



Accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of library and information Science, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract

Preliminary observations have shown a decline in the utilization of reference materials by most undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Could this also be true considering the undergraduates in the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS), Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri? This is an issue investigated in this study, which focused on examining the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of Library and Information Science, IMSU, Owerri, Nigeria. Four objectives guided the study. The descriptive survey method was adopted with a sample of 140 undergraduates, which represents the entire population of the students from 100 to 400 level as at 2019/2020 academic session. A researchers' -made close-ended questionnaire was used for data collection. However, data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and mean scores. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted to ascertain the agreement or disagreement of item statements by the respondents. Findings showed the accessibility of greater number of reference materials, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and projects/theses/dissertations, among others. It was also revealed that most of these materials, which include projects/theses/dissertations are utilized. The challenges to accessibility and utilization of these materials, include inaccessibility of reference materials and provision of irrelevant reference materials, among others. Solutions were given to include provision of access point to reference materials, and provision of relevant reference materials, among other things. Based on the findings, the study concludes that there is high accessibility and high utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of Library and Information Science, IMSU and further recommends efforts by the Management of university libraries to improve on the number, forms and relevancy of reference materials provided and made accessible to their users.

Keywords: Reference materials, accessibility, utilization, undergraduates, library-university

Introduction

Libraries, regardless of the type and size are valued based on their ability to provide for the information and research needs of its divergent users. To achieve this, the acquisitions and provision of access for utilization of library resources and services, come in place. The contemporary library entails not only the traditional function of acquiring, organizing, preserving, conserving and providing access to vast amount of printed materials but further creation of more sophisticated information environment, that ensures quality access, effective and efficient use of library resources, both print and non-print. In corroboration with this, Rathinasabapathy (2005) [23]. Posited that the library remains an important intellectual resource of the academic community, charged with the responsibility of assisting in fulfilling the curriculum requirements and promoting studies and research.

The university library, which is the library domiciled in a university, includes the totality of human and organized material resources available in both book and non-book formats for providing and obtaining needed information (Ahiauzu, 2002; Aina, 2004; Nnadozie, 2007; Edom, 2013) [4, 5, 14, 9]. Onye (2016) [21] observed that without the information resources provided by these university libraries, teaching, learning, research and other reasons for using library resources will lack requisite support. Amongst these library resources, are the reference materials. These reference materials refer to those information resources in

the form of books or non-books that are consulted for research and other referral purposes. Aina (2004) [5] opined that reference materials are documents that contain miscellaneous information on any topic, be it an event or individual. Examples include: dictionaries, encyclopaedias, atlases, yearbooks, biographies, gazetteers, index, abstracts and bibliographies, projects, theses, dissertations, etc. Reference materials are one of the essential information resources that have found its way into the modern libraries. Their values are inestimable in the hands of a user, who requires quality information to meet a need. Among the users are the undergraduates. This category of library users refer to the students in pursuit of their first degree in different fields of discipline in higher institutions of learning, be it a university, polytechnic or colleges of education. The undergraduates of Library and Information Science, Imo State University, Owerri, simply refers to students in pursuit of first degree in library and information science at the Imo State University Owerri. These students, no doubt, have needs for library resources, such as the reference materials to help solve their reference and information needs. There are different types of reference materials and each of them contain diverse information ranging from simple definition of words and concepts to detailed explanation of ideas and events. They are oftentimes classified into two categories, viz, the source and the access categories. According to Nnadozie (2007) [14], the source type of reference materials are those that contain the

information needed by the users (e.g. encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and handbooks, etc.) while the access type of reference books are those that refer the user to the source of information required (e.g. indexes, abstracts, and bibliographies, etc.).

Consequently, these reference materials find their way into the library's collection. Hence, it does not translate to their utilization (Lawal-Solarin, 2012; Nnadozie & Nnadozie, 2008)^[11, 13]. Further substantiating this claim, Ugah (2008) and Onuoha, Chukwueke and Nnadozie (2018)^[13] observed that availability do not necessarily translate into utilization. Consequently, these materials need to be accessible before utilization can set in. According to Hornby (2015), accessibility is the quality of being at hand when needed, while availability is concerned with resources physically located in the library. Furthermore, accessibility deals with problems of storage, display, and transmission of information resources to users promptly (Onye, 2016)^[21] either manually or electronically. Without access to reference materials, utilization is unrealizable, and the value of the reference material is meaningless to users. Granting unrestricted access to university library reference materials requires a series of protocols (such as cataloguing, classification, indexing, etc.) to ensure that users can identify and locate the materials (Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami & Salami, 2014)^[15], with ease. It is also important for university libraries to consider user-needs during the acquisition stage of references materials to maintain relevance and increase utilization (Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002)^[3].

