

---

## Utilization of Reference Resources and Services by Users of Benue State Public Library, Makurdi, Nigeria

Akpe Precious Doo

Department of Library and Information Science, MAUTECH, Yola

Murtala Aliyu

Department of Library and Information Science, MAUTECH, Yola

### Abstract

This paper focuses on the utilization of reference resources and services by users of Benue state public library, Makurdi. Related literature on the study reviewed shows that reference services are very important and needed by library clientele. The study attempted to identify the types of reference resources and services available for use by the subjects of the study as well as the extent to which they address the needs of users. The study found out among other things that the patrons utilize to a moderate extent the reference services provided to them. They also utilize the reference resources and services mostly for their course work and research works. Findings of the study also show that the users derive to a moderate extent satisfaction with the services provided to them by the library. Finally from the findings of the study it has been recommended that provision of current information resources and employment of dedicated and experienced reference staff will guarantee user satisfaction and solve information apathy.

**Keywords:** reference services, reference sources, public library, makurdi, Nigeria

### Introduction

Reference service is the totality or the culmination of all library activities aimed at facilitating the use of library and its resources (Aboyade: 1983). Reference service can be described as the services provided by library to its users so as to meet the information needs of its community; this in turn makes the library relevant in contributing to the socio-economic, educational and political development of the community where the library is situated. In other words, reference service in libraries is most often defined as direct personal assistance to readers. If the three common functions of libraries are acquisition, organization and dissemination of information, then reference service is directed primarily towards the dissemination function. Reference service can best be defined and approached in understandable terms of functions since there are several definitions for the term.

The nature of reference service differs remarkably among libraries in terms of type and size. That is, school libraries undertake reference work in a different manner than the librarians who work in other institutions or in business settings; reference services provided in academic libraries differ in some respects from the reference services offered in public libraries. The size and characteristics of the potential user groups vary greatly. A librarian in a special library may serve thirty library users, while a school librarian may have three hundred children who regularly visit the library. Thus, the primary process of reference service is always the same that is, translating a request into terms that can be met by different reference sources. It is always the duty of the reference librarian to listen to the patron, find out and translate his/her information needs and provide the correct sources to satisfy those information needs.

The reference service however, may range from a minimal level of help to users in locating information, on the one hand, to the actual delivery of information to clients, on

the other. Reference service is the most demanding and the most intellectual and brain tasking aspect of librarianship; the performance of which can make or mar the effectiveness of the overall service of the library, or the image of the library profession as a whole. The Reference Department of a library is usually referred to as the “showcase” or the window/mirror of the library. This is because reference service embraces a variety of activities; such services bring Reference Librarians directly in contact with those who use or patronize the library. Relevant to this, is the importance of information in the acquisition of knowledge (Bankole: 1998). Similarly, reference work is defined as the personal assistance given by the librarian to individual readers in pursuit of information (Rothstein, 1961). This involves not locating the material where the required information can be found but also locating the information and sorting out what information is relevant from a mass of information. In short, reference service involved with all aspects of information both theoretical and practical. In library services, failure to locate any required information leads to a user’s frustration. Misinformation and disinformation have the same effect. A satisfied user, on the other hand, serves as a public relations officer for the library. Thus assistance to readers is a great task that embraces an enormous range and variety of activities. Many users want to know more and more about less and less; they want to acquire more knowledge; and they want to know more about their society and their historical cultures.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:-

1. Identify the types of reference resources available for use in the Benue State Library Board, Makurdi.
2. Examine the types of reference services provided to meet the information needs of her clientele.

3. Determine the extent to which the resources and services address the needs of the users.
4. Determine the problems militating against the utilization of these resources and services.
5. Suggest ways in which the identified problems could be overcome.

### Research Questions

This study sought to find answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the types of reference resource and services available for use by patrons?
2. To what extent do users in the study utilize reference resources and services of the library?
3. To what extent do the available resources and services meet the information needs of the users?
4. What are the problems militating against the provision and utilization of Reference resources and services in this study?
5. What strategies can be adopted to overcome the problems militating against the provision and utilization of information Resources and services?

### Review of Related Literature

A reference work is a compendium of information, usually of a specific type, compiled in a book for ease of reference. That is, the information is intended to be quickly found when needed. Reference works are usually referred to for particular pieces of information, rather than read beginning to end. The writing style used in these works is informative and emphasizes facts. Indexes are commonly provided in reference books. Updated editions are published as needed, in some cases annually. Typical reference books include dictionaries, encyclopedias, and compendia. Many reference works are available in electronic form and can be obtained as software packages or online through the internet.

