



Access Skill of Librarians and Service Delivery in University Libraries

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Abstract

The study was conducted to examine the influence of access skill of librarians on service delivery in university libraries. The ex- post facto research design was adopted for the study. This study was conducted in Federal university libraries in South-South Nigeria. However, the study focused on three out of six Federal University libraries, being libraries in University of Uyo, University of Calabar and University of Benin. The region covered is part of the coastal Niger-delta oil rich region of the country. The population of the study consisted 327 respondents (124 professionals and 203 para-professional librarians) in universities of Uyo, Calabar and Benin. Census sampling technique was used to sample 327 respondents. The researcher developed an instrument entitled "Access Skill and Service Delivery Questionnaire (ASASDQ)" for data collection. The researcher with the help of research assistants administered copies of the questionnaire to respondents in the selected universities. However, after the administration of the instrument, only 324 copies of questionnaire were useful for data analysis. The obtained data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and t-Test to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the finding revealed that access skill has a significant influence on service delivery in university libraries of South-South Nigeria. It was recommended among others that librarians should access information by locating and sharing materials that meet the information needs of users.

Keywords: Access skill, library service, university library, media literacy, library resources.

Introduction

Libraries are created to meet the information needs of defined groups of people in a definite environment. University libraries therefore meet the information needs of its users in the academic environment and undertakes the responsibility of supporting the parent institution's curriculum with relevant information resources that enhances the accomplishment of its tripartite functions of teaching, learning and research. University libraries are not mere repositories of knowledge; they exist to provide both resources and services in varied forms. To this end, they acquire, organise, manage and make accessible varied resources such as prints, non-prints and electronic resources to patrons.

University library personnel are adopting access skill in order to keep up with up-to-date developments in library practices in the more competitive and dynamic information society. In addition to the technical abilities required to manage a library, it also profoundly depends on a variety of soft skills, such as access skill, which must be developed in order to provide satisfactory services in libraries. Skill typically infers a judgment of quality particularly in terms of meeting of goals or objectives of the library. It is ability to perform an action with predefined results, typically in a predetermined amount of time, energy, or both, is referred to as a skill¹. Since the entire field of librarianship is service-oriented, which requires both providing services and doing so efficiently with an eye on user's satisfaction, librarians must actively participate in the discussion about the skills and

competencies necessary to operate in information environments. For rapid service delivery to be possible librarians need access skill.

Access skill involves locating appropriate information resources and comprehending the meanings of the contents. It should be noted that physical access to media messages or media tools does not guarantee effective use of them. With respect to the accessibility skill which has social, cultural and technological aspects, factors such as having the permission to use media tools, peer group norms regarding accepted actions are important². Access can be regarded as consisting of two phases of physical access to media and contents of media, and the ability to use the media properly. Access skill involves listening skill, comprehending content, using appropriate technology tools, asking questions, gathering information using multiple sources and implementing information to solve a problem and ensures quality service delivery³.

Library services delivery can be referred to all activities or duties of library staff in ensuring the goals and objectives of the library are obtained. Any service rendered by a library staff either directly to users or indirectly can be called service delivery and are rendered in different departments or units of the library. University libraries provide a variety of library and information services to satisfy different information requirements of users.

Library services are activities or functions provided by the library to the users which can include instruction on how to access and use the library materials⁴. Generally, library services in a university library can be classified under the following: reference, circulation, technical, serial and online services. These services are classified according to the various departments available in the library.

Each of the departmental services has specified services carried out on regular basis. specific services are reading and lending services; bibliographic instruction and library orientation; assisting in the use of the library catalogue and locating documents; current awareness services (CAS); selective dissemination of information (SDI); bibliographic services; reprographic services; inter-library loan (ILL) service; maintenance of documents and files; user education; exhibition and special displays; securing library and resources; and so on. Against this background, this study poised to examine how access skill influence service delivery in University libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Statement of the problem: Due to the multi-media domain available to librarians, the quality and content of services offered to users therefore depends on how well library staff comprehend and access collection relevant to students' information needs. Therefore, mastering access skill is crucial for delivering top-notch services.

However, librarians in most academic libraries do not seem to utilise access skill to their full potential in providing users with optimal services. One then wonders and asks, could access skill influence service delivery by librarians? If yes, in what ways. It is based on the raised question that this study aims to examine how access skill of staff influence service delivery in university libraries.

Objective of the Study: The main aim of the study is to examine how access skill of staff influence service delivery in university libraries in south-south, Nigeria.

Research Question: What is the influence of access skill on service delivery in university libraries in South-South, Nigeria?

