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## LIBRARIANS' PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND REFERENCE SERVICE DELIVERY IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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**LIBRARIANS' PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND REFERENCE SERVICE DELIVERY  
IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines librarian's professional ethics and reference service delivery in Colleges of Education in Delta and Edo States in south-south, Nigeria. To guide the study, three research questions and one hypothesis have been formulated. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The purposive sampling technique has been employed in the selection of data while the instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was estimated using test-retest method and the coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. Simple frequency and percentage were used to analyse section A of the research instrument. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency and mean distribution were used to analyse the research questions. The hypothesis was tested using Cronbach Alpha correlation coefficient method at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the research showed that there is significant relationship between librarian's professional ethics and reference service delivery in Colleges of Education in Delta and Edo States.

## Introduction

Ethics is a field of study addressing the principles of morality based on right and wrong actions and decisions that occur within society (Salman, Ocholla & Mostert,2013). Access to and the use of information resources and services in colleges of Education libraries are examined with a view to level of reference service provided by librarians. In another development, Mutula cited in Jiyane (2013) opined that ethic refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that proscribe what humans ought to do, usually in forms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness or specific virtues. There exist some professional codes of conduct that will, when adhered to strictly, bring advancement in librarianship. According to the Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria (2014), professions are described as 'having characteristics such as mastery of esoteric skills'. A profession is a calling, admission to which special training, education and character is required. An individual and collective concern for the common good is often included in this list of professional attributes.

The International Federation of Library Association and Institution (IFLA) makes it explicit that, the role of information institution that includes libraries and librarians, in modern society is to support the optimization of the recording and representation of information and to provide access to it. Information service is the interest of social, cultural and economic well-being of librarianship and therefore librarians have social responsibility (IFLA, 2012). Deriving from this document is the summary of the ethics which, librarians and other information workers are to uphold.

1. Access to information: to this end the core mission of librarians and other information workers is to ensure access to information for all personal and societal development.

2. Responsibilities towards individual and society: provision of equitable services, promote social inclusion and eradicate discrimination.
3. Privacy, secrecy and transparency: librarians and other information workers should respect personal privacy and the protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions. They are enjoined to deal with corruption and other vices in the public interest.
4. Support for Open Access and Intellectual Property: librarians and other information workers are to ensure that both users' right and creators' rights are respected. They seek appropriate and necessary limitations and exceptions of libraries and in particular, seek to limit the expansion of copyright terms.
5. Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills regarding collection access and service: they seek to acquire balanced collection, maintain unbiased stance regarding service and seek the highest standards of professional excellence.
6. Colleague and employer/ employee relationship: librarians and other information workers should seek to treat each other with fairness and respect. They should strive to earn reputation and status based on their professionalism and ethical behaviour.

At this juncture in world history, the statement by IFLA is instructive about the interest of Library and Information Science professionals the world over to serve humanity assiduously with fairness and justice irrespective of race, creed or colour. It goes further to reveal that the profession is leaving no stone unturned to ensure that society gets the best of them. By this, Library and Information Science profession recognises its extremely important position in society that it is critical to carry out its mission in an ethical manner and as such is prepared to stir humanity to the pinnacle of their advancement.

In Nigeria, professional librarian ethics are codified in the Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria. In the preamble to the document articulated by the Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria, it is stated inter-alia 'that librarians and information scientists are imbued to serve people through the provision of access to quality information resources in either print or electronic formats through which people's standard of living are actualised, education sustained, sound decisions are made and executed, freedom of expression is enhanced and information resources are preserved for posterity. The foregoing statement provides the rationale for Library and Information service in Nigeria. The Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria invoked the UNDHR 1948, as indication that it concurs with IFLA's code of ethics.

In the same vein, Buchanam and Henderson (2009), insisted that 'there still exist a host of traditional and emerging ethical problems, conundrums and sometimes insoluble dilemmas, including protection of physical and intellectual property, conflict of interest, censorship, overbearing peers, personnel and administrators who sometimes become bullies make anomalous rules and agreement that delimit access to information'. In the view of Odero (2012), 'these codes of ethics determine the limits of acceptable conduct and point out actions as right and wrong in the occupation'. Similarly, Vaagan (2002), averred that 'such code provide members with not only a sense of identity but also with a basis for consistent ethical behaviour, thus serving as a frame of reference for decision making which is impersonal and objective'.