Alafiatayo, (1997) in his study of University libraries in Nigeria used a total

number of 600 respondents as the population sample for the study. The instruments used for data collection in his study were questionnaire and personal interview. The findings of the study pointed to the fact that the type of reference assistance to users in University libraries in Nigeria do not probably go beyond conservation to moderate level. Some of the factors which have been identified to be responsible for such a situation are the fact that none of the libraries have laid out objectives to guide its reference services, inadequate personnel, organizational structure of the library and ‘ignorance’ of the users particularly patrons among others. Therefore, considering the present level of library potential in Nigeria, the liberal and maximum level of reference service is recommended.

In another development, Klumpp, (2007) carried out a study on reference service; patron, instructors and librarian in the 21st century in UMCP (university of McKeldin). Two hundred undergraduate students were used as respondents in the university campus. Instrument used for data collection was questionnaire and simple percentage was used for the data analysis. In the report it was found out that, the undergraduate are unaware of the many services and resources which are available in the library. And also that the undergraduate students are reluctant to ask for assistance in the use of information resources and services while some are intimidated by the complexity and large size of the library. Suggestion was made that reference services ought to recognize the need for generally experience in working with the special needs of naive users. In addition, system of training and evaluation targeted specifically at the need of these users should be part of reference services.

Sheri (1993) opines that reference service and resource are of paramount importance to users. They are services that formalized provision of information in diverse form by a reference librarian who is interposed between the questioner and the available information resources as well as to interpret the sources in the light of the question asked towards the

operation of reference services. In the same line of thinking Amkpa (2000), is of the opinion that information resources and services provides numerous benefit to users. Benefits such as meeting their information needs, hence, Nigerian public libraries need to improve their services so as to equip the users with the skills of accessing relevant information and effective utilization of information resources and services.

First step towards improving the services is by implementing a better reference services. The library among other services should provide relevant information resources and services for patrons, to cope with the changing needs of users, the need to impart some basic knowledge and skills of reference resource and services to their staff and users (Luban:2007). According to Sheri (2007), patrons make use of information resources because they are information bearing materials that can meet their information needs. He further opined that the services (personal assistance) usually given to library users in pursuit of information by the librarian in charge of the reference collection also enables the user to meet their information needs. From Sheri's study, it was found out that, the purpose of utilization of information resources and services by users is to meet the various information needs of library users such as writing a term paper, seminar essay, lectures, education, entertainment, courses work, assignment, leisure and self improvement.

The level of satisfaction derived from usage of reference resource and services according to Heaton (1996), appears to dwindle over time. In his study also Carlso (2008) observed that users were once satisfied with the resources and services offered in the Hornbake library. The study indicated that forty nine percent of users use information resources and services on the reference desk while 51% went with the new technology of referencing. The remaining 49% indicated they were satisfied with the references and services available to them.

The problems of provision of information resources and services and their

corresponding utilization by patrons were recorded by Carlso, (2008) to include among others; Lack of adequate reference collection which is the working tool of reference librarian. From the studies it is observed that quality reference collection is hard to come by. The librarian depends on overseas publishing houses and marketing agent for their collection. This dependency in itself is a problem, more especially now that the prices of these resources have escalated due to production cost and the devaluation of our domestic currency. Secondly, because of transnational distance materials ordered take months, at times years before they arrive. By the time this information resources finally arrive in Nigeria and are cleared from the port agencies and other relevant agencies most of the imported information materials become obsolete. Indeed a lot of changes might have taken place this makes them useless. Another major problem is that of inadequate qualified Staff. Those who possess a wide range of intellectual capacity, interest, desire to assist the users, flair for organizing document, ability to research literature and adequacy of the resources of the library. The quality of staff usually reflects on the quality of reference service delivery. Such qualities earlier discussed are lacking in many reference librarian. This is partly because most of them are not well trained either while in library school or on the job training. Also because some took up the library profession without thinking about problems involved in becoming a successful librarian.

Users of information resources themselves constitute a problem to the provision of effective reference services. Klumpp (2007) in his study recognize this problem that users are unnecessarily selfish in the way and manner they make use of library resources. Some either tear pages of sheets of book, journals, and other information resources they consider most useful or some times steal a whole document. This behavior is very disturbing to a conscious reference librarian or readers who may want to make use of a piece of information in a document only to find out that it cannot be found. Lack

of skill on the part of patrons in using reference resources and services was high and difficulty in locating reference resources on the right shelf was also identified in the study. Another problem was inadequate use of information resources for academic and self improvement by patrons.

