



ASSESSMENT OF READERS' SERVICE IN SELECTED ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN BAUCHI STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed readers' service delivery in selected academic libraries in Bauchi State, Nigeria. Four objectives guided the research: to determine the extent of efficiency in charging and discharging systems, the quality of reference service delivery, the accessibility and utilization of reserve book collections, and the effectiveness of shelving and shelf-reading practices. The study adopted a survey design, with a sample of 420 respondents drawn from a population of 12,093 registered library users using Yamane's (1967) formula. A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection, and responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentage scores. Findings revealed that charging and discharging processes operated at a low level of efficiency, while reference service delivery was reported to be at a very low extent. Reserve book collections, however, were relatively more accessible and utilized, while shelving and shelf-reading practices were ineffective and inaccurate. The study recommends the adoption of automated circulation systems to improve charging and discharging, proactive and user-friendly approaches in reference services, and the introduction of consistent shelf-reading routines supported by staff training.

Keywords: reader services, circulation, reference services, reserve collections, shelving, academic libraries, Bauchi State

INTRODUCTION

Information plays a critical role in the development of individuals, organizations, institutions, and nations. The benefits of information are only realized when the right information is

delivered to the right user at the right time. Valid information is foundational to knowledge, which in turn is a prerequisite for development. For this reason, an institution's library, whose primary role is the dissemination of information, is invaluable through both its books and non-book materials.

Academic libraries are integral to tertiary institutions—universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and research institutes—and serve as hubs where scholarship pivots. They provide indispensable instruments for intellectual growth, providing information storage and access for students and faculty alike (Oladele & Nweke, 2025). Librarians' core function often centers on information dissemination, especially in an era dominated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which allows libraries not only to serve on-site users but also remote or virtual users (“Information Management in the Academic Environment,” 2024).

Among services in an academic library, *Reader's Services* represent the major front where the library and its users interact. The materials prepared by other library units—collection development, processing, bindery, administration—are brought into use via Reader's Services. Both professional and non-professional librarians engage directly with users through Reader's Services, sometimes called the “Public Services” arm of the library. Like a salesperson who interacts with customers in a factory's product pipeline, Reader's Services is how library inputs become usable outputs for users. A modern academic library proactively anticipates user expectations and strives to provide resources and services that meet those expectations.

Reader's Services include schemes designed to allow users unfettered access to library resources. When users visit a library, their expectations are high—if these expectations aren't met, dissatisfaction and frustration follow. Lending services (charging and discharging), reference services, reserve collections, shelving, shelf-reading and current awareness all form part of these readers' services. Lending involves the processes whereby library materials are loaned to users and then returned, including policies for overdue fines or lost items. Reference services involve direct assistance (in-person, virtual, or via other media) to users seeking information, including guidance in finding resources, answering queries, or directing users to outside resources (“Leveraging Open Data for Reference Services Delivery in Academic Libraries,” 2024). Shelving and shelf-reading ensure that materials are physically organized and retrievable; cataloguing and classification enable users to know what is available, where it is, and how to access it.

However, preliminary observations of academic libraries in Bauchi State (for example, at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Aminu Saleh College of Education Azare, and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic Bauchi) suggest performance in these areas falls short of ideal standards.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Effective service delivery in libraries depends heavily on satisfying users' needs. The degree to which a library is utilized in supporting learning and research is significantly related to how well it can provide accurate, timely, and equitable information services. Readers' Services in academic libraries are crucial in shaping user satisfaction, institutional reputation, and academic success.

It appears, however, that several academic libraries in Bauchi State may not effectively recognize or implement these vital services. Possible issues include poor organization of shelves, unclear location or availability of resources, inadequate responsiveness in reference services, and lack of knowledge among users about available services. Such gaps may hinder users from using library services, or push them to alternative sources outside the library, potentially affecting academic performance. There is, therefore, need to assess *how* these services are delivered, *what* obstacles exist, and *to what extent* users are satisfied.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to:

1. Evaluate the efficiency of the charging/discharging (lending) system in academic libraries in Bauchi State.
2. Assess the quality of reference service delivery based on user-reported outcomes in academic libraries in Bauchi State.
3. Measure accessibility to and utilization of reserve book collections via user engagement in academic libraries in Bauchi State.
4. Examine the effectiveness of shelving and shelf-reading practices using accuracy and order benchmarks in academic libraries in Bauchi State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is the charging/discharging system in academic libraries in Bauchi State efficient?

