# SOFT SKILLS AND INFORMATION LITERACY AS DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY REFERENCE SERVICE DELIVERY AMONG SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN FCT, ABUJA

**[1]AKANYA, JOHN OKWUDILI CLN [2]JAJA, C. A.**
*[1]Assistant Chief Librarian*
*[1,2]Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) Sheda, Abuja*
**Odiak2006@yahoo.com**
*[2]Chief Librarian*

**Abstract**
*The paper assessed the influence of Soft skills and Information literacy skill of school librarians as determinants of quality Reference service delivery in secondary schools of FCT, Abuja. The population of the study comprised school librarians in FCT while the sample comprised 20 school librarians in Gwagwalada and kwali Area Councils of FCT. 20 school librarians were purposively selected from 20 schools that have school libraries and librarians. The schools comprise 5 private and 5 government schools from each area council surveyed. Data for the study was gathered with a research instrument developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by two experts from the fields of librarianship and measurement and evaluation and trial tested with four librarians that were not part of the original study. The test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83 which was considered okay for the study. Data collected from the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentages and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (r) Findings revealed reveal awareness and acquisition of soft skills and information literacy by school librarians, availability of enough hard copies but low e-resources and a positive significant relationship between soft skill, information literacy and quality reference service. It is recommended that IL and SK should be included in school library curriculum, acquisition of online resources, adequate budgetary allocation among others.*

## Introduction

Reference service is a personal assistance eagerly given to library users in pursuit of information by a librarian in charge of the reference section. These Librarians are referred to as Reference librarians. School libraries are not only willing to give help to individual readers' they consider the assistant as important aspect of their responsibility to the users and justification for their training. The provision of reference services in a school library or school library media centre should be regarded as and recognised as a serious aspect of library service which seeks to satisfy the hunger of the user for information. This service carried out by reference school librarians who possess professional competencies in addition to other skills makes use of available information resources to meet the critical needs of the users.

Reference service is as old as librarianship. As commerce is the life blood of any given nation, reference service is the heart on which the entire school library system rest and depends upon in rendering its services. The responsibilities of libraries go beyond gathering and organizing books and journals to include an active role in disseminating

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information. One way this can be achieved is through effective reference service Nurul, (2012). According to Iroagunanachi and Ilogho, (2012) the use of reference and information resources is very beneficial to achieve student's educational outcomes. This is because they contain information that is always authentic, accurate and more reliable. However, reference service delivery can only be effective when the school librarian is equipped with soft and information literacy skills that will enable him or her perform better.

A reference work or resource is a compendium of information, usually of a specific type, compiled in a book for ease of reference. That is to say that the information is intended to be quickly found when needed. Reference works are usually referred to for particular pieces of information, rather than read from beginning to end. Akpe and Murtala (2015) listed typical reference books to include dictionaries, encyclopaedias and compendia. Other reference sources are available in electronic form and can be obtained as software packages or online through the internet. Nurul, (2012) opined that a tremendous growth and continuous development of technology has decreased the number of user using traditional library services as well as reference services. Technology development has affected not only the formats and sources of information, but also how and where to provide library services.

Soft skill is a term often associated with a person's intelligent quotient (IQ), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationship with other people. Shaheen and Anton, (2012) referred to soft skills as personality, attributes, qualities and personal behavior of individuals. Soft skills complement hard skills which are the occupational requirements of a job and many other activities. However, there is need for the school librarian to have a good grasp of information literacy skill in addition to soft skills before delivering quality reference services.

Information literacy encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns, needs and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organise and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand. It is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society and is part of the basic human right of life- long learning. It involves knowing when and why you need information, where to find it and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner. According to Abiola and Elaturoti, (2012) information literacy skills are the skills one will need throughout one's life and the need to be inculcated in human beings right from childhood; primary through secondary school up to the University days and even beyond. Okiki (2012) considered information literacy as an important element in educational and professional settings and in particular, the academic environment.

Notwithstanding the appreciable high number of published works on reference services and sources such as Madu, (2010) on reference services in libraries and information centres in the 21st century, Adeyi, Odubanjo-Francis and Adelowo (2018) on student's perception of reference services as determinants of library use in colleges

of Agriculture in Oyo state, Nigeria and  Malanga, (2015) on factors hampering the provision of references and information services in Malawian school libraries, no effort was made to unravel  Soft skill and Information literacy skills  as determinants of quality reference service delivery among school librarians in  secondary schools of FCT, Abuja.  Based on the above revelation, this topic was chosen to unravel the role that soft skill and information literacy skills acquisition play in rendering of quality reference services to the users of the school library by the Reference librarian.