## Methodology

The research design used for this study was survey. The area of study was Benue State Library Board, Makurdi. Benue State Library Board, Makurdi. The study covered only the patrons in the reference section. The population of this study constitutes two hundred and sixty patrons. The sample for

this study was 125 respondents drawn from the total population of two hundred and sixty (260). This was sampled using random sampling technique. For the purpose of generating data, questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was titled "Utilization of Reference Resource and service by patrons of the State library Makurdi Questionnaire (URRSBSLMQ)". The data collected was analyzed using frequency charts and percentages.

## Findings

A total of 125 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents out of which 110 were returned. This indicates a response rate of 88%.

**Table 1: Resources and Services Available**

S/N	Resources	No.	Freq.	Percent
1.	Encyclopedia	110	30	27.28
	Dictionaries	110	40	36.37
	Directories	110	10	9.091
	Bibliographies	110	10	9.091
	Glossary	110	5	4.55
	Constitutions	110	15	13.63
<b>B. Services available</b>				
	Library instructions	110	30	27.28
	Information services	110	5	4.55
	Asst. in the use of resource	110	50	45.45
	Photocopying	110	12	10.91
	CAS	110	7	6.36
	SDI	110	6	5.45

Table 1 shows the available reference resources and services in the study. From the study, it is found that the most available reference resources are Dictionaries, Encyclopedias and Constitutions these are indicated by 36.37%, 27.28% and 13.63% respectively.

On the other hand, the table reveals that the most available reference services are assistance in the use of R.R, library instructions and photocopying. These are represented by 45.45%, 27.28% and 10.9% respectively. The table also showed that the least available resources and services are Glossaries, (4.55%) information services (4.55%) and SDI (5.45%).

**Table 2:** Extent of Utilization of Resources and Services.

S/N	Resources	Regular		Often		Occasional		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Encyclopedia	18	16.36	30	27.28	-	-	-	-
	Dictionaries	15	13.63	10	9.091	-	-	-	-
	Directories	-	-	3	2.72	-	-	-	-
	Bibliographies	-	-	-	-	5	4.55	-	-
	Glossary	-	-	-	-	5	4.55	-	-
	Constitutions	03	2.72	7		14	12.72	-	-
<b>B. Extent of services utilization</b>									
1.	Library instructions	5	4.55	-	-	8	7.27	-	-
	Information services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Asst. in the use of Resources								
	Photocopying	2	1.81	7	6.36	18	16.36	-	-
	CAS	8	7.27	10	9.09	12	10.9	-	-
	SDI	6	5.45	-	-	10	9.09	-	-
		4	3.63	-	-	20	18.18	-	-

From table 2, the extent of utilization of reference resources and services was captured. The table showed that the most regularly used reference resources are encyclopedias (16.36), those often used (27.28%) again was found to be encyclopedias. Those occasionally used were found to be constitutions (12.72%). On the part of services, it was found that the most regularly utilized reference service was photocopying (7.27%), often used, photocopying (9.09%) and occasionally used (10.9%). The least utilized were found to be SDI (3.63%) and library instructions (4.55%) respectively.

**Table 3:** Level of Satisfaction derived from Resources and Services.

S/N	Resources	Highly satisfied		Moderately satisfied		Fairly satisfied		Not satisfied	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Encyclopedia	-	-	8	7.27	13	11.8	12	10.9
	Dictionaries	8	7.27	-	-	10	9.09	10	9.09
	Directories	-	-	4	3.63	-	-	4	3.63
	Bibliographies	-	-	2	1.81	-	-	2	1.81
	Glossary	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.81
	Constitutions	7	6.36	14	-	10	9.09	10	9.09
<b>B. Services</b>									
1.	Library instructions	5	4.55	10	9.09	6	5.45		
	Information services	-	-	-	-	-	-		
	Asst. in the use of Resources								
	Photocopying	5	4.55	23	20.91	4	3.63		
	CAS	20	18.18	29	26/36	-	-		
	SDI	-	-	7	6.36	-	-		
		-	-	1	0.91	-	-		

Table 3 sets out to establish the level of satisfaction derived by patrons from the resources and services of the library under study. The table reveals that the patrons are generally fairly satisfied with resources of the library. This is indicated by 11.81%, on the whole, a respondent percentage

of 10.9 indicated they are not satisfied with the resources provided by the library under study. As regard to the services rendered by the library, it was found that patrons are moderately satisfied with all services. This is indicated by 26.36% for photocopying, 20.91% for assistance in the use of reference resources, 9.9% for library instructions and 7.36% for CAS.

