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INFLUENCE OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study explores the role of reference and information services in enhancing service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State. A survey research design was employed, with the population comprising 50,000 students, academic, and non-academic staff from five academic institutions: Benue State University, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Akperan Orshi College of Agriculture, Benue State Polytechnic, and College of Education, Katsina-Ala. A sample of 397 respondents was selected using Yamene's formula. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire, which was validated by experts and tested for reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, regression analysis, and ANOVA. The findings reveal that services such as thesis and dissertation databases, institutional repositories, and bibliographic instruction are frequently used, while subject-specific databases and online catalogues remain underutilized due to factors like limited awareness and accessibility issues. Additionally, reference services like in-person assistance and access to electronic databases are more frequently used, while services such as email reference and interlibrary loan are rarely utilized. The study emphasizes the significant influence of information services, such as information literacy programs and online databases, on enhancing the academic experience. The study recommendations for improving resource accessibility, promoting underutilized services, strengthening reference services, and fostering better

collaboration between academic libraries and departments. It also advocates for continued investment in information literacy programs to empower students and faculty in navigating library resources effectively.
Keywords: Reference services, information services, service delivery, academic libraries

Introduction

Service delivery is central to the mission of academic libraries, ensuring that users access the information they need promptly and efficiently. Zemengue (2021) define service delivery as the ability of a library to meet users' information needs at the point of request to improve user satisfaction. Academic libraries are established to support research, teaching, learning, and community service, and timely service delivery contributes significantly to these goals. Akpan (2018) stresses the importance of delivering both print and non-print materials promptly. To optimize this, libraries must clearly explain the scope and limitations of their services so users know what to expect, especially in areas such as reference and information services. Reference services are a core component of library operations, providing direct personal assistance to users. Sahabi and Otobo (2021) describe reference services as the support librarians give to users seeking information through various platforms. Akor and Alhassan (2015) emphasize that the reference department is often the first point of contact for patrons needing information, regardless of the subject. These services include research consultation, bibliographic instruction, reader advisory, and bibliographic verification (Thorpe, (2017). When combined with broader information services, reference services enhance the quality and responsiveness of academic libraries, making them more effective in fulfilling their educational mandate.

Information services, though overlapping with reference services, encompass broader functions including the collection, management, and dissemination of data to meet diverse user needs. Singh and Kaur (2009) notes that these services span multiple sectors such as education and government. Ike and Chinedu (2023) sees them as crucial for helping users solve problems effectively, while Luo and Buer (2015) add that they involve activities like collecting, organizing, and storing information. These services may include user education and digital interfaces that support independent information retrieval. They are essential in promoting critical thinking, independent learning, and a culture of lifelong learning within academic institutions, especially in states like Benue. Technology is reshaping how academic libraries deliver reference and information services. Younus and Nadeem (2021) report the growing use of tools like chatbots and virtual reference services that improve accessibility and user

engagement. Libraries are also using data analytics to guide decision- making in service provision. Ihim and Edom (2022) explain how user data helps optimize staffing and resource distribution. However, many academic libraries in developing countries face obstacles to implementing such improvements. Malanga (2015) cite inadequate staffing, outdated materials, poor funding, and lack of infrastructure as key challenges. Ishola and Obadare (2014) also point out issues such as erratic power supply, insufficient ICT facilities, and low user awareness. To overcome these challenges, libraries must adopt strategic solutions, especially in the Nigerian context. Information technology offers new channels for delivering information in multiple formats, making services more dynamic. Olaniyi (2024), highlights the absence of effective staff development policies in library schools and advocates for stronger institutional linkages. Quadri and Abiodun (2017) suggests inclusive policies and staff engagement programs that support professional growth and job satisfaction. These measures are essential for improving service delivery and ensuring academic libraries remain vital to institutional success.

