

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Students' attitude towards the use of reference and information services (RIS) in academic Libraries in Nigeria

Ifeka E. Okeke<sup>1</sup>, Lucky U. Oghenetga<sup>2</sup> and Ezemba C. Nwabu<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Library and Information Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University –Awka, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Library and Information Science, Madonna University, Okija, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Nigeria.

Accepted 10 September, 2013

The research is on students' attitude towards the use of reference and information services (RIS) in academic libraries Nigeria. Specific purposes include determining the electronic reference available for reference librarians to render effective and efficient services to users, types of reference materials in use in academic libraries in Nigeria and find out problems that hinder effective reference and information services. The work is limited to four academic libraries in Anambra State namely Nnamdi Azikiwe University- Awka, Anambra State University- Uli, Federal Polytechnic –Oko, And Madonna University-Okija-Anambra State. Relevant literatures were reviewed. The population of the study is fifty users, each from institution. A survey method was used. Questionnaire, interview, observation and checklist are instruments used for gathering information. Findings show that students do not make proper use of reference services and sources due to stocked obsolete materials and inexperienced staff in this section. Recommendations include making available enough fund, trained staff, user education programme for students and the provision of e-library for use by students.

**Key words:** Reference information services, library resources, attitude of students.

## INTRODUCTION

In any library as it is with information centre there are many resources and services offered to its users. One of these services is reference service. Reference service is undoubtedly one of the basic services provided in the library especially academic libraries, and here lies the root of librarianship/ library and information services. It is also considered as the "the most interesting and stimulating of library services, aspects that arouse all sense of professionalism in the practitioner". Kumar (2008) is of the view that the field of reference services is vast and dynamic and many new developments have taken place in it during the last ten years or so. The rapid

developments have occurred in computer technology, telecommunication (including satellite communication), printing, and reprography. These developments have important implications for the provision of information by libraries to their users. Great advances have been made in the automation of indexing and abstracting services, which are important tools for providing reference service.

Reference materials are information materials in the library, regardless of their formats, whether in print or electronic formats can be used to provide relevant answers to divergent information needs of the library users. When student's needs are met then reference

services have taken place. There is no way reference librarians can work without reference materials (Ifafesobi, 2005). Furthermore, Okolo (2002) opined that library staff especially those in the reference section must be conversant with the different sources of the information that will be of benefit to any enquirer. There are a lot of challenges posed to academic librarians that work in the reference section; which include the changing nature of the materials, personal image expected of library and information service practitioners in emerging democracy and its economy as well as ICT incursion to the profession. Other setbacks are outdated resources, irrelevant materials on shelves for user. Based on these challenges, therefore, the researchers will investigate the kind of reference and information services available among university libraries, and students' attitude towards RIS.

### **Statement of the problem**

Reference and information services justify the existence of the university library. Achebe (2012) opined that reference and information service (RIS) 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 printed or electronic. RIS is the most demanding of the entire library services and close to the patrons. Management of reference section in academic library is the most difficult task facing librarians in the world today.

The reference materials of most academic libraries are outdated and irrelevant to meet demand of potential user. Undergraduate students in Nigerian universities are supposed to use the reference unit of the library, yet the expectation is far from real, hence the need to find out the attitude of students towards the use of reference and information services of university libraries in Nigeria.

### **Scope**

The work is limited to Nnamdi Azikiwe University-Awka, Anambra State University-Uli, Federal Polytechnic Oko and Madonna University Okija. The content consists of reference books/sources definition, information services, types of reference materials in both digital and traditional, role of reference librarians, as well as attitude of students towards reference department in academic libraries.

### **Purpose of the study**

The general purpose of this study is to find out students' attitude towards the use of reference and information services (RIS) in university libraries in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are:

- i. to determine the electronic reference sources available for reference Librarians to render effective and efficient information services to users.
- ii. to ascertain the types of reference materials in use in academic libraries in Nigeria
- iii. to find out problems that hinder the effective reference and information services in academic libraries in Nigeria.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The field of reference service is vast and dynamic and many new developments have taken place in it during the last ten years or so. The rapid developments have occurred in computer technology, telecommunication (including satellite communication), printing, reprography, etc. These developments have important implications for the provision of information by libraries/ information centres and documentation centres to their user (Kumar, 2008). The new trends of ICT in library and information science added reference materials and services as a concept. But there are needs to separate the two concepts- resources materials and services to enhance readers.

In line with this, Achebe (2012) was of the view that reference and information service is an aspect of library service in which contact between the reader and library materials is established through staff assistance, matching the user with the library materials which could be printed or electronic. She further said that, as a service legally provided by the reference librarian, there is no gain saying that reference and information service (RIS) is the life-wire and bridge of any library. The absence of this service can make or mar the image of not only the library but also that of profession.

However, RIS is the most demanding of all the library services because it brings the content and activities of the library close to the user. Besides, it deals with human aspect of library service which is difficult to manage.

### **Reference materials/sources**

Generally view is that reference materials are information resources in library used for specific purpose. The researchers see reference materials as those information bearing that can be used within the building or environment where information is disseminated. A reference book/ source is not meant to be read through, but has an array of unrelated entries, which are generally alphabetically arranged. Nwogu (n.d) defines reference source as "books not meant to be read from cover to cover but only to be consulted for certain information or facts." He

continues in his definition, saying, "these books are expected to be in the library at all times.

Oyedum (2005) defined reference books/ sources as books designed by the arrangement and treatment of its subject matter to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively. American Library Association glossary of library and information science defined reference books as those books whose use is restricted to the library. While Obiora (2004) defined reference books/materials as the publications –book and non- book materials consulted only within the library for specific facts or a subjects. Conclusively, Ifafesobi (2005) defined reference materials/ sources as information in the library, regardless of their formats, whether in print or non- print relevant format can be used to provide relevant answers to divergent information needs of the library users. However, Reference sources are often the best place to start your research because they:

1. provide a good introduction to a topic.
2. provide brief, factual information.
3. summarize and clarify issues.
4. define unfamiliar terms.
5. identify additional relevant sources such as books and periodical articles.

Janice (n.d) stated that reference materials/sources are obviously those items most likely to be useful in answering reference questions. For this reason, they are often held by libraries as resources which are either non-circulating or circulated under strict limitations. In the case of some very useful or popular titles, the patron is best served when the library can own at least two copies to allow for a "reference" and a circulating copy. A brief outline of the most common types of reference materials is presented below.

### **Almanacs**

Contain specific facts, statistical data, tables of comparative information, and organized lists of basis reference information related to people, places, events, etc. Usually cover broad periods of time, whereas Yearbooks will have the same time of information for a single year.  
Example -- *World Almanac and Book of Facts*

### **Atlases**

Contain an organized group of physical, political, road, and/or thematic maps. Symbols, scales, and terms used in the atlas should be explained in an easy to understand and complete manner.

Example -- *Atlas of American History*

### **Bibliographies**

Contain one or more lists of resources and materials sharing some common attribute such as location, publishing date, subject, etc. A good bibliography should include all pertinent bibliographical data. Some will include descriptive or critical annotations.

Example -- *Guide to Reference Books for School Media Centers*

### **Biographical resources**

Contain information about individual people or locate (index) other works which provide this type of information. Collected biographies can cover a given subject, a stated time period, or other special groups of individuals.  
Example -- *Current Biography Yearbook*

### **Dictionaries**

Contain words of a given language and other information such as their origins, pronunciations, and definitions. Unabridged dictionaries contain 250,000 words or more. Special dictionaries include picture dictionaries, foreign language dictionaries, synonym dictionaries, thesauri, etc.

Example -- *Webster's School Dictionary*

### **Directories**

Contain an organized list of people and/or organizations of some type. Other information such as addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, etc. are included for each entry.

Example -- *Special Collections in Children's Literature*

### **Encyclopedias, General**

Contain an alphabetically organized listing of a broad range of subjects with basic information for each entry. General encyclopedias provide a good basis for the beginning stages of research. They are also helpful resources for ready reference questions.

Example -- *World Book Encyclopedia*

### **Encyclopaedias, Subject**

Contain the same type of information and organized like

a general encyclopedia. The entries are limited to those that fall within the subject encyclopedia's scope of the coverage.

Example -- *The Grolier Encyclopedia of Science and Technology*

### Handbooks

Contain an abundance of information related to one subject. This is one type of reference material which needs to be circulating in order to serve the patron well.

Example -- *Famous First Facts*

### Indexes

Contain information necessary for locating information in a given specific item or a type of resource. They help to locate information in periodicals, anthologies, newspapers, etc. Concordances and quotation dictionaries are specific types of indexes.

Example -- *National Geographic Index*

### Reference service/work

The term reference service has been defined in various ways by different scholars. Reference work/service is an ongoing process. It involves assisting people in filling gaps in their knowledge and solving problems. The 'Gap' represents the real information needs. Reference service can be defined as helping library users to solve their information problems. While reference work is material that is collected from various sources and conveniently arranged for easy use. It is for Adhoc consultation. It is not cover to cover reading but consulted for a specific piece of information (Awana, 1997).

Reference service/work can be defined as branch of the services of library which includes the assistance given to the users in their search for information on various subjects (Prytherch, 2000 cited in Adomi, 2007). Reference service deals with the provision of reference work by library staff. Reference services also mean all the functions performed by a trained librarian employed in the reference section of a library to meet the information needs of patrons (in person, by telephone, or electronically).

### Role of reference librarian in academic

Reference is all about helping people – and always will be. In 1876, Samuel Green suggested in the first published paper on reference service (based on his talk at the first American Library Association conference) that

reference librarians have four roles:

1. Teach people how to use the library and its resources
2. Answer queries for specific information
3. Recommend good sources and reading material
4. Promote the library within the community

The researchers agree with Dave and we think that by doing all of those things, we empower our patrons. Teaching them to use the library and its resources is vital. Since one of the primary responsibilities is consumer health information in a public library, teaching patrons to evaluate information can literally be life saving (Barbar, 2010). Edison (2000) believed that reference librarian specialist training and subject skills will help mediate user information needs. Librarians should develop the competencies they need to be more successful. Corroborating this, Osunnilu (2003) noted that poor reference service will create a poor image for the library. Kresh (2001) stated that an explosion of information and the popularity of the Internet and commercial search engines have opened the way for new demands and expectation from users.

The reference librarian is a professional library staff who is in charge of the reference section of the library where user's queries are answered. The reference librarian is very vast in knowledge. Therefore, he/she can perform operation information services that are central to the realization of the library objectives. Other role for reference librarian includes the following:

1. Provision of general information services
2. Provides answers to users queries
3. Gives instructions in the use of library
4. Compiles bibliography
5. Planning the reference section and pattern of his work
6. Selects dissemination of information
7. Indexing and abstracting services
8. Publication of library guide and bulletin
9. Displaying and exhibition of materials

### METHODOLOGY

Survey method was adopted. A questionnaire was used to collect data from students. Fifty (50) copies of questionnaire were administered in each institution. The instruments were distributed randomly to undergraduate students inside the library during the second semester of 2012/2013 academic sessions of individual school. Accidental sampling technique was adopted by the researchers in distributing the instrument. A total of one hundred and ninety seven copies of questionnaire (97.5%) were returned. The instrument was analyzed using simple percentage count table method under descriptive statistics.

### Analysis of data

From the total number of questionnaire distributed to students in

**Table 1.** Population of sex.

Respondents	Frequency	(%)
Male	78	40
Female	117	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2.** Attitude of students towards the use reference and information services (RIS) in the above institutions.

Attitude	Frequency	(%)
Positive	58	29.74
Negative	110	52.41
Undecided	27	13.84
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

each library one hundred and ninety- five were returned which were analysed.

#### Bio-data

Table 1 indicates that male students hardly use the library for assignment and other academic purposes during the time of distribution of the instrument are 78(40%) only present in the library. While, females in the library by the time of administration of the instruments are 117 (70%). This shows that female students use the library materials than male counterparts in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Federal Polytechnic, Oko Anambra State University, Uli and Madonna University Okija.

#### Behaviour of students towards RIS

Table 2 shows that students in all the campuses have negative attitude towards reference and information services in academic environment especially Federal Polytechnic Oko; Madonna University Okija students did not know the usefulness of reference section in library 110(52.41%); while positive attitude is 58(29.74%). This indicated that the four academic libraries in Anambra are not up to standard to offer reference services to their patron. There is need for user education programme to remove these misconception from them.

#### Types of ICT reference services available to students

Table 3 shows that Nigerian tertiary institution libraries offered photocopy of documents in major services 68(34.87%), telephone online 22.(22. 74%). online download services 45(22.0%), social media services17(8.70%), digital reference robots services 5(2.56%), E-print repositories services 6(3.07%). This indicates that users are given proper reference and information services in the library. Most of the students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Anambra State University, Uli during the interview said

they preferred using cybercafé to search for materials to using the library.

#### Challenges of RIS to students

Table 4 shows that academic libraries in Nigeria had a lot of constraints in their services given to students. The researchers interviewed some of the students in the reference section of the four academic libraries; their responses indicated that the librarians in library are not helping them with sources of information. Especially, in Madonna University Okija, which is only private institution used, the students hardly use the reference section because there are no reference librarians and even the reference section is not up to standard according to them.

#### FINDINGS

From the analysis the following findings were made. It was discovered that part of the obstacles to the use of reference sources is that of obsolete materials; 68(34.87%) respondents clearly stated that the materials in the reference section of the academic library are obsolete, hence their refusal to use them.

Again, it was discovered that the problem of arrangement of materials on the shelves is another major obstacle to the use of reference materials. 34(17.43%) of the respondents indicated that the materials are not properly on the library shelves, hence the problem of easy accessibility to the materials on the shelves.

Inadequate reference sources is another obstacle discovered through the respondents reaction indices 45(22.0%). It shows that some of the respondents on realizing that the shelves are stocked with little or insignificant reference materials totally ignore them. Even when reference materials are available some of the respondents lack literature search skills. This is very common among students in Madonna University library, Okija. During the research observation and interview method was used to know their inability of literature searching skills. 16(8.2%) of the respondents indicate that they do not have the searching skills, hence their inability to properly use materials in the reference section.

Finally, some of the reference sections of the four academic libraries under study do not have reference librarians that man the activity of the reference services or help the students directly bearing in mind that the section renders direct personal assistance to library users. 32(16.41%) of the respondents indicated that they do not see professional in the section to help them. This problem was also found in Madonna University library-Okija.

#### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings from the above the following

**Table 3.** ICT reference services available to students.

<b>Services</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
E-mail alert/ (Listservs) services	-	
E-print repositories services	-6	3.07
Telephone (GSM) services	50	25.64
Online live chat with reference librarian services	4	0.01
Video/ Web-cam Services	-	
Text- based chat services	-	
Digital reference robots services	5	2.56
Social media services	17	8.70
Online downloading services	45	22.0
Photocopy services	68	34.87
Web forms services	-	
E- bulletin services	-	
Library websites and portals made available to students	-	
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4.** Problems encountered by students when using RIS.

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Out-dated materials on shelves	68	34.87
Books are not properly shelf by staff	34	17.43
Inadequate reference materials in various field studied in the Institution	45	22.0
Lack of literature search skills among students	16	8.20
No reference librarian or assisting staff to help students	32	16.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

recommendations are made to institutions used in this study:

1. The Management of each institution under study should vote reasonable amount of money to enable the library acquire up-date reference and information services.
2. The staff of institutions libraries should carry out training and retraining of staff to met required 21st century demand.
3. Attitude of students can be changed through user education programmes, conference, workshop on the use of reference materials and other resources in the institution.
4. Virtual library should be provided to help students source for information anywhere in the world
5. Reference librarian should be appointed to man the section.

## Conclusion

The importance of reference service cannot be over-estimated, since it is direct personal assistance given to

library users in search of information. A good reference librarian must be conversant with information sources that are relevant to library users and be able to understand user needs to serve them better. Reference services must be promoted, because if library resources are used properly, they can enhance the quality of Nigerian university graduates, who will in turn contribute to the development of the nation. The reference services and sources to be provided by a university library depend upon curriculum, research programmes, method of teaching, and objectives of the university. Various methods are used to provide reference services in university libraries. Some researchers affirm that new reference service models have been designed and developed roving reference, reconfiguring the reference desk, no reference desk, consolidating service points, tiered, outreach, and virtual reference. It is observed that virtual reference service are provided via email and telephone by a team of four librarians.

## REFERENCES

Achebe N (2012). Current trends and challenges in reference and

- information services in Nigerian libraries. In: Daniel JO, Ifidon EI and Okegbola T (eds) Trends In Library & information Science in Nigeria: festschrift in honour of Prof. Sam E. Ifidon. Lagos: Elis Associates.
- Adomi EE (2007) Foundations of reference services. Warri: Goddick publisher.
- Barbara B (2010) role of the reference librarian retrieved from (<http://pointsofreference.booklistonline.com/2010/02/16/what-is-the-role-of-the-reference-librarian/>).
- Edison M (2000). Using emotional intelligence in the reference interview. *Colorado Libraries* 36(2):8-10.
- Fehintola NO, Adeniyi OS (n.d) Reference Services in a University Library: Awareness and Perception of Undergraduate Students retrieved from <http://unllib.unl.edu/LPP/PNLA%20Quarterly/onifade-sowole75-3.htm>
- Janice F (nd) Nonfiction & reference resources for children specific types of reference materials. Retrieved from <http://www.lmcsource.com/tech/felker/reftypes.html>
- Ifafesobi SO (2005) Readers services. In Akinfolarin, W.A. (ed) Effective of the library. Akure: AOGE NIG.LTD
- Kumar K (2008) Reference service 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition. New Delha: Vikas publishing house PVT
- Kresh DN (2001). From search to search engine: Reference net on the World Wide Web. *Inform. Technol. Lib.* 20(3):139-142.
- Madu ED (2008) Fundamentals of modern reference services: manual versus technology. Ibadan: Evi.coleum publisher.
- Mugyabuso LJ (1999). User education and information skills: A need for a systematic programme in African University Libraries. *Afr. J. Lib. Inform. Sci.* 9(2).
- Okolo EO (2002) The use of the library for students in tertiary institutions. Ibadan: End-teime publishing house.
- Obiora CC (2004) use of library for & research. Enugu: Sound & Sense limited.
- Oyedum GU (2005). Introductory notes on reference and bibliography. minna: Mairo press and computer centre.
- Osinulu LF (2003). Effectiveness of reference services to faculty members: A case study of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye. *Gateway Lib. J.* 6(2):98-105.