
**EVALUATION OF REFERENCE SERVICES IN THE DELTA STATE POLYTECHNIC
LIBRARY OTEFE-OGHARA**

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ABSTRACT

Reference service because of its nature is regarded as one of the most important services offered by academic libraries. This is assumed to be the case of the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe-Oghara. This article therefore evaluates the reference section of the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe-Oghara and all the activities that takes place in the section in terms of quality and adequacy of resources stocked and services offered respectively by this all important section of the academic library. The study also examined students' level of awareness of reference service. The population for the study comprises of the six librarians and 525 registered HND 2 (final year) students from every department which cut across the three schools (school of applied science and technology, engineering and business study) of the polytechnic from which a sample size of 150 was taken. The findings of the study includes low awareness level of reference service and poor state of reference section whose outcome is students dissatisfaction with reference service provided by the polytechnic library. Recommendations were made on ways to improve reference services offered to the polytechnic students.

KEYWORDS: Reference service; reference sources; information resources; academic library; Polytechnic library.

INTRODUCTION

Effective reference service is key to the achievement of library's goals and objectives. The fundamental principles of librarianship are enshrined in Ranganathan's five laws of library science. These laws paraphrased are information resources are for use; every information user his/her information resource; every information resource its user; save the time of the information user and the library is a growing organism. When considered critically the reference section if properly equipped is a veritable tool that should be used to execute these laws. In fact the fulfillment of these laws can hardly be achieved by a library without a vibrant reference section.

Libraries generally are service oriented; information is the main item they market. The library will therefore not be making any profit or relevance if her clients do not record improved knowledge development, creation of innovative ideas as well as producing individuals that are capable of making

independent decision in the society. Academic libraries whose services are user oriented and recorded high level user satisfaction are those whose reference section is active and very functional. Reference service is the backbone of an academic library; it is the center on which information service revolves in the library. Okeke, Oghenetega and Nwabu, (2013) point out that reference service is the root of librarianship/library and information services hence it should be a core service in every academic library. Ultimately the library performs three functions of information collection, organization for easy retrieval and dissemination; the most important which is information dissemination is mostly carried out through reference service (Donald, Catlett and Collins, 2018). It will therefore only be saying the obvious that a library without a vibrant and active reference section will be unable to adequately serve her patrons. Such a library may find it difficult to reach a large number of users. In essence it might not be able to maintain her relevance as the nucleus of research and academic activities especially in an academic setting such as the polytechnic.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Essentially the academic library is established to assist the academic institution to provide information resources and services for the acquisition and development of knowledge. The library would have succeeded in fulfilling her purpose if it is able to adequately perform her services of providing and disseminating the right information resources at the right time in the way acceptable to the library's patron. Like most academic libraries, the Delta state polytechnic library Otefe is expected to have a reference section which houses reference materials and performs reference services. The library is also expected to have a professional librarian manning the section. However, it cannot be taken for granted that the reference section is living up to the expectations of the library users, in terms of adequacy and quality of reference materials/services provided. Moreover considering the place of this important section of the library it is important to find out if library users students in particular of the polytechnic library have adequate awareness and understanding of what reference services entail. The appraisal of reference service of the Delta State polytechnic library has become necessary as literature reviewed reveals no research of this nature has been done concerning the polytechnic in study.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the reference service of the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe with a view to:

- I. examine the reference materials available to provide reference services at the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe
- II. find out the level of awareness of the students of the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe regarding reference services
- III. find out if the patrons of the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe are satisfied with the quality of reference service they are offered.

Research questions

- I. What facilities are available at the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe for the provision of reference services?
- II. What is the level of awareness do students have of reference services?
- III. Are the students of Delta State Polytechnic Otefe satisfied with the reference services offered to them?