This research is justified by the critical role that effective service delivery plays in academic libraries, ensuring that students, researchers, and faculty members receive timely and relevant information to support learning, teaching, and research. Given the increasing reliance on digital resources and evolving user expectations, academic libraries must continuously adapt their reference and information services to meet these demands. However, as highlighted by Quadri and Abiodun (2017) libraries in developing countries face significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient ICT facilities, outdated materials, and poor funding, which hinder optimal service delivery. Investigating these issues will help identify gaps in library services and propose practical solutions to enhance accessibility, efficiency, and user satisfaction. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader discourse on how academic libraries in Benue State and similar contexts can leverage technology, policy improvements, and staff development to improve service delivery, thereby reinforcing their role in academic success and lifelong learning.

Statement of the Problem

Reference and information services play a crucial role in academic libraries by supporting teaching, learning, and research. However, academic libraries in Benue State face significant challenges that hinder effective service delivery. One major issue is the limited availability of essential resources such as books, journals, and electronic databases, which restricts access to relevant academic materials (Ike and Chinedu 2023). Additionally, outdated or inadequate technological

infrastructure further limits the ability of libraries to provide modern reference services. The lack of digital tools and advanced library management systems prevents efficient access to electronic resources, hindering students and researchers from retrieving necessary information in a timely manner (Sahabi and Otobo (2021). These resource limitations negatively impact the quality of research and academic performance, reducing the overall effectiveness of academic libraries in the region. Another key challenge is the shortage of qualified library personnel, which affects the quality and efficiency of reference services. Insufficient staffing leads to delays in information retrieval, reduced research support, and an inability to provide specialized assistance to users (Zemengue 2021). Furthermore, the lack of user awareness regarding available library services results in underutilization of resources, as many students and faculty members are unaware of how to access or maximize library offerings (Luo and Buer 2015)). Despite efforts to improve library services through resource mobilization, staff training, and technology upgrades, these challenges persist. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the factors affecting reference and information services in academic libraries in Benue State. By exploring issues related to resource availability, technological infrastructure, staffing, and user engagement, the study will provide insights and recommendations for improving library services to better meet the academic needs of students and researchers.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine the influence of reference and information service on service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- determine information resources used for service delivery in academic libraries.
- examine reference services used for service delivery in academic library.

Research Questions

The following research questions are set to guide the study.

- What are the information resources services used for service delivery in academic libraries?
- What are the reference services used for service delivery in academic library?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_o1: There is no significant difference on the information services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State

H_o2: There is no significant difference on the reference services used for service delivery in academic library in Benue State.

Research Methodology

This study employed a survey research design to examine the influence of reference and information services on service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State. The population of the study comprised all library users across five academic institutions, namely Benue State University, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Akperan Orshi College of Agriculture, Benue State Polytechnic, and College of Education, Katsina-Ala. A total of 50,000 students, academic, and non-academic staff were identified as potential respondents. The sample size of 397 respondents was determined using Yamene's formula. Data for the study were collected through a researcher-developed questionnaire designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of reference and information services in academic libraries. The instrument used was the Reference and Information Services Utilization Questionnaire (RISUQ). The RISUQ consisted of two sections (A and B). Section A represented the demographic information of respondents, while Section B contained 10 items rated on a four-point scale of Frequently Used (FU), Occasionally Used (OU), Recently Used (RU), and Never Used (NU), with numerical points of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively.

The research instrument was subjected to face validation by three Library and Information Science experts. Their recommendations were incorporated to enhance the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted with Library and Information Science students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to determine the instrument's reliability. Reliability indices of 0.76 and 0.79 were obtained for different sections of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha, confirming the instrument's internal consistency. The face-to-face method of data collection was employed, with the researcher and two trained research assistants administering the questionnaire. The research assistants were assigned to different institutions to facilitate effective data collection. A formal introduction letter was presented to the relevant school authorities before distribution. The questionnaires were collected on the same day, but in cases where immediate collection was not possible, an additional day was given to allow sufficient response time. This approach ensured a high response rate and minimized the chances of missing data.

