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## Influence of Information Source Parameters and personal Characteristics of Librarians on readers' ability to Retrieve Information in Reference service

Nkoyo B. Edem

*University of Calabar*, [nkyedem@yahoo.com](mailto:nkyedem@yahoo.com)

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# **INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION SOURCE PARAMETERS AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBRARIANS ON READER'S ABILITY TO RETRIEVE INFORMATION IN REFERENCE SERVICE**

NKOYO B. EDEM (PH.D)  
DEPUTY UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN  
UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR LIBRARY  
CALABAR  
E- mail: [nkyedem@yahoo.com](mailto:nkyedem@yahoo.com)

## **ABSTRACT**

**This study was conducted in four (4) University libraries, (two states and two federal) in the south – south zone of Nigeria to provide information on the perception of both librarians and readers on the influence of information source parameters (obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information sources), as well as personal characteristics of librarians (attitude and experience) on readers ability to retrieve information. The study used survey design to determine by means of a one item in a four point likert scale questionnaire, the influence of these variables on reader's ability to retrieve information. Four (4) hypotheses were tested. Out of the total of 700 library registered undergraduate students, only 698 students and all the 9 librarians answered and returned usable questionnaires. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS} and t-test was used for data analysis. The major findings are that all the four hypotheses tested, rejected the null hypotheses, which means that all these variables influence reader's ability to retrieve information. This calls for the librarians to improve upon their personal characteristics as well as the provision of relevant information sources if quality reference services are to be attained. Based on these findings, recommendations were made, the major ones of which are the automation and internet connectivity of the reference section of the library, provision of current and relevant information, online access to information sources/e-library and re-training of librarians especially those librarians working in the reader's services libraries.**

**Keywords: University libraries, reference service, personal characteristics, information source parameters, information retrieval and south-south zone.**

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of any library is not merely for the provision of information but to instruct readers on how to find the information sources they desire. Though all aspects of librarianship are concerned with this goal, it is very important that, at the reference desk, the process of determining the readers need, formulating a search strategy to find that need and providing accurate and complete information to the reader is finally tested. Providing quality reference service is a complex process, requiring extensive subject expertise, knowledge of library collections and systems and years of practical experience (Christensen, Benson, Buffer, Hall and Howard 1989).

The term “reference service”, according to Reih and young (2000), has a dual meaning. Reference service refers to a variety of activities associated with personal assistance to library users including selection, liaison activities, bibliographic instruction, and implementation of electronic products. It also indicates librarians’ user interaction which takes place in some physical service points particularly the reference desk. It also embraces some varieties of activities, which bring the librarian directly in contact with readers. These activities range from having ready answers for those who want specific information sources and follow up to endless clues to lighten the burden of those requiring information for research work. It therefore means that the reference librarian is expected to be familiar with the resources of his own immediate library, and also to look beyond in search of possible information sources from other libraries. According to Afolabi (2003),

provision of reference services is an important component of information service. The reference librarian's attitude determines the patronage of users in the library. Ajileye – Laogun (2004) attests that there is a strong link between the librarian's attitudes, student's perceptions and assumption of them as well as the rate at which they consult them for services and information. Ifidon (2003) puts it that apart from qualities such as qualification; love of people; knowledge of collections, love of book, interviewing skills and humility, another way of encouraging readers to make use of the library is the librarians' attitude towards them. The librarian must understand why a reader is behaving in a particular manner during the interview process. To Bopp and Smith (1991), reference librarians should have the capacity of dealing with essential management issues such as the ones involving decision making; coordination; Communication; personnel; administration; planning and goal setting.

Reference service is quite a demanding, intellectual and brain tasking aspect of librarianship (Bankole, 1999). Quality reference service requires the combination of information source parameters, attitude and experience of the reference librarian in making the reader independent and giving them the "key to the castle of knowledge" (Mendelson, 1997).

