2006) also noted that some of the scientific resources are being published in foreign languages and such information are lost to a large percentage of users who have no access to translations.

Based on the above reasons, the researcher was prompted to carry out this study to be able to uncover some of the problems that might be responsible for underutilization of reference services by students in Tertiary Institutions of Borno State with the aim of proffering solution to the problems.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research work was based on the following objectives:

i. To determine the level of utilization of reference section in libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

ii. To determine the types of reference resources (***Human and Material***) available in libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

iii. To determine the available types of reference services offered by libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

iv. To determine the purpose for using reference resources and services by the students in Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

v. To determine the students' level of satisfaction with reference resources and services in libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

vi. To determine problems militating against students' satisfaction with reference resources in libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State

Research Questions

i. What is the level of utilization of reference section by the students of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State?

ii.   What are the types of reference resources (***Human and Material***) provided by the libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State?

iii. What are the types of reference services offered by the libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State?

iv. What do the students of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State use reference resources and services for?

v.   Are the students of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State satisfied with the reference resources and services provided by their libraries?

vi. What are the problems militating against students' satisfaction with reference resources and services in Tertiary Institutions in Borno State?

Research Method

Survey design was chosen because the purpose of the study was to solicit for attitudes of students toward reference section usage. This was based upon the recommendation of Oche (2006) who stated that survey method is "concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions. A non proportional population of one hundred and fifty (150) students of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State was used for the study. That is, fifty students each from College of Agriculture Maiduguri, Ramat Polytechnic Maiduguri and College of Education Maiduguri. Structured questionnaire to clearly identify measurable variables associated with the research questions stated above was used as instrument for data collection while data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistic.

Findings and Discussion

Out of the One Hundred and Fifty (150) copies of questionnaire administered, 135 (90%) were retrieved and accurately filled and was used for the analysis. However, College of Agriculture Maiduguri had the highest response rate of 48 (36%) followed by Ramat

Polytechnic Maiduguri with 46 (34) while College of Education Maiduguri had 41 (30%) respectively. Furthermore, the finding equally revealed that, bulk of the students were males with 89 (70%) while 46(30%) of the respondents were females.

Table 1: Students' Level of Utilization of Reference Section of Libraries in Tertiary Institutions of Borno State.

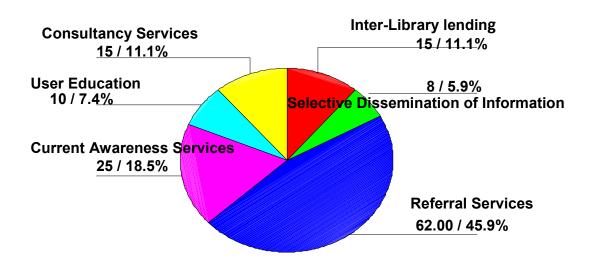| RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
How often do you go to the library?		
Daily	90	(66.7%)
Weekly	30	(22.2%)
Occasionally	15	(11.1%)
Total	**135**	**(100.0%)**
Do you make use of the reference section?		
Yes	98	(72.6%)
No	37	(27.4%)
Total	**135**	**(100.0%)**

The finding revealed that 90 (66.7%) of the respondents use library on "daily" bases, 30 (22.2%) went for "weekly" while 15 (11.1%) use the library "occasionally". It was equally revealed that majority of the students 98(72.6%) acknowledged using reference section, while 37(27.4%) indicated that they do not use reference section at all. It is therefore clear that, bulk of the students make use of the reference sections of their respective libraries.

Table2: Available types of Reference Information Resources (*Human and Material*) in Libraries in Tertiary Institutions of Borno State.

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
What are the main information resources in your reference unit?		
Book-materials	67	(50.0%)
E-Resources	36	(27.0%)
Both	32	(23.0%
Total	**135**	**(100.%)**
Do you have professional reference librarian in your library?		
Yes	52	(39.0%)
No	83	(61.0%)
Total	**135**	**(100%)**

With regard to the types of information resources available in the reference sections of the libraries, majority of the students 67(50.0%) opened up that "Book-materials" are the available information resources in their libraries, 36(27.0%) were of the opinion that "E-Resources" were the available information resources in the reference section of the libraries while 32(23.0%) were of the view that both "Book and E-Resources" were available in the reference section of their libraries. It was also revealed that majority of the respondents 83(61.0%) indicated that they do not have professional librarians as against 54(39.0%) who said they have professional librarians. Based on these finding, it is concluded that "book – materials" constitute the bulk of the information resources in libraries of tertiary institutions in Borno state.
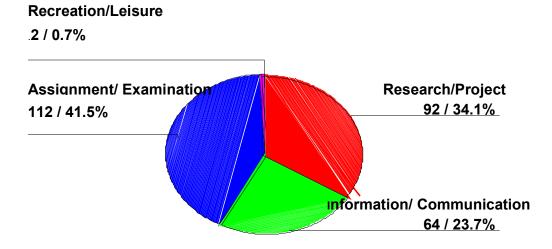
Table 3: Types of Reference Services Available in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State

