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## User Perspective of Reference Service Provision at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), Ghana.

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## **Abstract**

This study set out to investigate the reference service provision at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), Ghana from the perspective of users. A total number of 335 copies of questionnaire were administered to students and faculty of the National Film and Television Institute out of which 234 copies of the questionnaires were returned and used for the study representing a 69.9% response rate. The findings show among others that though the majority of respondents found the services and resources provided in the reference section coupled with staff attitude and skills of the library satisfactory, there is lack of electronic reference service provision. The researchers therefore strongly recommend the immediate adoption of electronic tools for reference service provision in addition to adequate user education.

**Keywords:** Reference Service, Academic Library, Library Services, Library Users, National Film and Television Institute, Ghana

## **Introduction**

Generally, libraries contribute to the social, cultural and economic aspects of every society (Reding, 2005). Libraries keep materials that are read by members of a society for knowledge that adds up to its economic growth. Information on our tradition and cultural values are kept by libraries to aid research on the present, past and future. As echoed by Alemna (2000) libraries over the periods have served as a source of information and knowledge that have been the pivot of providing cultural and financial development in any society. This confirms a library is an inevitable asset to any growing society across the globe.

The establishment of every library is to provide individuals with information resources. As an organization or institution, a library obtains and distributes information in every discipline to users with or without charges on their part. Libraries are often found in communities, public places, schools, institutions and universities. In the case of an academic library, which is

available in every academic institution or university, its core aim is to provide services to the faculty, students and staff (Tyckoson, 2001).

Academic libraries are said to be ‘the heart of academic institutions.’ It is the center within which teaching and learning revolve. Importance must therefore be placed on it to provide the best service available to the academic community they serve. This is to ensure that the objective of the community is accomplished. Reference service provision in libraries is the means by which this objective can be achieved (Ademodi, 2011).

An academic library according to Reitz (2004) is a vital part of an academic institution that meets the information needs of members of its community. Most academic libraries enable faculty members, students and staff to access books, periodicals and other relevant materials. Besides, academic libraries provide users with digital information through organized systems. Also, they make scholarly articles and journals available in support of academic writings.

As highlighted by Fan (2005) university libraries play important role in the provision of research support. Teaching faculty, as well as students, can use the library to conduct scholarly research. For instance, in the course of teaching, lecturers may want to use the database available at the library for class projects.

Also, students use the library as a learning environment and complete assignments given to them. University staff on further studies may patronize the library to complete research projects or read through the library’s collection to be abreast with current issues in their field of discipline. For these reasons, the provision of services by library staff or a librarian becomes a necessity and important in every library environment. Librarians play major roles in academic libraries in providing quality service to students, teachers and the entire staff. The services provided by librarians to such clientele are termed reference services (Tyckoson, 2001).

Reference service has thus become very pivotal in helping academic libraries meet their clientele in a more personal way to help meet their information needs which will eventually

lead to the achievement of the overall goal of the university. The nature of reference service provision in libraries has also evolved with the adoption of technology to reach out to users beyond the walls of the library. The Researchers, therefore, deemed it fit to undertake this research to explore the nature of reference service provision at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) library to help determine how it is meeting the needs of its users with its new status as a university in Ghana.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To determine the rate at which users patronize reference services
2. To determine users' perspective of the adequacy of reference service
3. To determine challenges users encounter with reference service provision

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sharma (2006) indicated that the value of a library is determined by the use of its collection and how promptly it attends to user needs. This value can only be achieved through reference service. The researchers base on the premise of the relevance of reference service sought to determine the nature of reference service provision at the National Film and Television Institute, Ghana, which is a unique tertiary educational institute and one of a kind on the African continent. NAFTI holds a special collection and its client base needs personalized services to make maximum use of the collection. In addition, the library literature from Ghana is almost silent on library services from the NAFTI library. This research, therefore, seeks to provide literature to fill this unique gap in library science in Ghana.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The concept of reference service**

In the opinion of Pomerantz et al. (2006) a critical look at the terminology reference service offers library managers and reference staff a better understanding of how well the services being provided meet the proposed aims and objectives, how well the service is helping users

acquire the needed information and whether the used resources are producing the desired outcomes. This means reference service serves as a personalized evaluative tool for libraries. According to Udensi and Akor (2014) reference service is a personal help provided to users searching for information in a library. Similarly, Edoka (2000) referred to reference service as personal assistance given to individuals looking for information for whatever purposes by librarians. In the opinion of Evarest (2008) the pivot of reference service offered in libraries is to assist users, even though, it has different forms of approach. Further, Evarest (2008) stressed that one way of providing reference service is to make available answers to queries addressed by users.

