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**Awareness and Patronage of Library Reference Services among Undergraduate Students
in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

Reference services are personal assistance given to library users in their search for information and these services are most likely patronized by those who are aware of them, hence, this study investigated the awareness and patronage of library reference services among undergraduate students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey design and a multistage sampling technique was used to select 370 undergraduate for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection and was administered to 370 respondents out of which, 317 copies were found useful for the study. The research questions were answered using simple frequency, percentage and mean statistics. Findings of the study revealed that although the undergraduates were generally aware of the reference services, they were unaware of SDI, digital reference and reprographic services. Also, apart from user education and CAS, the patronage of other reference services in this study was low. Inadequate reference sources and poor human relation of library staff were the main challenges of reference services patronage. It was therefore, recommended that funds set aside for the acquisition of reference sources should be utilized, and management should invest on ICTs and human resources. While staff with the right mindset for service provision should be identified and deployed to the reference section to attract more patronage for reference services in particular and the library in general.

Keywords: Library Services, Library Patronage, Awareness, Reference Services, Adeyemi College of Education

Introduction

Academic library is one of the main service unit of any institution of higher learning. The services provided by academic libraries are aimed at facilitating quick and easy access to information that are needed by the users/patrons. The patrons include students, staff and other persons that the library may grant entry and usage access to. The rate at which libraries are patronized are indication of their relevance to the patrons. One of the component of a library that may enhance library patronage are the services provided to the patrons, among which is the reference service. Atanda and Uchendu (2017) reiterated that although reference services may vary from one library to another; most libraries have reference desk or section where librarians provide assistance.

Reference services are the direct or indirect assistance given to users in their search for information and it is a combination of both the actions and reference information resources for providing this assistance. Atanda and Uchendu (2017, p.27) described reference services as the “personal assistance given by libraries to users who are in pursuit of information”. Reference services include: information, bibliographic verification and documentation, inter-library loan and document delivery, literature search, digital reference, Current Awareness Services (CAS), user education, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), computerized reference sources and reprographic services (Atanda & Uchendu, 2017, Okorafor, Ariole & Anyalebechi, 2017). One way to ascertain the relevance of these reference services to the users may be through a reflection on the level of reference services patronage. According to Schoenberger (2018) the patronage of a library by her users is a vital indicator of measuring the output of services that the library is providing.

Odunola and Tella (2019) defined library patronage as the consultation or use of library information resources by users of the library either physically or via remote access. In essence they defined library patronage as simply the regular utilization of library services by the intended users. Hence, in the context of this study reference services patronage will imply the regular consultation of reference services and the usage of reference information resources by the library’s patrons. Onuoha and Subair (2013) opined that the essence of evaluating the patronage of a library is to gather useful information on whether the library is fulfilling its mandate and to also help in the reform of services provision, planning and the effective management of the library.

Odunola and Tella (2019) reiterated that if library services and resources such as reference services and resources are not patronized by their intended users, then it means that there is little or no justification to the investment made to the library. According to Ibrahim and Wada (2021, p. 79), “the level of patronage of library ... is a good measure of how well libraries can facilitate teaching, learning and research activities”. Before a service is patronized by the intended users, the users must have a level of awareness of the services that are available for their patronage, hence, the patronage of reference services may be enhanced by the level of awareness.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defined awareness as the “knowledge that something exists, or understanding of a situation or subject at the present time based on information and experience”. Therefore, the awareness of reference service in the context of this study will imply the understanding and knowledge of the existence of reference services (such as information, inter-library loan and document delivery, bibliographic verification and documentation, CAS, user education, SDI, computerized reference sources or reprographic services) that users have gained through information or by experience. Even when users are aware of the reference services provided in the library, the patronage of the reference services may be hampered by some challenges. Challenges identified by some researchers include: inadequate information resources, poor communication skills, poor service quality, lack of library orientation among others (Okorafor, Ariole & Anyalebechi, 2017, Solanke & Nwalo, 2016, Abdullahi & Mamza, 2014).