Librarian's professional ethics should influence optimal reference service delivery. Therefore, reference service is defined as the ability of the reference librarian to strive within and outside available resources to provide answers to reference queries. Meanwhile, reference services rendered in academic libraries include: Abstracting services, indexing services, photocopying services, Information services, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and Users

Instruction services. The resources/sources used for these reference and information services may include Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Directories, Manuals and Handbook, Maps, Bibliographies, Biographies, Yearbooks, Almanacs and online resources. However the methods employed in rendering these services are: Answering of query, Telephone, Fax, E-mail, internet, Readers advisory services, verification, Referral services, Inter-library loans, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Data base Searches and Library Instructions programme.

Reference librarians are the image makers for the library and the link between the library, library resources, and library patrons. They are the individuals to ask when a patron does not know who to ask, or need to look for specific information and do not know where to begin. The reference librarian interprets information sources to library users and how to explore them.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine librarian, professional ethics and reference service delivery in Colleges of Education in Delta and Edo States.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the foregoing, the following research questions have being raised to guide this study:

- i. To what extent are reference services rendered?
- ii. What are the professional ethics displayed by the librarians to promote reference service delivery?
- iii. To what extent are the professional ethics possessed by the librarians?

### **Hypothesis**

- ii. There is no significant relationship between professional ethics displayed by reference librarians and the delivery of reference services

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population consist of 154 librarians working in the libraries of colleges of Education in Delta and Edo states. All the returned copies of the questionnaire were found useful for the study and constituted the data collated for the study. The purposive sampling technique has been employed in the selection of data while the instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was estimated using test-retest method and the coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. The hypothesis was tested using Cronbach Alpha correlation coefficient method at 0.05 level of significance. Simple frequency and percentage were used and descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency and mean distribution were used to analyse the research questions

### Analysis of the Bio-data of the Respondents

This section is restricted to the discussion of the bio-data of the respondents pertaining to gender, name of the schools, and years of service. These are presented in Figure 1.

#### Figure 1. Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Data pertaining to the gender distribution of the respondents is presented in Figure 1

