Assessment of Reference Service Provision of Three Academic Libraries in Nigeria with Particular Reference to Ramat Library University of Maiduguri, Ramat Polytechnic Library Maiduguri, and Ibrahim Musa Library

Habibu Idris[1*] Samuel Ejembi Oji[2] Eatima Floretta Abana[3]

1. Taraba State Polytechnic Library P.M.B 1030 Jalingo, Nigeria
2. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library P.M.B 0248 Bauchi, Nigeria
3. Ramat Library, University of Maiduguri P.M.B 1069 Borno State, Nigeria

* E-mail of the corresponding author: idrishab2@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper takes a look at Reference Service Provision in Maiduguri Metropolitan with particular reference to: Ramat Library University of Maiduguri, Ramat Polytechnic Library Maiduguri, and Ibrahim Musa Library in Sir Kashim College of Education Maiduguri. The study goes further to identify the various resources available and examines the activities of these libraries in meeting the challenges in the provision of reference service to their clienteles. The methods employed in assessing these libraries were personal interview and direct observation of the existing systems. Suggestions are finally proffered for improving the service delivery in those libraries.

Keywords: Assessment, Provision, Reference Service, Academic Libraries, Nigeria, Maiduguri

1. Introduction

The libraries mentioned in this assessment by their nature are known to be academic libraries. As academic libraries, the institutional authorities are to be seen to pay much attention to service delivery otherwise the library's role would be seen dwindling. University or College library cannot be expected to fulfill its role and carry out its responsibilities effectively if its authorities failed to provide it with adequate funds, personnel and physical facilities, and if librarians cannot collaborate with the teaching staff in building up the library collection and in orienting the students' interests to effective library use (Aguolu, and Aguolu, 2002).

Library operations generally are by nature, service oriented. This is reflected in the referral services rendered by libraries. Considering the enormous role of Academic libraries in our institutions, it becomes necessary to assess Reference Service in our institutions, bearing in mind that Reference Service is the most important of all library activities.

2. Concept of Reference Service (RS)

Reference Service as perceives by many is all about rendering assistance to users in pursuit of their information need. Information need is an essential element in ones life. Information is power; it can build and can equally destroy; depending on the individuals and how they handle it.

In defining Reference Service, Gama (2008) cited scholars such as Lynch (1983), Bunge (1999), and Edoka (2000), to mean personal assistance given by librarians to users in pursuit of information. They further stated

that the assistance could be in form of referral to likely sources of information or in the form of information it self or it could be any library activity deliberately designed to facilitate easy retrieval of information".

It should be noted that the central course of discourse in reference service is "personal assistance". If this is so, the library must be seen performing its expected role in meeting the users' needs. To do this the librarian has a functional role to play hence he is expected to possess a wide range of intellectual skills and desires to assist the users in which ever way. His role as a reference librarian is vital and can not be under-estimated nor over emphasized. In discussing reference service in the three tertiary institutions mentioned in this paper, it is of paramount importance to put the findings in tabular form for easy assessment and understanding. (See table 1)

Deducing from the information table, it could be viewed that almost all the libraries are found wanting in one way or the other in service delivery. For effective reference service, the authorities (government/head of institutions) must be seeing performing. Where all this failed, the aim of the library is defeated. Gama (2008), cited Jackaman (1989) who argued that reference service was not just about answering questions posed by users, it was also about the maintenance of the reference sources from which answers to questions were provided and materials needed by users were made available. He further stated that reference work encompassed series of processes, which included;

- The collection and acquisition of appropriate materials, books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, maps, atlases, charts, microform, standards, reports, illustrations, records, videos, etc., in response to the needs of the clienteles.

- The organization arrangement and maintenance of those materials so that they can be used easily and effectively by both staff and users.

- The compilation of union list of holdings and specialized indexes related to those topics in which the service has a specialized interest.

- General information files giving details of searches and strategies employed in the answering of queries which are likely to be raised again.

- In-service training of staff to ensure that optimum use is made of all facilities and that a sense of teamwork is fully engendered.

- Production of printed and other guides to the library and the service it can offer, i.e. publicity and education.

- Adequate signposting and guidance to the layout of the library.

- Instructional guidance to users in the exploitation of the library and the use of reference materials.

- The search for, location and presentation of sought information on behalf of users.

