

LIBRARIANS' PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCE AND REACTION TO NON-USE OF SPECIAL LIBRARIES IN ENUGU STATE

S. NNAEMEKA ONWUBIKO

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about how librarians in special libraries perceive and cope with the problem of non-use of library services in Enugu State of Nigeria. In order to fill this gap, 42 urbaneness was questioned and 10 interviewed in a survey study. The result showed that non-use is widespread. It is also a complicated mixture of non-use and unsatisfactory user behaviour. Lack of awareness of the services' capabilities was a major cause of non-use. Many librarians who recognized this problem tackled it by means of promotional activities and presentation techniques. A few other librarians could identify their non-users.

KeyWords: non-use; special libraries or information centres, perceptions, reactions.

INTRODUCTION

Although many user-studies have been conducted in libraries, researches in non-use have been largely ignored. The study set out to investigate non-use of special libraries in Enugu State of Nigeria, by surveying and interviewing librarians and information managers about how they perceive and react to non-use. The study has become necessary because of the need for librarians to adopt modern marketing approach in library services (Yates- Marcer and Steward, 1977).

Non-user in this study is a person who might need information in his/her work but does not use it. Non-use implies not using the information services provided in the workplace as an aid to work. It encompasses under-use sub-optimal use, infrequent, superficial or inefficient use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Klintoe's (1977) call for studies of non-use in libraries resulted in increased research activities in the area (Slater, 1981 and whatley,

1988). But results of those studies could not easily apply to special libraries. Slater (1984) initiated research in non-use, which remained the only British, and infact international study in non-use from librarians' point of view. It was not until 1994 that research in non-use was reported in library literature (Mccarthy, 1994).

A study of non-use will enable librarians to find ways to improve their service to users, and also improve people's perception of libraries and their services. This is because, back of awareness of service can form a barrier to use of library services. Studies have found non-users to include staff who ate too busy to seek the help of information staff; those who though they need information, feel that they can manage without it, and those who feel that their subject knowledge is sufficient that they do not need library services (Green, 1994)

METHODOLOGY

The study is a survey of special libraries and information centres in Enugu State of Nigeria, made up of those in specialist, orthopedic and teaching hospitals banks, prisons, ministerial departments and media centres. Five research

questions guided the study which determined.

- (1) The composition of non-users;
- (2) Their patterns of use and non-use;
- (3) Reasons for non-use;
- (4) Reactions of librarians to non-use phenomenon; and
- (5) Strategies for motivating the use of the libraries.

Validated questionnaire and then interviews were administered to 50 randomly selected librarians in special libraries and information centres in Enugu State. Forty-two copies of the questionnaire were returned, while 10 interviews were conducted in order to obtain further information from librarians on aspects of the study. Frequencies and percentages were used in data analysis, while the results were presented in tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results showed that non-use was widespread. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents know that they had some sub-optimal usage problem-i.e. infrequent superficial, last-resort or inefficient usage. Only 29% were unaware of the current problem in the area. Seven percent never encountered usage problem. Results further showed that there was low penetration of library service and high level of non-use in the study area.

COMPOSITION OF NON-USERS OF SPECIAL LIBRARIES

Librarians were asked to indicate the nature of unsatisfactory usage pattern of service. Multiple answers were frequently given. The results are shown in table 1. Analysis of this result suggests that non-use of the service is composed of unsatisfactory or unrewarding user behaviour.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-USERS OF THE LIBRARY SERVICES.

Just over half of the sample (51%) that

Table 1; Patterns of use and non-use of library services.

<u>Patterns observed</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Complete non-use observable among		
Potential users	14	33
Minimal usage i.e. infrequent, superficial	24	57
Frequent but sub-optimal usage	18	43
No apparent non-user problem at all	5	12

Table 2. Frequency of types of staff who are usually non-users

<u>Types of non-user staff</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Senior staff/director level	7	37
Other staff	4	21
Lazy/apathetic types	4	21
Research staff	3	16
Newly recruited staff	2	11
Support Staff e.g. Secretaries	2	11
Consultants	2	11
Arrogant/complacent staff	2	11
Others	1	5

experienced a non-usage situation believed that

certain categories of staff did not use the service for reasons best known to them or because of the nature of their duty. (Tables 2)

Librarians were further questioned on what they thought non-user made little or no use of their services. Allowing for multiple reasons, the results are shown in table 3. Lack of awareness of the service' capabilities was given as possible cause by majority (78%) of the respondents. The librarians' views of the cause of low awareness among staff are given in table 3.