Many library users are aware of the need for information acquisition but are ignorant of the roles of the library and the librarians. This explains why the increased recognition of the value of information has not brought with it increased recognition of the librarian as information professional. One obvious reason for this is the thwarted image of the librarian. The librarian's image over time has been that of a

negative one. They cannot be approached for any problem as regards information retrieval. This work is therefore carried out to address the perceptions of the librarian and the library user on the influence of these variables on readers' ability to retrieve information.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many Scholars have written on the importance of personal characteristics of the reference librarian for the delivery of quality service (Afolabi, 2003; Jennerich and Jennerich 1997; Ifidon, 2003; Bello, 1999; Edem and Edem 2000; Lawal, 2001; Ajileye – Laogun, 2004; Utor, 2004). Afolabi (2003) identifies the qualities of a reference librarian to include: The use of humor; Importance; Patrons view; avoid being a teacher; be frank on your ignorance; Privacy; Control the situation; Help; be approachable. Ifidon (2003) added other qualities to a competent librarian to demonstrate in his/her professional duties. These qualities include; Academic and professional qualifications; Love of people; Knowledge of the collections and love of books; Imagination and resourcefulness; Patience, persistence; perseverance; approachability and flexibility and Interviewing skills. He further attests that, for a librarian to be a specialist in reference work, he/she must have the basic qualification of a master degree in library and information science and must also be knowledgeable in that field.

The personal characteristics of reference librarians are very critical in the delivery of quality reference service. Jennerich and Jennerich (1997) point out the importance of the following qualities in reference service delivery. Such characteristics include: Sense of humor; dedication and commitment; attitude; transparency of character; genuine liking to people, patience and persistence. Bello (1999) and Utor (2004) are also in support of Ifidon's and Jennerich's work and state that one of the attributes of a librarian is to possess these personal characteristics for quality reference service delivery. .Edem (2000) posits that these personal characteristics should therefore be given adequate attention if quality reference services are to be rendered to our numerous readers in the university libraries. Lawal (2001) on the other hand, highlights the functions of Nigerian reference librarians among which are assistance and instruction in library use, location of materials, use of the catalogues and use of basic reference tools and sources. They also provide brief, factual information of the ready reference query, conducting literature searches, interlibrary loans for users, selective dissemination of information to clients and public relations.

As libraries grow, more books are added to the collection and become available for use. For the provision of reference information sources, a good reference librarian who provides reference services to readers must be experienced and competent to manage the information sources as well as disseminate such information to users. Bello (1999) opines that effective management of information sources depend heavily on the good and experience reference librarian. The

reference librarian must be experienced to be able to instruct readers in the use of the library catalogue and the library collections and should be ready to handle simple, factual and ready reference information needs. There are certain problems encountered by reference librarians in the course of providing services to readers. Utor (2004) reports that “reference librarians are not sponsored by their employers to attend short courses so as to keep themselves abreast of current reference and information practices. This lack of instruction due to, perhaps, inadequate training and exposure of the reference librarian may affect the quality of service rendered.” Reference librarians hardly initiate programmes, which will stimulate their use information resources. Most of them who have worked in the reference section of the library for more than five years cannot carried out any survey on the use of reference information sources, they assume that everything is in order. Utor (2004) attests that it is unprofessional not to conduct surveys on the use of reference sources and that there is need for frequent study of users of reference information sources so as to ascertain their changing needs, and to work out modalities for meeting their current demands. An experienced reference librarian must have a profile of readers, which can help to plan for the future.

The librarians’ attitudes to a very great extent, determines the patronage of users to the library. When reference librarian is friendly and welcoming as well as being helpful, users are encouraged to use reference and information sources in the reference section of the library. Attitude, as one of the personal characteristics, determines the rate of utilization of information sources in the library. Afolabi (2003)

posits that the reference librarian must adopt a positive regard for the reader during the reference interview. Ifidon (2003) indicates that a personal relationship between the reader fascinate the process of retrieving information. The adoption of an open and relaxed attitude by the librarian and the display of certain amount of pleasure at being approachable will do wonders for the reader's confidence in opening up of the contact, and thereby improving the quality of the messages passed to the reference librarian. Afolabi (2003) confirms attitude to be very essential in the interview process.

