

ASSESSMENT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS PATTERNS AMONG LIBRARIANS FOR THE DELIVERY OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN KASHIM IBRAHIM LIBRARY, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was on the assessment of Interpersonal Communication Skills Patterns among Librarians for the Delivery of Reference and Information Services in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria. the objectives of the study was to find out the patterns of interpersonal communal skill among librarians and to identify the interpersonal communication skills utilise by librarians for reference and information services delivery in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU. Quantitative research methodology was adopted using cross-sectional survey research design. The target population of the study consisted of all the 18 reference librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Data collected were descriptively analysed using frequency tables, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that ability to speak fluently to users and ability to understand users queries are the major patterns of interpersonal communication skills among librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library, ability to speak fluently to users and ability to understand users queries are major interpersonal communication skills Utilised by librarians for reference and information services, the librarians listening skills helps them in understanding users query in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria. It could be concluded that interpersonal communication skills exists between reference librarians and library users in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria for reference and Information Service delivery but it is not very effective and this could be one of the reasons for the decline in reference patronage in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria. It was recommended that reference librarians should improve on their ability to speak fluently to users, ability to understand user queries, ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs, ability to guide users properly after listening to their queries and ability to serve users with the right information. Reference librarians should utilise the ability to send users answers to their query using appropriate channel, ability to receive and treat users query effectively and ability to provide good listening ears to users.

Key: Assessment, Interpersonal Communication Skills, Librarians, Reference and Information Service, Delivery

Introduction

Reference and information services are central tasks of any standard library and information center. Reference and information services are primary services of the librarians irrespective of the type of library and information center. The library clientele are the hub of reference service. However, the reference librarian and the clientele belong to different communities. The process which integrates the duo and makes reference service happen is interpersonal communication (Kemoni, 2014). When the user expresses his/her needs, the reference librarian considers what resources to use to meet them because the reference librarian serves as an intermediary between the library collection and the library user and this can only be feasible through effective interpersonal communication in reference transactions.

Interpersonal communication involves sending and receiving of messages between two or more people. DeFleur and Dennis (2012) conceptualized interpersonal communication as a process of using language and non-verbal cues to send and receive messages between individuals that are intended to arouse particular kinds of meaning. Interpersonal communication is the procedure by which people swap information, feelings and impart through verbal and non-verbal messages. This definition underlines the crucial fact that interpersonal communication is not only apprehensive about „what“ is pronounced, i.e., the language employed, but „how“ it is pronounced, e.g., the nonverbal messages sent, such as tone of voice and facial expressions. Abdurrahman (2021) stressed that interpersonal communication usually occurs when an individual communicate one a one-on-one basis usually in an informal, unstructured setting, mostly between two individuals, though it may include more than two.

Interpersonal communication can be media mediated or take place face to face between the librarian and the library user. Media mediation in reference service has been branded as mediated communication. Mediated communication is viewed as a situation where a technological medium is employed into face to face interaction. Telephone conversations, letters, electronic mail, instant messages, multimedia messages, faxes, etc. are modes of interpersonal mediated communication. The application of these technologies in reference interaction has impacted greatly on relationships and made face to face contact dispensable. It is common knowledge that the non-verbal aspects of communication are often more important than the verbal. That is, what is said is less important than how it is said. The reason for this is that the non-verbal techniques indicate exactly what interpretation should be put on the words that are uttered.

An effective interpersonal communication enhances the quality of services rendered to clients by the reference librarian. For reference librarian to effectively meet the information needs of its clients, effective interpersonal communication is needed. It is most important and relevant to librarians and workers whose basic instrument and stock-in-trade rests on continuous exchange of information with their clientele. Effective interpersonal communication between reference librarian and library patrons is one of the most important elements for improving user satisfaction (Ojomo, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Interpersonal communication encompasses many kinds of relationships from the most casual to the most long-lasting, Good interpersonal communication in reference section creates good relationship between patron and reference librarians, it makes the patrons feel free to express their feelings and their information needs to reference librarian for anticipation. Despite the relative assistance reference librarians render to library users, the preliminary investigation carried out by the researcher in Kashim Ibrahim Library shows that there is low patronage in the reference section of the libraries based on the statistics and report taking on daily, weekly and monthly basis of users in the reference section. Could it be is as a result of lack of ability to effectively communicate with the users or it could be is as a result of pattern of communication between the two parties involved i.e the reference librarian and the library user. It is based on this assertion that the researcher carried out study on Application of interpersonal communication skills in information service delivery in Kashim Ibrahim Library Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the patterns of interpersonal communal skill among librarian in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU.
2. To find out the interpersonal communication skills utilise by librarians for reference and information services delivery in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU.