3. Findings
Viewing from the above table, it is evident that:

a) In the first place there is poor power supply system in all the three tertiary institutions' library being assessed and every operation of the libraries are manually done and does not warrant quicker and effective service.

b) Ramat library, University of Maiduguri even though a Federal University, it is seriously lacking behind if at this moment we are still talking of automation or internet connectivity in process; and it is amazing when an academic library of this nature has no effective abstracting and indexing services.

c)   It was discovered that Ramat Polytechnic Library collections are mostly obsolete; much attention has not being given for its development, insufficient professional staff, compacted building, lack of services such as CAS/SDI, catalogue service poorly organized, no internet services talk-less of automation and inter-library cooperation ineffective. This attitudinal act has violated the fifth law of R.S Ranganathan which states "library is a growing organism." According to him, the library has all the potential of a growing organism and the parts that are capable of growth are the area of collection, readers and staff. He further stated that just to possess large volumes in the collection and to have increased numbers of readers does not constitute a library. That what constitutes one is when the staff provides reference service to generalists or to a specialist reader which will bring about the contact between the right book and the right reader." (Varghese M.M. 2011), quoted in Ranganathan.

d) Similarly, in Ibrahim Musa Library in Sir Kashim College of Education Maiduguri, the problem is not far fetched from that of Ramat Polytechnic Library, Maiduguri. Outdated collections form the core of their resources, no internet services talk-less of automation, CAS/SDI is lacking and catalogue service poorly organized.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

As earlier pointed out, reference service is all about making public the information needs of a user through personal assistance in which ever way provided that user satisfaction is achieved. To achieve this all stakeholders in the scene (the government, staff of the library even the users inclusive) must jointly put hands on deck to vigorously contribute for effective reference service in these libraries.

Government (State Government) should not fold her hands simply because ETF funds are being allocated to institutions for development. In as much as ETF is performing her part, the State Government should as a matter of fact provide fund for the development of the library services in general. When this is done, a follow up supervision machinery should be put in place to check how these funds are being utilized.

Automation of the library systems should be given top priority hence we are moving to the age in which information explosion is the order of the day. The dwindling library budget if there is, would not cope with this unprecedented rate. The vast need of users is information. This would help in answering users' query using remote databases.

In as much as possible the library authorities should ensure that adequate attention is given to current resources even with the little funds available. The library is a growing organism that needs to be up dated always. Let's put aside our personal interest and face the reality in meeting challenges ahead. The library must be seeing performing and where it fails, it is the librarian that would be looked upon.

The Federal Government should as well stretch her arms towards these institutions to help in the area of capital projects which are financially demanding.

Each of the libraries mentioned in this study should make provision for functional stand-by power supply system so as to keep the system moving at all times eye-services should be avoided.
Services such as CAS/SDI should be given priority hence they contribute immensely to reference service wok.

Where there is congestion, expansion activity should be carried out to allow room for the creation of more units for effective reference service.

Hence all the above mentioned libraries are still manually controlled; the need to pay more attention to update the library catalogue is inevitable.

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Mr. Idris Habibu was born on 13th July, 1965 to the family of Idris Adamu at Tapare Village in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. He attended Tapare Primary School from 1975 to 1982, Teachers College Wukari in the then Gongola State where he obtained grade II teacher's certificate from 1983 – 1988, Taraba State College of Education Jalingo, Nigeria where he obtained Nigeria Certificate in Education library science/social studies from 1989 to 1992, University of Maiduguri Borno State Nigeria where he obtained bachelor degree in library science from 1999 to 2004. At present on study fellowship for his Masters Degree in Library and Information Science specializing in information science at University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Mr. Idris Habibu has vast experience in teaching and administration and started his civil service carrier as a Grade II Teacher in 1989. Later joined post-primary institution as classroom teacher from 1993 where he rose to the post of Vice Principal Administration in 2005. In July 2005 he transferred his service to Taraba State Polytechnic Library Jalingo, as Senior Librarian and at present an Assistant Chief Librarian. He has served as Guidance Counselor, Cultural Master, and Form Master while in post-primary institution. He is also a Resource Person with the Consultancy Services Unit; Library Science Department, Taraba State Polytechnic Jalingo Campus from 2005 to date. Idris Habibu believes in knowledge acquisition and information sharing.

Mr. Samuel Ejembi Oji was born on 21st August, 1960. He holds bachelor of library and information science from Bayero University Kano, Nigeria. Currently on study fellowship for his masters of library and information science at University of Maiduguri, Borno state, Nigeria. He is a staff of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University library Bauchi, Nigeria.