Reference service thus provides an opportunity for library staff to obtain the relevant information to users by; understanding the nature and intent of queries or requests, using the information resources available coupled with the personal and professional skills of the library staff. It is imperative to note that, reference service in libraries has become increasingly important for effective service delivery and maximum utilization of library resources as library information resources increase at an exponential rate and the tools and systems for service delivery become more complex than the average information user can comprehend.

### **Role of Reference Service in Academic Libraries**

Libraries exist to satisfy the information needs of their users by providing the relevant resource. Information resources are made available mainly through cataloging and indexing services by the reader service division of the library. Reference service fulfills the function of dissemination of relevant information through the use of emails, telephone, information desks and other communication channels to entertain reference question and their answers (Dwaha & Oyedum, 2015).

Reference services offered in academic libraries are in diverse forms, but common to them is providing the needed support to users in search of information. The ingenuity of the librarian

ensures the successful implementation of the reference service. The librarian acts as an advisor, the teacher and an expert to the user (Evarest, 2008).

Another type of reference service is user education services. According to Amaeshi (2003) user education service is a way of making library users learn how to make effective use of the resources available in the library. This can be done through the required skills gained in location, retrieval, and manipulation of information.

User education service as explained by Kumar (2007) is a form of instructional teaching on how to use the library for the initial time in an academic environment. These range from directing users to the appropriate units of the library, educating users about the techniques for bibliographic searching online and teaching them to be able to fully utilize the resources in the library.

Reference units of the libraries also reserve physical library materials by placing them in a designated location called the reference room. Such materials are loaned out for a limited period (Aina, 2004) or are restricted to being used in the library.

Reference librarians use bibliographic tools to identify, verify and locate materials that are relevant and meets the information need of users. These tools are used as selection aids and also provide information about publications. Examples of bibliographic tools used include but are not limited to abstracts and indexes, library catalogues, almanacs, encyclopedias, gazettes, maps and dictionaries (Aina, 2004).

Reference librarians also render what is called selective dissemination of information as a form of reference service package for researchers. Libraries use the website to disseminate information to researchers. Librarians do this by keeping users informed of existing trends and development in their field of knowledge (Ozioko & Amuchazi, 2008).

Academic libraries are in the ostensibly boundless process of transforming the public service to meet the need of an endlessly changing environment. Besides, not only are librarians

expected to serve more students with a little number of resources, the accessibility of an overwhelming volume of information has made information literacy skills a more visible constituent of postsecondary education. As explained by Folk (2015) reference dealings are opportunities to engage library users in informal teaching and learning activities, in which the reference librarian assists users to develop information literacy and critical thinking skill.

### **Technology in reference service**

Technology has changed reference service considerably. Technology use in libraries at the initial stages was primarily applied to the technical and organizational sides of library operation, mostly to produce large centralized catalogues and databases. As computers became more available, reference librarians began to employ them to enhance their services. The first use of technology was through mediated online database services such as dialog and BRS. In the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, libraries introduced unmediated searching using CD-ROMs for the databases. Database search rose dramatically and the librarian's role now shifted from searching on behalf of the patron to teaching the patron how to do their searches (Tyckoson, 2001).

As information technology became available in households, technology became more and more applied to reference services. Most libraries today, have inculcated digital reference services as part of their reference service. In Africa, these services are more prevalent in academic libraries. Some of the technologies introduced into reference service include e-mail, web form, chat services, Ask-A librarian service, web customer call center software and video conference (Chadwani, n.d.).