**Table 4:** Problems of Provision and Utilization of Resources and Services.

S/N	Problems	No.	Freq.	%
	Inadequate manpower	110	10	9.09
	Poor funding	110	50	45.45
	Lack of modern facilities	110	30	27.27
	Non current collections	110	15	13.63
	Others	110	5	4.55
<b>B. Problems of Utilization</b>				
	Lack of adequate reference resources	110	7	6.36
	Lack of skills to use the reference resources	110	52	47.27
	Mutilation of reference resources	110	13	11.81
	Lack of knowledge of existing reference resources	110	8	7.27
	Inadequate staff asst.	110	10	9.09
	Poor reference services	110	10	9.09
	Lack of knowledge of existing reference services	110	20	18.18

The table shows that the most pressing problems in the area of provision of the said resources and services are; poor funding (45.45%), lack of modern infrastructural facilities (27.27%) and non-current collections (13.63%). In terms of utilization, the study shows that the most critical problems include but not limited to lack of skills to use the resources and services (47.27%), lack of knowledge of existing resources and services (18.17%) and the others as indicated in the table.

**Table 5:** Strategies to be adopted to overcome the problems of provision and utilization

Strategies	No.	Freq.	%
Better funding	110	60	54.55
Provision of modern infrastructure	110	20	18.18
Provision of effective reference services	110	10	9.09
Employment of qualified staff/training	110	5	4.54
More security measures	110	5	4.55
Provision of adequate reference resources	110	10	9.09

Table 5 showed the strategies to be adopted to overcome the problems of provision and utilization. 54.55% indicated better funding, 18.18% indicated provision of modern infrastructural facilities and provision of effective reference services (9.09%).

### Discussion of Findings

The importance of information in the life of every living individual cannot be overemphasized. This explains why libraries acquire and organize a wide range of information resources, reference materialsii-inclusive. The findings of this study show that the basic reference resources providediii-by the library under study include but not limited to encyclopedias (27.28%), Dictionaries (36.37%), constitutionsiv-(13.63%) among others. The study provide for her patrons such reference service as assistance in the use of resources (45.45%)v-library instructions (27.28%) and photocopy services (10.91%). Also from the findings of this work, it was discovered that the study population utilized the available resources and services to a moderate extent and thatvi-their purpose of utilization is for research works. The study again found the level of satisfaction to be a reflection of the extent of usage. Thus, it was found that the patronsvii-get a moderate level of satisfaction from the use of resources and services.

Despite the fact that these resources and services and funding are found to be *sine qua non* for the patronage of research needs, some problems are discovered from this study to be impediments to the library under study. The results of this study revealed among others, problems such as funding, inadequate reference resources and services and poor utilization skills. This corroborates Carlso (2008) findings in a study he conducted on utilization of resources and services in Hornbake library and came out with above mentioned findings. To curb the above mentioned problems, the study recommends proper funding to address the problems of inadequate resources and services. This again is in line with Carlso (2008) earlier suggestion.

### Summary of Findings

From the analysis made, the following major findings were arrived at:

- i- The study population is provided reference resources of varying types, except abstracts. In the same vein they are provided a number of reference services except general information services. Patrons utilize to a moderate extent the reference services provided to them. The study population utilizes the reference resources and services mostly for their course work and research works. The population derives to a moderate extent satisfaction with the services provided to them by the library. Problems of provision and utilization of reference resources include Inadequate reference resources and services; poor utilization skills and inadequate funding among others. The strategies to be adopted to overcome the problems highlighted include proper funding of the library; proper staffing; tightening up of the security etc.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

There are various ways by which people get information. Some get it from organized sources like the libraries and others through discussion with colleagues etc. Patrons of Benue State Library Board utilize reference resources and services of different types to meet their information needs for their course work and research works. From the above findings it is recommended that provision of current information resources and employment of dedicated and experienced reference staff will guarantee user satisfaction and solve information apathy. It is also recommended that the budgetary allocation for the state library board need to be reviewed to reflect and accommodate all their mandatory services including reference service to users.