Literature review

A typical library is divided into several divisions or sections as the case may be, for the purpose of administration. While some libraries have the reference section as a division of its own in others it is a sub division under the readers' service division. The reason most times is as a result of the size of the library which also means the size of her patrons. Whether as sub division of main division the section performs the same function and remains a vital part of the library. The section houses reference materials of various forms and sizes for the provision of reference services. It is the department where reference transactions take place in the library (Okunade, 2016). Reference materials/source/resources are used interchangeably within the library to mean those library collections according to Okafor (2012) that have special characteristics in the treatment of their content. Reference materials by their nature do not allow for continues reading. They are designed to be consulted or referred to from time to time for specific piece(s) of information. Okunade (2016) explained that reference sources are "documents that contain miscellaneous information on any topic – be it an event or individual". They generally provide quick answers to questions or direct you to additional information sources. Because of their importance they are usually not circulated and separated from the regular library books collection, thus are readily available and accessible. According to Elmer E. Rasmuson Library (2018) reference sources can be books, serials, on-line databases or information accessed on the internet. In the opinion of Ahiauzu (2015) generic reference sources has to do with everything and everywhere that information can be gotten to meet the information needs of a patron. This include the library, the human mind, the library catalogue and generic books and all such sources of information and tools acquired by the library in order to facilitate the access to information sources in the library and other sister libraries.

The conventional reference sources found in a typical academic library as out lined by Shorter University Library (2019) are dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, indexes, abstracts, bibliographies and biographical sources, directories, almanacs. Others are yearbooks, handbooks and manuals, geographical sources, gazetteers, maps and atlases. These reference sources are usually highly used and non-circulating. They represent the most current sources of information of the library's materials.

Use not just use, but effective and maximum use is the ultimate goal of collecting these reference sources. Against this backdrop reference service distinct from the usual day to day running of the library

is meant to actualize the fulfillment of the ultimate purpose of the library which is spelt out in the law of librarianship by S. R. Ranganathan. In the traditional sense reference service can be seen as the personal assistance which is provided by trained personnel in the library to users in pursuit of information of any sort. (Tapas, Pritam and Nimai, 2009, Idris, Oji, and Abana, 2011). As defined by Ranganathan (1931) (in Ahiauzu, 2015) who is reputed to be the father of librarianship reference service is the establishment of contact between the researcher (information seeker) and the book (information source) in a personal way. Here reference service is given the outlook of an intermediary or just a link between the reader and the book. In practice it has been discovered that reference service is broader, painstaking, more intensive and crucial than a “go between”. Hence Okunade, (2016) defines reference service as information service which involves the knowledge, use, recommendations, interpretation or instruction in the use of one or more sources of information by member(s) of a library staff. He explained further that it includes information and referral services. According to IFLA (2013), reference service encompasses the following –

- reference: in form of general or specialized help in refining information queries, locating information, accessing information, and interpreting information,
- circulation: the ability to access physical materials for use outside of a library
- interlibrary loan: which connects users to resources not available in their home libraries
- Library use instruction: assistance in the general use of the library and various technologies that can be used to access, use and manipulate information within or outside of the library

Similarly, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library (2018) gave the high points of reference work by any given library to be to:

- Provide instructions and guiding users with the use of the library; this includes retrieving materials, using the catalogue, using computers to access information, and using basic reference sources,
- Constructing search terms as well as assistance in identifying library materials needed to answer particular question.
- Providing quick, brief and factual answers to questions, such as addresses, statistics, phone numbers, dates of important events, names of notable personalities locally and internationally etc

In clear terms reference service is the personal assistance offered by librarians to library users in search of information or in the course of a research work; the assistance could be in form of information itself or it could be any library activity deliberately designed to quicken and make information access and retrieval easy (Ogunniyi, Efofa and Sheji, 2013; Sabah, 2018).

One of its characteristic effects of the influx digitizing technology in the library is the transformation of

reference service. Most libraries especially academic libraries now offer digital reference services (Krug, 2017; Yang and Dalal, 2015; Adomi, 2008). According to Uutoni (2014) digital reference are fast becoming part of today's library service especially academic libraries. This according to Uutoni is necessitated by the increased awareness and use of the internet which has reduced user's physical presences in the library and growing need of librarians to attract more users to the library. Cassell and Hiremith (2011) are of the view that the switch to digital reference by most libraries is as a result of the rapid development in electronic resources as well as its availability in large amounts. Supporting this view Kemp, Ellis and Maloney (2015) and Oxford (2017) studies revealed that the use of virtual reference service is capable of increasing the number of reference queries received from library users. Uzoigwe and Eze (2018) revealed from a survey of selected university libraries in Nigeria that easy retrieval of information as well as speedy dissemination of information are some of the benefits users and librarians alike derive from the use of digital reference service.