The characteristics of information sources in the context of this study include obsolescence and availability. As library grows, more books are added to the collections and become available for use, but the influx of new books might also affect the demand for the old ones, so that they can become less desirable or interesting. Obsolescence, according to Dejager(1994) “ is the decreased of used materials with age”. Line and Sandison (1974) in their study reveal that the use of library materials diminishes over time until the use may cease altogether. Obsolete information resources may affect readers' ability to retrieve information in the sense that readers may not find them useful. Zaki (1999) has it that relevant information sources constitute the literature of a subject field, which can be regarded as records of human achievements. This can be differentiated from reference sources, which are materials designed exclusively for consultation in the library for definite pieces of information. Zaki defines it as a source from which the answer to a query can be met or sourced. Reference information resources on the other hand could be available in

the library but not relevant. Edem and Edem (2000) confirm relevance of information resources to be very useful in the library for quality reference services. It is a well-known fact that the problem of information storage and retrieval has attracted increasing attention. There are vast amounts of information in our universities to which accurate and speedy access is becoming ever more difficult. For Van Rijsbergen (1980), “the one effect of this difficulty is that relevant information gets ignored since it is never uncovered, which in turn leads to much duplication of effort”. He pointed out with the advent of computers; a great deal of thought has been given to using computers to provide rapid and intelligent retrieval systems. But the question is how many universities have automated their libraries for these services. Many of these libraries have information storage and retrieval problems in the aspects of providing reference services to readers. The present study will therefore examine the influence of information source parameters (availability and obsolescence) and personal characteristics of librarians (attitude and experience) on readers’ ability to retrieve information in reference service

The following research question were posed to guide the study

1. Is there any influence of obsolete information sources on readers’ ability to retrieve information?
2. Is there any influence of relevant information sources on readers’ ability to retrieve information?
3. Is there any influence of attitude of the readers’ services librarian on readers’ ability to retrieve information?

4. Is there any influence of experience of the readers' services librarian on readers' ability to retrieve information?

These research questions were converted to the following hypotheses thus:

- H<sub>01</sub> Obsolete information sources in the library has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.
- H<sub>02</sub> Availability of relevant information sources has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.
- H<sub>03</sub> The attitude of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.
- H<sub>04</sub> Experience of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used survey research design. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire for both librarians and library registered undergraduate students (Readers). Four universities (2 Federal and 2 States) from the South –South zone were used for the study. 9 readers services librarians working in two federal and two state universities in the South-South zone of Nigeria as well as 700 library registered undergraduate students in selected universities constitute the sampled of the study. The study was carried out in 2009/2010 academic sessions.

For purpose of clarity, population of the study includes all the readers' services librarians and library registered undergraduate students during the 2009/2010 academic session in the various universities in the south south zone of Nigeria. These universities are: Delta State University in Abraka, and Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST) in Port Harcourt. Two federal Universities are University of Calabar (UNICAL) in Calabar and University of Port Harcourt (UNIPOINT) in Port Harcourt. A total of 9 Readers' Services Librarians and 15,576 library Registered undergraduate students constitute the population of the study. The distribution of the population is shown in table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of Population**

	<b>Population size of readers' services librarians</b>	<b>Population size of library registered undergraduate students</b>
A: RSUST	2	2079
B: DSU	2	4775
C: UNICAL	4	3924
D: UNIPOINT	1	4798
	9	15576

**Source: 2009/2010 Library Registration lists in the Readers' Services Library of the various Universities under study**

## Methodology

All the four (04) Universities in the south-south zone of Nigerian constitute the sample for the study. While simple random sampling was used in selecting (700) library registered undergraduate students from the sampled universities. All the 9 readers' services librarians and 700 library registered undergraduate students of the sampled universities constituted the sample for the study. The distribution of sample size is shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of sample**