The study focused on undergraduate students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. The undergraduate students are students in pursuit of a bachelor's degree and they constitute the highest number of library users/patrons. It is important to note that without patrons, there would be no patronage. There is a section in the library building primarily dedicated for the provision of reference services and the users are expected to patronize the services provided and this is one way of justifying the resources committed to the progress of the library. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the awareness and patronage of library reference services among undergraduate students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

Brief Background of Adeyemi College of Education

Adeyemi College of Education (ACE) was established in 1964 and it is located in Ondo town, Ondo State, Nigeria (Adeyemi College of Education, 2014). The College is a bachelor's degree and National Certificate of Education (NCE) awarding institution, with programmes spread across five schools of Arts & Social Sciences, Education, Languages, Sciences and Vocational &

Technical Education. At the inception of the College in 1964, a library was established and it is called the Babs Fafunwa Library (formerly called College Library). The role of the library is to serve and promote teaching, learning and research activities of the College. The sections in the library include: Circulation, Serials, Reference, Virtual/ICTs Library, Cataloguing & Classification section. The official website of the College is <https://www.aceondo.edu.ng>.

Research Problem

Reference services are meant to directly or indirectly provide assistance to library users who are in need of information that would help in addressing their curiosity. To this end, the library under study have a section setup within her building to provide users with reference services. These services include: current awareness, selective dissemination of information, digital library service, references information resources among others. In addition, personal observations at the reference section of the library had shown the genuineness of the library in providing reference services through reference information resources that are well arranged on the shelves and library personnel who are available to respond to users' queries. However, users may not be patronizing the services that the library offers as evidences from observing the activities in the reference section showed that, unlike the book shelves in other sections of the library; the reference shelves are not clustered by users and the consulted reference books on the reading carrels were very few when compared to consulted books in other sections. Furthermore, the library personnel who are charged with attending to users queries are less pressured by the users as most of them use the reference reading space for purposes other than reference related. The poor level of the library's reference services patronage could be as a result of poor level of awareness of reference services provided in the understudied library. In this light, the study investigated the awareness and patronage of library reference services among undergraduate students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the awareness and patronage of library reference services among undergraduate students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria. While the specific objectives are to:

- i. Ascertain the level of awareness of library reference services in ACE Library Ondo.
- ii. Determine the extent of library reference services patronage in in ACE library Ondo.

- iii. Find out the challenges to library reference services patronage in ACE library, Ondo.

Research Questions

In line with the stated objectives, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the level of awareness of library reference services in ACE Library Ondo?
2. What is the extent of library reference services patronage in ACE library Ondo?
3. What are the challenges to library reference services patronage in ACE library, Ondo?

Literature Review

Several studies have described reference services as the direct personal assistance given by library staff to library users' in their search for information, and these services include a variety of activities such as bibliographic instruction, SDI, CAS, liaison activities among others (Atanda and Uchendu, 2017, Musangi, 2015, Qobose & Mologanyi, 2015, Gadanga, 2013 & Adekunjo, 2008). Tyckoson (2011) categorized reference services into four dimensions which are: instructing users, providing answers to users' queries, recommending information resources and marketing library services. Akor and Alhassan (2015) explained that reference services can be attributed to CAS as well as SDI. They noted that in the provision of reference services, a reference librarian should be able to "provide selected information that are relevant to the researcher and also create an enabling environment" (p.24) that can help the researcher or library user to get current information that are needed to solve a specific problem.

Okorafor, Ariole and Anyalebechi (2017) investigated the "awareness and use of reference and information services amongst library users in university libraries in two states in Nigeria" they found that most of the respondents were aware of the various forms of reference services provided. In a similar study conducted by Ofodile and Ifijeh (2013) that examined the "current trends in library patronage by faculties in Nigerian universities: a study of Ladoke Akintola University, Ogbomosho, Nigeria", they found that there was a significant relationship between awareness and patronage. This implies that when the users are aware of the services that are provided in the library, they may likely patronize such services.