The use of social media such as Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, 3-D or second life, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter for reference services is more prevalent in academic libraries worldwide (Chu and Du, 2013). In a report by Steiner (2012) 78.6% of libraries in the US were using social media networks to interact with library users. Also, a study by Mabweazare and Zinn

(2016) which examined the use of social media by academic librarians in South Africa and Zimbabwe revealed that a vast majority of the academic librarians used social media tools to offer reference services to their users. According to Okite-Amughoru (2017) social media facilitates information flow between the library and the users, enhances reference service and is useful in promoting library services. It also serves as a link between libraries and their user communities (Howard et al., 2018). The study further revealed the most used social media tools were Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Instant Message. Similarly, Ahenkrah- Marfo (2015) in a study revealed that Facebook and Twitter were the most used social media platforms by librarians in reference services. The findings of the study also revealed librarians that librarians used social media the most to respond used to reference queries, feedback and user enquires.

### **Challenges facing Reference Service in Academic Libraries**

A major factor that impedes the growth of reference services is the lack of financial resources for the purchase of reference materials (Kumar, 2006). Another challenge facing reference services is lack of library professionals. The use of untrained staff, especially in academic libraries is a major problem. The reference desk is mostly left to unqualified staff and this inhibits effective service (Fabunmi, 2004). Okafor (2012) identified lack of electronic resources and inadequate photocopiers as some major challenges encountered by libraries in their reference service provision in Nigeria.

Lack of interpersonal communication also affects the effective delivery of reference service. This is a result of the inability of users to accurately formulate their queries, lack of commitment on the part of the library staff and physical distraction in the library. There is also an improper structure of reference queries which leads to a gap in understanding and misconstruing accurate information provided to users (Ifidon & Ugwuanyi, 2013). Stereotypes and low self-esteem of the users and library staff also hinder the effective utilization of

interpersonal communication. Stereotypes in reference service introduce interference in communication making decoding of queries very difficult (McKay et al., 2003).

Poor working conditions amount to barriers to effective use of interpersonal communication in the reference service. If the library staff are not happy with the system due to poor remuneration, there is the propensity to take it out on users through transfer aggression (Katz, 2002).

Putting the user in the center is also a challenge that the reference librarian faces at all levels and in all types of libraries today. Users keep changing and so are their information needs. Therefore, the reference librarian must know and understand the user's needs to meet the information need. Addressing the needs of the user effectively requires the librarian to keep multi-tasking (Cordell, 2013).

Again, low bandwidth, unstable power supply and slow internet speed are some of the major challenges facing libraries in their quest to introduce social media for reference service provision (Ahenkrah- Marfo, 2015). Okita-Amughoru (2017) also identified lack of time and dedication on the part of library staff to explore, learn and update new networks as some of the challenges by academic libraries are a result of the rate at which social media networks are evolving.

## **Methodology**

A quantitative approach was employed for the study. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire from a population of 33 faculty members and 302 students giving a total of 335. Out of the total number of 335 copies of questionnaire administered to faculty and students of the National Film and Television Institute, 234 copies were returned and used for data analysis giving a response rate of 69.9%. The study employed census and data was analyzed using SPSS.