Data gathered were first coded and cleaned using Microsoft Excel before

analysis was conducted with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions 1 and 2, while linear regression was used to answer research question 3. Real limits of numbers were used for decision-making, with 3.50-4.00 for FU, 2.50-3.49 for OU, 1.50-2.49 for RU, and 0.5-1.49 for NU. A correlation coefficient associated with regression analysis was used to interpret findings for research question 3. The formulated hypothesis was tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA) at a 0.05 level of significance. Hypotheses were considered statistically significant if $P < 0.05$ and not significant if $P > 0.05$. This approach ensured a rigorous and systematic analysis of data, leading to reliable findings on the impact of reference and information services on academic library service delivery in Benue State.

Results: Summary and Discussion of findings

This section presented the results of data analysis and interpretation in line with the specific objectives that guided the study.

Research Question One

What are the information resources services used for service delivery in academic libraries?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the information

rS/Nu	Item Statement	e FU	a OUe	RUl	NU 1		SD	Dec.
1	Online catalog	0	107	138	5	2.41	0.53	RU
2	Subject-specific databases	8	74	123	45	2.18	0.76	RU
3	E-journals	44	102	84	20	2.68	0.86	OU
4	E-books	33	89	107	21	2.54	0.83	OU
5	Research guides	11	63	139	37	2.19	0.74	RU
6	Institutional repositories	60	107	78	5	2.89	0.80	OU
7	Digital archives	37	109	80	24	2.64	0.85	OU
8	Thesis and dissertation databases	67	102	75	6	2.92	0.81	OU
9	Open educational resources (OER)	5	102	141	2	2.44	0.55	RU
10	Special collections	18	103	98	31	2.44	0.80	RU
	Cluster Mean					**2.53**	**0.32**	**OU**

Key: = mean, SD = Standard Deviation, RU = Rarely Used, OU = Occasionally Used, Dec. = Decision.

The results presented in Table 1 reveal that key information resource

SD = 0.81), institutional repositories ($\bar{x}$ = 2.89, SD = 0.80), and e-journals ($\bar{x}$ = 2.68, SD = 0.86), are occasionally used, indicating their significance in academic research and scholarly activities. However, other resources like subject-specific databases ($\bar{x}$ = 2.18, SD = 0.76), research guides ($\bar{x}$ = 2.19, SD = 0.74), and the online catalogue ($\bar{x}$ = 2.41, SD = 0.53) are rarely used, suggesting lower levels of engagement due to potential issues with accessibility, awareness, or relevance. The findings point to the need for enhanced user education, better access to resources, and increased promotion of underutilized services to ensure that students and faculty can fully leverage the available digital and information assets for academic success.

The findings reveal that while some information resources, such as thesis and dissertation databases and institutional repositories, are frequently used, others like subject-specific databases and research guides remain underutilized due to factors like limited awareness and accessibility issues. This suggests that academic libraries need to implement strategies to improve resource awareness, accessibility, and training to boost engagement among users. The findings contributes to knowledge by identifying patterns in resource usage and offering insights into factors influencing their utilization, providing a foundation for improving library services and supporting academic success through better resource management and user education.

Research Question Two

What are the reference services used for service delivery in academic library?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the reference services used for service delivery in academic library

S/N	Item Statement	FU	OU	RU	NU		SD	Dec.
1	In-person assistance from librarians	60	107	78	5	2.89	0.79	OU
2	Online chat reference	8	74	123	45	2.18	0.76	RU
3	Email reference	2	63	130	55	2.05	0.71	RU
4	Telephone reference	0	103	144	3	2.40	0.52	RU
5	Access to electronic databases	48	63	139	0	2.64	0.79	OU
6	Bibliographic instruction (library orientation)	65	107	78	0	2.95	0.76	OU
7	Interlibrary loan services	5	56	124	65	2.00	0.75	RU
8	Document delivery services	0	85	147	18	2.27	0.58	RU
9	Citation management support	0	102	146	2	2.40	0.51	RU
10	Reference desk services	0	103	116	31	2.29	0.67	RU
	Cluster Mean					**2.41**	**0.25**	**RU**

Key: = mean, SD = Standard Deviation, RU = Rarely Used, OU = Occasionally Used, Dec. = Decision.