## References

- Aboyade, B.O (1983), Keynote address on reference services in Nigerian Librarianship, *Lagos Librarian* 10(2) p.8
- Adomi, E.E (2004). *Collection Development and Management* Benin City; Ethiopie publishing cooperation.
- Aina, L.O (2002). *Research in information science: an African perspective*. Lbadon Strirling Horden Publishers (Nig) Ltd.
- Ajayi, N.A and Adetayo, J.O (2005). Utilization of Library Books to Enhance Academic excellence in Nigeria-Tatiary Institution: A case study of Hezekiah Oluwasamin library; OAU, Ile-Ife. *Journal of Social science* 10(2):119-122.
- Alafiatayo, (1997). Refernce Services in the University Libraries in Nigeria: Two case studies. ABU thesis.
- Ameh, O.A. (2007). An Appraisal of Reference and users Services in the National library of Nigeria. *Nigerbiblio: vol. 11 nos1&2, Jan-Dec,2007. p33-44.*
- American Library Association (1983). *The ALA Glossary of library and information science*. Chicago: ALA.
- Amkpa, S.A(2000). Students Use of University of Maiduguri Library: An Evaluative Study. *Gateway Library Journal. 2&3. P70-80.*
- Bankole, B.S (1986), Special Libraries. *ALA World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Chicago, American Library Association, p.782.
- Carlso, J. S. (2008). Utilization of Resources and Services in Hornbake Library. Retrieve from: <http://www.mlanet.org/education/irpl>
- Dad, H and Khan, S.(2006). *A guide to Library and Information Science Question and Answers*. Ishmabad: Poorab Academy Publishers.
- Edoh, T., Sambe J. and Adejoh, A. (2002). *A Decade of Academic Excellence Benue State University at Ten (1992- 2002)*. Makurdi: The Return Press Ltd.
- Edoka, B. E. (2000). *Introduction to Library Science*. Onitsha: Palma Publishing and Link Company Ltd.
- Heaton, G.T. (1996). Rethinking the Provision of Reference Service in Academic Medical School libraries. Jan; 84(1): 17-24. retrieved from <http://mlanet.org/education/irpl>.
- Iman, A. A.. etal (2008). *Library and information Studies*. Nigeria; Eagle Publishers.
- Kent, A. (Ed). (1983), *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*. New York: Marcel Dekker, INC., Vol.25, pp.210-224.
- Klurnpp, J. F. (2007). Reference Service; Students, Instructors Librarians in the 21st Century: A Report of the Team in University of McKeldin (UMCP) retrieved from: [www.google.com/referenceserviceaccessed](http://www.google.com/referenceserviceaccessed).
- Kumar, K. (1987). *Reference service. 5<sup>th</sup> revise ed.* Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd.
- Luban, J. (2007), Summary of Undergraduate Students Viewpoint on Reference services. Retrieved from: <http://www.mlanet.org/education/irpl>
- MacLeod, F. (2007), University Provision of Library Services to Undergraduate Students. Retrieve from: <http://www.mlanet.org/education/irpl>

- Madu, E.C. (2010), *Reference Service in the Libraries and Information Centers in the 21st Century*. In Madu, E.C and Ezeani, C. N. (Ed), *Modern Library and Information Science for Information Professionals in African*. Ibadan: Text Links Publishers.
- Markum, D.G. and George, G. (2003), *Utilization of Library Resources in College*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clir.org/pubs/d-lib/pub/oabs.htm> 1/→
- Nwalo, K. N. (1996). *Reference source and services*. Ibadan; External Studies, University of Ibadan. Retrieve from: [www.aiol.infor././28319](http://www.aiol.infor././28319).
- Olanlakun, S.O (2003), *Perspective reference services in Library the Nigeria Perspective*. *Lagos Journal of Library and Information Science*. 1(1) Sept. pp 85-90.
- Oyedum, G.U (1999), *Reference services and emerging trends in information technology*. Paper presented at the workshop on reference and information service organized by M.A research and information management consultancy services, Zaria, Kaduna state.
- Oyedum, G.U (2005), *Introductory notes on reference and bibliography*. Minna, Mairo press.
- Raganathan, S.R. (1961). *Reference service* 2nd ed. Bombay: Asia publishing House.
- Rothstein, S. (1961), *Reference service: The new dimension in librarianship*. *College and research libraries*. 22: p. 3-14
- Sheri, P. (1993), *Reference source and services in libraries*. Retrieved; [www.osra.org/itlp:/bartlkotrlikhiggins.pdf](http://www.osra.org/itlp/bartlkotrlikhiggins.pdf)
- Utor, J.K. (2008), *Reference sources and services*. Makurdi: Lanrad Print.
- Wyer, J.I (1930), *Reference Work: A textbook for students of Library Work and Librarians*. Chicago: American Library Association.