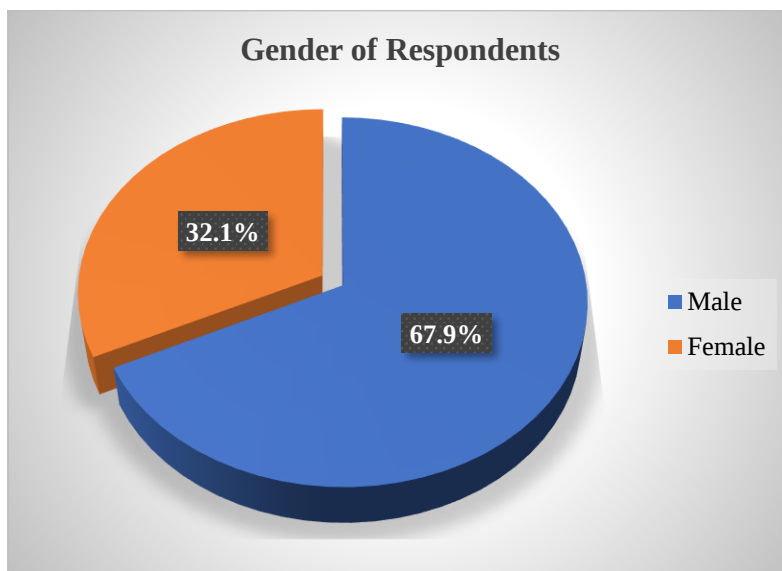
## Presentation of findings

### Background information

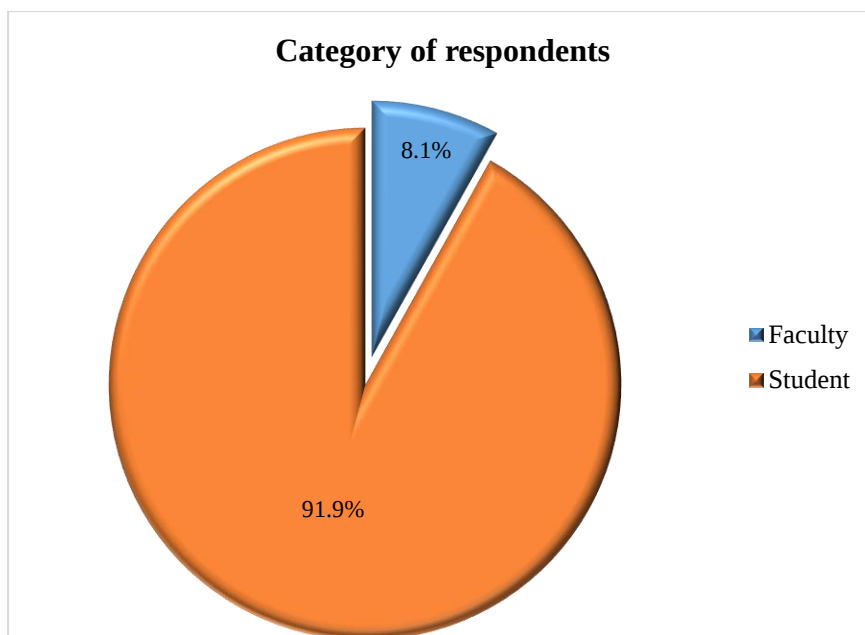
This section presents data on the gender and category of respondents that took part in the study.

Data provided on background information shows that out of the 234 respondents, 32.1% were females and 67.9% were males as shown in Figure 1. This indicates that the female respondents were less than the male respondents.

Responses on the category of respondents revealed that 91.9% of respondents were students and the remaining 8.1% represented faculty. This is represented in Figure 2.



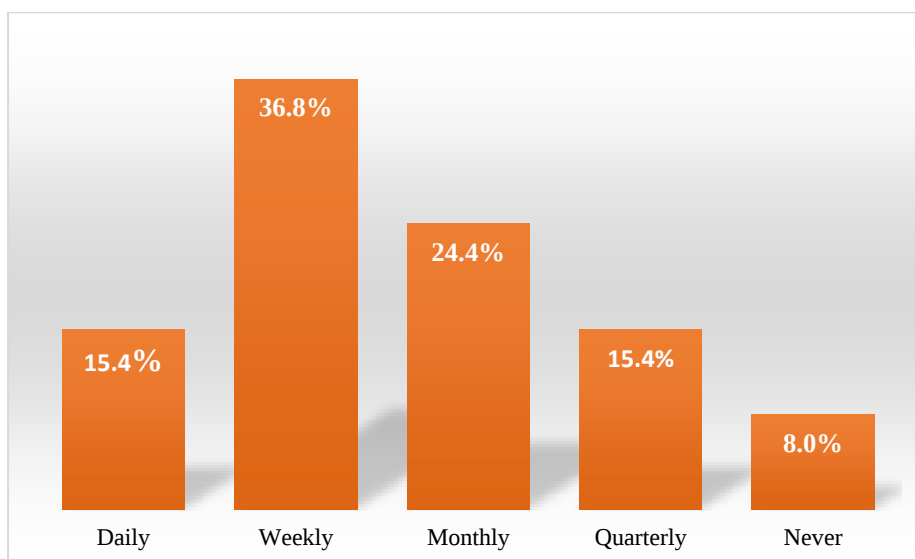
**Figure 1: Gender of respondents**



**Figure 2: Category of respondents**

#### **Frequency of use of library reference resources**

Respondents were asked how often they use reference resources, out of a total of 234, 86 (36.8%) indicated weekly while 57 (24.4%), 36 (15.4%), 36 (15.4%) and 19 (8.0%) indicated monthly, daily, quarterly and never respectively as represented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Frequency of use of library reference resources**