Literature Review

Interpersonal communication is usually defined by communication scholars in numerous ways, usually describing participants who are dependent upon one another. It can involve one on one conversations or individuals interacting with many people within a society. It helps us understand how and why people behave and communicate in different ways to construct and negotiate a social reality. While interpersonal communication can be defined as its own area of study, it also occurs within other contexts like groups and organizations.

Interpersonal communication is the process that we use to communicate our ideas, thoughts, and feelings to another person.

Reference librarians perform various duties, these duties have an impact on interpersonal communication in reference services. Relationships thrive on the maintenance of a good communication link between the parties involved, the reference librarian is expected to be a good communicator who links library users to the resources of their choice. The essence of reference work is personal service. The primary function of the reference department as observed by Nwalo (2010) among other things is answering reference questions and user education and this can only be achieved or performed effectively through interpersonal communication between the reference librarian and the library user through the use of appropriate skills expected of professionals. Rothwell (2014) notes that communication skills are critical to landing a job, receiving a promotion and performing effectively in the workplace. Skill in interpersonal communication is one of the factors that distinguish a reference librarian. In general, interpersonal communication serves as a process of establishing a relationship. It connects people and their social activities and provides a manner consistent with a bond. In this, it connects people closer to each other who sometimes seem to be away from each other.

Interpersonal communication skills are a set of abilities, attitudes and values that enable reference librarians to work efficiently, be good communicators and survive in the new world of work (Haddow, 2013). These skills are further described as the basic tools for creating and nurturing an environment of mutual respect and trust. It is also noted that a major component of reference work involves direct service to and interaction with patrons. As stressed by Saunders (2012), interpersonal communication skills as well as the ability to build relationships through active listening and inquiring is essential when offering a reference service. Saunders also noted that as reference services move online, interpersonal and communication skills are very important since librarians are communicating with patrons in many different ways and often without the support of nonverbal cues.

Obite (2021) in Kollo (2014) identified the following as vital interpersonal skills that reference librarians should possess which includes: ability to work with people, social poise, self-assurance and confidence, exhibit self-control and be tactful, ability to make decisions, maintaining high standards of professionalism, be honest and objective, organize time and priorities, be persuasive and create enthusiasm and have a high concern for communication. Thus, having good interpersonal communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing cannot be over-emphasized for the reference librarian. To effectively serve users, a reference librarian must possess and exercise these skills maximally.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey research design was used in conducting the study. The cross-sectional survey design is found suitable due to the nature of the research which is quantitative in nature with a population of all librarians in reference section of Kashim Ibrahim ABU Zaria and is eighteen (18) in numbers, and all are used, therefore no sample was required. Questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection for this study; having been subjected to face and content validity research experts to determine its suitability. The self-designed in line with the major variables raised in the research objectives. It was made-up of two sections; Section A for the background information and Section B for the main research objectives. Descriptive statistics such as percentage, mean, standard deviation was used for the analysis of the data collected for the study.

Result and Discussion

Response Rate

A total of eighteen copies of the questionnaire was administered to the respondents in Kashim Ibrahim Library. Out of the eighteen copies of questionnaires administered eleven (11) representing 66.1% were duly filled, returned, examined and found fit for analysis. The analysis in this study is therefore based on the 11 copies of retrieved questionnaires.

Patterns of Interpersonal Communication Skills among Librarians

The patterns of interpersonal communication skills among librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library are presented in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Patterns of Interpersonal Communication Skills among Librarians

S/N	Patterns of interpersonal communication skills	Frequency	Percentage
1	Ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs	9	81.8
2	Ability to speak fluently to users	10	90.9
3	Ability to understand users queries	10	90.9
4	Ability to guide users properly after listening to their queries	9	81.8
5	Ability to serve users with right information	9	81.8
6	Ability to send users answers to their queries using appropriate channel	7	63.6
7	Ability to receive and treat user's query effectively	6	54.5
8	Ability to provide good listening ears to users	8	72.7

Table 4.1 showed that ability to speak fluently to users and ability to understand user's queries have 10(90.9%) each followed by the ability to receive and treat user's query effectively as the least pattern of interpersonal communication skills among librarians with 6(54.5%). Aside ability to speak fluently to users and ability to understand user's queries, other patterns of interpersonal communication skills among librarians include ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs, ability to guide users properly after listening to their queries and ability to serve users with right information with 81.8% each. The findings corresponds with that of Saunders and Jordan (2013) who reported that the ability to speak correctly to the users as well as the ability to understand the users query were the tasks the librarians mostly used. The implication of this is that librarians would always fail to satisfy the needs of users if they do not have the ability to speak and understand users query.