Furthermore, proper accessibility and utilization of appropriate reference materials is *sine-qua-non* to the delivery of quality and effective library services and educational development of the undergraduates (Chukwueke, Onuoha & Nnadozie, 2018)^[8]. This justifies, to a large extent, the reason for their acquisition in university libraries.

Statement of the Problem

In a typical Nigerian university library, such as the library of Imo State University, Owerri, preliminary observations and survey of literature have shown that accessibility influences utilization of the library's holding by students and other categories of library users. This is to say that before users can utilize resources in the library, the functions of making information readily accessible must first be activated. As a university library, most of the information materials and services tend towards academic performance and success of students, as well as the goal of the university in fulfilling higher education objectives. However, when these materials and services are not being put to adequate use, defeat of the aim becomes inevitable

Though the library of Imo State University Owerri acquires reference materials, preliminary investigation holds that there still remain the users' apathy to their use, especially, those students at the undergraduate level in the Department of Library and Information Science, who are supposed to be students properly trained in the use of libraries. Without empirical proof, the reason(s) for this apathy could be best assumed. Contrarily, research is not based on assumption. Hence, the need for such a study. To this end, the problem of this study lies on investigating the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of Department of Library and information Science, Imo State

University, Owerri. It sought to determine the reference materials accessible, reference materials utilized, challenges as well as the solutions to the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of Library and Information Science (LIS), Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The following objectives guided the study. To;

1. find out the reference materials accessible to undergraduates of LIS, IMSU, Owerri;
2. determine the reference materials utilized by undergraduates of LIS, IMSU, Owerri;
3. Investigate the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of LIS, IMSU, Owerri; and ascertain solutions to the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of LIS, IMSU, Owerri.

Literature Review

According to Makinde, Aba and Ugah (2017)^[12], reference materials are part of the library materials that are special to users, because they contain facts that have been brought together from varied sources, which are organized for easy and quick access for specific use. These materials are not meant to be read from cover to cover but are used as sources of finding precise information (Abdulahi & Mamza, 2014)^[1]. Furthermore, reference materials are goldmines of the reference section, with highly estimable values in the information/Internet age (Attamma, 2013)^[6]. According to Popoola and Haliso (2009)^[22], these materials form part of the raw information materials that libraries acquire, catalogue; stock and make available to users; and are needed for reference and information services.

Aguolu and Aguolu, (2002)^[3] strongly believed that reference materials may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one's subject of interest, but one may not be able to access or retrieve them for utilization. Consequently, one may identify citations in indexes of a library, but may not have access to the sources containing the relevant articles. Summarily, Okiki, as cited in Makinde, Aba and Ugah, (2017)^[12] observed that the more accessible reference materials are, the more likely they are to be used, owing to the fact that users tend to use those materials that require the least effort to access. In corroboration with the preceding assertion, Onye (2016)^[21]'s study on availability, accessibility, and utilization of information resources by students of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri revealed that students utilized the information resources that were available and accessible in the library. Consequently, the identification and location of information pertinent to the user's inquiry depends upon the availability of effective bibliographic apparatus in general and specialized fields (Okafor, 2019)^[17].

