# Availability and Use of Reference Sources and Service in Babcock University Library

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*Abstract:* **This study investigated the availability and use of reference sources and service in Babcock university library. A survey research design was used and a simple random samplingmethod was adopted to determine the 93 samples used for this study. Findings were analyzed using descriptive statisticsand the results indicated that 38(40.9%) of the respondents use the reference sourcesweekly. Majority of the respondents indicated that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate exceptyearbook, bibliographies and biographies that are not available, accessible and adequate.Therefore, university libraries should provide students with relevant reference sources, effective library orientation programmes and also employ an innovative librarian that has good customer relationship.**

*Keywords:* **Availability, Babcock University library, Reference sources and services, Use.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The provision of reference services is one of the most essential functions of library and information services provided tomeet the information needs of users. It is the core service of the library that creates contact between the reference librarian, information resources and the users. Kumar (2003) said that it helps to establish contact between a user and the right document, thereby saving the time of the user.

However, the responsibilities of academic libraries go beyond information resources gathering and organizing but play an active role of information dissemination through the process of reference services. Thus, reference services serves as the fundamental basis of research activities to students.Hence, university libraries should endeavour to provide adequate and relevant reference sources in order to meet the information needs of students.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The reference department is one of the most important departments in the library that provides free flow of information through the provision of reference services. Nwalo (2003) said that the reference department is another major area of the library where contact is made with the public.Therefore, Reference service is defined as direct personal assistance giving to the users seeking for information in the library, inorder to provide them with the relevant information resources that meet their information needs.Retting (1993) asserts that the distinguishing features of reference include a staff designated to provide the service; a collection of reference works accessible to the public (staff, students and university community) in an area set aside for the provision of the service; adequate guides to the library's resources; and a high degree of interaction between the staff and the clientele. Achebe (2012) opined that reference and information service is an aspect of library services in which contact between the reader and library materials is established through staff assistance, matching the user with the library materials which could be in printed or on electronic form.

Importantly, reference sources are information materials that are consulted for specific purpose based on the information needs of the user. According to Reitz (2004) it is any publication from which authoritative information may be obtained, including but not limited to reference books, catalog records, printed indexes and abstracting services and bibliographic. Oyedum (2005) defined reference book/sources as books designed by the arrangement and treatment of its subject matter to be consulted for definite item of information rather to be read consecutively. Therefore, reference sources are publications that provide background and factual information to a subject matter.They are not meant to be read from cover to cover, they are used within the library and also they are meant to be consulted for specific information needs. The availability of reference sources would increase students' interest on the use of the library as this will greatly support learning and research activities.Thereby university libraries should provide students with relevant reference resources that will aid their academic pursuit.

Furthermore, the provision of reference services in the library or information centers should be regarded and recognized as a serious aspect of library services which seeks to satisfy the hunger of user. Undoubtedly, reference service is one of the basic services provided in the libraries, especially academic libraries, and here lies the root of librarianship. It is based on the circumstances, that Nwalo (2003) averred that services offered by this section includes answering reference queries, user education, compilation of reading lists, bibliographies, indexing and abstracting, inter library loan services, and current awareness services.

Lessick (2000) and Palmer (2000) asserts that users enquires at the reference desk are declining. This is as a result as of information and communication technology which has created a wider access to users in different institutions. However, the changing technology, and the exponential growth of information resources have influenced the way students' access to reference section. It is based on this background that Han and Goulding (2003) opine that librarians have been considering how to adjust services to the new environment. The nature of reference services provided by librarians will determine the rate student use reference sources as new media has greatly changed the traditional style of referencing. Tajer(2009) asserts 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.

University libraries are faced with great challenges in meeting the information needs of students. Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2009) affirm that many universities in Nigeria have not been able to acquire collections comprehensive enough to meet the needs of their users due to inadequate funding of the universities. The 10% allocations meant for the library as stipulated by the National University Commission (NUC) has not been adhere to in many Nigeria universities. And this has resulted to poor reference service delivery which has relegated the library to the background.