## Statement of Problem

School librarians are expected to deliver quality reference services based on their professional competencies to users. However, provision of this service seems inadequate in FCT school libraries.  Efforts have been made by stakeholders such as schools, Nigerian Library association (NLA), Nigerian school library association (NSLA) etc in organising workshops, seminars and in house service training to improve the quality of reference services.  Despite all efforts, the problem has persisted without any identifiable solution.  Based on the persistence, school librarians have failed to deliver reference services appropriately and at the right time.   This research is embarked upon to find a lasting solution to the problem.  It is on this premise that this study investigated soft skills and information literacy as determinants of quality reference service delivery among school librarians in FCT, Abuja.

## Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study addressed the following:

1. Determine the level of Soft skills possessed by school librarians towards quality reference service delivery
2. Determine the level of information literacy skills possessed by school librarians for effective reference service delivery.
3. Identify the available reference resources in FCT school libraries
4. Identify the available reference services that are offered by school librarians in FCT schools.
5. Establish the nature of the relationship between soft skills and quality reference service delivery in FCT secondary schools.
6. Establish the nature of the relationship between information literacy and quality reference service

## Research questions

1. What is the level of soft skills possessed by school librarians in rendering quality reference service to users?
2. What is the level of information literacy skills possessed by school librarians for quality reference service delivery to users?
3. What are the reference resources that are available in your library for?
4. What are the reference services that you render to your library users towards satisfaction of their information needs?
5. What is the nature of relationship between soft skills and reference service of the school librarian?

6. What is the nature of the relationship between IL skills and quality reference service of the school librarian?

The findings of the study would be beneficial to stakeholders in the education industry such as school librarians who need the two skills to be able to function effectively in rendering quality reference services. Parents would be able to realise the importance of inculcating good behaviours in their children while teachers/head teachers would be able to teach information literacy skills to the students. Administrators should be able to realise the importance of employing a trained school librarian with a combination of professional competency and other skills such as soft and information literacy skills.

**Literature Review**

Reference service is the totality or the culmination of all library activities aimed at facilitating the use of library and its resources. It can be described as the services provided by library to its users so as to meet the information needs of its community. Akpe and Murtala (2015) defined reference services as the personal assistance given by librarians to individual readers in pursuit of information. Adeyi, Odubanjo and Adelowo (2018) opined that reference service is an important personalized service and a one to one service involving user and the reference librarian physically interacting in the library. In the views of Malanga (2015) reference and information service is defined as a personal assistance provided to library users seeking information. This comprise information services that involve either finding information on behalf of users, assisting users in finding information, offering instruction in the use of library resources and services, and user guidance in which users are guided to the most appropriate sources.

Quality reference service is defined as user satisfaction with reference service which is driven by library staff behaviour, communication skills, user friendly environment and suitable levels of staff morale and workload Awodoyin & Aina (2018). The services provided by reference librarians can be said to of high quality when users are satisfied with their information needs are and when reference librarians have the requisite skills and competence. This includes the ability to communicate to users and the convenience of physical facilities of the reference environment.

Awodoyin & Aina 2018) opined that quality reference service is measured based on users satisfaction with the services provided, availability of reference tools relevant in the users field of interest, availability of both traditional and electronic services tailored to capture and meet users needs; library environment and by extension reference environment. Other variables are reference queries answered, reference query response time, assistance from school librarian, communication skills of the user and the reference school librarian.

Awodoyin & Aina (2018) carried out a study on the analysis of quality reference service delivery as perceived by undergraduates in selected University libraries in south west,

Nigeria using descriptive survey design and a population of 637 users and 16 reference librarians.   From their findings, reference service quality was perceived by undergraduates as low in terms of comfortable and inviting location, latest resources for easy access to needed information, giving users individual attention and courteous staff.

In a survey by Destiya & Tamara (2017) in which they studied how reference service transformation is beneficial for students in learning process at school using qualitative approach with indebt interview and non-participant observation.  Findings revealed that students would rather search information online from their gadgets than visit the library to research their assignments.

For quality reference service, the school librarian should possess relevant soft skills that will enable him interact effectively with users.

Most employers are likely to hire, retain and promote persons who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, be self directed with effective communication skills, Positive attitude and willingness to work.  Employers usually want to see a fine blend of competencies in their staff and in addition to disciplined based knowledge and skills.

Soft skills are behavioral competencies and also known as interpersonal skills, or people skills. Wats, and Wats,  (2009) identified the following as soft skills that should be included in the curricula to complement technical or hard skills: communication skill; conflict resolution and negotiation; personal effectiveness; creative problem solving; strategic thinking; team building etc.

Kanu (2016) undertook a study on the assessment of business studies curriculum for soft skills content: Implications for teaching and learning.  The researcher adopted the post facto research design for the study.   The result of the study showed that although the identified soft skills were in the existing business studies curriculum, they are sparingly represented.