**Table 1: Types of reference services provided in the NAFTI library**

| Types of reference service                       | Available |      | Not Available |      |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|---------------|------|
|                                                  | Freq.     | %    | Freq.         | %    |
| Reader's advisory                                | 136       | 58.1 | 98            | 41.9 |
| Interlibrary loan and document delivery services | 0         | 0    | 234           | 100  |
| User education services                          | 189       | 80.8 | 45            | 19.2 |
| Computerized literature searches                 | 0         | 0    | 234           | 100  |
| Current Awareness Services                       | 127       | 54.3 | 107           | 45.7 |
| Photocopying and printing services               | 0         | 0    | 234           | 100  |
| Internet browsing                                | 167       | 71.4 | 67            | 28.6 |
| Ready reference                                  | 160       | 68.4 | 74            | 31.6 |
| Research Consultancy                             | 153       | 65.4 | 81            | 34.6 |
| Subject specialist                               | 135       | 57.7 | 99            | 42.3 |

The responses from the table above indicate that the National Film and Television Institute's library provides the following services – reader's advisory, user education, current awareness service, internet browsing, ready reference, research consultancy and subject specialist. However, services such as interlibrary loan and document delivery services, computerized literature searches and photocopying and printing services are not available.

**Table 2: Adequacy of the reference services provided by the NAFTI library**

| Response given             | Very Adequate |      | Adequate |      | Inadequate |      |
|----------------------------|---------------|------|----------|------|------------|------|
|                            | Freq.         | %    | Freq.    | %    | Freq.      | %    |
| Reader's advisory          | 71            | 30.3 | 126      | 53.8 | 37         | 15.8 |
| User education services    | 56            | 23.9 | 124      | 53.0 | 54         | 23.1 |
| Current Awareness Services | 46            | 19.7 | 121      | 51.7 | 67         | 28.6 |
| Internet browsing          | 68            | 29.1 | 116      | 49.6 | 50         | 21.4 |
| Ready reference            | 66            | 28.2 | 129      | 55.1 | 39         | 16.7 |
| Research Consultancy       | 52            | 22.2 | 119      | 50.9 | 63         | 26.9 |
| Subject specialist         | 32            | 13.7 | 109      | 46.6 | 93         | 39.7 |

The results presented in Table 2 suggest that 197 (84.1%) of respondents rated the level of reader's advisory as either adequate or very adequate and user education services were rated by 180 (76.9%) of respondents as either adequate or very adequate. Current Awareness Services was rated by 167(71.4%) of the respondents as adequate or very adequate. The adequacy of internet browsing was confirmed by 184 (78.7%) of the respondents, ready reference by 195 (83.3%) respondents, research consultancy 171 (73.1%) and subject specialist 141 (60.3%).