## 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to investigate the availability and use of reference sources and service in Babcock university library. They specific objective to the study are to:

(1)      determine the extent of use of reference service;

(2)      ascertain the  availability and adequacy of reference sources in the university library;

(3)      determine  the accessibility of reference sources in the university library;

(4)      find out the challenges that hinder effective reference service in university libraries in Nigeria;

(5)      Proffer solution to the challenges that hinder effective reference service in university libraries in Nigeria.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

Survey research method was adopted for the study and structured questionnaire was used to collect data.A total of hundred (100) undergraduate students of Babcock University library users were sampled, out of which ninety three (93) was completed for analysis using frequency counts and simple percentage to answer the research questions. Thus, Random sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaire.

# 5.    ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

**Demographical Variables:**

**Table1. Distribution of the respondents by Level**

| Level | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 100 | 8 | 8.6 |
| 200 | 18 | 19.4 |
| 300 | 19 | 20.4 |
| 400 | 41 | 44.1 |
| 500 | 7 | 7.5 |
| Total | 93 | 100.0 |

Table1shows that 8(8.6%) are 100 level, 18(19.4%) 200 level, 19(20.4%) 300 level, 41(44.1%) 400 level, while 7(7.5%) 500 level.

**Table 2. Distribution of the respondents by Gender**

| Level | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 26 | 28.0 |
| Female | 67 | 72.0 |
| Total | 93 | 100.0 |

Table 2 above shows that 26(28.0%) are males while their female counterparts are 67(72.0%).

**Table 3. Distribution of the respondents by Age**

| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 15 - 18 | 41 | 44.1 |
| 19 - 21 | 42 | 45.2 |
| 22 - 24 | 6 | 6.5 |
| 25 and above | 4 | 4.3 |
| Total | 93 | 100.0 |

Table 3 shows that 41(44.1%) are between 15-18 years, 42(45.2%) are between 19-21 years, 6(6.5%) are between 22-24 while 4(4.3%) are above 25 years

**Table 4. Extent of use of reference sources and services**

| S/N | Items | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Daily | 33 | 35.5 |
|  | Weekly | 38 | 40.9 |
|  | Monthly | 14 | 15.1 |
|  | Twice monthly | 6 | 6.5 |
|  | Never | 8 | 8.6 |
|  | Total | 93 | 100 |

Table 4 reveals that 33(35.5%) of the respondents usereference sources and services daily, 38(40.9%) weekly, 14(15.1%), monthly, 6(6.5%) twice monthly, while 8(8.6%) indicated Never.

**Table 5. Availability of reference sources**

| S/N | REFERENCE SOURCES | Available | Not Available |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dictionaries | 84(90.3%) | 9 (9.7%) |
| 2 | Yearbooks | 12(12.9%) | 81(87.1%) |
| 3 | Manuals | 79(84.9%) | 14(15.9%) |
| 4 | Indexes | 82(88.2%) | 11(11.8%) |
| 5 | Abstracts | 81(87.1%) | 12(12.9%) |
| 6 | Bibliographies | 11(11.8%) | 82(88.2%) |
| 7 | Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who | 19(20.4%) | 74(79.6%) |
| 8 | Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc | 87(93.5%) | 6(6.5%) |
| 9 | Directories | 83(89.9%) | 10(10.8%) |
| 10 | Handbooks | 87(93.5%) | 6(6.5%) |

Table 5 shows that reference sources in the library are highly available; except yearbook 81(87.1%), Bibliographies 82(88.2%) and biographical sources 74(79.6%) thatare not available.

**Table 6. Adequacy of reference sources**

| S/N | Reference sources | Adequate | Not Adequate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dictionaries | 84(90.3%) | 9(9.7%) |
| 2 | Yearbooks | 19(20.4%) | 74(79.6%) |
| 3 | Manuals | 77(82.8%) | 16(17.2%) |
| 4 | Indexes | 82(88.2%) | 11(11.8%) |
| 5 | Abstracts | 81(87.1%) | 12(12.9%) |
| 6 | Bibliographies | 8(8.6%) | 85(91.4%) |
| 7 | Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who | 16(17.2%) | 77(82.8%) |
| 8 | Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc | 84(90.3%) | 9(9.7%) |
| 9 | Directories | 81(87.1%) | 12(12.9%) |
| 10 | Handbooks | 84(90.3%) | 9(9.7%) |

Table 6 shows that reference sources in the library are highly adequate; except yearbook 74(79.6%), Bibliographies 85(91.4%) and biographical sources 77(82.8%) that are not adequate.

