

**ASSESSMENT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AT FEDERAL UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY LOKOJA.**

by
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Abstract

The aim of the paper was to access interpersonal communication within the library. To achieve this, four objectives were chosen. The quantitative research method was adopted with a survey research design. The population of the study comprises all registered students of the Federal University, Lokoja library. The population was randomly surveyed with the use of an online questionnaire, with a total of 126 responses. The study found that service delivery in federal university library Lokoja seems to be leaning towards a single pattern of interpersonal communication (Face to face interaction) which could mean the possible dearth of service delivery in the near future. The study suggested maximum attention from the librarians to carry out effective library services; building and maintenance of a friendly library environment, and reengineering of library services

Keywords: Library, Service Delivery, Interpersonal Communication, Library Users, Librarians

Introduction

Academic Librarianship is a service-oriented profession focused on meeting users' information needs. Academic libraries provide these services through varied services to meet their users' information needs. Information service delivery is one of the major functions of the library that enhances the efficiency and growth of library users. Uganneya (2011) posits that library and information service delivery is a set of mechanisms whose interactions determine library and information service effectiveness. The services rendered in the library include Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Cataloguing and Classification, User education, Current Awareness Services, Reference services, etc. which cannot be carried out except with effective communication. Akoh and Udensi (2013) posit that

service delivery is one of the most professional aspects of the librarian's responsibilities in which all librarians must properly understand and be able to offer personal assistance to a user in the pursuit of information, which can be done through interpersonal verbal or non-verbal communication. The emergence of new demands surrounding information and its delivery naturally dictates the need for libraries to meet these emerging user interests and desires, and to create a newer, more participatory type of user interaction (Kowalsky, 2013).

Interpersonal communication is an interactive process through which information is exchanged in a manner that stimulates mutual relationship, and understanding. Interpersonal communication in library services delivery is the process through which information, knowledge, idea, and messages are interpreted and conveyed from librarian to library user or from library user to librarian with perfect understanding of each other in a regular manner. According to Yildiz (2012); Ifidon and Ugwuanyi, (2013), Interpersonal communication is the exchange of meaning between individuals through a common system of symbols, emotions thoughts, and knowledge is transferred throughout the process of sharing of ideas, feelings thoughts, and messages with others on a common basis.

The service delivery performance and effectiveness of any library depend not only on how the individual service performs in isolation but also on how they interact with each other as elements of a collective system of knowledge and information dissemination and use and their interaction with other information resources base (Uganneya 2011). Kumar (2012) explained that most services delivered in university libraries are reference services, which is the provision of information on demand and indicates that the user who makes a specific request will be communicated answer to his query on-demand.

The importance of interpersonal communication in the library cannot be underestimated as it provides the opportunity for face-to-face interaction and relationships between the librarian and users for effective library service delivery. Interpersonal communication according to (Drago 2015) involves face-to-face interactions as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the digital world. Face-to-face interaction consists of both verbal and non-verbal communication where two or more people use words, signals, or body language to convey their message. Consistent and effective interpersonal communication helps to enhance individual goals and objectives in a very easy manner. Owoye and Dhunsi (2014) state that interpersonal communication is an indispensable force towards achieving individuals and organizational goals, an objective that facilitates the sharing of information, experience, and knowledge, the transmission of ideas, decision making, coordination, and interpretation of activities. Given Ranganathan's laws, the main mission of the library is to serve people through the establishment of good quality relationships with clients (Ashrafi-Rizi, et al., 2015). Hence, interpersonal interaction cannot be isolated from library operations as this enables librarians to engage in face-to-face interaction and understand the information needs of users more clearly for the effective rendering of efficient and satisfactory information services.

