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USER SATISFACTION WITH REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES OF CENTRE FOR ARID ZONE STUDIES LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI, BORNO STATE

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Abstract
This study examines user satisfaction with the reference and information services provided by the Centre for Arid Zone Studies (CAZS) Library, University of Maiduguri, Borno State. The objective of the study was to investigate the extent of users' satisfaction with the services offered by the library. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey research design. A total of 185 copies of the questionnaire were administered to library users, out of which 160 were duly completed and returned, representing a high response rate. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts and percentage scores for interpretation. The findings of the study revealed varying levels of user satisfaction with the services provided by the CAZS Library. While many users expressed satisfaction with reference and information services, others indicated dissatisfaction with aspects such as information retrieval and selective dissemination of information. The study concludes that reference and information services are essential in providing personal assistance to users in meeting their information needs. It further recommends that the CAZS Library should be adequately equipped with current information resources, effective Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities, and improved dissemination and retrieval systems to support the research needs of its users.
Keywords: Reference Services, Information Dissemination, User Satisfaction, Library Services.

Introduction

Academic libraries are central to teaching, learning, and research in higher education institutions. Among their core functions, reference and information services (RIS) play a pivotal role in helping users locate, evaluate, and apply information for coursework, research, and

professional activities. Contemporary reference services encompass in-person desk enquiries, mediated searches, bibliographic and citation support, research consultations, and an expanding range of virtual channels such as email, chat, WhatsApp, and institutional platforms. The growing reliance on digital resources and remote access has transformed both the form and expectations of RIS: users now demand rapid, accurate, and flexible assistance that connects them seamlessly to licensed databases, e-journals, institutional repositories, and print or special collections Adebayo, (2022). Reference service is one of several information services offered in libraries. It involves providing answers to specific enquiries and may take different forms depending on the nature of the question. Reference service is a personalized form of assistance offered by a librarian usually in the reference section to a user seeking information, either directly or indirectly. King, (2011) described reference services as the culmination of all library activities designed to facilitate the effective use of library resources, provided on a one-to-one basis regardless of the user's purpose or demographic characteristics. Typically, reference service entails direct personal assistance to users through various communication channels such as reference desks, telephone, email, and other digital means. The provision of reference service should therefore be regarded by librarians as a core professional responsibility and a vital component of library operations.

Measuring user satisfaction with RIS is an essential aspect of library quality assurance. Satisfaction is commonly defined as the degree to which library services meet or exceed users' expectations and needs. It is a multidimensional construct encompassing information quality, accessibility, staff competence and behavior, responsiveness, and the usability of systems and physical spaces. Frameworks such as LibQUAL and related service-quality instruments are widely employed to identify and quantify gaps between expected and perceived service quality, helping libraries prioritize improvements. Contemporary research consistently identifies several key determinants of user satisfaction with reference services. Librarian expertise and responsiveness how quickly and accurately staff respond to enquiries are among the strongest predictors of positive satisfaction, especially in mediated and virtual reference interactions. The availability and currency of both print and electronic collections, ease of access to e-resources, and the library's ability to provide tailored research support (such as literature searches, citation assistance, and data retrieval) also play critical roles. Studies examining newer communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp and live chat) reveal that when librarians adopt and manage these tools effectively, satisfaction levels rise significantly (Abubakar and Eze, 2022).

However, findings across regions are not uniform. In many low- and middle-income contexts including studies from Nigeria and other African countries constraints such as limited budgets for e-resources, intermittent internet connectivity, insufficient staffing and training, restricted opening hours, and inadequate physical infrastructure negatively affect users' perceptions of reference services. Local studies frequently recommend targeted investment in professional development, digitization, and stable network infrastructure, along with service redesign (including the adoption of mobile and asynchronous contact points) to reduce gaps between expectations and performance (Yusuf & Balogun,(2024).

Aina, 2020). In specialized and small unit libraries (for example, departmental or research center libraries), the determinants of user satisfaction may differ from those in central university

libraries. Users in specialized research settings often expect deeper subject expertise, access to specialized reports and grey literature, and proactive current awareness services. When such units lack adequate staffing, subject expertise, subscriptions to niche databases, or reliable digitization workflows, user satisfaction tends to decline, even when general library services are rated positively. This divergence underscores the importance of conducting unit-level assessments, rather than relying solely on campus-wide surveys, to identify targeted improvement opportunities (Kumar, (2022).