However, to facilitate identification and location of information materials in the libraries, Nnadozie (2007)^[14] and Onuoha and Chukwueke (2020)^[19] believed that the library is expected to provide effective access tools, such as catalogues, bibliographies, guides, indexes and abstracts Olorunsola (2008) noted that nothing frustrates a researcher and information seeker more than trying to retrieve an article, which seems right on target, only to find that the library does not own such material or difficulty getting the

Internet access to the article. In their study, Ogunniyi, Efosa and Sheji (2013) ^[16] found out the high use of reference sources in Akure College of Education Library, Ondo, Ondo State, which was attributed to good understanding of these resources. Without access to library resources, utilization is unrealizable, and the value of such resource will be meaningless to users. The issue of access poses numerous challenges to both library management and users, because making reference materials accessible demands certain requisite skills, which when lacking, renders available reference materials, not accessible. This was further amplified by the study of Okafor (2019) ^[17], which revealed significant positive relationship between organization and utilization of library materials in federal universities in South-east Nigeria. It could also be right to believe that the format of the reference materials accessible, speaks volumes in the level of utilization. In an attempt to uncover this, Iroaganachi and Ilogho (2011) ^[10] assessed the utilization of reference books by final-year students of Covenant University, Nigeria, and found that majority of the students make use of reference materials frequently, with preference on online reference sources because they are more easier to use. Ademodi (2015) ^[2] in his study on Awareness and Use of Reference Sources by Undergraduates in Adekunle Ajasin University Library found that only few students are aware of the services library offer while there is a significantly high response in awareness of reference sources. However, the response rate of use of reference sources is significantly low. Abdullahi and Mamza (2014) ^[1] observed that poor quality of resources have negative effects on the utilization of reference materials by users in most university libraries in developing countries. This is largely owing to the fact that these developing countries have limited access to funding and modern information and communication technology facilities, thereby giving rise to more reliance in the print resources. This scenario becomes difficult for the ordinary undergraduate with Internet-enabled phone and mentality. Furthermore, most of these undergraduates, from the grassroots of their academic journey, lack basic use of library skills. Therefore, their ability to access and utilize these reference materials, seems to be hindered (Gama, as cited in Awodoyin & Aina, 2018) ^[7]. This agrees with the study of Okorafor, Ariole and Anyalebechi (2017) ^[18], which recommended sensitization of the students to further stir up the utilization of reference materials. To further drive this, university management must

insisting on the undergraduates' participation in library orientation programs, mostly at the early stage in the university. Summarily, there have been great emphasis on ensuring the effective and efficient accessibility and utilization of reference materials in university libraries in Nigeria and beyond, as can be deduced from literature reviewed in this study. Though some of the studies available within the reach of the researchers frowned at the low accessibility and utilization of reference materials, some still believe there is high accessibility and utilization of these materials in some university libraries. Sad enough, none of these studies, to best of the knowledge of the researchers focused on the Department of Library and Information Science, Imo State University, Owerri. Thereby, still leaving a gap in literature, which the present study, upon completion, will fill.

Methodology

This research made use of the descriptive survey design with focus on the Department of Library and Information Science, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria. The complete census sampling techniques was used in studying all the 140 undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU. A close-ended researchers'-made questionnaire with 40 item statements was used for data collection. It was made up of two sections. Section A contained the personal data of the respondents, while Section B contained core variable questions divided into clusters ranging from Clusters 1 to 4. The items in the close-ended were structured using a 4-point scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD). A total of 140 copies of the questionnaire were distributed but 127 copies were returned and found suitable for data analysis, giving a response rate of 90.7% and reliability co-efficient of 0.91. However, data collected was analyzed using frequency counts mean scores. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used to decide the agreement or disagreement of item statements. Hence any item statement with mean score equal to or greater than the criterion mean (Mean ≥ 2.50), was agreed, while any item statement with mean score less than the criterion mean (Mean < 2.50), was disagreed. Furthermore, results were presented using frequency tables.

Presentation of Result

The presentation of result gotten from the field survey follows the order of questions in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Distribution and Return of Questionnaire

Study population	Number of questionnaire distributed	% value of questionnaire distributed	Number returned	% value of number returned	Not returned	% value of not returned
140	140	100%	127	90.7%	13	9.3%

Table 1 shows the distribution and return pattern of the questionnaire administered to the respondents. It presents that 140 copies of questionnaire but 127 copies were returned, representing a percentage value of 90.7% while 13(9.3%) were not returned. The non-return could be attributed to the attitudes of the students who went away with the instrument and others who partially responded

without completion. However, only valid data were analyzed and reported in subsequent Tables

Research Objective

To find out the reference materials accessible to undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri.