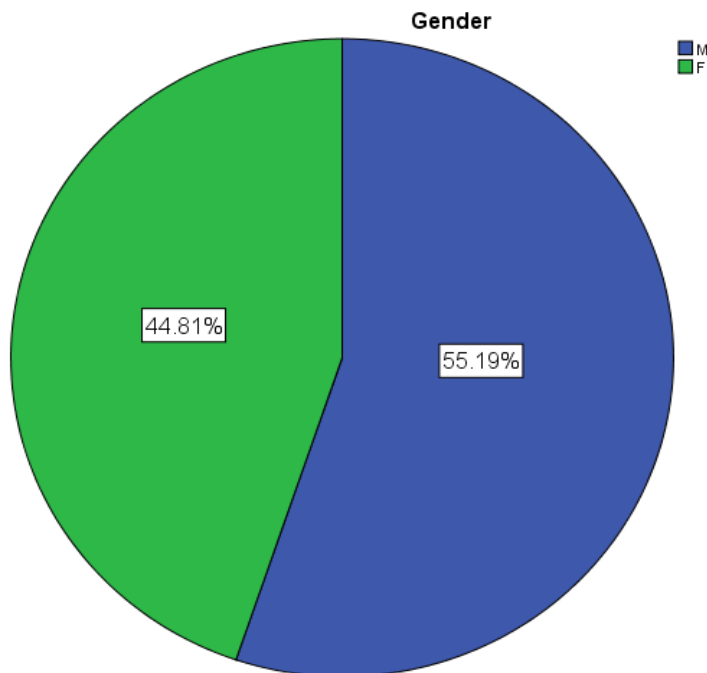
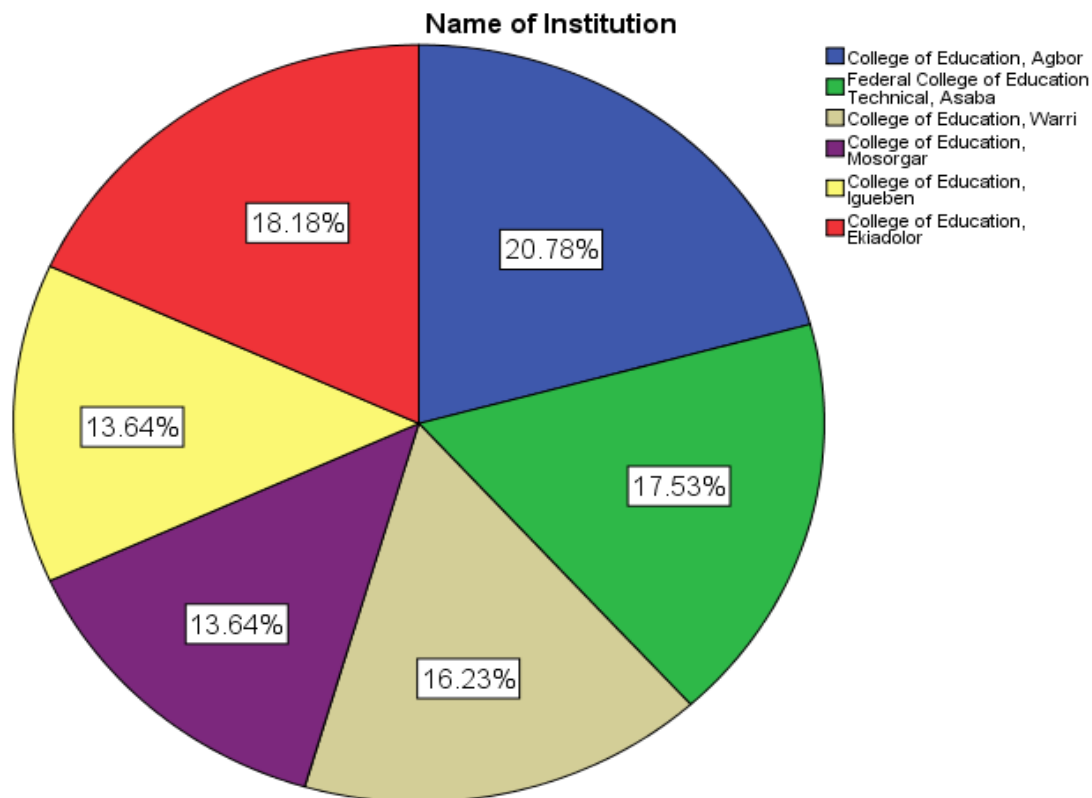


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

As shown in Figure 1, the male respondents (56.19%) were more than their female respondents which is (44.81%).

