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Availability and extent of utilization of reference sources and services by academic staff of federal universities in North East, Nigeria

Adamu Hassan CLN¹, Abubakar Tanimu Albaba², Rabiu Ahmad³

¹ MW Federal poly Bauchi State, Nigeria

^{2,3} Department of Library, Isa Kaita College of Education Dutsinma, Katsina State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Adamu Hassan CLN

Abstract

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprises 1,264 Libraries academic staff in federal university of north east Nigeria. The simple random sampling technique was used in the study, giving every member of the population equal opportunity to be selected. The sample was 126 Libraries academic staff which represent 10% of the entire population. Instrument titled Availability and Extent of Utilization of Reference Sources and Services by Academic Staff Questionnaire (AEURSSASQ) was used for data collection. 20 items instrument developed by the researcher to measure the identified variables. The content validity was established by two experts in Library and Information Department. The reliability of the instrument was done by Cronbach Alpha Method. Availability coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained. This shows that the instrument was reliable and good for the study. A total of 126 questionnaire was administered by the

researcher and three trained research assistants. At the end 118 instruments were retrieved representing 93.7 return rate. The research questions were answered with mean(x) and standard deviation while the hypotheses was tested using z test at 0.05 level of significance. Recommendation: university management should ensure reference resources are up-to-date in the library so as to encourage patrons to use the resources for research and information acquisition, university Library management should ensure that its staff develop positive attitudes towards reference services for effective dissemination of information on new trends in the library and university libraries should create awareness during orientation programmes about the availability of new resources and services or additions of new databases for user of the library. This will enhance users' use of the resources and services.

Keywords: Availability, Reference Sources, Academic Staff, and Federal Universities

Introduction

Federal universities are the foremost tertiary institutions in Nigeria with responsibility for equipping people with knowledge and skills to undertake tasks and employment functions which are necessary for transformation of societies. Federal university is established primarily to support and cater for teaching, learning and research activities of parent institution. The functions of federal university in Nigeria include: teaching, research, production of texts, certification, storage and retrieval of knowledge, community service and enlightenment service. The vision, mission and strategies which are adopted by federal universities as a guide for meeting the core function of teaching, learning, research and providing information form the foundation on which the role of the federal university library is established.

Federal University libraries are the bedrock upon which any university is built. In the university, library occupies a unique position as it manages the intellectual product of the university. The federal university library is a repository of resources; it is an integral part of the educational system whose primary function is to serve users (Oriogu, 2015) [8]. The major aim of federal university library according to Oriogu, Chukwuemeka and OrioguOgbuiyi (2018) [7] is to promote the tripartite objectives (teaching, learning and research) of education through the provision of adequate and relevant information resources and senders in both print and non-print format. This is why Shehu, Urhefe and Aworo (2015) stated that federal university libraries stand to support teaching, learning and research in ways consistent with, and supportive of the institution's mission and goals. In the view of the authors, these institution's mission and goals are enhanced by federal university libraries provision of reference resources and services. As quality education depends on the current and relevant information resources and services, university libraries ensure reference resources and services are readily available and accessible to users' community. Federal University libraries are major access points in the provision of reference resources and for quality teaching, learning and research.

While reference resources are information bearing materials in personnel, prints and electronic form used by reference librarians to provide access to specific information for users, reference services are services that deal with the assistance given to users in finding information, answering questions, and otherwise fulfilling users' information needs. The ultimate goal of reference resources and services is to provide accurate and specific information in the shortest possible time (Makinde, Aba & Ugah, 2017) [5]. It is sufficed to

Reference sources are goldmine of the reference section their value is inestimable to users who need them to obtain relevant information Abudulahi and Manze (2014). They are very important tools needed for proper functioning of academic libraries. Libraries acquire information resources, organize the resources for easy retrieval and dissemination of information. The provision of reference services seeks to fulfil the greater mission of the library by helping users to convincingly access and use information through reference sources in the library. According to Ifeka, Oghenetega, Nwabu (2013) asserts the importance of reference sources as it provides a good introduction to a topic, brief factual information, and summaries and clarify issues, define unfamiliar terms and identify additional relevant sources such as books and periodicals and titles. They are to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively. In most libraries reference sources do not circulate they are located in a separate reference section. This practice makes them readily accessible. They provide background information or direct one to additional sources. Gaur (2013) asserts that reference sources is grouped into three categories primary, secondary and tertiary sources. The primary sources of information are more current and up-to-date than other sources of information. These includes journals, articles, technical reports etc. Secondary sources interprets and rearrange primary sources in other to satisfy the information needs of users, they include, indexes, abstract and bibliographies. Tertiary sources are produced after the filtration of primary and secondary sources. They are dictionaries, encyclopedias, biographies, yearbooks, handbooks, fact books, almanac, maps, atlases, manuals etc. Utilization of reference resources refers to the extent library users exploit and benefit from reference resources in different formats to satisfy their information needs. Effective utilization by students enhances knowledge and overall academic performance. Mucai (2013) stated that utilization is taking advantage of an item and benefiting from it. Thus, utilization of appropriate resources play an important role in the achievement of educational goals. Utilization determines the quantity and quality of information obtained and consequently, the quality of research output of users. Research output refers to performance in different academic areas such as examination, assignments, seminar papers, undergraduate project report as well as level of technical skill required.

Statement of the problem

Reference sources are very important tools that assist library

users in terms of information search. It makes access to large information resources easy and less cumbersome to users. Despite the relevance of these reference sources to library users, most academic libraries finds it very difficult to provide adequate and satisfying services to their users, could this be as a result of lack of awareness that such references are available and their relevance to the users, inappropriate evaluation of reference sources and poor utilization of the available reference sources by library users. It is against this backdrop the researcher decided to carry out this study availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries and also to proffer possible solutions in Federal Universities in North East, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine Availability and Extent of Utilization of Reference Sources and Services by Academic Staff of Federal Universities in North East, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study include the following:

1. To determine the available reference sources in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria.
2. To determine the available reference services in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the available reference sources in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria?
2. What are the available reference services in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria?

Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprises 1,264 Libraries academic staff in federal university of north east Nigeria. The simple random sampling technique was used in the study, giving every member of the population equal opportunity to be selected. The sample was 126 Libraries academic staff which represent 10% of the entire population. Instrument titled Availability and Extent of Utilization of Reference Sources and Services by Academic Staff Questionnaire (AEURSSASQ) was used for data collection. 20 items instrument developed by the researcher to measure the identified variables. The content validity was established by two experts in Library and Information Department. The reliability of the instrument was done by Cronbach Alpha Method. Availability coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained. This shows that the instrument was reliable and good for the study. A total of 126 questionnaire was administered by the researcher and three trained research assistants. At the end 118 instruments were retrieved representing 93.7 return rate. The research questions were answered with mean(x) and standard deviation while the hypotheses was tested using z test at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of the Result

Research Question 1

What are the available reference sources in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria?

s/n	Items	Mean (x)	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Printer	2.98	.78	High extent
2	Scanner	3.02	1.01	High extent
3	Television	3.33	.88	High extent
4	Telephone	3.52	.92	High extent
5	Encyclopedias	2.68	.92	High extent
6	Biographies	2.41	1.10	Low extent
7	Indexes	2.34	.99	Low extent
8	EBSCOHOSS	2.41	.88	Low extent
9	Abstracts	2.47	.91	Low extent
10	AGRIS	2.28	.97	High extent

Table 1 shows the available reference sources in federal university libraries in North East in Mean and Standard Deviations. From the table as indicated, except for items 6, 7, 8 and 9 with Mean values of 2.41, 2.34, 2.41 and 2.47 which are below the benchmark of 2.50, other items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10) are available reference sources to a high extent. The

table also reveals standard deviation values with close ranges from .78-1.10 which shows the homogeneity of the data collected from the respondents. Further, the table revealed a cluster Mean of 2.84 and SD = .94. With this cluster Mean of 2.84, it implies that the extent to available reference sources in university libraries in North East, Nigeria is high.

Research Question 2

What are the available reference services in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria?

s/n	Items	Mean (x)	Standard deviation	Decision
1	E-mail reference services	2.76	.98	High extent
2	Ask-A-Librarian	2.69	.86	High extent
3	Virtual Reference Desk	2.33	.81	Low extent
4	Path Finder's online.org	2.42	.90	Low extent
5	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)	2.39	.89	Low extent
6	Question Point Reference Services	2.30	.84	Low extent
7	User Orientation and Feed Back	2.60	.91	High extent
8	Online/Digital Services e.g. subject portals	2.20	.91	Low extent
9	Links to e-resources	2.33	.83	Low extent
10	Online Current Awareness	2.56	.80	High extent

Table 2 shows the available reference services in federal university libraries in North East, Nigeria in Mean and Standard Deviations. From the table as indicated, except for items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 with Mean values of 2.33, 2.42, 2.39, 2.30, 2.20 and 2.33 which are below the benchmark of 2.50, other items (1, 2, 7, and 10) are available reference services to a high extent. The table also reveals standard deviation values with close ranges from .80-.98 which shows the homogeneity of the data collected from the respondents. Further, the table revealed a cluster Mean of 2.76 and SD = .98. With this cluster Mean of 2.76, it implies that the extent to available reference services in university libraries in North East, Nigeria is low.

Summary of Findings

The following findings emanated from the study based on the research questions answered:

1. The high extent utilized the available reference resources in university libraries in North east Nigeria.
2. The low extent utilized the available digital reference services in university libraries in North east Nigeria.
3. The challenges that hinder the utilization of reference resources and services in university libraries in North east Nigeria include, poor internet connectivity, inadequate/irregular power supply, lack of awareness about the digital library, poor user interface of the

system, inappropriate search engine, outdated relevant resources, inadequate reference librarians, unavailability of a functional interactive chat box stream, librarians poor attitudes towards digital reference services, lack of professional skills and lack of professionalism of reference librarians.

4. The strategies for enhancing the utilization of reference resources and services in university libraries in North east Nigeria include, provision of good internet facilities, adequate/regular power supply through use of stand-by generator, creation of awareness about the digital library, assisting users in the use of the information system, provision of information retrieval skills through user education programmes, provision of appropriate search engine, provision of current and relevant resources, ensuring adequate training for reference librarians to update their skills through in-service training, provision of professional skills to reference librarians through workshop and seminars, ensuring positive attitudes of librarians towards digital reference services, provision of a functional interactive chat box stream and ensuring adequate reference librarians are employed.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that, universities libraries in North East, Nigeria to have a

high extent utilize reference resources while the available reference services were utilized to a low extent. A plethora of challenges some of which include lack of fund for purchasing electronic resources, inadequate/irregular power supply, lack of Technical Know -How, poor attitudes of librarians and inadequate reference librarians hinders the effective utilization of the reference resources and services in university libraries in North East, Nigeria.

Research and Reflection, 2015, 3(78)

Recommendation

1. University management should ensure reference resources are up-to-date in the library so as to encourage patrons to use the resources for research and information acquisition
2. University Library management should ensure that its staff develop positive attitudes towards reference services for effective dissemination of information on new trends in the library
3. University libraries should create awareness during orientation programmes about the availability of new resources and services or additions of new databases for user of the library. This will enhance users' use of the resources and services

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