For academic libraries seeking to strengthen their support for research and postgraduate training, evidence shows that investment in staff expertise particularly the recruitment and continuous professional development of specialist reference librarians along with stable digital access and proactive outreach initiatives (such as user education and embedded librarian programs) produces measurable improvements in both user satisfaction and research outcomes UNESCO, (2024). According to Nwalo & Oluwayinka, (2016), satisfaction represents the consumer's fulfillment response a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service as a whole, has provided a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, whether complete, partial, or deficient. The authors emphasize that satisfaction is a dynamic feeling that can readily change. User satisfaction in libraries therefore derives from a user's overall evaluation of the perceived performance or usefulness of a service.

The Centre for Arid Zone Studies (CAZS) Library is a special library located within the University of Maiduguri. Established in 1988, the library was designed to facilitate material acquisition, documentation, computing, and the dissemination of information services to both the general and specialized research community. The aims and objectives of the CAZS Library are to select, acquire, preserve, organize, and disseminate relevant information resources both local and international to meet the needs of researchers, students, and postgraduate scholars in environmental and arid zone studies. The library also collaborates with national and international organizations, university libraries, and research centres for the exchange of resources. Additionally, it participates with the Centre in organizing, hosting, and conducting local and international seminars, conferences, and workshops on arid zone ecology. User satisfaction is a multifaceted concept that measures how well a system, product, or service meets the requirements and expectations of its users. Remenyi & Money, (2019), key determinants of user satisfaction include usability, system quality, information quality, service quality, and overall user experience. Other studies have shown that tailoring satisfaction metrics to specific contexts such as e-learning, e-commerce, or health services enhances their reliability and practical relevance.

This study aims to examine the perceptions and experiences of users regarding the services provided by the CAZS Library. In particular, it investigates user satisfaction with reference services, information services, and other related functions rendered by the library, recognizing that satisfaction represents an essential attribute derived from users' evaluation of service performance after utilization.

Statement of the Problem

Reference service rests upon a set of core functions that embody key professional values such as precision, accuracy, timeliness, authority, accessibility, individualization, and expert

knowledge. User satisfaction with reference services is largely determined by how effectively these values are reflected in meeting users' information needs. However, previous studies have indicated that many librarians do not consistently apply established reference standards, a factor that significantly influences users' satisfaction and their ability to obtain the desired information.

Despite the vital role of the Centre for Arid Zone Studies (CAZS) Library at the University of Maiduguri in supporting research, teaching, and learning in arid zone–related disciplines, little empirical evidence exists on how effectively it meets the diverse information needs of its users. User satisfaction at the CAZS Library may be affected by several factors, including the adequacy and relevance of information resources, accessibility, and quality of services, staff responsiveness, and infrastructural limitations. Bell (2008), cited in Adewusi, (2017). If such gaps in service delivery and resource provision remain unaddressed, the library's ability to fulfill its mission of supporting research and academic development in arid zone studies may be undermined. It is crucial to identify the factors that render a library less significant in user engagement so that librarians can take corrective measures. Hence, this study seeks to examine the extent of users' satisfaction with the various services offered by the CAZS Library and to identify the factors influencing their satisfaction levels.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Examined user satisfaction with reference and information services provided by Centre for Arid Zone Studies Library, University of Maiduguri, Borno State.
2. Determine the extent of users' satisfaction with service provision by the Centre for Arid Zone Studies Library, University of Maiduguri, Borno State
3. Determine the user's satisfaction with retrieval of information in Arid Zone Studies Library, University of Maiduguri, Borno State

Review of Related Literature

Reference and information services have long been a central component of library operations, offering personalized assistance to users in accessing appropriate information resources that meet their diverse needs. The dynamic digital environment has profoundly influenced the scope, delivery, and expectations of reference services in modern libraries. One of the most important criteria for evaluating library effectiveness is the degree of satisfaction users express regarding the services provided. The ability of a library to anticipate user needs and integrate these insights into its collection development and service delivery strategies plays a crucial role in shaping overall user satisfaction. As a general concept, **user satisfaction** refers to the extent to which users are pleased with a product or service after its use. In the library context, **library user satisfaction** specifically denotes how satisfied patrons are with the library's collections, facilities, and services. Inuwa et al. (2022) conducted a study on *user information needs and reference service satisfaction* across selected federal university libraries in northeastern Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 288 postgraduate students drawn from four federal universities Information is fundamental to every aspect of human endeavor and is

regarded as one of humanity's essential needs. For any task academic, professional, or social the availability of accurate and relevant information is indispensable. Kadir & Hussin, (2018) emphasized that the acquisition and use of information are critical to societal development since information serves as a vital resource for individual and collective progress. Similarly, Asogwa & Daniel, (2022) asserted that the success of any library depends largely on its ability to meet the research demands of its users.

