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REFERENCE SOURCES AND SERVICES IN COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION LIBRARIES WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO FEDERAL
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION OKENE LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problems and prospects of reference sources and services in colleges of education in Nigeria. The issues discussed are: lack of current reference sources, lack of foreign exchange, inadequate finance and lack of trained professional reference librarians. This paper recommends the following solutions: up-dating of reference sources through new acquisitions, government liberalization of foreign exchange and use of UNESCO coupons, adequate financing of libraries including reference section, professionalism of Reference Services Librarians to bring about better utilization and exploitation of reference sources and services in academic libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The Federal College of Education Okene library is one of the academic libraries existing in Kogi State. The nucleus of the college library was established in 1975 when the institution started functioning. It exists to provide a variety of resources, books and non-books alike, and auxiliary services which support and extend research.

In all libraries, no matter how small or large, there is usually a provision for reference section, which can come in form of a big room or a small portion of the library. The reference section of this library is located within the Readers' Services Section of the main library.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica (1975) defines Reference Service as "providing personal assistance to individual library users in pursuit of information". It requires the recognition by the library that such assistance is necessary in fulfilling its duties; and that a specific administrative organisation of qualified personnel must be provided. The emergence of reference service as a major aspect of librarianship is rather recent in comparison to the acquisition, organisation, and custody of library materials. The term did not appear until about 1890, although recognition of the need for aid to readers had been emerging for several decades.

The most austere or conservative approach to reader assistance is found in College and University libraries.

Reference sources have been defined in different ways by different authors. However reference sources in the context of this paper is defined as such books or materials that are kept constantly within reach for looking up information. They are books usually referred to for answers to some of the basic problems in language background, facts, people, organisation, trend, places, activities and bibliography. They contain specific facts about issues, problems and ideas. The information in them are easy to come by without reading from cover to cover because they are entered in a brief and concise form for easy reference.

TYPES OF REFERENCE SOURCES

Reference books can generally be grouped into two major classes. First, books written to be referred to from time to time and not meant to be read through from cover to cover. And secondly, books meant to be read from cover to cover but had to be confined to the reference library because of its heavy demand so as to be available for consultation. A brief attempt is made to discuss the major reference sources like Encyclopedia, Dictionaries, Year books, Almanac, Atlases, Manuals, Handbooks, Directories and Biographies.

Encyclopedia: These consist of series of articles rather than series of words as in dictionaries. The articles in different encyclopedias vary in length from a few lines to several pages, and are written by experts whose initials are sometimes affixed to the articles. Encyclopedias are comprehensive in coverage, and will answer all questions of general information. They also give the basic facts on most subjects including definition, description, illustrations, background and bibliographical references. If one requires information on a subject one knows little about, this is where to begin for an outline of the subject and for suggestions for further reading.

There are two broad categories of encyclopedia. There are general encyclopedias covering all branches of knowledge like the Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Americana and there are specific ones dealing with single branches, like the encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, encyclopedia of Education, etc.

Dictionaries: Dictionaries provide information about words and can be defined as an alphabetical list of the words of a language or terms of a particular subject area dealing with the words, spellings, meaning, derivation, pronunciation, syllabication and usage including current

status of each word or term. Apart from general dictionaries, some specialise in pronunciation, slangs, and abbreviations. There are dictionaries on different subjects written in different languages. The Oxford English Dictionary, Chambers Dictionary, and Webster's Dictionary are all examples of general dictionaries that treat all aspects of the words that make up a language. Generally, there are two types of general dictionaries: the abridged and the un-abridged. An unabridged dictionary deals with all or nearly all words in a language with information on pronunciation, varying usages and etymologies. The extent and scope of coverage varies with different unabridged dictionaries. Abridged dictionaries are essentially condensations of the unabridged.

Year Books: Year books are annual publications that give up-to-date information on the events of the past year through brief articles, tables and charts. Year books are supplement to encyclopedia and are issued by government and voluntary agencies to cover important national trends and statistics. They may also be issued by various agencies listing the events that occurred in the immediate past year e.g. the Nigerian Year book, Ghana Year Book, West African Year Book, Commonwealth Year Book, Europe Year Book, etc.

Almanacs: They give facts, statistics, data and basic information on almost everything. It is defined as annual publication containing a calendar usually accompanied by facts, data and other basic information, sometimes in a particular field. Almanacs are excellent reference sources that provide answers to a variety of questions on population, business, sports and agriculture. Almanacs also provide information on governmental agencies, elections, cities and states. In fact, they are excellent for current and past information on everything for everyone.

Atlases: Atlases are usually a one-volume source for maps, plates, and charts of geographical areas. Many atlases will have short articles, tables of statistics, or additional maps, showing population density, climate, rainfall, vegetation, mineral resources and other important information about the area.