**Table 3. Level of satisfaction with the resources available at the NAFTI library**

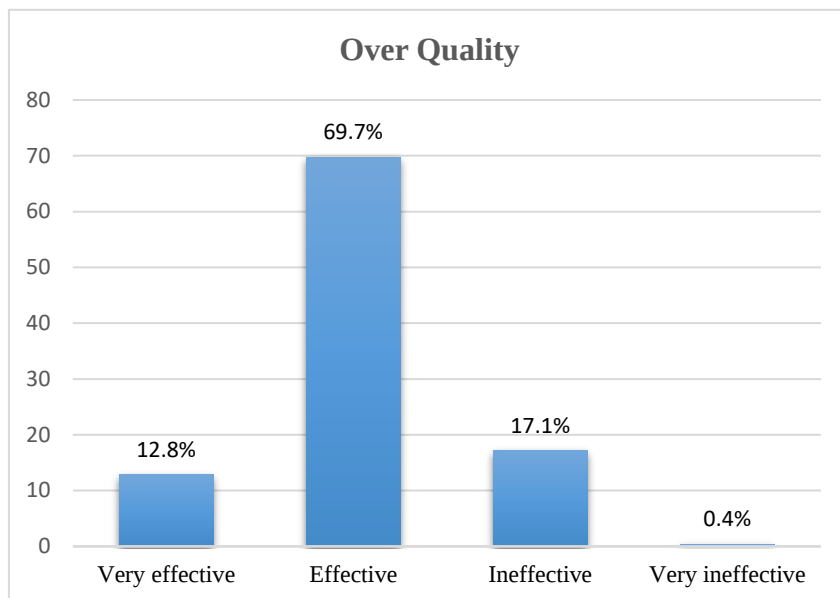
| Response given       | Very Satisfactory |      | Satisfactory |      | Not Satisfactory |      |
|----------------------|-------------------|------|--------------|------|------------------|------|
|                      | Freq.             | %    | Freq.        | %    | Freq.            | %    |
| Lending collection   | 60                | 25.6 | 131          | 56.0 | 43               | 18.4 |
| Reference collection | 60                | 25.6 | 132          | 56.4 | 42               | 17.9 |
| Periodicals          | 38                | 16.2 | 128          | 54.7 | 68               | 29.1 |
| Electronic resources | 32                | 13.7 | 78           | 33.3 | 124              | 53.3 |
| Archival materials   | 60                | 25.6 | 126          | 53.8 | 48               | 20.5 |

Respondents were required to indicate their level of satisfaction with the available resources in the library, Table 3 above shows that except for electronic resources which had 53.3% of respondents indicating they were not satisfied with their content, most of the respondents were satisfied with all the other resources provided.

**Table 4. Challenges encountered by users in the use of reference services in the library**

| <b>Statement on problems affecting reference services.</b>             | <b>Yes<br/>%</b> | <b>No<br/>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| The reference environment is not conducive                             | 58.5             | 41.5            |
| Reference materials are not easily located and retrieved easily.       | 32.1             | 67.9            |
| The number of reference books is not adequate for users in the library | 45.7             | 54.3            |
| Most of the reference materials are outdated                           | 45.3             | 54.7            |
| The available space is not adequate                                    | 32.9             | 67.1            |
| The opening hours are not convenient                                   | 29.5             | 70.5            |
| The closing hours are not convenient                                   | 49.6             | 50.4            |
| Photocopiers are not available in the library                          | 60.7             | 39.3            |
| The electronic resources and services are not adequate                 | 62.8             | 37.2            |
| Printers are not available in the library for users                    | 69.2             | 30.8            |
| Some library staff are not skillful                                    | 5.1              | 94.9            |
| Some library staff are not easily approachable                         | 15.8             | 84.2            |

The result from Table 4 shows that the major problems respondents encounter in their use of reference services at the NAFTI library are; the reference environment not conducive (58.5%), lack of photocopiers in the library (60.7%), inadequate electronic resources and services (62.8%) and lack of printing facilities (69.2%).



**Figure 4: Overall quality of services provided**

The results presented in Figure 4 suggest that 82.5 % of the respondents rated the quality of reference service provided at the National Film and Television Institute's library as either very effective or effective. While 17.1 % rated the quality of reference service provided ineffective, 0.4% rated it as very ineffective.

**Table 5. Suggestions for improving reference services**

| Statements on strategies for improving problems                                                                  | Yes  | No   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
|                                                                                                                  | %    | %    |
| Library users should be educated on the relevance of the reference services                                      | 40.6 | 59.4 |
| Library users should be informed on how to use the reference resources                                           | 59.8 | 40.2 |
| Reference staff should be trained to acquire the needed skills to perform effectively and efficiently.           | 45.7 | 54.3 |
| More reading areas should be provided for library users                                                          | 50.4 | 49.6 |
| Appropriate technology should be provided for accessing electronic resources and provision of reference services | 65.4 | 34.6 |
| The library should extend the opening hours                                                                      | 59.4 | 40.6 |

From the responses received from the respondents as recommendations to improve reference service provision as shown in Table 5, recommendations on electronic reference sources and services received the highest percentage of 65.4% among the comments provided. This was followed by user education with 59.8% and extension of opening hours with 59.4%.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings show that faculty and students generally do not frequently utilize the reference section of the library as less than a quarter (15.4%) use reference resources daily while a little more than a quarter (36.8%) use the reference resources weekly. This is an indication that either faculty and students do not appreciate the relevance of the reference resources, or the resources available in the reference section are inadequate hence their lack of interest.