With regard to the services provided by the reference units of the libraries, bulk of the respondents 62(46.0%) indicated "Referral service". This was followed by "Current Awareness Services" while 25(18.5%) of the respondents indicated "Inter-library loan".
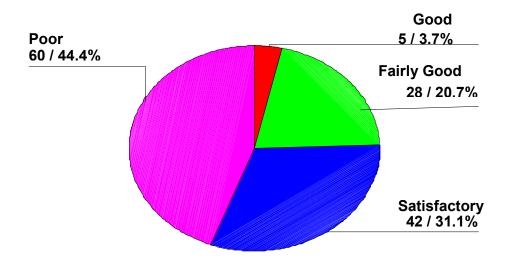
Furthermore, "Consultancy services" attracted 15(11.1%) of the respondents while the least scores came from" Selective Dissemination of Information" and "User Education" with 8(5.9%) and 10(7.4%) respectively. This concludes that, the quality of services provided by the libraries were very poor.

Table 4: Purpose for Using Reference Resources and Services in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions of Borno State.
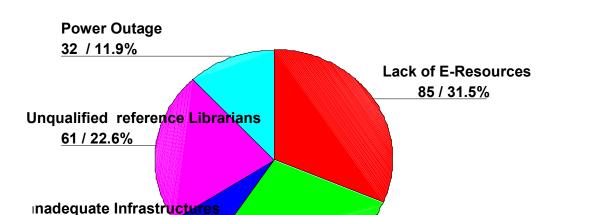

With regard to the purpose for using reference resources by the students of tertiary institutions in Borno State, majority of the respondents 112(41.5%) indicated using the available reference resources for "Assignment/Examination" followed by "Research/project" with 92(34.1%) where "Information/Communication" and "Recreation/leisure" had 64(23.7%) and 2(0.7%) respectively. It is therefore concluded that, the students in tertiary institutions of Borno State use reference resources for "Assignment / Exams" and "Research/Project" purposes.

Table 5: Students' Level of Satisfaction with Reference Resources and Services in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

Although there are various services offered in form of references services by the Libraries in Tertiary Institutions of Borno State, it was regrettably revealed that most of the respondents 60(44.4%) indicated that, the services offered were "poor" while 42(31.1%) of the respondents shared the view that the services were "satisfactory". Furthermore, 28(20.7%) indicated that the services were "fairly Good" while only 5(3.7%) indicated that the services were "good". This concludes that, the quality of services provided to the users in relation to their information needs were "poor".

Table 6: Problems Inhibiting Non-Satisfaction with the Reference Resources and Services in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions of Borno State.

Power Outage
32 / 11.9%

Lack of E-Resources
85 / 31.5%

Unqualified reference Librarians
61 / 22.6%

Inadequate Infrastructures
1 8 / 6.7%

Irrelevant Information Resources
74 / 27.3%

In line with the students' response to the quality of services offered by the reference sections of the libraries, they were asked to indicate some of the problems responsible for the references services' inability to provide their information needs. The bulk of the respondents 85(31.5%) went for "Lack of E-Resources" as the problem, 4(27.3%) of the respondents indicated "Irrelevant Information resources". "Unqualified Reference librarians" attracted 61(22.6%), "Power Outage" attracted 32(11.9%) and "Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities" attracted 18(6.7%) respectively. This concludes that lack of e-resources, irrelevance of the available information resources and lack of qualified reference Librarians constitute the bulk of problems inhibiting students' satisfaction with reference resources of libraries in tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

Based on the study carried out, the following were drawn as summary of major findings:

®   There is a high level of utilization of reference section by the students of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State;

®   Books constitutes the bulk of the information resources used in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State with a very few reference librarians;

®   Referral Service, Current Awareness Services and Inter-Library lending constitute the bulk of reference services provided in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State;

®   Students in tertiary institutions of Borno state mostly use reference resources for "Assignment / Exams" and "Research/Project" purposes.

®   The quality of reference services provided by libraries in Tertiary Institutions of Borno State in relation to users' information needs were "poor".