Whether digital or tradition reference service the ultimate goal of the service is to connect library users with best available library and information services for their research, information and otherwise needs as well as ensuring that the connection between the library and the users is in the most effective way (Ashikuzzaman, 2013). Adomi (2008) clearly pointed out that digital and traditional reference services basically share the same principles in terms of vision, mission, purpose and end result, their differences however lie their modes of operation. Whereas digital references services is offered electronically through information commutation technology (ICT) devices (internet, computer, cell phones, CD-ROMs etc), the traditional reference insists on face to face contact, manual search and delivery of information materials/sources (Destiya and Tamara, 2017).

Drawing from the definitions it is clear that reference service is the hub on which the core library operations revolve. For a library to earn the confidence of her users the library management has to ensure that the reference section is functional and active in the execution of her functions. The reference section also has to voluntarily support the education and research activities of her users. Tapas, Pritam and Nimai (2009) concluded from their study that reference service is the most intensive kind of personal service which attempts to bring together the user and the information in a personal way in a library setting. However, as important as this service is for users to achieve the most of their information search and use, several studies have shown that most library users seem to have low awareness of reference service and do not make high use of the service. Onifade and Sowole (2011) found that majority of undergraduate students of the University of Agriculture Abeokuta demonstrated low awareness of reference service at the university library which invariably affected their use of the service. A similar study by Ifeka, Okeke, Oghenetega and Nwabu (2013) covering four academic libraries Anambra State, Nigeria revealed that respondents use of the institutions' reference services and sources is hindered by low experience of librarians and obsolesce of available reference sources.

Ogunniyi, Efosa and Sheji (2013) on the other hand found that students demonstrate considerate level of awareness and use of reference sources and services; they are however faced with the challenge of obsolete reference resources stocked by the library and long time spent while using the available sources in their institutions library. The evaluation of reference service at the Delta State Polytechnic becomes necessary as users' satisfaction is a way of measuring the adequacy (quality and quantity) of library services provided to them as well as ascertaining that their expectations are met by the library (Tiemo and Ateboh, 2016). Moreover it appears from the review of literature that there seem to be paucity of studies of this nature on the Delta State Polytechnic, Library Otefe, this study intends to fill this gap.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey design using mixed method of data collection. Quantitative method was used to collect data from students using questionnaire as method of data collection while the qualitative method collected data from librarians with the use of semi-structured interview. The population for the study comprise of the six librarians and 525 final year HND students who are duly registered users of the library during the 2018/2019 academic session. A sample size of 150 was taken out of the 525 registered HND 2 (final year) students from every department which cut across the three schools (school of applied science and technology, engineering and business study) of the polytechnic. The questionnaires were administered to students as they came to the library during the second month (November 2018) of resumption of first semester October 2018 to December 2019. 150 copies of questionnaires were distributed out of which 145 were retrieved, this constitutes 98% response rate. While 4 out of the 6 librarians who were available were interviewed for the study, this constitutes 67% response rate. The response rate of 67% and 98% are considered suitable for a study of this nature according to Livingston and Wislar (2012) as it capable of giving a considerable level of the true picture of the situation under investigation. Quantitative results were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentage and presented in tables while content analysis was used to present qualitative results.

Data analysis Response rate

The above table 1 shows the number of respondents from each school of the polytechnic. Out of the 145 questionnaires retrieved, 72 (50%) were from School of business studies; 42 (31%) from school of applied science and technology while 31 (22%) were from school of engineering. The result further shows that out of the 145 respondents 82 (57%) were female while 63 (43%) were male. The score of the response rate is a reflection of the sizes of the schools in terms of students' population. School of business is the largest followed by engineering and applied science and technology. The high scores of the school of business and applied science and technology are probably due to this fact.

Table 1 Response rate

Schools	No. of responses (N=150)	% of response
School of business	72	50%
studies	F-57	M-15
	School of engineering	
School of applied science and technology	31	21%
	F-7	M-24
Total	42	29%
	F-17	M-25
Total	145	100
	F-82	M-63

Research question 1 was asked to ascertain what facilities are availability for the provision of reference services and how adequate the facilities are in terms of quantity and quality.

Table 2 what facilities are available at the Otefe Polytechnic library for the provision of reference services?