Assessing soft skills development in library and information science curriculum content: A  study of University of Abuja, Akanya (2015) adopted a combination of survey research design and case study.   Findings from the study revealed that the university does not offer enough soft skill related courses in the department.  Only basic information skill, communication, peace and conflict resolution were offered as soft skill courses.

Information literacy encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns, needs and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organise and effectively create, use and communicate such information to address issues or problems at hand.  It is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society and is part of the basic human right of life- long learning.  It involves knowing when and why you need information, where to find it and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner.  According to Abiola and Elaturoti (2012), information literacy skills are the skills one will need throughout one's life and the need to be inculcated in human beings

right from childhood; primary through secondary school up to the University days and even beyond. They went further to say that students must be information literate in order to reap the benefits of the global society.

Durodolu & Adekanye (2017) in their study, examined perception of information literacy skills among the librarians using University of Lagos library as a case study. Post positivist research paradigm in which quantitative and qualitative research method were used. Librarians and library officers were used as the target population. Findings from the study established that librarians and library officers possessed advanced level of perception of the need for information literacy and use library resources effectively. Surveying IL programmes in technical University (TU) libraries in Ghana, Baffor Kwabena & Beatrice (2017) revealed that majority of the examined libraries included IL classes as part of their IL programmes and that lack of integration of IL into school curriculum of tertiary institutions as a barrier to effective IL programmes

This study is based on the James Wyner (1930) Liberal theory. Liberal theory focuses on maximum help. According to this theory, reference librarians must apply any approaches to retrieve the information that the users need. In fact, reference librarians carry out the whole job and reference work takes a long time in many cases.

**Methodology**
Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consist of all school librarians in both private and public secondary schools of FCT while the accessible population comprise ten private and ten (10) public secondary schools in Gwagwalada and Kwali Area Councils of FCT, Abuja. The sample size for this study consist of 20 school librarians that are purposely selected from the 20 private and public secondary schools being surveyed. The instrument used for data collection for this study is a structured questionnaire titled: "School librarian's acquisition of Soft Skills and Information literacy for Quality Reference Service Delivery" (SLASSILQRSD). The questionnaire consist two sections A and B. Section A solicit for personal data on the respondents such as age, subject taught, Educational qualifications etc while section B consist of items soliciting for information on respondents. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and validated by two experts in school librarianship from University of Abuja and one measurement/ evaluation expert from Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) Sheda Abuja. For reliability, the instrument was trial tested in three schools that were not part of the original study. For the collection of the required data for the study, the researcher would visit the selected schools and administer the questionnaires with the assistance of school librarians and teachers. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages to address research questions 1-4 and inferential statistics to address research questions 5-6- Pearson's product moment coefficient correlation (r) PPMC

**Results/discussions of findings**

**Research question** 1: What are the levels of soft skills possessed by school librarians in rendering quality reference service

**Table 1**

| S/N | VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|-----|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Highly skilled | 20 | 100 |
| 2. | Moderately skilled | Nil | Nil |
| 3. | Poorly skilled | Nil | Nil |
| 4. | Not skilled | Nil | Nil |
| | Total | 20 | 100 |

Table one above indicated responses on the level of soft skill possessed by school librarians for effective reference service delivery. All the respondents indicated that they are highly skilled in the possessing soft skill in the rendering of reference services. None indicated moderately, poorly and not skilled. Findings from the study indicated that all the school librarians surveyed possessed relevant soft skills that enables them to interact positively with users such as communication, creative, critical thinking etc. This supports the views of Wats and Wats 2009) who identified soft skills that should be included in the curricula to include communication skills, conflict resolution, negotiation, personal effectiveness, creativity etc. The finding is however in contrast with the findings of Akanya (2015) that revealed only few soft skill courses that are taught at the University of Abuja. With few soft skill courses taught at LIS undergraduate level, school librarians would not be properly equipped for the task ahead.

**Research question 2:** What is the level of information literacy skills possessed by school librarians for quality reference services?

**Table 2**

| S/N | VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|-----|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Highly skilled | 15 | 75 |
| 2. | Moderately skilled | 5 | 25 |
| 3. | Poorly skilled | Nil | Nil |
| 4. | Not skilled | Nil | Nil |
| | Total | 20 | 100 |

Above table indicated the level of information literacy skill possessed by school librarians. 15 respondents translating to 75% indicated that they are highly skilled in the possession of information literacy skill that enables them need, identify, locate and evaluate information. Only 5 respondents indicated that they are moderately skilled. There were no responses for poorly and not skilled. Findings from the study revealed that the school librarians possessed adequate information literacy skill that is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society and part of basic human right of lifelong learning. The above findings is in agreement with that of Durodolu & Adekanye (2017) that revealed that librarians and library officers possessed advanced level of perception of the need for information literacy skill and use library resources effectively. The success of the school librarians could be that IL is included in the programme of their school in accordance with the findings of Baffor & Beatrice (2017) that majority of the surveyed libraries included IL classes as part of their IL programmes. According to them, lack of integration of IL into school curriculum of tertiary institutions as a barrier to effective IL programme.