Statement of the Problem

Communication has remained a vital aspect of the library and information service because the librarian is in the business of providing services. To carry out this service there must be understanding from the two parties which can only be achieved through proper communication. However, this communication that fosters understanding and aids service delivery seems to be waning, with the proliferation of information resources and services on the web. Research has tried to address the issue of

improving library service with many solutions like enhancing the information literacy of users (Odigie et al., 2020), Despite all the research and recommendations, service delivery remains a critical issue within the library. This research is concerned with assessing the Interpersonal Communication at Federal University Library Lokoja.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include to:

1. ascertain the pattern of interpersonal communication utilized for library service delivery in the FUL library
2. examine the level of satisfaction derived from interpersonal communication in library service delivery in the FUL library
3. identify the barriers to effective interpersonal communications in the FUL library
4. determine strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication in Library service delivery in the FUL library

Literature Review

Ebijuwa, Salami, and Isamotu, (2016) evaluated users' perception and satisfaction with communication services in OlusegunOke Library, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Ogbomosho, Nigeria; the study revealed that users did not rank highly satisfied to any category of communication services, identified user's constraints encounter while using communication services include unwillingness of staff to help users, difficulty in retrieving reference materials as well as the ill effect of users' education on information literacy skills of users. Hussein and Mokhar's (2018)

study of the effectiveness of communication services and users' satisfaction with communication services in an academic library, reported that users' level of satisfaction was moderate and that users' satisfaction was greatly influenced by service accessibility, the responsiveness of librarians, and quality of answers provided in response to users' queries. Similarly, the findings of Yabanet, Gbaje, and Odigie, (2020) revealed that students attributed library visits and communication to the behavior of librarians.

Akor and Udensi (2013) in a study to ascertain interpersonal communication in rendering reference service in Nigeria. The study found out that lack of self-confidence made it difficult for the reference librarians to handle difficult questions from supposedly highly knowledgeable clients. Kwofie (2015) noted the poor listening habit of people not able to listen properly as contributing factors to ineffective interpersonal communication. He suggested people should learn to tolerate silence, concentrate on the speaker and observe body movements to improve communication. Nwalo (2003) considered a low level of education as a factor that affects effective interpersonal communication. He stressed that in the service delivery process it is the question of clarification process that helps in service being well delivered. This means that library staff, in their reference interview process, should take the level of education of their customers into consideration. Femi, (2018) posits that poor communication is a hindrance to effective work performance.

Kelly (2000) identified one of the barriers to effective interpersonal communication as perception. According to him, communication depends on the perception of the people; how they perceive things, like their motives, and intentions. Zhang (2007) enumerates cultural values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors shared by a group of people as a barrier to effective interpersonal communication. He believes that the way a person was nurtured and socialized influences the way he or

she presents messages, and this helped him or her to shape appropriate communication behaviors such as listening, speaking, silence, distance, and body language.

To curb these challenges, Kneen (2011) suggests that maximum attention should be employed during interaction by removing distractions during communication, being patient and not over hurry to move out without exploiting the full message or information the sender is passing to you, listening to understand rather than to oppose, asking questions to encourage the talker and show that you are listening, and holding your temper during interpersonal communication to enhance effective dissemination of information. Ndakalu (2014) suggests that the skills required in accessing the maximum potential of digital information services are much greater than those required for searching printed sources. LaRue (2012) firmly believes that the library's most powerful asset is its professional staff. According to him, librarians have the power to change lives and build community but to do this, they have to leave their desks, and acquire more skills. Librarians need to constantly learn a new skill to exhibit relevance with the changing information needs of users. To reverse the dwindling state of interpersonal communication services, Academic librarians must transform their approach (Martins, 2009). For library service to be effective and efficient there is the need to encourage a high level of staff confidence, reasonable workplace, and user-friendly environment to enhance excellent reference services and interpersonal communication.

Methodology

The study utilized a quantitative research methodology, with a survey research design for the investigation on Library Service delivery at the Federal University Lokoja. The population of the study comprised all students of the university who registered at the University Library for the session. The

population was randomly surveyed with the use of an online questionnaire on google forms. The questionnaire link was administered to students upon their visit to the library. The questionnaire responses were collected for eight (8) weeks totaling 126 responses. The responses from the questionnaire were downloaded and analyzed using charts, mean and standard deviation with benchmark mean ≥ 3.00 as agreed/satisfied and mean < 3.00 disagreed/dissatisfied respectively.