	<b>Sample size of readers' services librarians</b>	<b>Sample size of library registered undergraduate students</b>	<b>Total</b>
A: RSUST	2	150	152
B: DSU	2	150	152
C: UNICAL	4	200	204
D: UNIPORT	1	200	201
	9	700	709

The instrument used for data collection in this study was a questionnaire for both librarians and library registered undergraduate students (Readers). Two researcher-developed questionnaires were used to collect data for the study: the first questionnaire for librarians is referred to as "Information source parameters,

librarians' personal characteristics and Readers' information retrieval Ability Questionnaire" (ISPLPCRIRAQ), while the second questionnaire for readers is tagged "students' Information Retrieval Questionnaire (SIRQ). The questions were designed by the researcher to accomplish the research questions and hypotheses.

In preparing the data, the respondents of the instrument were objectively scored as follows: With a likert scale of 1-4, where 4 signified the highest score and 1 the lowest to measure the variables.

For the librarians' questionnaire, the data collected showed a total response rate of nine (09) from the readers' services librarians in the four university libraries under study with a total response rate of hundred percent (100 %). In a similar manner, out of a total of 700 readers' questionnaires distributed, 698 respondents returned usable ones, which shows a total response rates of 99.7% while the non response rate was 0.3%. The hypothesis was tested and analyzed using librarians and readers data with a total number of 707.

## **Analysis of Data**

### **Hypothesis 1.**

Experience of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

In testing hypothesis 1, the observed mean of the respondents' perception of the influence of experience in the readers' services library on readers' ability to retrieve information for both librarians and readers were compared to the expected mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scale measuring this variable.

The hypothesis was then analyzed and tested using t-test (one sample test) as presented in table1. The expected mean was the mean obtained from the scoring of the scale, i.e. 4=3=2=1 =2.5. The result is presented thus:

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**Table 1: t-test analysis of influence of experience of the readers' services librarians on readers' ability to retrieve information.**

N = 707

Influence of experience	X	SD	t-cal	p	Decision at p<0.05
Observed	2.9519	.93133	12.902*	.000	S
Expected	2.50	.93133*			

**Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706; t<sub>cri</sub> = 1.96**

The result in table 1 shows that t-calculated value of 12.902 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 significant level and degree of freedom of 706 under a two-tailed test. This means that experience of the readers' services librarian in the readers' services library is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

## Hypothesis 2

The attitude of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

To test hypothesis 2, the observed mean of the respondents perception of the influenced of attitude of the readers' service librarians on reader's ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scale measuring this variable. The hypothesis was analyzed and tested using t-test as presented in table 2

**Table 2**

**t-test analysis of influence of attitude of the readers' ability to retrieve information.  
N = 707**

<b>Influence of attitude</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t-cal</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Decision at p&lt;0.05</b>
Observed	2.9646	.93871	13.161*	.000	S
Expected	2.50	.93133*			

**Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706; t<sub>cri</sub> = 1.96**

Since t-calculated value of 13.161 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and a degree of freedom of 706. The null hypothesis is rejected, which means that the attitude of the readers' services librarian is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

### Hypothesis 3

Obsolete information sources in a library have no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

To test hypothesis 3, the observed mean of the respondents perception of the influence of obsolete information sources on readers' ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scale measuring this variable. The hypothesis was analyzed and tested using t-test as presented in table 3.

**Table 3**

**t-test analysis of influence of obsolete information sources of the readers' ability to retrieve information.**  
**N = 707**

<b>Influence of Obsolete Information sources</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t-cal</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Decision at p&lt;0.05</b>
Observed	3.2390	.74382	15.296*	.000	S
Expected	2.50	.74382*			

**Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706; t<sub>cri</sub> = 1.96**

As shown in the table, the t-calculated value of 15.296 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 significant level with degree of freedom of 706 under two tailed test. The null hypotheses is therefore rejected, which means that obsolete information sources in a library are perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

## Hypothesis 4

The availability of relevant information sources has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

To test hypothesis 4, the observed mean of the respondents' perception of the influence of availability of relevant information sources on the library on readers' ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scale measuring this variable. The hypothesis was analyzed and tested using t-test using as presented in table 4.