Furthermore, in Uganda, Namugera (2014) in a study that investigated "users' awareness, perception and usage of Makerere library services in the main and selected branch libraries" the researcher found that the awareness level of reference services such as CAS and SDI was low as only 10.6% of the respondents in the study indicated that they were aware. In USA, Donabedian,

Carey and Balayan (2018) examined the “use and awareness of library services among faculty at two American universities” and they found that the awareness level of reference services was lower among the respondents who had stayed more in the institutions. Similarly, Chodounska and Krueger (2016), in a study that assess the “awareness of library services: an ethnographic examination of bachelor students at two Czech technology universities” found that there was a poor awareness level of library services such as reference services among the undergraduates.

Olajide and Adio (2017) opined that library patronage and use encompass service points used, frequency of usage, time spent, browsing, reading and studying among others. Similarly, Ibrahim and Wada (2021) observed that the patronage of a library is a compass for library services provision and this is in line with the assertion made earlier by Odunola and Tella (2019) that if library services and resources such as reference services and resources are not patronized by their intended users, then it means that there is little or no justification for the investment made to the library. From the assertions made by the scholars, it may be inferred that the patronage is an indicator that may be used to evaluate reference services provided in libraries.

Emerole and Ogugua (2007) found in a study that investigated “library use pattern at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri” that the patronage of library services is low. Similarly, Odu (2017) observed that the patronage of library services was low in the University of Calabar, Nigeria. In another study, Solanke and Nwalo (2016) investigated the “influence of user needs and satisfaction on patronage of reference services by undergraduates in selected universities in Osun State, Nigeria”, and they found that there was a moderate patronage of reference services by the undergraduates. Usoro (2019) reiterated that the satisfaction with reference services depends on how well the services are delivered and that adequate services delivery will enhance satisfaction. This implies that the effectiveness of reference services delivery to users may likely influence the level of satisfaction and consequently, the level of patronage. For instance, Abdulsalami and Efosa (2020) examined the “non-patronage of library information resources and services by students of federal universities library”, they found that the patronage of library resources and services was low and this was attributed to some unsatisfactory elements such as: the lack of library orientation, poor relationship between staff and users and inadequate ICT facilities.

Okorafor, Ariole and Anyalebechi (2017) found that some of the challenges hampering the level of awareness and patronage of reference services by undergraduates were inadequate reference sources, non-participation of student in library orientation programmes, poor

communication skills of library staff and inadequate reading space. Similarly, Solanke and Nwalo (2016) found in their studies that unfriendly reference personnel, obsolete reference materials, inadequate reference time and poor service quality were challenges to the patronage of reference services. In Borno State, Nigeria, Abdullahi and Mamza (2014) found that some of the challenges resulting in the non-patronage and dissatisfaction of reference services among students in tertiary institutions include: inadequate electronic/print resources and the lack of qualified reference librarians.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the reviewed literature were mostly local based, and this is an indication that reference services is still an issue of concern in Nigeria and the patronage of reference services in Nigerian tertiary institutions is generally low. More so, none of the literature consulted focused on reference services awareness and patronage in Adeyemi College of Education. It is this gap that this study intend to fill.

Research Methodology

The study adopted survey design. The population of the study comprised eleven thousand, one hundred and sixty-nine (11,169) undergraduate students who were undergoing bachelor's degree programme in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, of which a sample size of three hundred and seventy (370) were selected for the study. The sampling size was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select the sample size of the study. The first stage was a purposive sampling that involved selecting undergraduates students who make use of the ACE library. The undergraduates were purposely selected because they make use of the library and they would be better informed of the services that are provided in the library when compared to their counterparts who do not make use of the library. The second stage involved using the students' identity cards to identifying those undergoing bachelor's degree programme in the college. While the last stage involved randomly sampling the identified library users who were actively using the library at the time (two weeks) of data collection. Hence, the sample size of the study was 370 respondents. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire which was administered to the respondents. The data collected were coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The research questions were answered using simple frequency and mean distribution. The results were discussed and the findings of the study were either supported or refuted using the findings of previous literature reviewed.