**Table 7. Accessibility of reference sources**

| S/N | Reference sources | Accessible | Not Accessible |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dictionaries | 85(91.4%) | 8(8.6%) |
| 2 | Yearbooks | 16(17.2%) | 77(82.8%) |
| 3 | Manuals | 80(86.0%) | 13(14.0%) |
| 4 | Indexes | 82(88.2%) | 11(11.8%) |
| 5 | Abstracts | 77(82.8%) | 16(17.2%) |
| 6 | Bibliographies | 20(21.5%) | 73(78.5%) |
| 7 | Biographical sources e.g. Who's Who | 25(26.9%) | 68(73.1%) |
| 8 | Geographical sources e.g. Maps, Atlases etc | 79(84.9%) | 14(15.1%) |
| 9 | Directories | 83(89.2%) | 10(10.8%) |
| 10 | Handbooks | 85((91.4%) | 8(8.6%) |

Table 7 shows that most of reference sources in the library are very accessible; except yearbook 77(82.8%), Bibliographies 73(78.5%) and biographical sources 68(73.1%) that are not accessible.

**Table 8. Challenges to the use of reference services**

| S/N | Challenges | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lack of reference staff to assist me | 20(21.5%) | 25(26.9%) | 48(51.6%) |
| 2 | Unavailability and Inadequacy of  reference sources for my course | 20(21.5%) | 14(15.1%) | 59(53.4%) |
| 3 | There are old and irrelevant reference sources for my course | 26(28.0%) | 19(20.4%) | 48(51.6%) |
| 4 | The reference section is not convenient and conducive for reading | 15(16.1%) | 17(18.3%) | 61(65.6%) |
| 5 | I don't know how to use reference sources | 16(17.2%) | 11(11.8%) | 66(71.0%) |
| 6 | I waste a lot of time when searching for reference materials | 56(60.2%) | 7(7.5%) | 30(32.3%) |
| 7 | The reference librarians are not user-friendly | 53(57.0%) | 29(31.2%) | 11(11.8%) |
| 8 | Poor power supply in the reference section | 18(19.4%) | 16(17.2%) | 59(63.4%) |

Table 8 shows that 56(60.2%) of the respondents waste a lot of time when searching for reference materials and 53(57.0%) indicated that the reference librarians are not user-friendly.

**Table 9. Suggested solutions for effective use of reference services**

| S/N | Solutions | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Employment of reference staff to assist in the reference desk | 70(75.3%) | 9(9.7%) | 14(15.1%) |
| 2 | There should be adequate provision of reference sources for all disciplines | 82(88.2%) | 8(8.6%) | 3(3.2%) |
| 3 | Provision of new and relevant reference sources for my course | 84(90.3%) | 8(8.6%) | 1(1.1%) |
| 4 | There should be a convenient and conducive reference section for reading | 83(89.2%) | 8(8.6%) | 2(2.2%) |
| 5 | There should be provision of library orientation to users | 7782.8%) | 10(10.8%) | 6(6.5%) |
| 6 | The reference librarians should be user-friendly and  ready to assist users | 83(89.2%) | 6(6.5%) | 4(4.3%) |
| 7 | There should be steady power supply in the reference section | 83(89.2%) | 4(4.3%) | 6(6.5%) |

Table 9 shows that 70(75.3%) of the respondents suggested that there should be employment of reference staff to assist in the reference desk, 82(88.2%) there should be adequate provision of reference sources for all disciplines, 84(90.3%) provision of new and relevant reference sources for my course, 83(89.2%) there should be a convenient and conducive reference section for reading, 7782.8%) there should be provision of library orientation to users, 83(89.2%) the reference librarians should be user-friendly and ready to assist users, 83(89.2%) there should be steady power supply in the reference section.

## 6.    CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reference service is the major aspect of library services where contact between the reader and materials is established through staff assistance, matching the user with the library materials which could be in printed or non -printed form. Thus, reference sources are information materials that are consulted for specific information needs of the user. Therefore, reference sources are publications that provide background and factual information to a subject matter. They are not meant to be read from cover to cover, they are used within the library and also they are meant to consult for specific information needs.However, the availability, accessibility and adequacy of reference sources would increase students'

interest on the use of the library as this will greatly support learning and research activities.Therefore, university libraries should provide students with relevant reference resources, effective library orientation and also employ a projective and innovative librarian that has good customer relationship.

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