**Table 4**

**t-test analysis of influence of relevant information sources on readers' ability to retrieve information.**

**N = 707**

<b>Influence of relevant information sources</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t-cal</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Decision at p&lt;0.05</b>
Observed	3.2390	.74382			
			26.419*	.000	S
Expected	2.50	.93133*			

**Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706;  $t_{cri} = 1.96$**

The result from hypothesis 4 shows that t-calculated value of 26.419 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom of 706 under two tailed test. This indicates that availability of relevant information sources is

perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

## **Discussion of findings**

The results of this study show that experience and attitude of the reader services librarians are perceived to have significant influences on readers' ability to retrieve information. Furthermore, obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information sources are perceived to also have significant influences on readers' ability to retrieve information. From the four universities studied, result has shown that experience of the readers' services librarians in the readers' services library is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information. Experience is one of the characteristics of a reference librarian that plays an important role in reference process. Reference librarian should be acquainted with the activities in the reference library with a wide range of intellectual interest in reading, organizing materials and have adequate knowledge of the available resources for information retrieval, and also be in the position to assist readers in search of literatures. Result has shown that reference librarians from DSU, UNICAL and RSUST libraries except UNIPORT have been there for more than six years, but seemed not to participate in workshops/conferences. Afolabi (2003); Ifidon (2003); Bello (1999) and Utor (2004) have confirmed this fact that, experience in the readers' services library influences readers' ability to retrieve information. For a reference librarian to be experienced, he/she must have worked in the library for

many years, attend conferences and seminars to update their knowledge in the area of reference services; have the desire to assist readers at all times. In another development, attitude of the reference librarian can discourage a reader from searching for information and this might affect quality service to readers. Studies have shown that many researchers in the aspect of reference interview have investigated the problems pertaining to attitude (Ifidon, 2003; Afolabi, 2003). Ifidon (2003) observed that the reference interview is not conducted as effectively as it ought to be due to the attitude of the reference librarian. He suggested that librarians should treat the reader as he or she will be a guest in a private house". Afolabi (2003) has it that "showing the right attitude depends on relationship between the librarian and the reader during reference interview". The reference librarian must adopt a positive attitude towards the reader. There must be genuineness in the reference librarians' words, behaviour, feelings and attitudes, empathetic understanding of the readers' questions and the ability to communicate some of this understandings to the reader and a warm, positive welcoming attitude towards the reader. Ifidon (2003) summarizes that a personal relationship with the reader fascinate the work in the reference library.

Edem and Edem (2000) also noted that since reference information sources occupy an important position in the library, remarkable efforts should be geared towards its organization and utilization by readers particularly in university libraries. When the information resources are obsolete and outdated, there is a tendency for it to affect readers, because of this; readers tend to use the online

system, which will provide them with current information. In terms of availability of relevant reference information sources, the various sources such as primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information must be put into consideration. A library collection must attempt to be comprehensive as possible and also relevant without which retrieval process will be affected. This result has supported the work of Edem and Edem (2000) when he observed that proliferation of information sources has made the retrieval process a cumbersome task, because when there are relevant information sources on the shelves of the library and readers are not able to retrieve such information, it makes such information useless. Possible hindrances of such problems are lack of understanding of user education and library orientation. This has been the problem encountered in the four universities studied. Many readers are not interested in user education, which has posed a lot of problems to their ability to retrieve information. No matter the amount of information sources available in the library, what is most important is how to make use of such materials. Edem and Lawal (2000) submitted that, user education is a device by librarians to educate readers on how to use the library resources effectively and efficiently. In as much as information resources are available in the library and readers are able to use with the method taught to be able to retrieve them, the effect of such problem will be minimized or erase completely.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that since reference service is a brain tasking, intellectual aspect of the library and information science, problems associated with personal characteristics of reference librarians, information sources parameters should be given adequate attention if quality reference services are to be rendered to our numerous readers in university libraries. Experience and attitude influence readers' ability to retrieve information. In addition, obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information sources have similar influence and must be redressed properly. The study results shows that much is still expected from reference librarians in terms of meeting the information requirements of the readers. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, recommendations are made to librarians for improvement of their personal characteristics and for the provision of quality reference services.