Questionnaire Administration and Response

A total of three hundred and seventy questionnaires were administered to the respondents. However, three hundred and seventeen copies of the returned questionnaires were found useful for the study, thus, giving 85.68% response rate. Table 1 presents data on the questionnaire administration and response rate.

Table 1: Questionnaire administration and response rate

| Respondents | Numbers of undergraduate Students | Numbers of Questionnaire Administered | Numbers of Questionnaire Returned | Percentage of Returned Questionnaire |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Undergraduates | 11,169 | 370 | 317 | 85.68% |

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages were used for the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The results are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Demography of respondents

| Items | Sub-Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Part/Level of study | 1 | 63 | 19.90% |
| | 2 | 117 | 36.90% |
| | 3 | 60 | 18.90% |
| | 4 | 77 | 24.30% |
| Sex/Gender | Male | 155 | 48.9% |
| | Female | 162 | 51.1% |
| Age | 15-20years | 150 | 47.30% |
| | 21-25years | 96 | 30.30% |
| | 26-30years | 68 | 21.50% |
| | Above 31years | 3 | 0.90% |
| | Total | 317 | 100 |

Source: field survey, 2021

Table 2 presents demographic information of the respondents that have contributed to the outcome of this study. Firstly, from table 2 most of the respondents were in “part 2” 117(36.90%) of their studies, while there was a reduction in the number of respondents in the higher parts (3 & 4) of their studies. This could implies that their previous experience, perception, knowledge etc. of the library may have influenced the number of respondents that were available for this study. Secondly, the female 162(51.1%) was the gender with the most number of respondents in this study, however, the difference in the percentage of both genders (male and female) was 7(2.2%) which is relatively low; this therefore, implies that the gender distribution of the respondents may

have little or no influence on the outcome of the study. Lastly, on the age distribution, most of the respondents were within the ages of “15-20years” 150(47.30%) while the least number of respondents were in the age range of “above 31years” 3(0.9%). This shows that the respondents were mostly young adults whose primary responsibility was to focus on their study.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Research question 1: What is the level of awareness of library reference services in ACE Library Ondo?

Table 3: Awareness of reference services

| Reference Services | I am not aware | | I am aware | | Decision |
|--|----------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| | Freq. | Percentage | Freq. | Percentage | |
| User education (Library users are provided with instructions and guide on how to make good use of the library) | 32 | 10.10% | 285 | 89.90% | Aware |
| Information Services (The reference librarian can refer you to sources where you can get needed information). | 45 | 14.20% | 272 | 85.80% | Aware |
| Current Awareness Service (Latest publications are provided to help students/researchers with their work and assignments). | 93 | 29.30% | 224 | 70.70% | Aware |
| Inter-library loan (Books can be borrowed on your behalf from other libraries). | 128 | 40.40% | 189 | 59.60% | Unaware |
| Digital reference services (Reference section provide access to their services and resources via the internet and social media). | 162 | 51.10% | 155 | 48.90% | Unaware |
| Reprographic service (The library can make photocopies of certain pages of books that cannot be borrowed for users). | 176 | 55.50% | 141 | 44.50% | Unaware |
| Selective Dissemination of Information (Library users are informed of latest information in their field). | 185 | 58.40% | 132 | 41.60% | Unaware |
| N= 317, Percentage average= 50%, Calculated percentage average= 63% | | | | | |

Source: field survey, 2021

Awareness of reference services is of importance if the services provided were to be patronized, hence, table 3 presents data on reference services awareness among the respondents in this study. Thus, from this study, table 3 shows that among the reference services provided by the library under study, over 50% of the respondents ranging from (70.7% to 89.9%) indicated that they were aware of the following reference services: user education, information service, CAS and

inter-library loan. This was however negated by the findings of Namugera (2014) that CAS had a low level of awareness. While, there was a low percentage response ranging from (48.9% to 41.6%) of respondents who were aware of digital reference service, reprographic services and SDI services.