Interpersonal Communication Skills Utilised by Librarians for Reference and Information Services

Table 4.2 Interpersonal Communication Skills Utilised Librarians for Reference and Information Services

	Items	HU	U	RU	NU	UD	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
a	Ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs	6	4	0	0	1	4.27	1.19	Utilised
b	Ability to speak fluently to users	7	3	0	0	1	4.36	1.21	Utilised
c	Ability to understand user's query	7	3	0	0	1	4.36	1.21	Utilised
d	Ability to guide users properly after listening to their query	5	5	0	0	1	4.18	1.17	Utilised
e	Ability to serve users with the right information	7	2	1	0	1	4.27	1.27	Utilised
f	Ability to send user's answers to their query using appropriate channel	3	4	1	2	1	3.55	1.37	Utilised
g	Ability to receive and treat user's query effectively	5	2	2	0	2	3.73	1.56	Utilised

h	Ability to provide good listening ears to users	5	3	1	1	1	3.91	1.38	Utilised
	Cumulative						4.08	1.30	Utilised

Key: Highly Utilised, Utilised, Rarely Utilised, Not Utilised, Undecided

Decision= Mean ≥ 3.0 = Utilised, Mean < 3.0 = Not Utilised

Table 4.2 showed the respondents' response on interpersonal communication skills utilised by librarians for reference and information services. The table revealed aggregate mean response scores 3.55 to 4.36 which are all greater than the benchmark mean of 3.00. This implies that interpersonal communication skills are highly utilised by librarians for reference and information services. In particular, majority of the librarians were of the opinion that ability to speak fluently to users and ability to understand user's query are the major interpersonal skills utilised by librarians for reference and information services with each having a mean response score of 4.36. Though above the average mean score of 3.00, the least interpersonal communication skills Utilised by librarians is the ability to send user's answers to their query using appropriate channel with response score of 3.55.

The findings in this study agrees with that of Koganuramath and Angadi (2005) who emphasized that it is vital that reference librarians be kept in touch with modern developments and maintain a proactive approach to their work in an ever-changing information world. The finding is also in consonance with Muddapur and Agadi (2017) noted that interpersonal skills for library professionals especially in the reference section of any library is all about possessing effective listening, writing, presentation, decision making, problem solving and leadership skills to create friendly environment for library users, create and promote a positive image and good will for the library and enhance information service delivery

Summary of findings

The following are the summary of the findings:

1. The patterns of interpersonal communication skills among librarians in Kashim Ibrahim library are: ability to speak fluently to users, ability to understand users queries, ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs, ability to guide users properly after listening to their queries, ability to serve users with the right information, ability to provide good listening ear to users, ability to send users answers to their queries using appropriate channel and ability to treat and receive users query effectively.
2. The highly utilised interpersonal communication skills by librarians for reference and information services in Kashim Ibrahim library are: ability to speak fluently to users, ability to understand users query, ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs, ability to serve users with the right information, ability to guide users properly after listening to their queries, ability to provide

good listening ears to users, ability to receive and treat users query effectively and ability to send users answers to their queries using appropriate channel.

Conclusion

Interpersonal communication skills exist between reference librarians and library users in Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria for reference and Information Service delivery. The interpersonal communication skills possessed and utilised by reference librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library are; ability to speak fluently to users and ability to understand users query which are not enough in efficient and effective reference and Information Service delivery and this can be concluded to be the reason for the continuous decline in library patronage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made, that:

1. Reference librarians should improve on the following interpersonal communication skills possessed; ability to speak fluently to users, ability to understand users queries, ability to ask users relevant questions concerning their needs, ability to guide users properly after listening to their queries and ability to serve users with the right information.
2. Reference librarians should utilise the ability to match users answers with their queries using appropriate channels and develop ability to receive and treat users query effectively and improve good listening ears to users.

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