AVAILABILITY OF REFERENCE SOURCES AND SERVICES IN SELECTED ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract
This study examined the reference sources and services in some selected academic institution libraries in Niger State. To achieve the set objectives of the study, two research questions were raised: what is the extent of availability of reference sources in academic libraries in Niger State, what is the extent of availability of reference services in academic libraries in Niger State. Descriptive survey design method was adopted for the study. A random sampling technique was used in selecting respondents for each institution library. Questionnaire was the instrument used for the collection of data. The data collected were analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The results were presented using frequency counts, percentages and mean scores. The findings revealed that in all the academic libraries surveyed, the provision of the major reference sources like encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources and fact sources were moderately available and high, but that of geographical sources and literature search tools were low. Similarly, the provision of the major reference information services like library orientation, directional, information on research, information on specific topic, question and answer services were high, however indexing and abstracting, inter-library loan and study guide information services were not available. The researchers therefore recommended that the procurement of current and up to date reference sources as well as provision of professional services to the users to enhance and sustain high level reference services.

Keywords: *Academic, Availability, Libraries, References, Selected, Services, Sources, Niger State, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Libraries are considered as a nucleus of academic in all academic institutions where librarians of these institutions serve a variety of users, such as students, faculty, staff and administrators with diverse information needs (Neeru and Ranjana, 2007). One of the important functions of a library is the use of its resources such as reference and information sources to provide information to users on request. The request could range from the specific to general information. Whatever form of information desired by a user can be made available if the library has adequate reference and information sources in its collection (opoku, 2011).

The provision of reference services in academic library should be regarded and recognized as a serious aspect of library services which seeks to satisfy the hunger of user, .and it is the root of librarianship. Based on the circumstances, Nwalo (2010) averred that services offered by this section includes answering reference queries, user education, compilation of reading lists, bibliographies, indexing and abstracting, inter library loan services, and current awareness services. More so, reference services are grouped into two – direct and indirect reference services. In fact, the reference service section of every library is of paramount importance to the library just as the library is of paramount importance to every higher institution of learning. Reference service as a distinct function of the library began in the late nineteenth century largely in response to the growing prevalence of publicly funded libraries (both public and academic) seeking to serve relatively inexperienced and unskilled readers and scholars. There was a problem – they did not know how to use the library. Thus a reference service was developed to solved the problem (Das, Gurey & Saha, 2010). Reference services has been defined by librarians as the personal assistance given by librarians to individual readers who are seeking for information This involves not only locating the material where the required information can be found but also locate in the information and sorting – out what information is relevant from a mass of relevant and irrelevant information.

Udensi and Akor (2014) defined reference services as a direct personal assistance to readers seeking for information in the library. Consequently, reference services in Nigeria libraries is an age long tradition as reference librarians serve as pilot toward directing information seekers on the latest information that are inherent in a particular field of human endeavor, the provision of qualitative reference service will no doubt promote research and development for national development. Reference sources are information materials that are consulted for specific purpose based on the information needs of the user. Oyedum (2010) defined reference books/sources as books designed by the arrangement and treatment of its subject matter to be consulted for definite item of information rather to be read consecutively. Therefore, reference sources are publications that provide background and factual information to a subject matter. They are not meant to be read from cover to cover, they are used within the library and also they are meant to be consulted for specific information needs. The availability of reference sources would increase students" interest on the use of the library as this will greatly support learning and research activities. Therefore, university libraries should provide students with relevant reference sources that would aid their academic pursuit.

Academic libraries refer to those libraries established in tertiary institutions to support and strengthen the academic programmes of such institutions of learning as it contributes to the total development of its user's community by broadening their intellectual horizons and inculcating in them a lasting desire to study and carry out research. However, all these could be possible if the

relevant information resources are available in the library. The main functions of academic library is to acquire, organize, preserve and disseminate information (Adamu, Babalola and Udoudoh, 2017). Ifidon and Okoli cited in Adamu, Babalola and Udoudoh (2017) defined academic libraries as libraries established in higher institutions and which include universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.

Academic Libraries in Niger State

Niger State has eleven tertiary institutions made up of Federal and State owned institutions, which cut across universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and monotechnics. Niger State College of Education, Minna was the first higher institution established as an Advanced Teachers College by the Defunct Northwestern State Government. The College was sited in Minna in 1975.

Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries exist to support the teaching, research and services functions of their parent institutions. As part of academic library services, reference services are often rendered in academic libraries with the view of assisting library clienteles as regard to the most appropriate library resources to consult. Most library patrons lack the skills of searching for library resources in the library. Academic libraries in Niger State just like those in other parts of the country are established primarily to meet the information needs of their user communities through reference sources and services as one of the services to support teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge. For these to be achieve, there is need for the availability of reference sources and services in the academic libraries. Preliminary investigation carried out by the researchers showed that availability of reference sources and trained personnel to handle the reference services especially at this present technological time were inadequate and ineffective in some academic libraries in Niger State. It is in the light of the above that, this study is carried out.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1.   identify the types of reference sources available in academic libraries in Niger State;

2.   determine the extent of availability of reference services in academic libraries in Niger State.

Research Questions

1.   What types of reference sources are available in academic libraries in Niger State?

2.   What is the extent of availability of reference services in academic libraries in Niger State?

Literature Review

Reference services refers to all functions performed by a trained librarian to meet the information need of patrons in person, by telephone or electronically. Reference service is one of the

essential services provided in the library. It is one of the visible expressions of the library's purpose and mission. According to the ALA Glossary of library and information science (2014) reference services is that phase of library work which is directly concerned with assistance to readers in securing information and in using resources of the library in study and research. Similarly, Opera cited in Edegbo (2011) opined that reference service is the act of bringing into contact the right reader and the right information sources at the right time and in the right personal way. Reference services involve providing answers to questions asked by library users. Furthermore, reference service goes beyond bringing the user in contact with the reference sources and the daily routine of responding to users queries. In its widest best development, it covers anything and everything necessary to help the user in his quest for information, education and knowledge (Owolabi and Adeyemi, 2015).

The provision of qualitative reference service will no doubt promote research and development for national development. In a similar view, Achebe (2012) posited that reference and information service is an aspect of library services in which contact between the reader and library materials is established through staff assistance, matching the user with the library materials which could be in printed or electronic format. Reference sources are information materials that are consulted for specific purpose based on the information needs of the user. The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association (2014) defined reference services as information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs. These reference transactions can take place in person or via the telephone, e-mail or virtual reference technologies. Librarians are also creating websites, answer archives and links to answers to frequently asked questions all designed to anticipate user questions and help people find information independently.

Adebayo (2009) opined that one of the means of meeting the needs of the academic and research community is by providing an effective reference service, the speed accuracy in dealing with user's enquiries by the reference librarian have a great bearing on user satisfaction. On the importance of reference service Kumar (2010) posited that reference services helps the users to get right kind of documents and information at the right time, thus uplifting the institution. It assists the researchers to avoid duplication of work and helps them in the introduction of new ideas. It makes information available to decision makers to take right decisions. Thus reference services attempts to fulfill the objectives of the parent body. A satisfied user serves as a friend of the reference service.

Methodology
Descriptive survey research method was adopted for this study. A total of two hundred and forty-three (243) professional and para-professional staff in the academic libraries selected were the respondents in the study. Questionnaire and checklist were the instruments used to elicit responses from the respondents. Data collected were tabulated and analysed using mean scores. Professional and para-professional staff of the six academic libraries in Niger State form the population of the study.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What types of reference sources are available in academic libraries in Niger State?

Table 1: Types of reference sources available in academic libraries

S/N	Reference Sources	Academic Libraries					
		FUTML	IBBULL	FCEKL	FPBL	NSCEML	NSPZL
1.	Encyclopedias	√	√	√	√	√	√
2.	Dictionaries	√	√	√	√	√	√
3.	Biographical Sources	√	√	√	√	√	√
4.	Year books	√	√	√	√	√	√
5.	Hand books	√	√	√	√	√	√
6.	Directories	√	√	√	√	√	√
7.	Almanacs	√	√	√	√	√	√
8.	Indexes and Abstracts	√	√	√	√	√	√
9.	Bibliographies	√	√	√	√	√	√
10.	Catalogues	√	√	√	√	√	√
11.	Government Publications	√	√	√	√	√	√
12.	Maps, Atlases and Globes	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Total	**12**	**12**	**12**	**12**	**12**	**12**

Key: √ = Available   × = Not Available

Key: FUTML= Federal University of Technology, Minna Library; IBBULL= Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai, Library; FCEKL= Federal College of Education Kontagora, Library; FPBL= Federal Polytechnic Bida, Library; NSCEML=Niger State College of Education Minna, Library; NSPZL= Niger State Polytechnic Zungeru, Library.

Table 1 reveals that dictionaries were available in all the six (6) academic libraries. Encyclopedias were available in six (6) academic libraries. Biographical sources were also available in six (6) academic libraries. Yearbooks were available in all the six (6) academic libraries. Handbooks were available in all the six (6) academic libraries. Directories were available in six (6) academic libraries. Almanacs were available in six (6) academic libraries. Indexes and abstracts were available in six (6) academic libraries. Bibliographies were available in all the six (6) academic libraries. Catalogues were also available in all the six (6) academic libraries. Government publications were available in all the six (6) academic libraries. Maps, Atlases and Globes were also available in all the six (6) academic libraries. All the twelve (12) reference sources listed, were available in all the six (6) academic libraries under study.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of availability of reference services in academic libraries in Niger State?

Table 2: Responses on the extent of availability of reference services in academic libraries

Reference Services	FUTML =8	IBBULL =7	FCEKL =5	FPBL =6	NSCEML =4	NSPZL =3	OVRM =33	Decision
	$\overline{X}_1$	$\overline{X}_2$	$\overline{X}_3$	$\overline{X}_4$	$\overline{X}_5$	$\overline{X}_6$	$\overline{X}$	
Library Orientation	3.71	3.50	3.60	3.50	3.75	4.00	3.64	VH
Directional	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	VH
Ready Reference	2.37	2.03	2.08	2.00	2.10	2.05	2.10	L
Information on specific topic	3.00	3.00	2.80	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.58	H
Information on Research	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	VH
Indexing and Abstracting services	2.02	2.05	2.12	2.00	2.10	2.05	2.05	L
Compilation of bibliography	2.00	2.10	2.00	2.33	2.00	2.00	2.07	L
Inter library loan services	2.05	2.10	2.02	2.00	2.04	2.00	2.03	L
Study guide	3.00	2.25	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.27	L
Selective Dissemination of information	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	H
Question and answers services	3	2.5	2.8	3.04	3.32	2.6	2.96	H

Key: VH = Very High; H = High; VL = Very Low; L = Low; $\overline{X}$ = Mean Score; OVRM = Overall Mean.

Table 2 reveals that: of the eleven items, only three of them were very high as indicated by the staff respondents to have constituted the level of reference and information services provided by staff of academic libraries. Those items as contained in the table includes: library orientation, directional and Information on Research. Also the table also showed that only three items were also high as level of reference and information services provided and they include: Information on specific topic, selective dissemination of information and question and answers services. The table also shows that the respondents indicated that level of reference and information services provided five items were low. The items include compilation of bibliography, inter library loan services, ready reference, indexing and abstracting services, compilation of bibliography respectively. This is because their mean is less than 2.5 criteria set for acceptance of result.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings revealed that provision and availability of the following reference sources: encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources, and fact sources like handbooks, yearbooks, almanacs and directories were highly available. However, geographical sources, and literature search tools were significantly low in the academic libraries studied. This finding agrees with Udoudoh (2007) who states that relevant reference sources must be provided to answer library users many questions likely to arise from the day-to-day happening in the classroom thereby, thus providing avenue to stimulate and sustain their information literacy acquisition consciousness.

The study reveals that provision and availability of the following reference and information services: library orientation and directional information services were very high while Information on specific topic, information on research, question and answers services and selective dissemination of information services were high. However, ready reference, indexing and abstracting services, compilation of bibliographies, inter library loan services and study guide information services were low. This finding agrees with Neeru and Ranjana (2007), Kapoon (1995) and Onuoha (2012) who found that inadequate funding and ICT skills of library staff were major challenges in the rendering of effective reference services in academic libraries in Nigeria..The finding also agrees with Dara (2005) and Mont (1995) finding that erratic power supply, lack of qualified or skilled reference librarian, obsolete reference sources were major challenges facing effective library services in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study reveals that reference sources were inadequate in academic institutions in Niger state. Despite the fact that the major reference information services were being rendered to users, indexing and abstracting, interlibrary loan service and study guide information services were virtually not available in academic institutions in Niger state.

Recommendations

1. There is need for academic libraries to be involved in the procurement of current and up to date reference sources such as geographical sources like maps, atlases, globes and literature search tools as well as fact sources like yearbooks, almanacs and directories to enhance reference sources and services.

2. The Reference staff should provide professional services to the users in the form of ready reference, indexing and abstracting services, compilation of bibliographies, interlibrary loan Services and study guide information services which would sustain high level reference service.

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