



THE ROLES OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES.

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Abstract

The provision of Reference and information services is an important function of a library. It is one of the basic services provided in library and information centers. The purpose of this service is to meet the information needs of its diverse users by providing personal assistance to users in need of information. This paper looks at the concept of reference and information service, reference and information sources which include dictionary, encyclopedia, yearbook etc. It also discusses the forms of reference services which include basic ones, those performed usually and sometimes in library, the role of reference services to users and the challenges hindering effective library services which include lack of adequate resources, lack of qualified and experience staff, personal attitude of librarians etc.

Keywords: *Reference, Information, Services, Sources, Library*

INTRODUCTION

Information is very crucial for knowledge acquisition, decision-making and national development. Information has turned up to be the “fourth resource” after land, labour and capital in this fast-growing knowledge-based economy. And it is so because information is the bedrock of almost every sector of the society and when you possess the right and enough information you can reduce uncertainty. Libraries are built to preserve cultural heritage, to conduct research and easy access to information resources. A library is a place where individuals access information and ideas. The libraries are especially important now when the whole idea of education stresses more and more on independent learning and acting in providing information and services.

Libraries are considered as the heart of educational centers. They are vibrant learning units and knowledge centers. Academic libraries are professionally organized collection of graphic and non- graphic materials or information resources for the exploitation of staff and students in tertiary institution. Academic libraries are designed to serve parent institution. The library is required to provide varied, authoritative and up-to-date resources that support its mission and the needs of its users. It is therefore the function of the library to provide services to meet the information needs of its users and achieve its mission. One of these services is the Reference service.

Reference service is the personal assistance given by librarian to individual's readers in pursuit of information. This service provided include information, instruction and guidance (Ruthstein 1961)

METHODOLOGY

The plan of studying and discussing the roles of reference and information services was subjected to a rigorous literature search in the area and relevant research carried out in the area. Literature were reviewed on the concept of reference and information services, forms of reference services, reference and information sources, role of references services to users and challenges hindering effective reference services. Therefore this paper is a reviewed work.

CONCEPT OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Reference and Information services are a major component of library services and it is constantly developing as the library itself.

The earliest concept of modern reference work is usually traced to Samuel Swett Green's 1876 paper entitled "Personal relation between libraries and readers" in which he advocated the importance of personal service and guidance to the library patron. Over the following hundreds of years the concepts and practices of reference work have been expanded and have evolved significantly. Based on Green's ideas, Bopp and Bunge categorized the practices of reference services into three groups

1. Information services that take the forms of ready reference questions, bibliographic verification, interlibrary loan and document delivery, information

and referral services, research questions and fee-based services and information brokering;

2. Guidance, including readers' advisory services, bibliotherapy, term-paper counseling, selective dissemination of information (SDI, also called current awareness service);

3. One-to-one or group instruction.

Reference service is the process of establishing contact between the reader and his documents in a personal way.

As the guidelines by the Reference and User Services Association (a division of the American Library Association) state, "the goal of information services is to provide the information sought by the user. Information service should anticipate as well as meet user needs. It should encourage user awareness of the potential of information resources to fulfill individual information needs.

Quadri and Abiodun (2017) citing Achebe (2012) opined that reference and information service (RIS) is an aspect of library services in which there is contact between the reader and library materials which could be printed, or electronic. Yusuf (2012) citing Bunga & Bopp (2001) noted that reference service varies in different forms from simple such as the provision of an address or telephone number to tracking down an elusive bibliographic citation or the identification and delivery of document about a specific topic.

FORM OF REFERENCE SERVICES

Madu (2010) identify the following as forms of reference services provided in libraries and information centres:

- information and referral services
- bibliographic verification,
- inter-library loan and document delivery
- selective dissemination of information (SDI)
- databases searches
- research questions
- information brokering

Reference collections are provided in libraries to enable reference librarians provide answers to user's queries. .Kumar (2010) divided reference services into three groups, namely

- i. Basic ones
- ii. Those performed usually and
- iii. Those performed sometimes

Basic services: These are those services which every library should try to perform, and is the minimum which can be expected. These include:

- Provisions of general information e.g. where are stacks? Where is the text book section? Where does the chief librarian office etc.
- Provision of specific information: this requires specific information for the use of document available or consultation of another library.
- Assistance in searching and location of document: This is assistance given to a user in form of aid to enable him/her be able to find answer to a query in hand.
- Assistance in the use of library catalogue: library catalogue is an important tool, which is a record of the holdings of a library.

REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SOURCES/ MATERIALS

Reference sources are documents that contain miscellaneous information on any topic, event or individual. These sources are designed to be consulted for specific piece of information or fact and are not intended to be read through, they are only consulted for the specific required information and dropped. These books are usually not allowed on loan but only consulted within the library, and because of the importance of this reference sources, they are usually separated from the regular non-fiction books in the library. Reference sources can appear both in printed and electronic forms. They contain factual information and are specially compiled to provide answers to any type of queries (Aina, 2004). Information sources will include primary books, periodicals and newspapers. However the number and forms of sources are continuously increasing including unpublished sources. In academic library, unpublished sources are becoming increasingly important to scholars, students etc to obtain information. Information sources according to Aina (2004) and Kumar (2010) can be categorized into three, namely primary sources, secondary sources and tertiary sources;

- Primary sources: According to Kumar (2010), they are the first published records of original research and development or description of new application or new interpretation of an old theme or idea. These are original documents representing unfiltered original idea (Kumar 2010) They include journal articles, technical reports, dissertations and theses etc.