This also indicates that faculty and students are not making use of personalized services as described by Udensi and Akor (2014) and Evarest (2008) provided in the library to meet their

information needs. This may perhaps be an indication that the library users are not fully aware of the reference services available as over 50% of them recommended that they need to be given user education. The current situation where the reference services provided at the NAFTI library are not fully utilized is not the best as this does not market the library and the work of the reference librarian very well.

Regarding the types of reference services available at the NAFTI library, the findings reveal the users benefit from most of the standardized reference services described by Amaeshi (2003), Ifidon and Ifidon (2008), Kumar (2007) including; reader's advisory services, user education services, current awareness services ready reference services, research consultancy through a subject specialist. This finding confirms the assertion by Evarest (2008) that reference services in academic libraries can take different forms and will demand creativity from the reference librarian. NAFTI library however did not provide interlibrary loan and document delivery services, computerized literature searches and photocopying and printing services.

It is interesting to note that, the findings reveal that majority of respondents evaluated most of the reference services provided at the National Television Institute (NAFTI) to its users as adequate and satisfactory and the resources provided useful but do not use them regularly.

However, the findings identified some major challenges that the users encounter with reference service provision at the library under study. Prominent among these challenges is the lack of electronic reference service provision and inadequate electronic resources. This is a major shortfall in reference service provision in an academic library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was revealed by the study that no form of electronic reference service is available to users. This is contrary to what is happening across the globe where academic libraries are adopting social media for timeless reference service provision as noted by Chu & Du (2012) and Steiner (2012).

The adoption of computer technology for reference service provision is a widespread phenomenon in Africa also (Okite-Amughero, 2017; Ahenkrah- Marfo, 2015).

The study also revealed that due to the unavailability of electronic reference services, the users solely depend on the physical library space to use the library. Over 50% of the respondents however noted that the reference environment and the closing time of the library are not conducive for them.

There is also the challenge of lack of electronic resources and lack of printers which is similar to Okafor (2012)'s finding that lack of electronic resources and inadequate photocopiers are part of the major challenges encountered by libraries in their reference service provision in Nigeria.

Despite the challenges identified, the staff at the National Film and Television Institute's library seem to be doing a good job as the majority of the respondents rated the overall quality of reference service provided effectively. Over 90% of users found the staff to be skillful at their work and over 80% also found the staff to be approachable. This is a boost to the image of reference service provision as it has been noted by Fabunmi (2004), Ifidon and Ugwuanyi (2013), McKay et al. (2003) that both professional and personal competencies affect the quality of reference service provision.

## **Conclusion**

The user communities in academic libraries are inundated with a lot of information and different tools that require the learning of new skills in order for users to be able to utilize available information resources. The work of the reference librarian to help users in a such a time cannot be over-emphasized.

The study brought to the fore the extent of assistance users of the NAFTI library receives from the reference section of the library. As clearly indicated by the users, the library in its attempt to assist users, provides several reference services but unfortunately, these services are not made available to users through any of the current electronic technologies available. To benefit from the services of the reference department one has to visit the library. This is an indication that the NAFTI library has not taken advantage of available technology to promote the use of its reference resources and services.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings of the study, the researchers are making the following recommendations:

1. The NAFTI library as a matter of urgency should adopt the use of electronic platforms to provide reference services. This will enable several users to benefit from the services without visiting the library and will also boost the image of the library.
2. There should be adequate user education given to both students and staff. A strategy should be developed to make user education and training a continuous activity of the library. This will help increase patronage of the services provided.
3. Efforts should be made to make photocopying and printing services available to users. This will help meet the needs of users as well as generate some income for the library.
4. Users judge available electronic resources as inadequate. To help solve this problem, funds should be made available to subscribe to additional databases. The library should also scout for Open Access databases that are relevant to its users and make them available.

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