Results & Discussion

Interpersonal Communication used by Students in Interacting with Librarians

Table 1: Interpersonal Communication used to Interact with Librarians

S/N	Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Face – to – face interaction	76	42	3	3	2	4.48	0.80	Agreed
2	Email	34	39	18	24	11	3.48	1.31	Agreed
3	Social media	36	39	25	18	8	3.61	1.22	Agreed
4	Library Website	45	43	15	16	7	3.82	1.21	Agreed
5	Signs/signals/body language	24	32	24	25	21	3.10	1.37	Agreed
6	Text messages	26	41	21	28	10	3.36	1.26	Agreed
7	Writing	35	42	25	16	8	3.63	1.20	Agreed
Aggregate							3.64	1.20	

Benchmark: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agree, Mean < 3.00 = Disagree

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, N – Neutral, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree

Table 1 showed the respondents' opinions on the interpersonal communication used to interact with librarians in FUL Library. The table revealed mean response scores of 3.10 to 4.48. All the mean scores are greater than the benchmark mean of 3.00. This implies that all the identified patterns of interpersonal communication are utilized in interacting with librarians in FUL Library. In particular, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that face – to – face interaction is the major interpersonal communication method utilized in interacting with librarians as indicated by a high mean response score of 4.48 ± 0.80 . Utilization of Face-to-face as the major method of interaction is not

unconnected with the level of attention, relationship, and satisfaction students expect while interacting with a librarian especially when they visit the library.

Interpersonal communication according to (Drago, 2015) involves face-to-face interactions which are verbal and can be non-verbal. Narunsky-Laden (2015) observed that verbal communication helps to facilitate human cooperation, enables the sharing of information, intentions, and communicative conventions, which regulates social conduct and human relationships.

Level of Satisfaction Derived from Various Interpersonal Methods

Table 2: Levels of Satisfaction Derived from Interpersonal Communication in Library Service Delivery in FUL Library

S/N	Item	VS	S	N	D	VD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Face – to – face interaction	79	35	11	1	0	4.52	0.69	Satisfied
2	Email	21	57	33	12	3	3.64	0.95	Satisfied
3	Social media	23	51	29	15	5	3.62	1.07	Satisfied
4	Library Website	34	47	30	12	3	3.77	1.03	Satisfied
5	Signs/signals/body language	20	38	38	23	7	3.33	1.12	Satisfied
6	Text messages	23	43	40	15	5	3.51	1.05	Satisfied
7	Writing	32	43	35	13	3	3.70	1.04	Satisfied
Aggregate							3.73	0.99	

Benchmark: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Satisfied, Mean < 3.00 = Dissatisfied

Key: VS – Very Satisfied, S – Satisfied, N – Neutral, D – Dissatisfied, VD – Very Dissatisfied

Table 2 showed respondents' level of satisfaction derived from the interpersonal communication in library service delivery in FUL Library. The table revealed mean response scores ranging from 3.33 to 4.52. All the mean scores are higher than the benchmark mean of 3.00. By implication, students are satisfied with all the identified methods of interpersonal communication in FUL Library as indicated by an aggregate mean score of 3.73 which is greater than 3.00. It is evident from the table that students are very satisfied with face – to – face interaction as a method of interpersonal communication with the highest mean response score and standard deviation of 4.52 ± 0.69 . However, students derived least

satisfaction from signs/signals/body with mean score of 3.33. This shows that the importance of interpersonal communication in the library cannot be overemphasized as it provides the opportunity for direct face-to-face interaction and relationships between the librarian and users for effective library service delivery.

Similarly, Yusuf (2011) opines that interpersonal interaction cannot be isolated from library operations as it contributes to user satisfaction through face-to-face interaction with the librarian. Understanding the information needs of users more clearly enhances the effective rendering of efficient and satisfactory information services. Hussein and Mokhar (2018) also reported that students' satisfaction with communication services in academic libraries is influenced by service accessibility, the responsiveness of librarians, and quality of answers provided in response to the user's information needs.

Barriers to Effective Interpersonal Communication

Table 3: Barriers to Effective Interpersonal Communication

S/N	Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Lack of patience from the librarian	28	35	30	24	9	3.39	1.23	Agreed
2	Fear of approaching a Librarian	48	29	26	18	5	3.77	1.21	Agreed
3	Pride	18	26	27	38	17	2.92	1.28	Disagreed
4	Unfriendly attitude of a Librarian	29	27	31	22	17	3.23	1.35	Agreed
5	Social/ Peer influence	16	33	32	23	22	2.98	1.29	Disagreed
6	Lack of approach	26	32	29	24	15	3.24	1.31	Agreed
7	Lack of constant power supply, computer and internet based service	34	40	25	16	11	3.56	1.26	Agreed
Aggregate							3.30	1.28	