Table 2: Reference Materials Accessible

S/n	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	Dictionaries are accessible	65	32	15	15	3.16	1	Agreed
2	Encyclopedias are accessible	65	17	25	20	3.00	2	Agreed
3	Year books are accessible	65	17	20	25	2.96	3	Agreed
4	Projects/Theses/Dissertations are accessible	54	31	25	17	2.96	3	Agreed
5	Reports are accessible	39	46	30	12	2.88	6	Agreed
6	Gazetteers are accessible	38	21	40	28	2.54	10	Agreed
7	Handbooks are accessible	49	31	47	0	2.65	9	Agreed
8	Thesaurus are accessible	20	39	6	62	2.13	11	Disagreed
9	Parliamentary white papers are accessible	20	21	18	68	1.94	12	Disagreed
10	Almanacs are accessible	49	22	30	26	2.74	8	Agreed
11	Directories are accessible	54	30	23	20	2.93	5	Agreed
12	Maps and Atlases are accessible	53	36	6	36	2.87	7	Agreed
Cluster Mean						2.73		Agreed

Table 2 shows the respondents’ views on the reference materials accessible to them in Imo State University Library, Owerri. Agreement and disagreement to reference materials as indicated in the decision column of the Table, is based on the attainment of the criterion mean score of 2.50. The reference materials agreed to be accessible by majority of the respondents and their individual mean scores include: Dictionaries (3.16), encyclopedias (3.00), yearbooks (2.96), projects/theses/dissertations (2.96), reports (2.88), gazetteers (2.54), handbooks (2.65), almanacs (2.74), directories (2.93), and maps and atlases (2.87). However, majority of the respondents disagreed with the accessibility of thesaurus

(2.13), and parliamentary white papers (1.94). However, the ranking column showed the order of preference to the accessibility of these reference materials investigated, with dictionaries ranking highest. Furthermore, a clearer picture of the responses based on the cluster mean of 2.73 obtained shows that majority of the respondents agreed with the fact that different reference materials are accessible to them.

Research Objective

To find out the reference materials utilized by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri

Table 3: Reference Materials Utilized

S/n	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	I utilizes the dictionaries in the library	64	25	32	6	3.16	4	Agreed
2	I make use of encyclopedias in our library	35	11	75	6	2.59	9	Agreed
3	I utilizes the yearbooks in our library	44	43	15	25	2.83	6	Agreed
4	I utilizes the projects/theses/dissertations in our library	95	15	12	5	3.57	1	Agreed
5	I make use of reports in our library	38	66	6	17	2.98	7	Agreed
6	I make use of the gazetteers in our library	20	45	12	50	2.28		Disagreed
7	I make use of handbooks in our library	68	47	6	6	3.39	2	Agreed
8	I make use of thesaurus in our library	5	33	46	43	2.00	11	Disagreed
9	I utilizes parliamentary white papers in our library	10	32	27	58	1.95	12	Disagreed
10	I make use of almanacs in our library	34	31	50	12	2.69	8	Agreed
11	I make use of directories in our library	56	41	25	5	3.17	3	Agreed
12	I utilizes maps and atlases in our library	53	11	6	57	2.47	10	Disagreed
Cluster Mean						2.76		Agreed

Table 3 presents result generated on the reference materials utilized by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri. It shows that majority of the respondents agreed with the utilization of the following reference materials: Dictionaries (3.16), encyclopedias (2.59), yearbooks (2.83), projects/theses/dissertations (3.57), reports (2.98), handbooks (3.39), almanacs (2.69), and directories (3.17). This is because the mean scores of each of the above mentioned reference materials falls within the agreement region. However, majority of the respondents disagreed with the utilization of gazetteers (2.28), thesaurus (2.00), parliamentary white papers (1.95), and maps and atlases

(2.47). Considering the ranking, it is evident that the utilization projects/theses/dissertation ranked highest, followed by handbooks and directories. The summary of the result with a cluster mean of 2.76 indicates that majority of the respondents agreed with the utilization of large number of reference materials in their University library.

Research Objective

To investigate the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri.