## **Recommendations**

The study found out that experience in the readers' services library, attitude as well as obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information influenced readers' ability to retrieve information. From the result of the study, the following recommendations are made.

1. The study found out that experience in the readers' services library is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve

information. From the result, it can be inferred that a reference librarian must be experienced in reference work and have a good knowledge in subject field to be able to man the reference desk.

2. The result also found out attitude of the readers' services librarians is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information. From the r.esult, the researcher recommends that a reference librarian must have a positive attitude. Be friendly, be prepared to meet and accommodate all types of people, be patient and cooperate with your leaders for effective interview process.
3. The study also found out that obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information sources in the library are perceived to have significant influences on readers' ability to retrieve information. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that a reference librarian should always be in the position to mount programmes from time to time to stimulate readers on the use of current information sources in the reference library. The library must from time to time update their materials in the library so as to encourage users to make use of such information resources for their research work.
4. The various university libraries must be automated for easy access to electronic resources to promote effective research output.

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**Dr. Nkoyo Edem is a Senior Librarian in the University of Calabar Library, Calabar, Nigeria. She is presently the Head of processing Division. She holds a BSc. degree in Fisheries, a Masters and a Ph.D in Library and Information science. Her research interest centres on Reference Services/ Information and Communication Technology (ICT).**

The following research question were posed to guide the study

1. Is there any influence of experience of readers' ability to retrieve information?
2. Is there any influence of attitude of readers' services librarians on readers' ability to retrieve information?
3. Is there any influence of obsolete information sources on readers' ability to retrieve information?
4. Is there any influence of relevant information sources on readers' ability to retrieve information?

These research questions were converted into null hypotheses thus

Ho1 Experience of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability for retrieve information.

Ho2 The attitude of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

Ho3 Obsolete information sources in the library have no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve in.

Ho4 Availability of relevant information sources has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

#### **PURPOSE OF CLARITY.**

The population of the study includes all the readers' services librarians and library Registered undergraduate students during the 2003/2004 academic sessions in the various universities in the south south zone of Nigeria. **These universities**

**are:** Bayelsa State University in Bayesa, Cross River State University of Technology (CRUTECH) in Calabar, Delta State University in Abraka. Ambrose Ali University (ASU) in Ekpoma and Rivers State University of science and Technology (RSUST) in Port Harcourt.

**Federal Universities are:** University of Uyo (UNIUYO) in Uyo, University of Calabar (UNICAL) in Calabar, University of Benin (UNIBEN) in Benin and university of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) in Port Harcourt. While **the private Universities** include Igbinedion and Benson Idahosa. A total of 20 Reader's library Registered undergraduate students consistitute the population of the study. The distribution of the population is shown in Table 1

## **METHODOLOGY**

A stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting four (4) out of twenty (20) universities in the south. South zone of Nigerian and then using random sampling procedure to select the samples, which are combined to form the total sample for the study. While simple random sampling was used in selecting registered undergraduate students from the sampled universities. All the readers' services librarians and 700 library registered undergraduate students of the sampled universities constituted the sample for the study. The distribution of sample is shown in table 2

**Table 2: Distribution of sample.**

<b>University</b>	<b>Sample size of readers 'services librarians</b>	<b>Sample size of library Registered undergraduate students</b>	<b>Total</b>
A: RSUST	2	150	152
B: DSU	2	150	152
C: UNICAL	4	200	204
D: UNIPORT	1	200	201
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>709</b>

The instrument used for data collection in this study was a questionnaire for both librarians and library-registered undergraduate students (Readers). To researcher developed questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. The first questionnaire for librarians is referred to as “information source parameters, librarians’ personal characteristics and Readers’ information Retrieval Ability Questionnaire” (ISPLPCRIRAQ), while the second questionnaire for readers is tagged “students” information Retrieval Questionnaire (SIRD. The questions were designed by the researcher to accomplish the research questions and hypotheses.