**Research question** 3: What are the reference resources that are available in your library?

**Table 3**

| .S/N | VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Strongly agreed | 10 | 50 |
| 2. | Agreed | 5 | 25 |
| 3. | Disagree | Nil | Nil |
| 4. | Strongly disagree | 5 | 25 |
| | Total | 20 | 100 |

Table 3 above indicated the responses of surveyed school librarians on the availability of reference sources in their libraries. 10 of the respondents translating to 50% indicated that they strongly agreed that they have enough reference sources such as dictionaries, encyclopaedia yearbook, maps, bibliography, gazettes and almanac. 5 respondents translating to 25% agreed that the reference resources exist in their libraries while 5 totally disagree. There was no response for disagree. Findings revealed the availability of enough reference resources as school librarians use their skills and information resources to meet the critical needs of the users. In the views of Iroagunachi & Ilogho (2012) the use of reference and information resources is very beneficial to achieve student's educational outcomes because they contain information that is always authentic, accurate and reliable. Unfortunately, there was no indication of the availability of online reference sources as librarianship is fast moving beyond the four walls of the school library. Nurul (2012) opined that a tremendous growth and

continuous development of technology has increased the number of users of traditional library services as well as reference services. Technology development has affected not only the formats and sources of information, but how and where to provide library services.

**Research question 4:** What are the reference services that you render to library users towards satisfaction of their information needs?

**Table 4**

| S/N | VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Strongly agree | 10 | 50 |
| 2. | Agree | 10 | 50 |
| 3. | Disagree | Nil | Nil |
| 4. | Strongly disagree | Nil | Nil |
| | Total | 20 | 100 |

Table 4 above indicated the rate of the reference services offered by school librarians towards meeting the information needs of their users. 10 of the respondents translating to 50% indicated the availability of reference services such as ready reference questions, information and referral, inter library loan, document delivery etc. The other 50% of the respondents agreed on the availability of reference services. Findings revealed the availability of traditional reference services as school librarians are not only willing to give help to individual's user's they consider the assistance as important aspect of their responsibility to users and justification for their training. However, the disagreed on the availability of online reference services. The findings are in contrast with that of Awodoyin & Aina (2018) that revealed that reference service quality was perceived by undergraduate as low in terms of comfortable and inviting location, latest resources, individual attention and courteous staff. Destiya & Tamara (2017) findings is in collaborated with the above findings when they revealed that students would rather search information online from their gadgets than visit the library for research and assignment.

**Research question 5:**

| VARIABLES | Soft skill | Quality ref. Service |
|---|---|---|
| Soft skill | 1.000 | |
| Quality reference service | .135 | 1.000 |

Table 5 revealed a low but positive significant relationship (r=0.135) between soft skills and quality reference service of the school librarian. Findings revealed that school

librarians need personal and interpersonal skills such as soft skill in order to deliver quality reference service to their users. The findings agreed with the views of Shahen and Anton (2012) that librarians need soft skills before quality reference service delivery. Awodoyin & Aina (2018) were equally of the opinion that quality reference service should be driven by library staff behaviour, communication skills and suitable levels of staff morale.

**Research question 6:**

| VARIABLES | INFOR. LITERACY | QUALITY REF SERVICE |
|---|---|---|
| Infor. literacy | 1.0 | |
| Quality reference service | 0.87 | 1.00 |

Table 6 above presented a very weak but positive significant relationship between information literacy skill and the quality reference services of the school librarian. Findings from the study revealed that for school librarians to deliver quality reference service in school libraries, there is need to develop their information literacy skills that would enable them to identify, search, locate and evaluate information for the benefit of their numerous users. According to Durodolu Adekanye 2017) librarians and library officers possessed advanced level of perception of the need for IL and use of library resources effectively.

**Conclusion**
Quality reference service by school librarians is at the heart of effective library service delivery and information services in general. However, this essential and critical role of the school library and the school librarian cannot be performed effectively without the acquisition of soft skills and information literacy. This is because of the positive significant relationship between soft skill, information literacy and quality reference service delivery. In addition, enough traditional resource existed with few e-resources.

**Recommendation**
The following recommendations were proffered based on the findings of the study:
1. Infusion of soft skill and information literacy skills in to LIS curriculum
2. Acquisition of online resources for the school library
3. Introduction of online reference services by the school librarians and FCT secondary schools.
4. More budgetary allocations to school libraries by government and the school authorities.

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