Result presented in Table 2 shows that items 1, 5, and 6 have mean ratings ranging from 2.50-3.49 set as benchmark for occasionally used. This implies that reference services such as in-person assistance from librarians (, SD = 0.79), access to electronic databases (, SD = 0.79), and bibliographic instruction (library orientation) (, SD = 0.76) are occasionally used for service delivery in academic libraries. The result also shows that items 2-4, and 7-10 have mean ratings ranging from 1.50-2.49 set as benchmark for rarely used. This implies that reference services such as online chat reference (, SD = 0.76), email reference (, SD = 0.71), and telephone reference (, SD = 0.52) among others are rarely used for service delivery in academic libraries. From the result, bibliographic instruction (library orientation) (, SD = 0.76) is the most used reference service, while interlibrary loan services (, SD = 0.75) is the least. Overall the result shows that reference services are rarely used for service delivery in academic libraries.

The findings indicate that reference services in academic libraries, such as in-person assistance from librarians, access to electronic databases, and bibliographic instruction (library orientation), are occasionally used, while services like online chat reference, email reference, and interlibrary loan services are rarely utilized. The study's implications suggest that libraries need to increase the promotion and accessibility of less frequently used reference services to enhance their effectiveness in supporting academic work. The research contributes to knowledge by providing a clear understanding of the patterns in reference service utilization and identifying areas where academic libraries can focus their efforts to improve service delivery, ultimately fostering a more engaging and supportive academic environment for users.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: There is no significant difference on the information services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State.

Table 3: ANOVA of the difference on the information services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	9.741	4	2.435	38.064	0.00	S
Within Groups	15.675	245	.064			
Total	25.417	249				

Table 3 shows an f-ratio of 38.06 with the significant value of 0.00. Since the significant value is less than 0.05 set as level of significance, it means that the null

hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected. Inference drawn is that, there is a significant difference on the information services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State. This implies that utilisation of information resources services differs among academic libraries in Benue State.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: There is no significant difference on the reference services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State.

Table 4: ANOVA of the difference on the reference services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	7.849	4	1.962	64.865	0.00	S
Within Groups	7.412	245	.030			
Total	15.261	249				

Table 4 shows an f-ratio of 64.865 with the significant value of 0.00. Since the significant value is less than 0.05 set as level of significance, it means that the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected. Inference drawn is that, there is a significant difference on the reference services used for service delivery in academic libraries in Benue State. This implies that utilisation of references services differs among academic libraries in Benue State.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the usage of information resources and reference services within academic libraries in Benue State. The findings indicate that while certain services, such as thesis and dissertation databases, institutional repositories, and bibliographic instruction, are occasionally used, others like subject-specific databases and online catalogue are underutilized. This suggests a need for improved resource promotion, awareness, and accessibility. The influence of information services on academic library service delivery is significant, with services like information literacy programs and access to electronic databases contributing positively to the effectiveness of library services. These findings emphasize the importance of enhancing information services to meet the evolving needs of students and faculty, ultimately fostering a more supportive academic environment. The study contributes to the knowledge base by identifying usage patterns and offering practical recommendations for academic libraries to improve service delivery and academic support.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- **Enhance Awareness and Training for Underutilized Resources:** The findings reveal that certain information resources, such as subject-specific databases, research guides, and the online catalog, are rarely used by library users. To address this, academic libraries should focus on increasing awareness and improving access to these resources. This can be achieved through user education programs, targeted orientation sessions, and regular workshops. Additionally, librarians can promote these resources through interactive online tutorials and guides that demonstrate how to effectively utilize them for academic research. Such efforts could significantly improve the usage of these resources and support academic success.
- **Promote less Frequently Used Reference Services:** Reference services such as online chat, email reference, and interlibrary loan services are rarely utilized by users. To improve their usage, libraries should implement strategies to increase visibility and user engagement with these services. For instance, integrating reference services more effectively into the library's website, creating easy-to-access helpdesk options, and offering virtual reference consultations could enhance user engagement. Furthermore, libraries should encourage faculty members to incorporate these services into their curricula, thereby fostering regular use among students and researchers.

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