User delegating the search to others is the second most popular cause of non-use. The factor is supported by Nicholas, Harris and Erbad (1997). Use of personal contact called networking is the second popular reason for non-use (15 or 41%).

Table 3: Opinion of librarians on reasons for non-use by some staff

<u>Reasons for non-use</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Lack of awareness of service capabilities	29	78
Delegation of search to others	24	65
They are not information conscious	21	57
They prefer to use personal contact	15	41
They believe their knowledge is sufficient	14	38
Service not located close to potential users	12	32
Apathy by non-users	9	24
Users suffer from information overload	7	19
Low status of the service	2	5
Management attitude to the service is		
Non-supportive	2	5
Others	3	8

Table 4: Librarians' worries about non-use

<u>Responses of Librarians</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes, worried	19	45
Perhaps slightly Perturbed	11	26
No, not worried	7	17
No, no non-use problems, so can't be worried	5	12

Librarians' reactions to non-use

Table 4 showed librarians' reaction to non-use of service.

Majority of the respondents was worried to some extent by the existence of non-use. Detailed reactions to non-use are presented in Table 5 and

Table 6. Multiple choice was made and most loudly voiced concern was lack of awareness.

Table 5: Reactions of Librarians who were worried about non-use.

<u>Types of concern shown by librarians</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Non-users are not aware of what is available	6	20
Service not being used to optimum level	5	17
Non-use lowers operating efficiency of the		
Parent organizations	4	15
If they don't use, they may decide they don't		
need the use	4	13
Non-users may use inaccurate information	3	10
Non-users wasting their own time	3	10
Worried, but could not handle any more		
enquires	3	10
Non-users are in senior positions that control		
our future	2	7
Total no of respondents worried about non-use	30	100

Table 6: Reactions of librarians who are not worried about non-use

<u>Reasons for lack of concern about non-use</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Kept busy enough by those who use the service	3	43
It is not my concern if people don't use the service	2	29
We would be swamped with enquires if tow		
Many people use the service	1	14
Library is paid for by one department		
who account for 60% of enquiries	1	14
Total number of respondents worried about		
non-use	7	100

Remedial Treatment

Twenty –six (62%) of the respondents suggested specific remedies to the problem of non-use. It was claimed that in over 80% (21) of the time, the remedial strategies worked. A multiple approach of analysis was used and Table 7 provides

Table 7: Remedial strategies suggested by Librarians.

<u>Suggested strategies by librarians</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Promotion – publications, poster.	18	43
Presentation /Demonstration	12	29
Personal contact/friendliness	8	19
Identifying target non-user/ targeted Services	7	17
Target non-users	6	14
Attendance at meeting	4	10
Verbal interaction	3	7
Guide to users	3	7

details. Promotional activities and demonstration of service are the most frequently used strategies. Promotion activities include detailing samples of resources used. Presentation, demonstration of the efficiency of the resources was used by 29% of the respondents. This finding is supported by Slater (1981).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Some conclusions can be drawn despite the small sample used and the geographical limitations of the study. First, the level of non-use has not changed from previous studies. Non-use appears to be widespread among the institutional libraries irrespective of their location. Second, non-use is a mixture of both non-use and unsatisfactory user behaviours are minimal use. This phenomenon is difficult to combat because Nigerians are not generally good readers except for examinations.

The research findings relating to the causes of non-use are partly supported by earlier researches. For instance, the main reason reported in this study – lack of awareness of the service capabilities was similar reported by Green, (1994). Furthermore, non-use was perceived as problematic and underable. Although a positive attitude to the non-use situation was suggested by Green, (1994) only three out of the 42 respondents showed positive

attitude to the non-use situation. It can be inferred that librarians in special libraries in Enugu State are concerned about non-use of service of their libraries.

Finally, some insight was gained on librarians' reactions to non-use and how they cope with the problem. There was strong support for self-promotion and use of presentation to attract and retain users.

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