®   Lack of e-resources, irrelevant information resources and, lack of qualified reference Librarians constitutes the bulk of the problems inhibiting students' satisfaction with reference services in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of establishing any information centre is to provide the most relevant information resources to the community of users and Tertiary Institutions in Borno State are not exception. There is also a clear expression of the students' desire to utilize reference resources and services in Libraries of Tertiary Institutions in Borno State. In line with Mohamed (2012) view, for reference service to be up to doing, libraries have to play a key role in providing current and adequate information resources in anticipation of the user needs. It is true that the students have shown effort toward making efficient use of the library's reference resources and services for research, assignment and, recreation purposes. But it was unfortunate that both the human and material resources were inadequate which led to the provision of poor services to satisfy the information needs of the students. Regrettably, problems ranging from Lack of E-resources, Irrelevance of the available materials,

Unqualified Reference Librarians and power outage were responsible for the libraries' inability to satisfy the information needs of their users and calls for proper redress.

Based on the above unveiled problems, the following recommendations are worthy of consideration:

® There is the need for better understanding between both government and the managements of the Tertiary Institutions to find a means of maintaining a high patronage of the reference section by the students;

® Effort should be geared toward recruiting more professional Librarians and the provision of current information technologies facilities such as computers and internet facilities such that students can be linked to the world of information ;

® The Libraries should organize training for the reference librarians on how best to   provide better services to the community of users ;

® Students should be encouraged to use reference resources for other purposes such as Information and Communication purposes since it has the capacity of providing current research findings and current dailies.

® There is the urgent need for cooperation between the managements of the tertiary Institutions and the librarians to see how best to satisfy the information needs of the community of users and,

® The need for improved power supply must be considered as a matter of urgency because even if the resources and services are there, students may not have enough time to make use of them since closing hours have always been geared towards 6:00pm. Selection of information resources should be carefully done to ensure that all acquired resources will be useful to the users in addition to providing adequate infrastructures.

References

Aguolu,C,. C. and Aguolu, I. E. (2002). *Library and Information Management   in Nigeria.* Maiduguri; Ed-Linform Service.

Aina, L. O. (2004). *Library and Information Science text for Africa.* Ibadan; Third World Information Service, Ltd. 365p.

Darman, M. (2012). *Need for Improved School Libraries in Northern State. Technical Education Today.* 10(3) 110-122.

Haruna, I. (2002). Users' satisfaction with information resources and services in medical libraries of Jos and Maiduguri. *Borno library and information science journal* 1(1).85

Katz, W. A. (1997). *Introduction t Reference Works vol. 1 Basic information Source.* 7th ed. New York; Mc graw-Hill Unlimited. 617p.

Martins, P. N. (2009). Societal transformation and reference services in the Academic library: theological foundation for re- envisioning reference. *library philosophy and practice.* at http//lib.un.edu.2000/lpp/martins.html.

Mutula, S. M. (2001). Financing public universities in East and South Africa: implications for information services. *Managing library finances.* 14(3) 116-132.

Mohamed, S. (2012). Importance of Reference Services for Users. *African Journal of Library. Archive and Information Science* Vol. 18. No. 1.

Oche, E. S. (2006). *Fundamentals of educational research method and statistics.* Kaduna, Nigeria Delray press.

Odeinde, I. O. (2006). Scientific and technical information needs and services. *Nigerian Libraries.* 2 (1 &2).1-7.

Patitungkho, K. and Deshpande, N. J. (2011). The Information Seeking Behavior of Faculty Members of Rajabhat University in Bangkok. 2 (4). 29 – 35.

Troll, D.A. (2012). How and Why Libraries are Changing: What We Know and What We Need to Know. *Libraries and the Academy, 2* (1), 97-121

Ugah, A. D. (2008). Availability and accessibility of information services and the use of library services in Michael Opara University of Agriculture, Umudike: *Library philosophy and practice.* Accessed on 3/3/2011 on http//www:ifla.org/iv/ifla66/papers 012-114e.html.

Unomah, J. (2006). Unavailability Syndrome of Academic libraries: A case study of BUK. *MLS Unpublished.* Kano: Bayero University.

Usman, I. (2005). NANS Seeks Improvement in Education Standard. *Daily Trust.* June.6.

Lawal, O. N: Kereuwen, E. And Edem, M. (2008). *Library use and Information Literacy hand book.* Calabar: Glad tidings Press ltd.

Zainab Mohammed Abdullahi and **Wavi Pur Mamza** are lecturers in the Department of Library and Information Science, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola.