

Full Length Research

The Use of Reference Resources and Services for Quality Research by postgraduate Students of Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi

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This study examined the use of reference resources and services for quality research of Postgraduate Students of Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi. Four research questions were answered. Population for this was 120 subjects comprising 31 Professionals and 89 Para-Professionals from University of Agriculture Makurdi library. The entire population was used for the study as sample. Instrument for this study was constructed questionnaire. Data was collected and analysed using weighted mean. Findings for this study revealed that reference resources are available in the library. The services also suit the level of students. However, the services and resources are not adequate in the library. Perception of users of the resources and services is also very low. The study concluded that use of library's resources and services have been found to be important for quality research by students of all levels. It was recommended that the available resources and services in the library should be intensively used by students as they enhance quality research and the University management should assist the university library financially so that more library resources and services are provided for use by students

Key words: Reference Resources, Services, quality Research and Postgraduate students.

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries exist in order to provide their clientele with information resources. These materials are made accessible through cataloguing, classification and indexing services provided by the libraries through the public service section. Among the public service functions of a library the greater part of it is performed by the reference section. The term reference service according

to Azubuike(2014) is a direct personal assistance to readers seeking for information in the library.

It is also defined as a personal assistance provided to users in the pursuit of information. Adenije (2007), posited that it is a major characteristic of reference service in Nigerian libraries to be part of a whole library organization, except where the specific function of the

organization concerned is mainly referral. 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 endeavour. The provision of qualitative reference service will no doubt promote research and development for national development. However, reference service can be attributed to selective dissemination of information (SDI) as well as current awareness services (CAS). This is to say that a reference librarian should be able to provide some selected information that are relevant to the researcher and also create an enabling environment whereby the researcher or the investigator or the information seeker can get current information that will help him/her solve a particular problem.

Subsequently, reference services are accorded great importance in libraries worldwide. It entails assisting library users to find the required library resources. A reference service is referred to as one of the most professional aspects of the librarian's responsibilities which every prospective librarian must properly grasp. Reference departments serve as the link between the library and its immediate clientele be they public, community or groups of specialist users. The main aim is to provide a wide range of services and facilities, which will enhance exploitative use of the literature through the concepts of assistance and self-direction. A library can be regarded as a collection of books and other forms of recorded knowledge, purposefully selected and systematically organized and preserved by qualified library personnel for use by either the public or a target group. As a repository of man's knowledge of the universe, the library is the most dependable source of information on any subject. Adeyemi (2005) opined that the modern reference librarian does not merely acquire published documents or books but also document original information emanating from its locality, such original documentation covers socio-cultural issues which ordinarily might not have been the subject of books for a long time to come.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major purpose of this study is to critically evaluate the reference services for quality research by postgraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi.

1. To find out the available reference resources and services in the academic library
2. The extent to which reference services provided by the library suit the users
3. The level of adequacy of the reference services provided in the library.

4. Users' perceptions on reference services in the library under study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study.

1. Which of the reference resources and services are available in the library under study?
2. To what extent do the reference resources and services provided in the library suit the users?
3. What is the level of adequacy of the reference resources and services provided in the library under study?
4. What are the users' perceptions on reference resources and services in the library under study?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The libraries help to disseminate information that is recorded, and that may be in form of written document, printed materials and digitized materials. They appear in different formats such as books, periodicals, newspapers, diaries, letters, manuscripts, tapes, diskettes, compact disks, databases, artifacts, microforms, etc. Thus, any activity that is concerned with the handling of information, such as searching, retrieval communication, dissemination, preservation, management and evaluation is librarianship. Anyone that has need of information no matter the subject, the first port of call should be the reference department of the library. This department has the human and material resources to provide answers to any information need expressed by the user, while it can provide some information immediately; it could lead the inquirer to the discovery of more detailed information through a variety of tools and techniques that are available in the resources or information centres/libraries.

Performance evaluation is the process of judging the competence with which a member of staff has performed the duties and responsibilities associated with the position for which the person was hired by an organization or Information centre. Akanya (2006) alleged that reference services are all the functions performed by a trained librarian employed in the reference section of a library to meet the information needs of the patrons (in person, by telephone, or electronically), including but not limited to answering substantive questions, instructing users in the selection and use of appropriate tools and techniques for finding information, conducting searches on behalf of the patron, directing users to the location of library resources, assisting in the evaluation of information, referring patrons to resources outside the library when appropriate, keeping reference statistics and

Participating in the development of the reference collection. Evaluation of services in any library is done in order to find out whether or not they are meeting the desired goals and to what extent.

In relation to educational research, academic performance of a student can be regarded as the observable and measurable behaviour of a student in a particular situation. For example, the academic performance of a student in biology includes observable and measurable behaviour of a student at any point in time during a course. Students' academic performance consists of his scores at any particular time obtained from a teacher-made test. Therefore, we can equate academic performance with the observed behaviour or expectation of achieving a specific statement of or statement of educational intention in a research. Academic performance of students consists of scores obtained from teacher-made test, first term examination, and mid-semester test. Academic performance is defined as measurable behaviour in a standardised series of tests (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). Academic performance test is usually constructed and standardised to measure proficiency in school subjects. In most cases, according to them, "Accomplishment" is sometimes used in place of "performance". According to Bruce and Neville (1979) educational performance is measured by standardized performance test developed for school subjects. What this means is that academic performance is measured in relation to what is attained at the end of a course, since it is the accomplishment of medium or long-term objective of education. What is important is that the test should be a standardised test to meet national norm. For a test to be standardised, it must be valid for over a period of time. Academic performance is regarded as action of completing or attaining by exertion.

Many authors and scholars wrote so much on reference services. In the view of Azubuike (2014) and Akanya (2006) reference service has a dual meaning. Reference service refers to a variety of activities associated with personal assistance to library users including selection, liaison activities, bibliographic instruction and the implementation of electronic products. It also indicates direct librarian user interaction which takes place in some physical service points, typically the reference desk. Jane (2002) in his own opinion states that reference services are the personal assistance given by librarian to an individual in search of information for whatever purpose as well as various library activities deliberately designed to facilitate easy availability of information. According to Kumar (2006) reference librarians are variously referred to as 'mediators between the user and the information', and 'navigators of information superhighway' The role of the reference librarian has changed greatly over the last two decades with the emergence of information technology and the huge impact in the librarianship and information

provision. The role has grown from that of a collector and preserver of information resources to a professional involved in very complex issues of organization, the dissemination of and access to information.

Traditionally, the librarian's function was to assist in the collection development and acquisition, cataloguing and classification, circulation, provision of reference services, and preservation, conservation and archiving. As the library evolves into the digital library, reference librarians have been considering how to adjust reference services to the new environment and new information needs. According to some statistics; for instance, users' enquiries at the reference desk are declining Mole (2004) and Moyo (2002). Today the reference librarian's responsibilities have increased by societal expectations for information access through enhanced electronic capabilities. Reference librarians are the key to the continued success of libraries. Several researchers have discussed the new role of librarians in the digital age. This is evident on the assertion of Olanlokun(2003), Singh (2004) and Smith & Bopp (2011). From their views highlighted, it is no doubt that the digital revolution has brought changes and affected the librarian and other information professional. This set-up is also changing the roles of the reference librarian into teaching, consultancy and researching besides providing access to information. The reference librarian must guide users in information gathering, information skills and tools, organizing information resources, search strategies, basic reference works, etc. Amozie & Usman (2010) noted that the success of applying ICTs to reference service depends on the skills and knowledge of the reference librarian and the user who may be searching for information using the internet. The internet has become an important tool for reference service. Several services such as e-mail, electronic publishing, blog, Wiki, bulletin boards, newsletters, online newspapers, online chatting, teleconferencing and many other services are available on the internet. In fact, reference service by its virtue is the core of research activities in the library. It is no doubt that ICTs has revolutionized access to information in libraries and users now search databases with the use of on-line catalogues terminals. The result is that reference service is more efficient and effective as questions posed to the reference librarian are answered faster and more easily using computerized sources. According to Bopp in Madu (2008) library users familiar only with traditional library services are amazed and impressed when the reference librarian without leaving his desk, moves fluidly and confidently from one online database to another to find an elusive citation or to print out the full text of a periodical or newspaper article for the user. It is not an overstatement to say that ICTs has impacted and improved the content and quality of reference service rendered in modern libraries. Access to outside databases of other libraries has considerably improved

through the delivery of documents by e-mail as well as answers to reference queries.

METHODOLOGY

The area of the study is Benue State. This study employed a survey research design. The population for this study was 120 staff, comprising 31 Professionals and 89 Para-Professionals from University of Agriculture Makurdi library. There was no sampling for the study. The entire population was used for the study as sample because the population size could be handled effectively by the researcher.

The instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire titled "The Use of Reference Resources and Services for Quality Research of Postgraduate Students Questionnaire (URRSQRPSQ). The instrument which was developed by the researcher was divided into six sections based on the research objectives. The questionnaire had restricted response options of highly available, (HA), available, (A), slightly available (SA), not available (NA); very great extent (VGE), great extent (GE), low extent (LE) and very low extent (VLE); highly adequate (HA), adequate (A), slightly adequate (SA) and not adequate (NA); strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) with corresponding values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The data for this study was collected by the researcher and 3 research assistants.

Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. Mean was used to answer the research questions. The bench mark for this was 2.50 ($4+3+2+1=10/4=2.50$). The decision rule was: any item with a mean value of 2.50 or above was regarded as agree while any item with a mean value of less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Questions 1

Which of the reference resources and services are available in the library under study?

Data for answering research question 1 is presented in Table 1.

Result in Table 1 shows that all the 9 items had their grand mean values ranging from 2.53 to 3.12 and were above the bench mark of 2.50. This shows that the respondents agreed that the 9 reference resources and services are available in the library.

Research Questions 2

To what extent do the reference resources and services

provided in the library suit the users?

Data for answering research question 2 is presented in Table 2.

Result in Table 2 shows that all the 14 items had their grand mean values ranging from 2.59 to 3.26 and were above the bench mark of 2.50. This shows that the respondents agreed that the 9 reference resources and services are provided in the library suit the level of users.

Research Questions 3

What is the level of adequacy of the reference resources and services provided in the library under study?

Data for answering research question 3 is presented in Table 3.

Result in Table 3 shows that out of 9 items, only 3 had grand mean values of 2.67 to 3.26 while 7 items had their grand mean values ranging from 2.26 to 2.45 and were below the bench mark of 2.50. This shows that the respondents agreed that the reference resources and services provided in the library are grossly inadequate.

Research Questions 4

What are the users' perceptions on reference resources and services in the library under study?

Data for answering research question 4 is presented in Table 4.

Result in Table 4 shows that out of all the 9 items had grand mean values ranged from 2.32 to 2.44 and were below the bench mark of 2.50. This shows that the respondents agreed that the users' perception on reference resources and services in the library under study is low.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one was to find out the available resources and reference services in the library. Findings revealed that dictionaries, yearbooks, manuals, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, biographical sources e.g. who's who, Geographical sources e.g. maps, atlases etc and handbooks were available in the library. This finding supports the study of Oguingu (2015) who conducted a study on Availability and use of Reference sources and services in Babcock University library. The study found out that Majority of the respondents indicated that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate except yearbook, bibliographies and biographies that are not available, accessible and adequate.

Research question two was to find out whether reference resources and services are provided in the

Table 1: Mean of Respondents on the available reference resources and services in the library

S/N	Item Statement	N ₁	N ₂	X ₁	X ₂	X _g	Remarks
1	Dictionaries	92	13	3.04	2.77	2.90	Available
2	Yearbooks	92	13	3.27	2.54	2.91	Available
3	Manuals	92	13	3.38	2.61	2.99	Available
4	Indexes	92	13	3.13	2.76	2.95	Available
5	Abstracts	92	13	3.16	3.07	3.12	Available
6	Bibliographies	92	13	3.03	2.21	2.62	Available
7	Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who	92	13	3.14	1.92	2.53	Available
8	Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc	92	13	3.37	1.90	2.65	Available
9	Handbooks	92	13	3.14	1.92	2.53	Available

N₁ = number of Professionals, N₂ = number of Non-Professionals, \bar{x}_1 = mean of Professionals, \bar{x}_2 = Mean of Non-Professionals, and \bar{x}_g = Grand mean

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 2: Mean of Respondents on the weather reference resources and services are provided in the library suit the users

S/N	Item Statement	N ₁	N ₂	X ₁	X ₂	X _g	Remarks
1	Dictionaries	31	89	2.80	3.00	2.90	Suitable
2	Yearbooks	31	89	2.67	2.76	2.72	Suitable
3	Manuals	31	89	2.76	2.77	2.77	Suitable
4	Indexes	31	89	3.00	2.84	2.92	Suitable
5	Abstracts	31	89	3.67	2.84	3.26	Suitable
6	Bibliographies	31	89	2.97	2.85	2.91	Suitable
7	Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who	31	89	3.10	2.61	2.86	Suitable
8	Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc	31	89	3.15	2.54	2.85	Suitable
9	Directories	31	89	3.11	2.08	2.59	Suitable
10	Handbooks	31	89	3.49	1.84	2.67	Suitable