- Secondary sources: These are information which are either compiled from or refer to primary sources of information. They contain information arranged and organized on the basis of some definite plan. They contain organized repackaged knowledge rather than new knowledge. They include indexes, abstracts, bibliographies etc.
- Tertiary sources: According to Kumar (2010) contained information distilled and collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary function of tertiary sources of information is to aid the searcher of information in the use of primary and secondary sources of information. They include Dictionaries, guides etc

Reference materials are categorized into two namely; general reference sources and literature search tool. According to Katz (1997) in Aina (2004) general references sources can be categorized into five-

Encyclopedia

Dictionary

Fact sources

Biographical sources

Geographical sources

- Encyclopedia: They are reference work containing information and facts on a variety of topics. They provide background information as well as current information. There are general and subject encyclopedias.
- Dictionaries: they are work that deals with all aspects of words, such as meaning, spelling, pronunciation, syllabication and grammatical information.
- Fact sources: They provide facts on a wide variety of issue – both background and current information. They include
 - Yearbook: They are published annually. They provide information on a country's social, political and economic developments in the past year.
 - Almanac: They provide basic data and statistics on any topic such as countries, personalities, subjects. They are published annually and contain retrospective materials.
 - Handbook: It is a portable reference material that provides useful information on a specific subject in concise and comprehensive form.
 - Directories: They list names and addresses of persons, organizations, institutions, ministries, recreation centers, societies and associations.
 - Compendium: It provides a brief summary of important information in a subject field.

- **Biographical sources:** They are sources that give account of a person's life. It contains information on personality, career, achievements, etc of an individual. There are two types; individual and collected biographies. Individual biography contains detailed account of the life of a person and collected biography contains brief account of various notable personalities.
- **Geographical sources:** They provide information on places, towns, cities, countries, geographical features, etc. These sources include;
Atlases: They are a bound collection of maps, sometimes accompanied with charts, tables and plates. They provide information about the physical and climatic condition of the places covered.
Gazetteers: Is the alphabetical list of places or features on the earth surface giving information as to whereabouts. It gives information about latitude and longitude. They also give historical, statistical, cultural and other relevant information.
Travel guide: It provide information to a traveller about places of interest and features of a particular place the traveller wishes to visit.

Literature search tools comprise:

- i. Bibliographies
- ii. Library Catalogues
- iii. Indexes and Abstracts

Bibliographies: They provide list of articles, books, technical reports, conference proceedings, theses, and dissertations on particular topic. They only provide bibliographic records of each item listed in the bibliography. The record includes author, title of book or article, place of publication, publisher's name, and date of publication. Bibliographies is categorized into Universal, National and Trade, Subject, Bibliography of Bibliographies, and Guide to Reference Sources.

Library Catalogues: They contain information on all materials held in the library. The entries in a library catalogue are done by author, title or subject. It is the first port of call to users interested in accessing document of interest in a library.

Indexes: They are guides to all documents relevant to a particular discipline. An index is a guide to the contents of particular subject and usually arrange by subject and author. Key subject terms are selected from the published document to represent the entire content of the document. The key subject term serves as the access point for a user who is interested in the subject.

Abstract: They provide the listing of all bibliographic record of each item and also provide summary of each item listed.

Guide to Reference Guide: They can be categorized as bibliographies since they only provide a list of reference sources. They are arranged in a systematic order and guide users to general and specific information resources in various fields.

ROLES OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES TO USER

According to Iroaganachi and Ilogho (2012) the use of reference and information resources is very beneficial to achieve students' educational outcomes. This is because they contain information that is always authentic, accurate, and more reliable. When students use reference sources, they will find information quickly and efficiently to complete their assignment and do their research. As result, students' academic performance is improved. Furthermore, reference and information services also provide access to background information on a topic and ideas. As a result, they provide significant information regarding the definition of a topic and its background. Therefore, frequent access to reference and information services leads to independent or discovery learning which can further improve the reading culture of students (Iroaganachi & Ilogho, 2012). Therefore, the provision of reference and information services to students lays the foundation upon which literacy skills among primary and secondary students can be built as they advance their career in the education ladder.

CHALLENGES OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN LIBRARIES

Yusuf (2012) highlighted the following as hindering effective reference and information services in academic library;

- lack of adequate resources
- lack of qualified and experience staff
- personal attitude of librarians

Baro (2009) identify obsolete references sources, lack of effective library co-operation, inefficient selective dissemination of information (SDI) services in Nigerian libraries, level of computerization of library services, information literacy among library users, inability to reach-out to the non-library users in Nigerian, incompetent reference librarians in most Nigerian libraries, unreliable telecommunication infrastructure, language barriers and information hoarding tendency among Nigerians.

CONCLUSION

The provision of reference service in academic libraries cannot be over emphasis because of its relevance in providing authoritative and authentic information to researchers, scholars, students, teaching staff etc in pursuit of their aspiration and academic excellence. To provide an effective reference services that will support teaching and learning, the library must provide a qualified reference librarian and up to date references materials.

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