In preparing the data, the responses of the instrument were objectively scored with a likert scale of 1-4, where 4 signified the highest score and 1 the lowest to measure the variables.

For the librarians questionnaire the data collected show a total response rate of nine (9) from the readers' services librarians in the four university libraries under study with a total response rate of hundred per cent (100%). In a similar manner, out of a total of 700 readers' questionnaires distributed, 1998 respondents returned usable ones, which of 99.7% while the non-response rate was 0.3%. The hypothesis was tested and analyzed using librarians and readers data with a total number of 707.

### **Hypothesis 1:**

Experience of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

### **Analysis of Data**

In testing hypothesis 1, the observed mean of the respondents' perception of the influence of experience in the readers' services library on readers' ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected mean perception. The hypothesis was then analyzed and tested using t-test (one-sample test) as resented in table. The expected mean was the mean obtained from the scoring of the scale, ie t-test analysis of influence of experience of the readers' services librarians on readers' ability to retrieve information  $4+3+2+1 = 2.3$  The result is represented in Table.

4

N = 707

Influence of experience	— X	SD	t-cal	P	Decision at p<0.05
Observed	2.9519	.93133	12.902	.000	5
Expected	2.50	.93133			

Significant at 0.04 level; df = 706; t-crit = 1.96

The result in the table shows that t-calculated value of 12.902 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 significance levels and degree of freedom of 706 under a two-tailed test. This means that experience of the readers' services librarian in the readers' services library is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

## Hypothesis 2

The attitude of the readers' services librarians has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

To test hypothesis 2, the observed mean of the respondents perception of the influenced of attitude if the readers' services librarians on reader's ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scales measuring this variable. The hypothesis was analyzed and tested using t-test as presented in table 2

### Table

t-test analysis of influence of attitude on readers' ability to retrieve information.

N=707

Influence of attitude	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	P	Decision at $p < 0.05$
Observed	2.9646	.93871	13.161	.000	5
Expected	2.50	.93133			

Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706; tcri = 1.96

Since t-calculated value of 13.161 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and a degree of freedom of 706. The null hypothesis is rejected, which means that the attitude of the readers' services librarian is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

### Hypothesis 3

Obsolete information sources in a library have no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

To test hypothesis 3, the observed mean of the respondents' perception of the influence of obsolete information sources on readers ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scale measuring this variable. The hypothesis was analyzed and tested using t-test as presented in table 3.

**Table 3**

t-test analysis influence of obsolete information sources on readers' ability to retrieve information.

N = 707

Influence of obsolete information sources	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	P	Decision at $p < 0.05$
Observed	2.9646	.93871	13.161	.000	5
Expected	2.50	.93133			

Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706; tcri = 1.96

As shown in the table, the t-calculated value of 13.161 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 significant levels with degrees of freedom of 706 under two tailed test. The null hypothesis therefore rejected, which means that obsolete information sources in a library are perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

**Hypothesis 4**

The availability of relevant information sources has no significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

To test hypothesis 4, the observed mean of the respondents perception of the influence of availability of relevant information sources in the library on readers' ability to retrieve information for the two groups were compared to the expected

mean perception as expressed on one item in a likert scale measuring this variable.

The hypothesis was analyzed and tested using t-test as presented in table 4.

**Table 4**

t-test of influence of availability of relevant information source on readers' ability to retrieve information.

N = 707

Influence of availability of relevant information	— X	SD	t-cal	P	Decision at p<0.05
Observed	3.2390	.74382	26.419	.000	5
Expected	2.50	.93133			

Significant at 0.05 level; df = 706; tcri = 1.96

The result from hypothesis 4 shows that t-calculated value of 26.419 is greater than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significant with degree of freedom of 706 under two-tailed tests. This indicates that availability of relevant. Information sources is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information.