2. What is the extent of quality of reference service delivery as reported by users in academic libraries in Bauchi State?
3. To what extent are reserve book collections accessible and utilized in academic libraries in Bauchi State?
4. To what extent are shelving and shelf-reading practices effective and accurate in academic libraries in Bauchi State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Efficiency of the charging/discharging (lending) system in academic libraries

Recent literature shows that circulation efficiency in academic libraries depends heavily on two interlinked factors: (1) the extent of ILS (Integrated Library System) adoption and proper configuration, and (2) staff capacity and procedural clarity. Studies of Nigerian academic libraries repeatedly report hybrid workflows (part manual, part electronic) that introduce transaction delays and record inaccuracies; where open-source ILS such as Koha are implemented and correctly configured, circulation accuracy and speed improve markedly (Tella & Olajide, 2020). However, successful ILS implementation requires staff training, reliable power/internet, and institutional commitment — otherwise libraries continue to operate inefficiently despite having software installed (Tella & Olajide, 2020).

Empirical surveys conducted since 2020 highlight common operational bottlenecks: long borrower registration procedures, slow loan/return processing, weak fine/overdue enforcement, and poor borrower-record maintenance — problems that reduce user satisfaction and increase loss/damage rates (Tom-George, 2022; regional repository summaries). Many authors recommend a phased ILS rollout (start with circulation module), clear circulation policies, and short targeted training sessions for circulation staff to secure quick wins (Tom-George, 2022). These recommended practical steps align closely with your study's finding that charging/discharging is currently at a low extent in the surveyed Bauchi libraries.

Cost-sensitive approaches are emphasized in the region's literature: adopting open-source ILS (Koha, Evergreen) or modular solutions, combined with barcode-based circulation, yields measurable improvements in check-in/out speed and record accuracy without huge capital outlay (comparative Koha/Evergreen reviews). The literature also notes that automation alone is insufficient; policy clarity (loan periods, fines), patron awareness campaigns, and routine

systems maintenance are necessary to sustain efficiency gains (Koha comparative studies, 2020).

Quality of reference service delivery based on user-reported outcomes

The research since 2020 indicates a mixed picture for reference services in Nigerian academic libraries. User surveys and institutional studies show that while librarians in many institutions continue to respond to direct reference queries, proactive reference services such as Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) are often under-resourced and low in coverage (Tom-George, 2022; Mensah, 2023). Users therefore report that the libraries are able to answer straightforward queries but fall short in providing sustained, proactive information support that anticipates research and teaching needs (Ezeani-type regional reviews summarized in recent studies).

The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated a rapid interest in digital/virtual reference. Studies from 2020–2024 describe pilots of email, web form, chat, and WhatsApp-based reference services in Nigerian universities; results show that digital reference increases reach and convenience but only where infrastructure, staff skills, and promotion are adequate (Ahmed, 2024; Mensah, 2023). Key barriers include low staff confidence in digital search tools, inadequate internet access, and limited promotional outreach — which together suppress user uptake even when services exist. The literature therefore emphasizes capacity building (training in online search techniques and virtual reference etiquette), minimal but maintainable digital channels, and simple metrics (monthly query counts, response time) to monitor quality (Ahmed, 2024; Mensah, 2023).

Several authors also link reference quality to broader collection currency and discovery: poor currency of reference collections, weak OPAC discoverability, and gaps in e-resource subscriptions reduce the impact of any reference interaction because librarians are limited by what they can access and recommend (Tom-George, 2022). Consequently, improving reference service quality typically runs in parallel with collection development and improved discovery tools.

Accessibility to and utilization of reserve book collections via user engagement

Course reserves (short-loan/high-demand holdings) continue to be among the most heavily used library services in resource-constrained academic contexts. Recent studies and practice notes indicate that reserve collections are highly valued by students who cannot afford textbooks; where reserves are visible and well-managed they significantly support academic

success (course-reserve guides and regional studies). Empirical results (2020–2024) show higher usage rates for reserve items when libraries expose reserve holdings clearly in their discovery systems (OPAC/reserves page) and when they coordinate with faculty to place high-demand texts on reserve (institutional guides).

Digitization of reserve materials (e-reserves) has been presented as a high-impact improvement in recent literature — offering 24/7 access and alleviating physical copy constraints — but it comes with copyright compliance, scanning capacity, and storage considerations (best-practice guides). Studies report that where e-reserve pilots were implemented with clear copyright procedures, student access and satisfaction rose markedly; however, barriers include limited scanning staff/time and unclear copyright policies at institutional level (practical guides and comparative reports). For Bauchi State libraries, the literature suggests prioritizing discoverability (OPAC metadata for reserves), short loan policies for high-demand physical copies, and targeted e-reserve pilots for the most used course texts.