Crowley, (2002) observed that although users generally perceived reference librarians and staff as courteous and patient, they were not always helpful and often distrusted student workers. Their study further revealed a tendency among staff and student assistants to be reluctant in offering help to patrons seeking reference support. The researchers concluded that understanding and delivering quality reference service requires analyzing it from the users' perspective. This insight aligns with the present study, as both focus on examining users' perceptions of information needs and satisfaction with the quality of library services. Kekana & Kheswa, (2020) identified a gap between users' information needs and their satisfaction with available services, which negatively impacted perceptions of service quality. In a related study, Luo &Buer, (2015) examined *reference service evaluation from the user perspective* at an African academic library. Their findings showed a high non-use rate of 42.6%, primarily attributed to users' self-sufficiency and lack of awareness of reference services. The study also revealed that the main motivations for using reference services were class assignments, personal interests, and the use of library facilities. Although users generally held a positive attitude toward reference services, they believed that librarians demonstrated stronger customer service skills than competencies in identifying users' information needs or locating relevant resources.

Zeithaml and Bitner, (2000) defined user satisfaction as the process by which individuals determine whether a product or service meets their needs and expectations. When services fail to meet these expectations, dissatisfaction arises. In the same vein, Iwhiwhu & Okorodudu, (2012) described user satisfaction with library information resources as the user's assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the library's materials and services. Likewise, Ikenwe , (2014) noted that users' satisfaction reflects how they feel after using library resources or services and influences their willingness to return to the library when future information needs arise.

Similarly, user satisfaction can be viewed as the level of fulfillment that users derive from utilizing the various information resources and services provided by the library to meet their diverse information needs in academic, professional, and everyday contexts. The availability and quality of information materials and services therefore exert a significant influence on library users. When users are satisfied with library services, they are more likely to return, make consistent use of the resources, and recommend the library to others. In this sense, user satisfaction not only reflects the effectiveness of library service delivery but also contributes to the library's reputation, user loyalty, and overall institutional value.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine users' satisfaction with the services provided by the Centre for Arid Zone Studies (CAZS) Library. The design was

considered appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a defined population for the purpose of describing existing conditions, opinions, and perceptions. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was designed to elicit responses on users' experiences and satisfaction with various library services. Respondents were instructed to limit their answers to the options provided in the questionnaire. A total of 185 copies of the questionnaire were administered to library users over a period of one month. At the end of the data collection exercise, 160 copies were successfully retrieved and found suitable for analysis, having been fully and properly completed. The collected data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage scores**,** which were employed to interpret the responses and present the findings in a clear and descriptive manner.

Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: The extent of users' satisfaction with reference and information service.

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	35	21.8
Satisfied	101	68.8
Dissatisfied	9	5.6
Very Dissatisfied	4	3.8
Total	**160**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

KEYS: VS= VE'RY SATISFIED, **S=** SATISFIED, **D=** DISSATISFIED, **VD=** VERY DISSATISFIED

Table 1 shows that 35 (21.8%) users indicated that they were *very satisfied*, 101 (68.8%) respondents reported being *satisfied*, while 9 (5.6%) were *dissatisfied* and 4 (3.8%) were *very dissatisfied* with the reference and information services provided by the CAZS Library. This finding implies that the majority of users are satisfied with the reference and information services, suggesting that the library's efforts in providing timely, accurate, and relevant information are generally effective and valued. However, sustaining user satisfaction will require addressing the concerns of the minority who remain dissatisfied—particularly through improved service delivery, enhanced responsiveness, and regular evaluation of service quality. This finding aligns with Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012), who noted that user satisfaction reflects the extent to which library services and resources meet users' expectations and needs.

Table 2: Users satisfaction with retrieval of information in the library.

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	23	14.4
Satisfied	36	22.5
Dissatisfied	92	57.5
Very Dissatisfied	9	35.6
Total	**160**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

KEYS: VS= VERY SATISFIED, **S=** SATISFIED, **D=** DISSATISFIED, **VD=** VERY DISSATISFIED

Table 2 indicates that 23 (14.4%) users were *very satisfied*, 36 (22.5%) were *satisfied*, while 92 (57.5%) were *dissatisfied* and 9 (5.6%) were *very dissatisfied* with information retrieval services in the library. This finding suggests that while a small proportion of users are satisfied—possibly due to their familiarity with the system or assistance from library staff—the majority experience challenges in retrieving needed information. Such difficulties may stem from limited accessibility, inadequate retrieval tools, outdated catalogues, or insufficient staff support. To address these deficiencies, the CAZS Library should consider improving retrieval systems through automation, enhanced indexing, and better user education and training. These improvements would align the library's retrieval services with global best practices and ensure more efficient access to information resources.