Table 4: Challenges facing the Accessibility and Utilization of Reference Materials

S/n	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	Inaccessibility of reference materials.	34	77	5	11	3.06	6	Agreed
2	Provision of irrelevant reference materials	35	67	5	20	2.92	7	Agreed
3	Absence of guide to the use of reference materials	39	58	30	0	3.07	5	Agreed
4	Inadequate reference materials	65	57	5	0	3.47	1	Agreed
5	Search and retrieval difficulty	52	75	0	0	3.41	3	Agreed
6	Negative attitude of the reference personnel	67	55	0	5	3.45	2	Agreed
7	Absence of electronic reference materials	29	61	32	5	2.90	8	Agreed
8	Absence of modern retrieval devices	55	55	12	5	3.26	4	Agreed
	Cluster Mean					3.19		Agreed

Table 4 reports challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri. The result obtained shows the agreement of all the items statements as part of the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri. They include: Inaccessibility of reference materials (3.06), provision of irrelevant reference materials (2.92), absence of guide to the use of reference materials (3.07), inadequate reference materials (3.47), search and retrieval difficulty (3.41), negative attitude of the reference personnel (3.45), absence of electronic reference materials (2.90), and absence of modern retrieval devices (3.26). Consequently,

the order of ranking revealed the challenge of inadequate reference materials, followed by negative attitude of the reference personnel and search and retrieval difficulty as the highly influencing challenges to the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by the students studied. However, a cluster mean of 3.19 obtained further supports the general agreement by majority of the respondent on the existence of numerous challenges.

Research Objective

To find solutions to challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri.

Table 5: Solutions to Challenges Facing the Accessibility and Utilization of Reference Materials

S/n	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Rank	Decision
1	Provision of access point to reference materials.	71	51	5	0	3.52	3	Agreed
2	Provision of relevant reference materials	70	57	0	0	3.55	1	Agreed
3	Provision of adequate guide to the use of reference materials	53	74	0	0	3.42	4	Agreed
4	Acquisition of adequate reference materials	72	50	5	0	3.53	2	Agreed
5	Ensuring easy search and retrieval means	49	72	0	6	3.29	6	Agreed
6	Ensuring the friendliness of the reference personnel	32	67	28	0	3.03	8	Agreed
7	Acquisition of electronic reference materials	47	63	11	6	3.19	7	Agreed
8	Provision of modern retrieval devices	52	69	6	0	3.36	5	Agreed
	Cluster Mean					3.36		Agreed

Table 5 presents result generated on the solutions to the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri. It shows the agreement by majority of the respondents with all the perceived solutions investigated. They include: Provision of access point to reference materials (3.52), provision of relevant reference materials (3.55), provision of adequate guide to the use of reference materials (3.42), acquisition of adequate reference materials (3.53), ensuring easy search and retrieval means (3.29), ensuring the friendliness of the reference personnel (3.03), acquisition of electronic reference materials (3.19), and provision of modern retrieval devices (3.36). The ranking order showed provision of relevant materials, followed by acquisition of adequate reference materials and provision of access point to reference materials as highly influencing solutions to the challenges. A cluster mean of 3.36 obtained further supports the general agreement by majority of the respondent on the solutions to the challenges facing accessibility and utilization of references materials of undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, Owerri.

Discussion of Findings

The study found out high number of reference materials accessible to the undergraduates of the department studied. These reference materials agreed to be accessible by

majority of the respondents include: Dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, projects/theses/dissertations, reports, gazetteers, handbooks, almanacs, directories, and maps and atlases. The implication of this report is that, not only do the Library acquire reference materials, they also ensure that these materials are accessible to the user community. To this end, the study corroborates with the earlier study of Ademodi (2015) [2], which found out that although only few students are aware of the services library offer, there is a significantly high response in awareness and accessibility of reference materials by the undergraduates he studied. This is a true state of the findings of these study where majority of the respondents indicated awareness of 10 out of the 12 reference materials investigated. Findings from the study provides numerous reference materials utilized by the students. The reference materials as found to be utilized by the undergraduates, include: dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, projects/theses/dissertations, reports, handbooks, almanacs, and directories. Based on this finding, it is clear that the undergraduates make use of those reference materials that are accessible to them. The implication is that the order of ranking in level of accessibility (Table 2) varies as in the order of ranking of item statements in level of utilization (Table 3). Dictionaries were ranked highly accessible while projects/theses/dissertations, though ranked 3rd in Table 2, took the lead in Table 3. However, it could