Monitoring user engagement with reserves (usage stats, peak-time demand logs, course linkage) is a recurring recommendation: reserve statistics provide strong evidence for purchasing additional copies, digitizing items, or lobbying faculty to adjust reading lists — a pragmatic, data-driven approach found in recent institutional reports.

Effectiveness of shelving and shelf-reading practices using accuracy and order benchmarks

Shelving accuracy and regular shelf-reading remain foundational to physical resource discoverability. Regional empirical work (2021–2023) documents that mis-shelving, irregular shelf audits, and insufficient shelving staff all reduce findability and increase user frustration (shelving studies in Kwara and other Nigerian states). These studies consistently report that weekly shelf-reading routines, use of trained shelvees or student assistants, improved signage, and simple shelf audit checklists deliver measurable improvements in retrieval accuracy (Ajibade; Busayo; Quest Journals reports).

Technological interventions — barcode tagging, better OPAC displays that show call numbers and shelf locations clearly, and (where budgets permit) RFID — are recommended in the literature as medium-term improvements. Comparative reviews show that barcoding combined with disciplined shelf-reading and periodic inventories yields substantial reductions in mis-shelving incidents even before higher-cost RFID is considered (Koha/Evergreen functionality reviews; tech adoption notes). Importantly, most authors stress that technology must be paired with staffing and routine workflows to be effective.

Finally, several studies advocate for integrating shelf accuracy metrics into routine KPIs (e.g., percentage of correct placements from spot-checks, average retrieval time) to make shelving performance visible to library management and justify staffing/resource decisions. This aligns with international good practice and was repeatedly recommended in regional reports as a low-cost governance improvement.

METHODOLOGY

The target population of the study comprises the registered users of three academic libraries in Bauchi State—Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, and Aminu Saleh College of Education Azare—totaling 12,093 as of the 2023 academic session. Sample size was determined using Yamane’s (1967) formula, yielding 420 respondents, apportioned among the libraries proportional to their user populations.

Library	Target Population	Sample Size
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Library, Bauchi	8,413	269
Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic Library, Bauchi	460	48
Aminu Saleh College of Education Library, Azare	3,220	103
Total	12,093	420

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of **420** questionnaires were administered; **372** were returned and usable (an **88.6%** response rate), while **48** were not returned (11.4%). Analysis is based on the 372 valid responses: 241 (64.8%) from ATBU, 33 (8.9%) from ATAP, and 98 (26.3%) from ASCOE Azare.

RQ1 — To what extent is the charging/discharging system in academic libraries in Bauchi State efficient?

Table 1 — Efficiency of Charging & Discharging System (n = 372)

Item	High extent (HE)	Moderate extent (ME)	Low extent (LE)	Very low extent (VLE)
Borrowing process	30 (8%)	34 (9%)	167 (45%)	141 (38%)

Item	High extent (HE)	Moderate extent (ME)	Low extent (LE)	Very low extent (VLE)
Management of borrowers' records	89 (24%)	153 (41%)	89 (24%)	41 (11%)
Surcharging / payment of overdue fines or loss process	26 (7%)	45 (12%)	123 (33%)	178 (48%)

Your data show that the majority of users rate the borrowing process and overdue/fine procedures poorly (45% low extent + 38% very low extent on borrowing; 48% very low for overdue processes). Only the management-of-records item had a relatively higher moderate/high response, suggesting partial record systems exist but other parts of the workflow are weak. This pattern — partial automation or limited ILS uptake, inconsistent enforcement of circulation policies, and long manual processes — is consistent with findings that Koha and other ILS rollouts improve circulation when properly adopted, but many libraries still operate hybrid/manual processes that create delays and errors (Tella & Olajide, 2020). Implementing or optimizing an ILS, clear circulation policies, and staff training are repeatedly recommended as cost-effective fixes to the problems your respondents described.

RQ2 — What is the extent of quality of reference service delivery as reported by users in academic libraries in Bauchi State?

Table 2 — Quality of Reference Services (n = 372)

Item	High extent (HE)	Moderate extent (ME)	Low extent (LE)	Very low extent (VLE)
Ready reference services	56 (15%)	115 (31%)	149 (40%)	52 (14%)
Current awareness services (CAS)	26 (7%)	56 (15%)	100 (27%)	190 (51%)
Selective dissemination of information (SDI)	22 (6%)	41 (11%)	89 (24%)	220 (59%)
Reference librarians answering queries	119 (32%)	208 (56%)	26 (7%)	19 (5%)

Overall, users perceive reference services to be weak: ready reference, CAS, and SDI are largely at low/very low extent, while query answering shows a better moderate response — suggesting librarians attempt to answer queries but are constrained in providing

proactive/current awareness services. This aligns with evaluations of Nigerian academic libraries that found variable adoption of digital/virtual reference and generally low levels of CAS/SDI activity unless deliberately resourced (Madu, 2024). The COVID-era push toward digital reference created new opportunities, but successful digital reference depends on infrastructure, staff training, and active promotion — gaps your respondents appear to be experiencing. Priorities are targeted staff training on reference techniques, modest digital reference tools (email, web forms, WhatsApp/chat), and simple metrics to track CAS/SDI uptake.