Table 3: Users satisfaction with selective dissemination of information in the library.

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	14	8.8
Satisfied	65	40.6
Dissatisfied	74	46.2
Very Dissatisfied	7	4.4
Total	**160**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

KEYS: VS= VERY SATISFIED, **S=** SATISFIED, **D=** DISSATISFIED, **VD=** VERY DISSATISFIED

Table 3 shows that 14 (8.8%) respondents were *very satisfied*, 65 (40.6%) were *satisfied*, 74 (46.2%) were *dissatisfied*, and 7 (4.4%) were *very dissatisfied* with the selective dissemination of information (SDI) services provided by the library. These results indicate a nearly even split between satisfied (49.4%) and dissatisfied (50.6%) users, suggesting that while some users benefit from SDI services such as updates on new materials, alerts, or research notifications others perceive the service as inconsistent or inaccessible. The findings imply that the SDI system is not uniformly implemented across user groups and requires strengthening to ensure equitable access and effectiveness.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate varying levels of user satisfaction with the reference and information services provided by the Centre for Arid Zone Studies (CAZS) Library, University of Maiduguri. The results are presented and discussed under specific thematic areas as follows: The study revealed that a majority of respondents (90.6%) were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the reference and information services offered by the library. This high level of satisfaction suggests that users perceive these services as effective in meeting their academic and research information needs. User satisfaction is a reflection of how well library resources and services align with users' expectations. However, the presence of a small dissatisfied group (9.4%) indicates that certain challenges persist. Possible factors contributing to dissatisfaction may include inadequate reference staff, slow response to information queries, or limited subject coverage of reference materials. Therefore, to sustain and improve the current satisfaction level, continuous staff development, improved service delivery, and better communication between librarians and users are recommended.

Results from Table 2 further show that only 36.9% of respondents were satisfied with the library's information retrieval services, whereas a significant proportion (63.1%) expressed dissatisfaction. This clearly points to a major challenge in accessing and retrieving needed information resources. The dissatisfaction could be attributed to poor cataloguing practices, lack of automation, insufficient search tools, or inadequate user orientation on information retrieval systems. To address these issues, the CAZS Library should consider upgrading its retrieval infrastructure by adopting automated catalogues, subscribing to electronic databases, and providing regular user training to enhance search skills and improve access to materials.

Findings on Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) revealed an almost equal split between satisfied (49.4%) and dissatisfied (50.6%) users, indicating inconsistency in the library's SDI service delivery. Although some users receive relevant and timely information updates, others appear to be underserved due to irregular dissemination practices, inadequate current awareness mechanisms, or limited ICT facilities. Strengthening SDI services through ICT integration, regular current awareness programs, and proactive engagement with users will help ensure that students and researchers consistently receive timely and relevant information.

Conclusion

The study examined the extent of users' satisfaction with reference and information services at the Centre for Arid Zone Studies (CAZS) Library, University of Maiduguri. The findings revealed that while the majority of users are satisfied with the library's reference and information services, significant challenges persist in the areas of information retrieval and selective dissemination of information (SDI). The high level of satisfaction with reference services indicates that users generally perceive the library as effective in providing guidance, relevant information, and research assistance. However, the low satisfaction scores for information retrieval and SDI services reflect weaknesses in technological infrastructure, accessibility, and user support systems. These shortcomings, if unaddressed, may reduce the overall effectiveness of the library in supporting teaching, learning, and research, particularly in arid zone-related disciplines.

Therefore, the study concludes that users' satisfaction with library services is directly linked to the availability, accessibility, and quality of information resources as well as the competence and responsiveness of library staff. Continuous evaluation and improvement of these aspects are essential for sustaining user confidence and ensuring that the library remains a vital component of the university's academic and research framework.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. The CAZS Library should adopt modern retrieval technologies, such as automated cataloguing systems, online databases, and discovery tools, to improve the speed and accuracy of information access.
2. The library should improve its SDI services by regularly updating users with new acquisitions, current awareness bulletins, and research alerts tailored to individual interests and academic disciplines.
3. Regular user orientation, workshops, and training sessions should be organized to equip patrons with the necessary skills to effectively search, access, and utilize both print and electronic resources.

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