Fatima Floretta Abana was born on 9th May, 1968 at Kaduna State, Nigeria. She hailed from Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. She had her primary education at Army Children School Kaduna Cantonment/Ihube Community School Imo State, Nigeria in 1975 and St Theresa College Ughelli Delta State Nigeria 1975-1979, Day Women Teachers College Maiduguri, Nigeria from 1981 – 1983; University of Maiduguri Where she obtained diploma in library science from 1984 – 1986 and was bachelor degree in library science at University of Maiduguri from 2000 – 2005. Currently she is on study fellowship at the University of Maiduguri from 2009 to date. Fatima Floretta Abana is an employee of the University of Maiduguri as an Assistant Chief Library Officer.

Table 1: Depicting Reference Service in Maiduguri Metropolitan (Assessment conducted in October, 2011).

S/N	ASSESSED AREAS	RAMAT LIBBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI	RAMAT PLOYTECHNIC LIBRARY, MAIDUGURI	IBRAHIM MUSA LIBRARY, SIR KASHIM COLLEGE OF EDUCATION MAIDUGURI
1	**Collections (General)**	Contain publications in all fields systematically arranged using Library of Congress Classification Scheme.	So much bias to science and technology documents systematically arranged using DDC Scheme. Most of which are out dated. Newer versions were envisage since 2006 ETF intervention.	Mostly on educational methods and teaching. Few are up to date (current). Systematically arranged using DDC Scheme.
2	**Reference Unit**	Exhaustive enough with Reference Materials and to some extent current materials inclusive. e.g. dictionaries of all categories (Newer Versions), Encyclopedias of 2004, 2007, and 2008; Handbooks, Yearbooks etc Continual update is observed.	Contains reference materials such as encyclopedias, Dictionaries, Handbooks etc but almost all outdated.	It has reference unit but outdated sources form the core of the collections.
	Research/ Bibliographic Unit	Well stocked with relevant resources for research	Nil	Nil
3	**Serials Unit**	Also in place with some current journals in different fields, Current Newspapers/Magazines etc.	Collections are in place but outdated documents out weight newer ones	It has serial publications such as Journals of Education with emphasis on teaching process, Government agencies publications such as Banking Inventory, NCCE, and NTRC. So also national dailies such as The Nation Newspapers, News Watch Magazines, etc with few that are current.
4	**Bibliographic Compilation/ Indexing and Abstracting Services**	It was in place but at present nothing is happening there	Nil	The library started but later abandon these services
5	**Catalogue Service**	In place (Manual) and functional	In place (Manual) but poorly organized.	In place (Manual) but poorly organized.
6	**SDI/CAS**	CAS is in place but not so serious.	Not available	Not available

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7	Facilities/Infrastructure	a) Building structure is okay, well ventilated with good light illumination through the windows. b) Poor power supply system. Standby power supply system is there but not seeing functioning for lack of diesel. c) Internet/ Automation on process.	a) Building compacted but expansion is going on presently (40% level) b) Ventilation/light illumination is okay. c) Poor power supply and the only generating system is meant for photocopying services only when students are on session.	a) Well-ventilated structure with moderate sitting capacity. b) Poor power supply c) Internet connectivity is still on process; hence the library is not automated.
8	Personnel Strength	The library has reasonable number of: a) Professionals, b) Para-professionals, c) Non-professionals. Hence all units are headed by professional librarians.	a) 3 Professionals b) 3 Para-professionals c) 22 Non-professionals	a) 5 professionals b) 8 Para-professionals c) 3 non-professionals d) 2 securities
9	User Education	This is solely left for GST department as pre-requisite for obtaining graduation certificate.	This is carried out during: Orientation programmes for newly admitted students and b) As GST course lectures for the first year students.	This is carried out during: Orientation programmes for newly admitted students and As GST course lectures for the first year students.
10	Bornoana/Nigeriana and Americana Collections	These publications are in place and up to date.	There are Annals of Borno Collections	There are Annals of Borno Collections.
11	Education and Information Unit	Is in place and solely for information, counseling and education.	Nil	Nil
12	American Corner	Well stocked and impressive. It serves as centre for information and education on politics, government, and culture of the Americans both in print and non-prints materials.	Nil	Nil
13	Inter-library Cooperation	The library inter-cooperates with: a) ABU b) BUK c) UNIJOS	It inter-cooperates with: a) British Council Kano (formally) b) Konduga College of Education Library.	It inter-cooperates with the all tertiary institutions in Maiduguri metropolitan including Ramat library, University of Maiduguri.