### Name of schools of the Respondents

Figure 2 presents data on the name of the institutions of the respondents



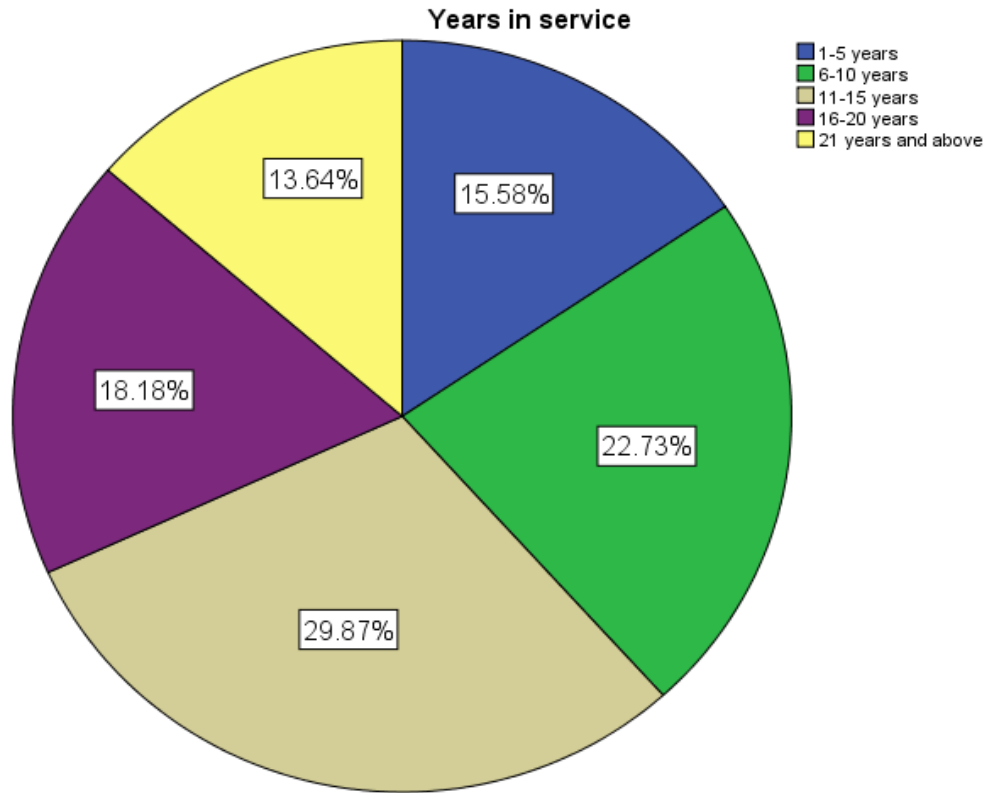
**Figure 2: Name of Institution**

As revealed in Figure 2, 20.78% of the respondents were from College of Education, Agbor, 18.18% from College of Education, Ekiadolor, 17.53% from Federal College of Education Technical, Asaba, 16.23% from College of Education, Warri, 13.64% from College of Education, Mosorgar, 13.64% from College of Education, Igueben, and 11.57% from College of Education, Agbor. This implies that there were more respondents from College of Education, Agbor than every other colleges of education.



## Years in service of Respondents

Data pertaining to the years in service of the respondents is presented in figure 3



**Figure 3: Distribution of Respondents by Years in service**

As revealed in Figure 3, 15.58% of the respondents had spent between 1-5 years in the library, 22.73% had spent between 6-10 years, 29.87% had spent between 11-15 years, 18.18% had spent between 16-20 years, and 13.64% had spent between 21 years and above. This means that the staff that had spent 11-15 years on the job had the highest population,.

## Answering of the Research Questions

**Research Question One:** To what extent are the reference services rendered?

### Table 1: Extent of the Reference Services Rendered

Services	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean
Arrangement of reference collections for ease of use	40	52	60	2	2.81
Current awareness services	31	51	52	20	2.59
answering questions and fulfilling user's information needs	33	54	40	27	2.55
indexing services	30	53	27	44	2.46
direct personal assistance to readers seeking information	23	49	50	32	2.41
Referral services	18	46	59	31	2.34
Selective Dissemination of Information	23	37	54	40	2.29
Library users' education	22	35	57	40	2.29
Abstracting services	19	37	60	38	2.29
Library-and-community linkage	12	36	71	35	2.18
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>					<b>2.42</b>
<b>Criterion mean</b>					<b>2.50</b>

Table 1 revealed the extent reference services are rendered in the colleges of education. Arrangement of reference collections for ease of use has mean of 2.81, followed by current awareness services 2.59, and answering questions and fulfilling user's information needs 2.55. However, reference services such as indexing services 2.46, direct personal assistance to readers seeking information 2.41, referral services 2.34, selective dissemination of information 2.29, library users' education 2.29, abstracting services 2.29, and library-and-community linkage 2.18, have mean values below average. Since the aggregate mean of 2.42 is less than the criterion

mean of 2.50, it can be said that the extent of reference services in the Colleges of Education is low.

### Research Question two

What are the professional ethics displayed by the librarians?

**Table 2: Professional Ethics Displayed by the Librarians**

Ethics	Yes		No		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development	143	92.86	11	7.14	154	100
Protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions	139	90.26	15	9.74	154	100
Provision of equitable services	137	88.96	17	11.04	154	100
Respect for personal privacy	134	88.90	20	14.10	154	100
Promotion of social inclusion and eradicate discrimination	126	81.82	28	18.18	154	100
Neutrality regarding collection access and service	126	81.82	28	18.18	154	100
Support for Open Access and Intellectual Property	118	76.62	36	23.38	154	100
Shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest	119	77.27	35	22.73	154	100
Personal integrity and professional skills	108	70.13	46	29.87	154	100
Treat library users with fairness and respect	102	66.23	52	33.77	154	100

Table 2 revealed the professional ethics displayed by the librarians. 143(92.86%) of the respondents indicated that ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development constitute professional ethic of reference librarians. This is followed by protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions 139(90.26%), provision of equitable services 137(88.96%), respect for personal privacy 130(88.90%), promotion of social inclusion and eradication of discrimination 126(81.82%), neutrality regarding collection access and service 126(81.82%), support for open access and intellectual property 118(76.62%), shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest 119(77.27%), personal integrity and professional skills 108(70.13%), and treat library users with fairness and respect 102(66.23%). This means that a good number of the respondents possessed professional ethics thus can provide reference service professionally.