The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study, show that experience and attitude of the reader services librarians are perceived to have a significant influences on readers ability to retrieve information. Further more, obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information sources are perceived to also have significant influences on readers ability to reference information. From the four universities studied, result has shown that reference librarians from DSV, UNICAL and RSUST libraries except UNIPORT have been therefore more than six years, but seemed not to participate in workshops/conferences, Afolabi (1986); Ifidon (1997); Bello confirmed this fact that experience in the readers' services library influences readers' ability to retrieve information for a reference librarian to be experienced, he/she must have worked in the library for many years, attend conferences and seminars to update their knowledge in the area of reference service, have the desire to assist readers at all times. In another development, attitude of the reference librarian can discourage a reader from searching for information and this might affect quality service to readers. Studies have shown that many researches in the aspect of reference interview have of have investigated the problems pertaining to attitude (Goth berg, 1973; and Halliday, 1975). Goth berg (1973) observed that the reference interview is not conducted as effectively as it ought to be due to the attitude of the reference librarian. Halliday (1972) posits, "that the librarian should treat the reader as he she will be a guest in a private house". Afolabi (1999) 29 has it that "showing the right attitude depends on relationship between the librarian and the reader during reference interview". The reference librarian must adopt a positive attitude towards

the reader. There must be genuineness in the reference librarians' word, behaviour, feelings and attitudes, empathetic understanding of the readers' questions and the ability to communicate some of this understandings to the reader and a warm, positive welcoming attitude towards the reader. Ifidon (1997) summarises that a personal relationship with the reader is a thing that makes the work fascinating. Edem and Edem (2002) also noted that since reference information sources occupy library, remarkable efforts should be geared towards its organization and utilization by readers particularly in university libraries. When the information resources are obsolete and outdated, there is a tendency for it to affect readers' usage because it is no longer in use and quality and recent information have taken its place. In most libraries, obsolete information sources have hindered quick information retrieval. Because of this, readers tend to use the online system, which will provide them with current information.

In terms of availability of relevant reference information sources, the various sources such as primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information must be put into consideration. A library collection must attempt to be comprehensive as possible and also relevant without which retrieval process will be affected. This result has supported the work of French (1990) when he observed that proliferation of information sources has made the retrieval process a cumbersome task, because when there are relevant information source on the shelves of the library and readers are not able to retrieve such information, useless. Possible hindrances of such problems are lack of understanding of user education and library orientation. This

has been the problem encountered in the four universities studied. Many readers are not interested in user education, which has posed a lot of problems to their ability to retrieve information. No matter the amount of information sources available in the library, what is most important is how to make use of such materials. mugyabus (1999) submitted that user education is a device by librarians to educate readers on how to use the library resources effectively and efficiently. In as much as information resources are available in the library and readers are able to use the method taught to be able to retrieve them, the effect of such problem will be minimized and erase completely.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that since reference service is a brain tasking, intellectual aspect of the library and information science, problems associated with personal characteristics of reference librarians, information sources parameters should be given adequate attention of quality reference services are to be rendered to our numerous readers in university libraries. Experience and attitude influence readers' ability to retrieve information. Additionally, obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information sources have similar influence and must be redressed properly. This study's results show that much is still expected from reference librarians in terms of meeting the information requirements of the readers. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, recommendations are

made to librarians for improvement of their personal characteristics and the provision of quality reference services.

## **Recommendations**

The study found out that experience in the readers' services library, attitude as well as obsolete information sources and availability of relevant information influenced readers' ability to retrieve information. From the result of the study, the following recommendations are made.

1. The study found out that experience in the readers' services library is perceived to have a significant influence on readers' ability to retrieve information. From the result, it can be inferred that a reference librarian be experienced in reference work and have a good knowledge in subject field to be able to man the reference desk.