However, on a general note the calculated percentage average of 63% shows that the respondents were aware of the reference services provided. This was supported by the findings of Okorafor, Ariole and Anyalebechi (2017) that most of the respondents were aware of the various forms of reference services provided. However, this was negated by the findings of Donabedian, Carey and Balayan (2018) that the awareness of reference services was lower among the respondents, especially those who had stayed more in the institution.

Research question 2: What is the extent of library reference services patronage in in ACE library Ondo?

Table 4: Patronage of reference services

| Reference Services | NP | LP | HP | VHP | Mean | Decision |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------|----------------|
| | Freq. (%) | Freq. (%) | Freq. (%) | Freq. (%) | | |
| User education: (You are instructed or guided on how to use the library and its resources). | 45 (14.2%) | 63 (19.9%) | 80 (25.2%) | 129 (40.7%) | 2.92 | Patronized |
| Current Awareness Service (Latest publications are provided to help students/users with their research work or assignments) | 54 (17%) | 86 (27.1%) | 77 (24.3%) | 100 (31.5%) | 2.70 | Patronized |
| Information service (You are referred to sources where you can get needed information). | 22 (6.9%) | 166 (52.4%) | 67 (21.1%) | 62 (19.6%) | 2.53 | Patronized |
| Digital reference services: (Provide access to information and resources via the Internet & social media). | 68 (21.5%) | 142 (44.8%) | 80 (25.2%) | 27 (8.5%) | 2.21 | Not Patronized |
| Selective Dissemination of Information (Users are informed of latest information in their field) | 114 (36%) | 45 (14.2%) | 158 (49.8%) | 0 (0%) | 2.14 | Not Patronized |
| Reprographic services (Photocopies of certain pages of books that cannot be borrowed can be made for students) | 91 (28.7%) | 167 (52.7%) | 33 (10.4%) | 26 (8.2%) | 1.98 | Not Patronized |
| Inter-library loan (The library on my behalf borrow books from other libraries for my use) | 162 (51.1%) | 75 (23.7%) | 57 (18%) | 23 (7.3%) | 1.81 | Not Patronized |
| N=317, Criterion mean= 2.5, Calculated mean=2.34 | | | | | | |

Source: field survey, 2021

Note: NP=No Patronage, LP=Low Patronage, HP=High Patronage, VHP= Very High Patronage

The extent to which reference services are patronized may help in justifying the investment made to the library. For instance, Odunola and Tella (2019) reiterated that if library services such as reference services are not patronized by their intended users, then it means that there is little or no justification for the investment made to the library. Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (mean above 2.5) patronize reference services such as user education, CAS and information services, while services such as digital reference, SDI, reprographic and interlibrary loan had a low level of patronage as indicated by most of the respondents (mean lesser than 2.5) in this study.

On a general note, the patronage of the reference services was low, as the result in table 4 shows that the calculated mean of 2.34 was less than the criterion mean of 2.5. This was partially supported by the findings of Solanke and Nwalo (2016) that there was a moderate patronage of reference services by undergraduates. However, it was affirmed by the findings of Emerole and Ogugua (2007) that the patronage of library services is low. In a nutshell, the respondents' patronage of reference services such as: digital reference, SDI, interlibrary loan and reprographic service in the library under study was low.

Research question 3: What are the challenges to library reference services patronage in ACE library, Ondo?

Table 5: Challenges of reference services patronage

| Challenges | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | Mean | Decision |
|--|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------|----------|
| | Freq. (%) | Freq. (%) | Freq. (%) | Freq. (%) | | |
| Non-participation of students in orientation programme | 29 (9.1%) | 60 (18.9%) | 120 (37.9%) | 108 (34.1%) | 2.97 | Agree |
| Inadequate space/location for reference services | 0 (0%) | 186 (58.7%) | 66 (20.8%) | 65 (20.5%) | 2.62 | Agree |
| Poor communication skills of library staff | 14 (4.4%) | 129 (40.7%) | 150 (47.3%) | 24 (7.6%) | 2.58 | Agree |
| Inadequacy of reference information sources | 19 (6.0%) | 164 (51.7%) | 112 (35.3%) | 22 (6.9%) | 2.43 | Disagree |
| Poor human relation of library staff | 25 (7.9%) | 172 (54.3%) | 99 (31.2%) | 21 (6.6%) | 2.37 | Disagree |
| N=3.17 | | | | | | |