Facilities	Frequency n = 145	%
Well trained reference librarian	42	29
Up-to-date reference materials-general and specific reference sources	37	26
A unit devoted to the provision of reference services	22	15
ICT facilities-computer e.g. desk top, laptops, internet connection, printers/photocopiers	37	26

The result in table 2 revealed that out of the 145 respondents, 42 (29%) affirmed that there are well trained reference staff in the Otefe Poly library; 37 (26%) affirmed the availability of up-to- date reference materials-general and specific reference sources while 22 (15%) and 37 (26%) affirmed the availability of a unit devoted to the provision of reference services and ICT facilities-computer e.g. desk

top, laptops, internet connection, printers/photocopiers respectively. It can be inferred from the result that students are either unaware of the existence of some of these facilities or that the library has not done much to sensitize users on the availability of reference services. This is absurd, as it is actually the right of users to be aware of and be offered reference services.

Table 3 Adequacy of available facilities for the provision of reference services

Facilities	Adequate		Not adequate N = 145	
	N =145			
	F	%	F	%
Well trained reference librarians	11	8	134	92
Up-to-date reference materials-general and specific reference sources	26	38	119	82
A unit devoted to the provision of reference services	25	17	120	83
ICT facilities-computer e.g. desk top, laptops, internet connection, printers/photocopiers	-	-	140	97

It can be seen from table 3 that 11 (8%) affirmed the adequacy of well trained reference librarians while 134 (92%) do not agree with the statement. For up-to-date reference materials- general and specific reference sources, 26 (38%) agreed while 119 (82) disagreed to their adequacy in the Polytechnic library. The results also revealed 25 (17%) agreeing to the statement that the unit devoted to the provision of reference services is adequate with 120 (83) disagreeing to the same statement. While for ICT facilities-computer e.g. desk top, laptops, internet connection, printers/photocopiers all the 140 (97%) responses stated they are inadequate. This discovery is worthy of note in the face of the ongoing global ICT and digital revolution.

Research question 2 was asked to find out if students are aware of the presence of references facilities in the library

Table 4 showing awareness of the reference facilities and services in the library

Awareness of the availability of the various reference facilities	Yes		No		No response	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Well trained reference librarian	18	12	100	69	29	19
Up-to-date reference materials-general reference sources	11	8	59	41	75	52
A unit devoted to the provision of reference services	11	8	95	66	39	27
ICT facilities-computer e.g. desk top, laptops, internet connection, printers/photocopiers	57	39	75	52	13	9

The result shows that majority (100: 69%) of the students investigated are not aware that there are well trained librarians in the library, 18 (12%) are aware while 29 (19%) did not respond to the question. In the case of up-to-date reference materials-general and specific reference sources, 11 (8%) are aware of their presence, 59 (41%) are not aware while 78 (52%) did not respond to the question. For unit devoted to the provision of reference services, the majority (95: 66%) is not aware of their presence, a significant percentage (27%: 39) did not respond to the question while only 11 (8%) respondents are aware. The result also shows that while 52% (75) of the respondents is aware of the presence of ICT facilities-computer e.g. desk top, laptops, internet connection, printers/photocopiers in the library, 39% (57) are not aware while 9% (13) did not respond to the question. The reason most students are not aware of the presence of reference facilities in the library may be due to the fact that they are not ardent users of the library. It can also be assumed that the library is not proactive in performing her functions (reference).

Research question 3 focused on the satisfaction students derive from reference services they are offered in the library.

Table 5 showing level of students' satisfaction with the reference services provided by Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe

Statement	Satisfied		Highly Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Not satisfied		Not at all Satisfied	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
How satisfied are you with the reference services provided by the library	-	-	-	-	12	8	93	64	40	28

The result in table 5 shows that most of the respondents are not satisfied with the reference services offered by the Otefe Poly library. The result shows that the majority are not satisfied (93 (64%) not satisfied and 40 (28%) not at all satisfied while only 8% (12) indicated they are somewhat satisfied. This is a clear indication of the need for aggressive sensitization of the entire students of Delta State Polytechnic Otefe - Oghara on reference services.