RQ3 — To what extent are reserve book collections accessible and utilized in academic libraries in Bauchi State?

Table 3 — Accessibility & Utilization of Reserve Collections (n = 372)

Item	High extent (HE)	Moderate extent (ME)	Low extent (LE)	Very low extent (VLE)
Access points to reserve collections	216 (58%)	115 (31%)	22 (6%)	19 (5%)
Ability to access reserve book availability	75 (20%)	130 (35%)	115 (31%)	52 (14%)
Borrowing process for reserve books	123 (33%)	167 (45%)	52 (14%)	30 (8%)
Reserve books meeting information needs	171 (46%)	123 (33%)	48 (13%)	30 (8%)

Reserve collections appear to be the strongest service area in your dataset: a majority report high access-point accuracy (58%) and that reserve books meet their information needs (46% high + 33% moderate). This matches broad findings that course reserves (short-loan/high-demand systems) are highly valued by students — especially where textbook costs or limited copies restrict student purchase (Catholic University Library, 2023). Library practice that increases discoverability (OPAC records for reserves, visible reserves web pages), short loan windows for high-demand texts, and faculty collaboration all raise reserve utilization. Digitized reserves (where copyright allows) further boost access. For Bauchi libraries, formalizing reserves workflows, improving OPAC/reserves metadata, and tracking reserve loan statistics will reinforce this positive service area.

RQ4 — To what extent are shelving and shelf-reading practices effective and accurate in academic libraries in Bauchi State?

Table 4 — Shelving & Shelf-Reading Effectiveness (n = 372)

Item	High extent (HE)	Moderate extent (ME)	Low extent (LE)	Very low extent (VLE)
Ease of searching/retrieving books on shelf	52 (14%)	60 (16%)	160 (43%)	100 (27%)
Library catalogue directing readers to shelf	52 (14%)	134 (36%)	141 (38%)	45 (12%)
Atmosphere conducive for reading	119 (32%)	130 (35%)	82 (22%)	41 (11%)
Accuracy of shelving by class mark	52 (14%)	120 (32%)	170 (46%)	30 (8%)

Your responses indicate substantial problems with findability and shelf accuracy: large shares rate retrieval ease and shelving accuracy as low. The catalogue often fails to reliably direct users to the shelf (only 14% high). This pattern is consistent with Nigerian studies that document mis-shelving, insufficient shelf-reading routines, and staffing shortages as principal causes of low shelf accuracy (Ajibade, 2023). Practical remedies used elsewhere include scheduled shelf-reading rosters, employing trained shelvers or student assistants, better signage, improving OPAC call-number displays, barcoding for faster check-in/out, and periodic inventories. Where budgets permit, phased technology (barcoding first; later RFID) plus consistent shelf audits produce measurable improvements.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings: Charging and discharging of library materials in the academic libraries studied is largely inefficient, with many users dissatisfied with processes for borrowing, record keeping, overdue penalties, and material returns. Reference services are provided at very low levels overall, failing to meet user expectations in areas like current awareness, selective dissemination, and assistance with queries. Reserve book services are relatively strong; reserve collections are reasonably accessible, utilized, and helpful in meeting information needs. Shelving and shelf-reading practices are weak, with poor accuracy, disorganization, and difficulty in resource retrieval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Charging/Discharging:** adopt/optimize an ILS (e.g., Koha), publish clear circulation policies, train circulation staff, and run a short user awareness campaign about borrowing rules.
2. **Reference Services:** hold targeted workshops on reference (including CAS/SDI), implement a simple digital reference channel (email/WhatsApp/form) and collect monthly usage stats to monitor improvement.
3. **Reserve Collections:** formalize reserve intake and OPAC metadata, explore e-reserve for high-demand texts (respecting copyright), and liaise with faculty to list required readings.
4. **Shelving & Shelf-reading:** institute routine shelf-reading schedules, create a simple shelf audit checklist, improve OPAC call-number display, and consider barcode tagging as the first technology step.

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