Directories: They give mainly names and addresses of persons, organisations or institutions. One of such titled directory is in the world of learning, which is a directory of institutions and societies connected with education and learning all over the world. There are various kinds of directories for different professions and trades, societies, institutions, localities and so on. Most of the directories on Nigeria and many other African countries are on trade and industry. Examples are the West African Directory and Trade Directory of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Hand books: Handbooks give broad and factual information on a particular subject or topic. It is always a small handy reference book arranged in a manner that make for easy consultation. Some of the information comes in the form of tables, formulae or brief introduction to a less comprehensive articles. Though, most of the information covered in Hand Books are available in other text books, the fact that a handbook brings these information together makes it an excellent reference material. There are handbooks of education in Nigeria in different editions.

Manuals: Manual are similar to handbooks but serve more as guides. They can give instructions telling you how to do something. Some can even outline the arrangement of an agency or the functions of a certain organization. The distinction between handbook and manuals can be made clear: manuals provide guidance as how to do something or give instructions on certain things. They can explain how to write or operate machines. There are even manuals on library operations.

Biographies: These are collections of sketches about the lives of individuals, arranged alphabetically by surname. They often carry the portraits of the individuals mentioned. Although the encyclopedias also give biographical information, they are not as comprehensive in this sphere as the biographical reference books. There are universal biographies covering eminent men all over the world, biographies by countries, by professions etc. A look in the Biography index, for instance, will show among other things if there are biographies of any sort including incidental biographical materials like prefaces and chapters in an otherwise non biographical book on a particular profession or person.

There are two types of biographical reference books – one deals with persons who are already dead and the other with living. The 'who's who' type lists only persons who are still living, it also limit itself to the factual details of their lives. But the 'Biographical dictionary' type deals with eminent dead people, and its accounts are usually evaluative e.g. the dictionary of National Biography (British) and the dictionary of American Biography.

REFERENCE SOURCE/SERVICES AND EDUCATIONAL VALUES

Reference sources contribute to major functions and objectives of building up a national information system including all the courses being offered in Colleges of Education. Sodipo (1987) stated that:

Apart from the parent and the teacher, the most important of all the agents of education is the library. A good educational environment is made up of the teacher, the world of knowledge and the learner.

He went further to say that this world of knowledge, that is, the library is introduced to the student or learner by the teacher who remains the source of inspiration and help to the learners. In fact, there is no part of library service in colleges that is more interesting than reference service. It keeps the librarian in close touch with the students and lecturers, as well as classrooms activities.

However the concerned reference Librarian probably knows more intimately what goes on, curriculum-wise, in various subject than does the principal officers, concerned as he is with administrative duties. To support the above fact, it can be said that there is no student that does not come to the reference section of the library, either to do assignment or to consult reference sources to find meaning to some words or concepts mentioned to them in the lecture hall that they do not understand; or to consult those sources for relevant information just to add more to what he or she has already learned in the lecture hall. Lecturers too consult reference sources when forming their lecture notes or reading to prepare themselves for lectures. Therefore reference sources and it's services help in promoting teaching and learning in the college.

Reference service is probably the most important work which the Reference Librarian does. It most closely, identifies him or her with the entire college and its objectives and qualifies him as a full-fledged college (academic) member.

Reference librarian knows the thrill of finding the answer, especially if the search proved not easy. He also knows the method of finding answers to multitudinous questions on every conceivable subject. The work at the reference desk is probably the most appreciated. "Gee. thanks" from a patron or a word of commendation from a lecturer compensates the librarian for such services rendered.

These services culminate in maximum utilisation of resources and facilities as well as offering qualitative information services; and above all, evaluating its success in meeting the information needs of the users.

PROBLEMS OF REFERENCE SOURCES/SERVICES

1. **SOME OF THE REFERENCE SOURCES ARE NOT UP TO DATE**
Some of the major reference sources available in the library are old editions and therefore not up to date, especially the Encyclopedia Britannica (1975), Encyclopedia American (1979), the Encyclopedia of Education (1971) etc.

2. **FOREIGN EXCHANGE PROBLEM**
Is a major factor to acquiring overseas publications and lack of published local sources. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Foreign Exchange Management (FEM), Economic Stabilization Acts (ESA) and the concomitant devaluation of the currency has greatly increased the difficulty encountered by the library in acquiring relevant foreign reference sources. and the absence of local materials to substitute the foreign ones has posed a big problem.

3. **FINANCE PROBLEM**
Finance is also one of the major problems affecting the reference services of the library. Inadequate funding creates an unhealthy situation for the growth and survival of any library. Though the library has its own vote like other departments in the institution, the contribution to reference books or materials is so high that it has become difficult to acquire new ones, and this has impaired the performance of the library in providing services to its clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UP-DATING OF THE REFERENCE SOURCES

On the issue of up-dating the reference materials, it is very important for the library to try and up-date materials so that the reference section can serve its purpose effectively. Abdulkadir (1990) states in this regard:

The central focus of any educational institution is its library. It is the hub of the system to which both students and staff resort for academic nourishment. Thus, an up-to-date library contributes, in no small measure, to academic excellence.