### Research Question three

To what extent are the professional ethics exhibited by the librarians?

**Table 3: Extent of Ethics Exhibited by the Librarians**

Ethics	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean
Respect for personal privacy	4	73	77	0	3.46
Protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions	52	83	19	0	3.21
Neutrality regarding collection access and service	18	89	23	23	2.80
Provision of equitable services	45	41	49	19	2.75
Treat library users with fairness and respect	31	60	43	20	2.67
Ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development	24	47	66	17	2.54
Support for Open Access and Intellectual Property	31	38	44	41	2.44
Personal integrity and professional skills	19	44	69	22	2.41
Shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest	26	25	95	8	2.10
Promotion of social inclusion and eradicate discrimination	0	50	65	39	2.09

Aggregate mean	2.67
CriterionMean	2.50

Table 3 shows the extent of ethics exhibited by the librarians. Responses indicate mean of 3.46 for respect for personal privacy. This is followed by protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions 3.21, neutrality regarding collection access and service 2.80, provision of equitable services 2.75, treat library users with fairness and respect 2.67, ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development 2.54, support for open access and intellectual property 2.44, personal integrity and professional skills 2.41, shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest 2.10, and Promotion of social inclusion and eradicate discrimination 2.09. Hence, the professional ethics exhibited by the librarians are respect for personal privacy, protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions, neutrality regarding collection access and service, provision of equitable services, treat library users with fairness and respect, ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development, support for open access and intellectual property, personal integrity and professional skills, shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest and promotion of social inclusion and eradicate discrimination.

## **Testing of the Hypothesis**

### **Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant relationship between professional ethics displayed by reference librarians and reference services delivery.

### **Table 4: Relationship between Professional Ethics Displayed by Reference Librarians and Reference Services Delivery**

		Professional ethics	Reference services delivery
Professional ethics	Pearson Correlation	1	.753**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034
	N	154	154
Reference services delivery	Pearson Correlation	.753**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	
	N	154	154

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 4 Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient  $r = 0.753$ . Since the significant value (Sig.2-tailed) is 0.034 (which is less than 0.05), it can therefore be concluded that there is significant relationship between professional ethics and reference services delivery. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between professional ethics displayed by reference librarians and reference services delivery.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings on the extents of reference services rendered revealed that reference services rendered by librarians in colleges of education in Delta and Edo States are very low. This is against the background of Katz (2012), who maintained that the reference librarian engages in person-to-person services. They interact with library users and interview them to be able to articulate their information needs clearly. Hence, there is a clarion call on librarians and

information practitioners in general to improve on rendering of reference services in colleges of Education in Edo and Delta States.

The findings on the professional ethics displayed by the librarians indicated that librarians possessed professional ethics. Research question two indicated that professional ethics displayed by the librarians are ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development , protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions, provision of equitable services, respect for personal privacy, promotion of social inclusion and eradicate discrimination , neutrality regarding collection access and service, support for open access and intellectual property, Shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest, personal integrity and professional skills and treat library users with fairness and respect. Hypothesis tested showed that there is significant relationship between professional ethics and reference services delivery. This implies that there is a significant relationship between professional ethics displayed by reference librarians and reference services.

The result on the extent of professional ethics possessed by the librarians showed that professional ethics possessed by the librarians are high. Research question three tested revealed that professional ethics possessed by the librarians are respect for personal privacy, protection of personal data necessarily shared between individuals and institutions, neutrality regarding collection access and service, provision of equitable services, treat library users with fairness and respect, ensuring access to information for all personal and societal development, support for open access and intellectual property, personal integrity and professional skills, shunning corruption and other vices in the public interest and promotion of social inclusion and eradicate discrimination.

However, hypothesis tested showed that there is positive significant relationship between professional ethics and reference service delivery in colleges of education in Delta and Edo States. This implies that professional ethics affect reference service delivery. This is in consonance with a study carried out by Kats (2012), who stated that when there exists a gap in communication, and professional ethics reference services may not be effectively and efficiently utilised and delivered to information seekers.

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