Qualitative data semi-structured interview from library staff reverent

The semi-structured interview was conducted with four librarians from the Polytechnic library Otefe. The results from the interview regarding the availability of up-to-date reference sources

reveal that two out of the four librarians rated the reference sources in terms of quantity to be 30% and in terms of quality to be 20%. The remaining two interviewees did not state percentage but confirmed that the reference resources and facilities available in the library are grossly inadequate for the provision of effective reference service to the Polytechnic community. One of the interviewees’ (librarian) stated particularly concerning the condition of journals and periodicals, in quote “the Otefe Polytechnic library is lagging behind in the provision of up-to- date journals and periodicals which are essential sources of information especially in the fields of science and technology”.

Responding to the number of students that visit the reference section in a week, there is no record of that, but all four librarians interviewed said “just a few” compared to the number of registered students which are about 4000 (according to the interviewee 2).

In respect of students satisfaction with the reference facilities and services the librarians’ responses are varied. One stated “cannot really measure as I have not taken time to find out if students are satisfied with reference services”. Another responded by stating that “they are cannot be satisfied as their needs are most times not met”. The third respondent said “anytime I am able to help a student with his/her information need he/she is happy but such times are few”. The last respondent said “we have more students projects in our reference unit than other sources and these are what the students mostly make

use of. Most times they find project topics related their own that they use in guiding themselves while writing theirs. They are always very happy for that”. It can be drawn from these 4 responses that the Delta state polytechnic library is lagging behind in the provision of reference facilities and services.

Findings and discussion

The findings of the study are summarized and presented in the table below

Table 6 outline of research questions and research findings

Research questions	Findings
What facilities are available at the Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe for the provision of reference services?	There is evidence of the availability of reference sources and services at the Delta State Polytechnic library Otefe but they are grossly inadequate.
What level of awareness do students have of reference services?	The level of awareness of Delta State Polytechnic Otefe-Oghara students regarding reference services is very low.
Are the students of Delta State Polytechnic Otefe satisfied with the reference services offered to them by the library?	The students of the Delta State Polytechnic Otefe are not at all satisfied with the reference services the library offers.

The findings of this study regarding the availability of reference facilities and sources is supported by Ifeha, Okeke, Oghenetega and Nwabu (2013) who found from their study that the students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Anambra State University, Uli and Madona University, Okija avoided the use of the reference section as there were no librarians who man the section to guide the students in their use of the resources. The interviewees’ responses reveal that Delta State Polytechnic Otefe students do not make high and regular use of the reference section due to non availability of reference facilities and services such as up-to-date reference sources and trained staff to man the reference section of the library. The study findings regarding awareness of reference facilities and sources revealed low level awareness of reference facilities and sources corroborates the findings of Onifade and Sowole (2011) which reported low awareness of reference services by undergraduate students of the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. This however, calls for attention as most recent similar studies revealed high level awareness of reference facilities and sources among tertiary institution students. For example, Ogunniyi, Efosa and Sheji (2013) study of the use of reference sources and services by students of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, state. Similarly, the findings of the present survey give credence to the statement of Ijiekhuamhen, Aghojare and Lerdinand (2015)

who averred that users' extent of library use depends on the level of satisfaction they derive from the said library. In effect the Delta State Polytechnic Otefe library may not record high use as this study recorded high degree of dissatisfaction of respondents from the reference service offered by the Polytechnic library.

CONCLUSION

Indeed reference sources and services are the core of every library's operation. They are the foundation on which the entire educational system of an institution is built. For "a complex and information abundant environment" such as the polytechnic, it is crucial for there to be an academic library whose reference section is well stocked with up-to-date reference sources and whose services are underpinned by the need to answer the diverse reference requests of her user community. The low awareness and users dissatisfaction of reference facilities and services reported by this study is a reflection of the poor state of the reference section of the Delta State Polytechnic Otefe Library. The results of the study are a clear indication of the fact that most students especially HND 2 may not find the reference section of the library useful to them in this critical stage of their study.

RECOMMENDATION

On the strength of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- The reference section of the Delta State Polytechnic Otefe Library needs to be revamped. This should include the training of library staff to reorient them of the importance of the reference section in library and information services.
- There is an urgent need for outreach programs such as workshops, conferences/seminars to be organized by the library during which awareness campaign as well as marketing of the services of the library to the entire polytechnic community will be done.
- It is also recommended that the library management organizes a special outreach program specifically for HND 2 and ND 2 students in their final year and sensitize them on how they can take advantage of the opportunities of reference services in their research work.

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