And in addition, library should also try and start acquiring the "Guinness Book of Records" and the "Vision 2010" which are the most current core reference sources in most academic libraries now. The Guinness Book of Records covers current events in all walks of life but with more emphasis on sports events. While that of the Vision 2010 covers all sectors of the Nigerian economy, whether industries, commerce, ministries, military or library and information systems etc.

2. FOREIGN EXCHANGE

As regards the problem of foreign exchange, it can be tackled through cooperative acquisition with other libraries. Another possible solution is to engage in inter-library lending with foreign libraries particularly those in countries where relevant reference sources are published.

Photocopying can also help in building the collection in view of the cost of subscribing to the reference sources published abroad. This eliminates the need for foreign exchange as cooperating libraries abroad would just send a Photostat copy to the library. The use of UNESCO coupons to buy foreign reference materials can also be of great help in this respect.

3. FINANCE

Finance is of paramount importance to an organisation as it determines the continual existence and survival of any institution and to a large extent individuals, just as Anafulu (1996) stated that:

Every library stands on three legs: a building, collections and staff. However, the tendon that holds each of those legs and ultimately binds together into a whole is money.

So if the reference section of the library is to meet the needs of its users within the limited vote granted it then much cooperation with other libraries is inevitable. Kidder (1982) suggested that "since the basic goal of all libraries is to serve the user, statewide cooperation would improve the ability of the libraries to meet their users' needs". The library should further intensify its cooperation with libraries abroad as local ones are not within reach.

4. APPLICATION OF COMPUTER SERVICES

Computer user services in library operation is the current trend in the reference section of modern libraries. Computer is one of the best technologies used in information management because of its numerous advantages such as speed and accuracy especially in areas like processing, organisation, storage, retrieval and information dissemination.

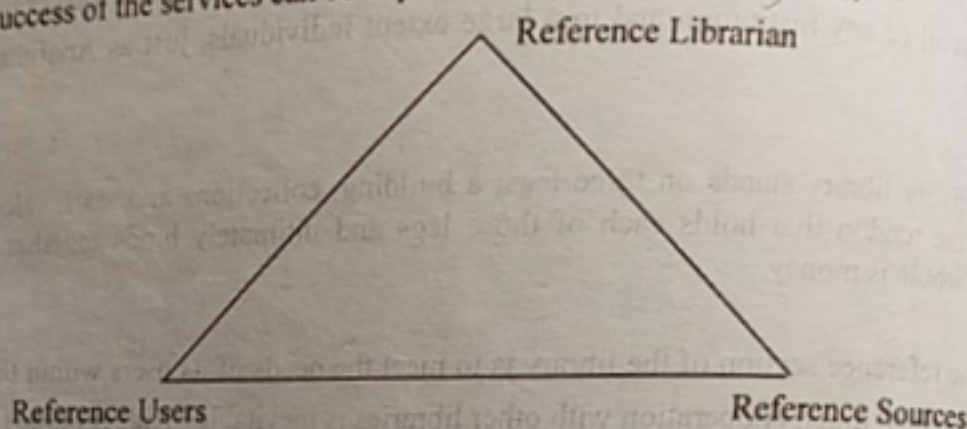
5. PROFESSIONALISM OF REFERENCE SERVICES LIBRARIES

Librarians designated to reference libraries are usually responsible for answering Reader questions. They are trained to answer a wide variety of questions, especially those pertaining to the use of books and libraries.

Questions may be simple directional, bibliographic, or short and long time searches; like "where are the scientific encyclopedia shelved in this library"? Or "where is the library catalogue located"? Questions may also be for general information like "How can I get some materials to read on industrialization in Nigeria for a tutorial essay"?

As regards the qualities of a reference librarian, in fact personal assistance to readers is at the heart of reference services and it takes several forms. Reference librarians realise that many library users face difficulties in using library resources, and given the complexity of the academic library, students, especially fresh ones, do feel lost and bewildered in searching for materials and information. Reference librarians therefore place a lot of premium on direct personal assistance to users.

In short, the success of the services can be expressed in three angles as follow:



As shown above, the reference librarian deals with both reference users and reference sources. The reference librarian's knowledgeability of reference sources and good communication skills is therefore very important. For example, he should know that Encyclopedia Britannica deals more on art information than sciences, while American deals more on science information. He is to educate the users to enable them have the awareness and utilization of the reference sources, i.e. they have to know what is available and it's usage. And it is also another thing for him to develop relevant sources.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the effective use of reference sources and services in academic libraries like the F. C. E, Okene Library, may not necessarily be achieved only through the number of sources but through the adequate and current reference sources and services as well as through the enthusiasm of the reference librarian. Because of the indispensability of reference sources to academic library patrons, it is very necessary for the reference librarian to know the multiple uses of these sources and to expose the patrons to these vital services.

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