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of access skill on service delivery in university libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Literature Review: Accessibility Skill and Service Delivery: Access skill is defined as how, when, where, and how often people have access to the tools, technology, and digital skills necessary to thrive. This includes but is not limited to understanding how media, technology and the internet works; understanding how to locate content and use media; knowing what resources are available online because how users access information may determine what information they receive; access to all information and ideas without censorship; individuals can draw conclusions about media based on their own assessment, experiences, values, and beliefs⁵.

Access skill involves locating and using appropriate media tools and comprehending the meanings of the contents; and requires technological knowledge at a certain level needed. For library staff to participate in the media culture as creators or consumers, it is prerequisite to possess accessibility skills. However, it should be noted that physical access to media messages or media tools does not guarantee effective use of them. With respect to the accessibility skill which has social, cultural and technological aspects, factors such as having the permission to use media tools, knowing the use of software, peer group norms regarding accepted actions are important⁶. However, access is not limited to one-time purchase or supply as it accommodates a dynamic and social process. Therefore, what is important is the sustainability of use. In this sense, access can be regarded as consisting of two phases, of physical access to media and contents of media, and the ability to use the media properly⁷. Competencies skill involves listening skills, comprehending content, using appropriate technology tools, asking questions, gathering information using multiple sources and implementing information to solve a problem³. Access skill can impact one's ability to participate in culture, access news and information, and learn the technology and skills necessary for employment, education, and civic engagement. Limited or no access can impact the ability to be a media creator and have one's voice represented in media (inclusion in media). Information is often accessed digitally, which can impact the gathering of information necessary for civic participation and economic growth.

Access skill of librarians is the first step in being able to analyze, evaluate, create, and act effectively and responsibly. If librarians actively seek out information from sources and vary those sources and the content they receive, they are more likely to access more diverse information and points of view than would be provided by content curators⁵. Access skill is a prerequisite to information utilization in libraries. The inclusion of digital databases and online resources as library information resources adds internet access to the list of challenges faced by librarians in accessing relevant materials. Libraries now require services of digital curation experts and data specialists to handle accessibility of digital resources.

Access skill enables managing and providing access to a collection of media tools identified as important for users. With access skill, access is also provided to items that are in high demand and those that are reserved materials which usually have a short loan period compared to other collections (e.g. hours instead of days). Access skill enhanced access to media tools held in the library and enables the use of media resources and scanning of journal articles or book chapters for use by library patrons⁸. For instance, a library patron can request a specific material, using an automated request system, and library personnel will create a usable file that is shared with the patron electronically. This skill may be especially helpful to provide users access to remote collections, where electronic delivery is faster and easier than physical retrieval and delivery.

Access skill helps librarians develop, provide and connect library users to library resources. It strives to make the library users' experience positive and rewarding service.

Therefore, access skill involves locating and using appropriate media tools to reach target information and comprehending the meanings of the contents in order to provide effective services to users in the library. It is also regarded as a skill to search and choose important information out of multiple diversified internet sources using technologies and more importantly, technological knowledge to a certain level to access these media contents are needed.

University Library service: The concept of library and information service delivery is fundamental to libraries, because they are processes and activities that are deployed by libraries to deliver services and resources to users. Library service refers to all actions or responsibilities taken by library employees to ensure that the institution's aims and objectives are met. Any service provided by library employees to patrons, whether directly or indirectly, is referred to as service delivery and is provided in various departments or units of the library. To meet the various information needs of users, university libraries offer a range of library and information services. Services refer to various offers made available to users by libraries. These include all services rendered to users at any point of need in the library. Library service is a means put in place to ensure that functions and activities carried out by libraries are transmitted by library staff to the library users⁹.

Library and information services as provisions from the library to users. Services delivery are the assistance rendered by the librarians to users to enable them make good use of the library resources without spending much time¹⁰. Services delivery has been identified as key indices for user's patronage of libraries. This is regarded as social services which are bound to stimulate the reading habit of the library clientele. Library services are activities or functions provided by the library to the users⁴.

These authors added that this can include instruction on how to access and use the library materials. Library services can be differentiated by types of libraries and departments of the libraries. Generally, library services in a university library can be classified under the following: reference, circulation, technical, serial and online services. These services are classified according to the various departments available in the library. Each of the departmental services has specified services carried out on regular basis. Specific services are reading and lending services; bibliographic instruction and library orientation; assisting in the use of the library catalogue and locating documents; current awareness services (CAS); selective dissemination of information (SDI); bibliographic services; reprographic services; inter-library loan (ILL) service; maintenance of documents and files; user education; exhibition and special displays; securing library and resources.