also be deduced that utilization only occurred on the reference materials accessible, with only gazettes being accessible (2.54) but not utilized (2.28) by majority of the respondents. However, the result showed high utilization of more reference materials by undergraduates which is contrary to the report of Ademodi (2015)^[2], which revealed that the response rate of use of reference materials is significantly low. The disparity may be as a result of the study considering all the undergraduates of a particular university whereas the focus of this present study is on the undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU. The year of conducting the research could also be a reason. It is however important to understand that the two findings will not be rejected. Furthermore, the present study is in agreement with the study of Iroaganachi and Ilogho (2011)^[10], which assessed the utilization of reference books by final-year students of Covenant University, Nigeria, and found that majority of the students make use of the reference materials frequently. On the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduates of DLIS, IMSU, the study found out the existence of numerous challenges. These challenges as reported in Table 4 include: inaccessibility of reference materials, provision of irrelevant reference materials, absence of guide to the use of reference materials, inadequate reference materials, search and retrieval difficulty, negative attitude of the reference personnel, absence of electronic reference materials, and absence of modern retrieval devices. Based on these revealed challenges, there is low accessibility and utilization of some reference materials in the university library studied. It therefore correlates with the report of Onye (2016)^[21], which revealed that the library studied had limited sources of information, and the available resources were not maximally positioned for access by students. Consequently, Ademodi (2015)^[2] found that the undergraduates do not ask library staff/reference librarian for a guide on the use of reference sources as among the challenges faced. However, it could also be as a result of the negative attitude of the reference personnel as agreed by majority of the respondents that can give rise to the issue of not asking for guide. The study in its attempt to discover the solutions to the challenges facing the accessibility and utilization of reference materials by undergraduate students of DLIS, IMSU reveals the following solutions: Provision of access point to reference materials, provision of relevant reference materials, provision of adequate guide to the use of reference materials, acquisition of adequate reference materials, ensuring easy search and retrieval means, ensuring the friendliness of the reference personnel, acquisition of electronic reference materials, and provision of modern retrieval devices. This study tolled the path of Onye (2016)^[21], which recommended the need to redirect focus towards expanding the library sources to take advantage of technology to enhance library stock and improve available, accessible, and utilizable information resources for students, among other things. Furthermore, the study of Okorafor, Ariole and Anyalebechi (2017)^[18] had recommended sensitization of the students to further stir up the utilization of reference materials.

Summary and Conclusion

The study showed a close relationship between reference materials accessible and reference materials utilized by the undergraduates of Department of Library and Information

Science, Imo State University, Owerri. Aside the fact that only those materials agreed accessible where agreed to be utilized, there was a clear indication that the undergraduates also considers the relevancy of the reference materials available to stir up their utilization of such materials. With this, the study believes that utilization will never be possible without ensuring accessibility of such materials by their users. However, accessibility to materials with high potency of use should be considered.

Nonetheless, ensuring accessibility and utilization of reference materials in university libraries are faced with numerous challenges. Except these challenges are properly handled and defeated, all efforts in ensuring availability of reference materials will be fruitless. To this end, the study concludes that accessibility have a vital role to play in utilization. Consequently, accessibility and utilization are very necessarily for all libraries in the business of information handling and dissemination. Furthermore according to findings, it is clear the department studied in Imo State University, Owerri indicated high accessibility and utilization of reference materials. However, considering the ranking of item statements in Table 2 and Table 3, one will discover that accessibility is not the only parameter for utilization. This is because though dictionaries were reported to be highly accessible, projects/theses/dissertations took the lead in terms of highly utilized. Therefore, not only making accessible, the needs of the users should also be considered.

Recommendations

Having conducted this research work and based on the findings of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Efforts should be made by the Management of university libraries to improve on the number and forms of reference materials provided and made accessible to their users.
2. It is also important for university libraries to understand the role of access points in the accessibility and utilization of reference materials, and further build on it. This can be done by ensuring accuracy of catalogue card production and filing, proper shelving and provision of shelf guides, among other things. Not forgetting the electronic access point.
3. Not only acquiring reference materials. University libraries should make sure that the needs of the users are taken into consideration in the process of acquiring reference materials. This will go a long way in ensuring that relevant materials are acquired.
4. As well, the issue of adequacy in acquisition should be considered. Libraries should make provision for multiple copies of reference materials so as to promote simultaneous utilization of such materials by users.

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