N₁ = number of Professionals, N₂ = number of Non-Professionals, \bar{x}_1 = mean of Professionals, \bar{x}_2 = Mean of Non-Professionals, and \bar{x}_g = Grand mean

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 3: Mean of Respondents on the level of adequacy of the reference resources and services provided in the library

S/N	Item Statement	N ₁	N ₂	X ₁	X ₂	X _g	Remarks
1	Dictionaries	31	89	2.71	1.92	2.31	NA
2	Yearbooks	31	89	2.78	2.00	2.39	NA
3	Manuals	31	89	2.64	2.23	2.44	NA
4	Indexes	31	89	3.2	1.54	2.37	NA
5	Abstracts	31	89	3.67	2.84	3.26	NA
6	Bibliographies	31	89	2.57	2.38	2.45	NA
7	Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who	31	89	3.12	1.69	2.41	NA
8	Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc	31	89	3.15	2.54	2.85	HA
9	Handbooks	31	89	3.49	1.84	2.67	HA

N₁ = number of Professionals, N₂ = number of Non-Professionals, \bar{x}_1 = mean of Professionals, \bar{x}_2 = Mean of Non-Professionals, \bar{x}_g = Grand mean, HA= highly adequate and NA=Not adequate

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 4: Mean of Respondents on the users' perceptions on reference resources and services in the library under study

S/N	Item Statement	N ₁	N ₂	X ₁	X ₂	X _g	Remarks
1	Dictionaries	31	89	2.57	2.38	2.48	Low
2	Yearbooks	31	89	2.71	1.92	2.32	Low
3	Manuals	31	89	2.78	2.00	2.39	Low
4	Indexes	31	89	2.64	2.23	2.44	Low
5	Abstracts	31	89	3.20	1.54	2.37	Low
6	Bibliographies	31	89	2.71	1.92	2.32	Low
7	Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who	31	89	2.78	2.00	2.39	Low
8	Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc	31	89	3.20	1.54	2.37	Low
9	Handbooks	31	89	2.64	2.23	2.44	Low

N₁ = number of Professionals, N₂ = number of Non-Professionals, \bar{x}_1 = mean of Professionals, \bar{x}_2 = Mean of Non-Professionals and \bar{x}_g = Grand mean

Source: Field survey, 2018

library suit the users. Findings revealed that dictionaries, yearbooks, manuals, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, biographical sources e.g. who's who, Geographical sources e.g. maps, atlases etc and handbooks are available in the library and suit the level of users. The result agrees with Oguingu (2015) who conducted a study on Availability and use of Reference sources and services in Babcock University library. The study revealed that reference sources such as dictionaries, yearbooks, manuals, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, biographical sources, Geographical sources available in the library suit the level of users.

Research question three was on the level of adequacy of the reference resources and services provided in the library. Findings revealed that dictionaries, yearbooks, manuals, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, biographical sources e.g. who's who, Geographical sources e.g. maps, atlases etc and handbooks were available in the library but not adequate for users. This finding is not similar with a study by Okafor, (2012). Appraisal of Reference Services in two Public Libraries -The FCT City Library Wuse Abuja and Nassarawa State Library, Lafia. The study found out that encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, journals, yearbooks, gazetteers, bibliographies, newspapers, biographies and thesis were available in the libraries.

Research question four was on the users' perceptions on reference resources and services in the library under study. Findings revealed that users' perceptions on dictionaries, yearbooks, manuals, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, biographical sources e.g. who's who, Geographical sources e.g. maps, atlases etc and handbooks is low. Finding differs from a study conducted by Okafor, A.I (2012) who found out that library users had low perception on the use of library due to challenges

such as lack of reference staff for assistance, Unavailability and Inadequacy of reference sources for course, old and irrelevant reference sources for course, the reference section is not convenient and conducive for reading, they do not know how to use reference sources, the reference librarians are not user-friendly and poor power supply in the reference section.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of reference resources and services for quality research of Postgraduate Students of Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi. Use of library resources and services has been found to be important for quality research by students of all levels. This study found out that reference resources and services are available in the library. The services also suit the level of users. However, the services and resources are not adequate in the library. Perception of users on resources and services is also very low.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The available resources and services in the library should be intensive used by students as they enhance quality research
- ii. The University management should make sure that more library resources and services are provided for use by students

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