Benchmark: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agree, Mean < 3.00 = Disagree

The major barriers encountered by students from Table 3 is fear of approaching a librarian with a mean and standard deviation of 3.77 ± 1.21 respectively. The cumulative mean response of 3.30 ± 1.28

is an indication that all the identified barriers hinder effective interpersonal communication between students and librarians. Other barriers include; lack of constant power supply, computer and internet based services (3.56 ± 1.26), lack of patience from Librarians/Unwillingness of library staff to assist (3.39 ± 1.23) and lack of approach with mean response of 3.24 ± 1.31 . This shows that the students felt they were not given a friendly environment to have effective interpersonal communication and good relationship with librarians, as such they found it difficult to communicate certain information needs even from their comfort zones, due to lack of personal computers and internet service thereby leaving them helpless.

The result is in line with a study by (Luo & Buer, 2015) who found that there are cases where users avoid using the reference/communication services because they do not feel comfortable talking to the librarians. Similarly, Yabanet, Gbaje, and Odigie (2020) revealed that students attributed library visits and communication to the behavior of librarians. Okafor (2012) also, revealed that the challenges associated with interpersonal communication service provision are lack of skill on the part of reference staff and lack of electronic resources. Ebijuwá, Salami, and Isamotu, (2016) in their study identified user constraints encounter while using communication services including unwillingness of staff to help users, difficulty in retrieving reference materials as well as the ill effect of users' education on information literacy skills of users. Hence, librarians need to take note of the suggested strategies to enhance effective communication in library services in Table 4.

Strategies to Enhance Effective Interpersonal Communication

Table 4: Strategies to Enhance Effective Interpersonal Communication

S/N	Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Maximum attention from Librarian during interaction	86	32	8	0	0	4.62	0.61	Agreed

2	Patience from both parties(User and Librarian)	76	41	8	1	0	4.52	0.65	Agreed
3	Listening ear	73	44	9	0	0	4.51	0.63	Agreed
4	Conducting frequent training for library users	67	42	15	1	1	4.37	0.79	Agreed
5	Creation of user friendly environment	67	43	14	0	2	4.37	0.81	Agreed
6	Skilled Librarians	83	28	12	2	1	4.51	0.80	Agreed
	Aggregate						4.48	0.72	

Benchmark: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agree, Mean < 3.00 = Disagree

Table 4 showed respondents' opinion on strategies to enhance effective interpersonal communication in Library service delivery in FUL library. The students suggested that librarians should pay maximum attention during interaction as this item attracted the highest mean response of 4.62 ± 0.62 . Patience from both users and the librarians is another suggestion for effective interpersonal communication in library service delivery as indicated by mean response of 4.52 ± 0.65 . The aggregate mean of 4.48 ± 0.72 is an indication that respondents agreed to the identified items as barriers to effective interpersonal communication. These suggestions put into practice will enhance the communication process and provide effective satisfaction to users.

Kneen (2011) suggests that maximum attention should be employed during interaction by removing distractions during communication, being patient and not over hurry to move out without exploiting the full message or information the sender is passing to you, listening to understand rather than to oppose, asking questions to encourage the talker and show that you are listening, and holding your temper during interpersonal communication to enhance effective dissemination of information. Similarly, Emezie and Nwaohiri, (2013) suggest that the 21st-century librarian will have to be armed with competent skills that will enhance the provision of effective library services to meet clients' changing information needs. On the part of training, Ndakalu (2014) also suggests that users need to be

frequently trained as the skills required in accessing the maximum potential of digital information services are much greater than those required for searching printed sources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Interpersonal communication enhances easy and effective library service delivery, by enabling librarians to understand the information need of users, and providing users with skills and assistance in navigating and analyzing information, especially with the large number of electronic information resources on the internet. The following are the recommendations of the study;

1. Face-to-face interaction creates a form of relationship with librarians and users Notwithstanding, users should be enlightened on the importance of digital reference services as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC) to enable communication with librarians from the comfort of their homes and to avoid being limited to a pattern of communication
2. The librarian should maintain a friendly environment and attitude to attract users irrespective of the time and place
3. Maximum attention should be paid to users' information needs, and answers to queries should be provided on demand, also libraries should focus on employing skilled librarians to communicate their value to users and re-engineer their services to attract new users.

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