Methodology

The ex- post facto research design was adopted for this study. This study design primarily examines events after they have already occurred; as a result, it employs available data for confirmatory purposes. This study was conducted in Federal university libraries in South-South Nigeria. However, the study focused on three out of six Federal University libraries, being libraries in University of Uyo, University of Calabar and University of Benin. The region covered is part of the coastal Niger-delta oil rich region of the country. The population of the study consisted 327 respondents (124 professionals and 203 para-professional librarians) in universities of Uyo, Calabar and Benin. Census sampling technique was used to sample 327 respondents. The researcher developed an instrument entitled "Access Skill and Service Delivery Questionnaire (ASASDQ)" for data collection. The researcher with the help of research assistants administered copies of the questionnaire to respondents in the selected universities. However, after the administration of the instrument, only 324 copies of questionnaire were useful for data analysis. The obtained data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and t-Test to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented by answering and testing of research questions and hypotheses

Research Question One: What is the influence of access skill on service delivery in university libraries in south-south, Nigeria?

The result in Table-1 reveals the mean range for the response on how access skill influences library staff service delivery in University libraries of South-South Nigeria. All the items are above the cutoff point of 2.50 which means the aforementioned access skills enable librarians in accessing messages for different audiences and purposes to meet users need. This implies that access skill influences library staff service delivery in University libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of access skill on service delivery in university libraries of South-South Nigeria.

The result in Table-2 showed a calculated t-value of 20.87 and table value of 1.98 at a significant level of 0.05. Since the calculated value of (20.87) is greater than the critical value found in the t-table (1.98), the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of access skill on service delivery in University libraries of South-South Nigeria, is rejected. Thus, it implies that access skill has a significant influence on service delivery in university libraries of South-South Nigeria.

Table-1: Summary of how access skill influences library staff service delivery in University Libraries of South-South Nigeria (n = 324).

S/N	Access Skills	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD	Decision
1	Locating appropriate media tools	227	81	12	4	3.6512	.57175	SA
2	Using appropriate media tools	147	161	10	6	3.4043	.58366	A
3	Reaching targeted information through media tool	179	97	39	9	3.4043	.73403	A
4	Comprehending the meanings of contents	179	112	22	11	3.4506	.67280	A
5	Accessing information using technological knowledge	163	125	21	15	3.5031	.50076	SA
6	physical access to media messages	179	122	17	6	3.5525	.49801	SA
7	The ability to disseminate media contents properly	211	92	13	8	3.6512	.47732	SA
8	Reaching targeted information	195	89	29	11	3.6019	.49027	SA
9	Rational inquiry of media contents	228	64	13	19	3.6049	.66172	SA
10	Gathering information using multiple sources	196	87	28	13	3.6049	.48962	SA
11	Managing media tools that are important to users	195	113	10	6	3.5525	.58914	SA
12	Providing access to collections for users	179	100	32	13	3.4537	.66841	A
	Cluster Mean					3.5363	.57812	SA

Table-2: t-Test analysis of the influence of access skill on service delivery in University libraries of South-South Nigeria.

variables	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-cal	t-crit	df	Decision
Access skill	3.5031	324	.59147	.03286	20.87	1.98	322	Significant
Service delivery	2.6080	324	.74072	.04115				

Discussion of findings: The finding of the study is discussed below:

Influence of Access Skill on library staff service delivery: The finding in Table-1 (research question) and Table-2 (hypothesis) revealed that access skill has a significant influence on library staff service delivery. The result is evident, as library staff engages in communication with users to ascertain their needs and thereby meeting the needs by providing access to media contents available in the library.

The finding is in consonance with the findings of Limilia and Bona⁶ who found that access skill consists of four sub-skills, namely: (i) the ability to recognize the role and scope of information from various sources; (ii) the ability to know the right source of information; (iii) the ability to access source of information effectively and efficiently; (iv) the ability to store information and that these skills influence service delivery.

Hobbs and Moore³ also supported the finding as they found that competencies of access skill implies listening skill, comprehending content, using appropriate technology tools, asking questions, gathering information using multiple sources and implementing information to solve a problem and that these competencies enable effective service delivery.

Conclusion

The ability to access information in a variety of formats, both print and non-print is a significant factor in information service delivery as revealed in the study. This is because, the library is growing up in a world saturated with media messages.

By using access skill appropriately, librarians develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of media both print and non-print.

Recommendation: The following are the recommendations made in the light of the findings of the study: i. Librarians should access information by locating and sharing materials that meet the information needs of users. ii. The skill of creating content in a variety of forms, making use of language, images, sound and new digital tools appropriate to users' needs, should be frequent task to maintain quality service.

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