Source: field survey, 2021

Table 5 shows the challenges to reference services patronage. From table 5, most of the respondents disagreed that the non-participation of students in orientation programme, inadequate space for reference services and poor communication skills of library staff were challenges to reference services in the understudied library. This negates the findings of Okorafor, Ariole and Anyalebechi (2017), that some of the challenges hampering the level of awareness and use of reference services by undergraduates were inadequate reference sources, non-participation of student in library orientation programmes, poor communication skills of library staff and inadequate reading space. Similarly, Abdullahi and Mamza (2014) affirmed that inadequate e-resources/print resources and the lack of qualified reference librarians were some of the challenges to references services patronage

However, most of the respondents with a mean score of 2.37 agreed that poor human relation of the library staff and inadequate reference information sources were challenges. This was affirmed by the findings of Abdulsalami and Efosa (2020) who found that poor relationships between library staff and users were responsible for low patronage of library services.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The studied library like most academic libraries, has a section dedicated to the provision of reference services and the aim is to assist users who may need support to get information that are relevant to solving a particular problem. A user who approached the reference section for help may do that either by mere coincidence or may have in one way or another become aware of the fact that he/she would get the needed support from the section and consequently patronizes it. The reference services patronage, is a reflection of their relevance to the library users and how well the objectives of committing resources to the library are being achieved by the library's management. This study had examined reference services with respect to the following dimensions; awareness level, patronage and challenges from the users perspectives. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The undergraduates were generally aware of the reference services provided by the library, therefore, this should be sustained by the library management through avenues such as library orientation and use of conspicuous signage/label to create awareness of the reference services.
2. The reference services had low patronage, therefore, library management may increase the patronage of these services by ensuring that innovative strategies that put into

consideration the dynamics of the users' population are factored into the delivery of reference services.

3. Digital reference has the potential of increasing the patronage of reference services because of its unlimited boundary of getting across to the users, however, it had a low patronage. Therefore, the library management should invest in ICTs and human resources that would contribute in achieving the gains of digital reference.
4. Since poor human relation of library staff was a challenge to patronage, the library management should identify and deploy staff with the right mindset (for services provision), to the reference section and they should be well motivated to attract more patronage for reference services in particular and the library in general.
5. To address the inadequate reference sources, the library administration and other stakeholders should ensure that funds set aside for the acquisition of reference sources, are utilized for the purpose, and other channels (gifts and donation) of acquisition should also be explored.

Practical Implication of the Study

The reference section is an important part of a library that provides services directly to any user that approaches it for assistance or indirectly through the packaging of information in the form of guides, CAS, SDI, signage etc., that would provide users with clues directing them to what they want from the vast information resources and other needs in the library. Thus, library's administrations and parent bodies are committing resources to ensure that the reference services provided are worthy in terms of meeting the objectives for setting up of the references section in particular and the entire library in general. It is not enough to setup a reference section that would be responsible for providing reference services, there is need for a constant review of how well these services are delivered to the users and if they are also well patronized (appreciated) by the users, so that the library's administration can be well guided in making strategic plans that would help to reposition the reference services provided in the library.

The review of the reference services may be based on results from empirical studies. For instance, the findings of this study have shown that the studied library is lagging in the provision of digital reference services as reflected in the poor level of patronage; this is therefore, a clarion call to the library's administration and the parent body of the need, to invest in ICTs and human resources that would result in a better provision of digital reference services and by extension, the

patronage of the library. The findings of the study is important to the management of the studied library, and other library managers are equally being sensitized for the need to regularly appraise their libraries for better service provision as well as increase in users patronage as a library primarily setup to serve the users.

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