COMPETENCIES OF LIBRARIANS: A PIVOTAL FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NIGER STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to assess the competencies of librarians in effective service delivery in university libraries in Niger State. The study was guided by the following research questions: What is the level of competencies of librarians in delivery information services to users in university libraries in Niger State, what is the level of application of competencies in information service delivery to users by librarians in university libraries in Niger State, what are the sources of acquisition of competencies of librarians for information service delivery to users in university libraries in Niger state and what are the challenges hindering librarians from enhancing their competencies towards delivery of information services to users in university libraries in Niger State. The population of the study constituted all academic librarians in the Universities in Niger State. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics. The major findings of the study showed that the level of competence of librarians was high in providing traditional library services than electronic library services. The study further revealed that librarians often applied their competencies in conducting user education programmes, conducting search interviews through manual medium, communicating effectively orally and in writing and developing innovative services and marketing the library. However, they did not apply their competencies in preserving and managing research data and they rarely conduct search interview online. Librarians acquired their competencies majorly from library schools and on the job experience. The major challenges hindering librarians from improving their competencies were lack of funds and motivation. The study therefore recommends that efforts should be made by librarians to apply their competencies in innovative and electronic information services.

Keywords: Competencies, Librarians, Effective Service Delivery, University Libraries

Introduction

Libraries over time are centres of learning and treasure houses of knowledge in academic institutions. Its main objective is to provide services to enhance teaching, learning, research and community development of its parent organization. The library achieves these objectives by acquiring, organizing, inviting and guiding readers in their search for information resources. However, as a result of information technology, librarians now find themselves at a critical position. The requirements and information technology literacy of library users have changed tremendously. They now demand for services that are easy, convenient, boundless, virtual and timeless.

In order to satisfy the changing information needs of the 21st century users, librarians need to utilize different approaches in the provision of services by developing themselves through improving their level of competency in information service delivery. Canadian Association of Research Library (2010) defined competencies as a list or group of series of knowledge, skills, abilities and behavior that defines and contribute to performance. Tyagi (2013) advocated that librarians must be proactive by challenging their traditional beliefs, understandings and expectations in order to be competence. This can be achieved when librarians understand the needs of users, plan service provision, promote the available services and deliver them effectively and efficiently. To achieve these, competency is the essential tool.

Statement of the Problem

The role of librarians in actively supporting the mission of the library and their institution cannot be overemphasized. They have always thrived to provide quality services in ways which are efficient, equitable, timely and meaningful. However, with the Internet, information can now be sought anywhere and at any time. The internet era now requires librarians who are competent in delivery information services both manually and electronically.

However, it was observed that the competency of librarians in Universities in Niger State is low especially in providing internet based services. It was also observed that those who were competent were not applying it to the maximum use in information service delivery to library users. Farooq (2018) and Okoye, (2013) in their studies discovered that the present level of skills is lower than the expected level of competencies of librarians in Pakistan and Nigeria respectively. This might result to low quality of information services and might lead to low turnout of users to the library. The study is set to determine the competencies of librarians in providing information service delivery in university libraries in Niger State.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions raised for the study:

1. What is the level of competencies of librarians in delivery information services to users in university libraries in Niger State?
2. What is the level of application of competencies in information service delivery to users in university libraries in Niger State?
3. What are the sources of acquisition of competencies of librarians for information service delivery to users in university libraries in Niger State?
4. What are the challenges hindering librarians from enhancing their competencies towards delivery of information services to users in university libraries in Niger State?

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Whitlatch (2003) defines competencies as the interplay of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitude that is effective to the satisfaction of the performer and the observer. Canadian Association of Research Libraries (2010) views competencies as a list or group of series of knowledge skills, abilities and behavior that defines and contribute to performance. Chandra (2011) views competency as the characteristics of individuals which affect the performance and behavior at work. In a nutshell, in a library setting, competencies can be defined as knowledge, skills and behavior that enable librarians perform their professional roles in their parent institutions.

Whififech et al (2013) as cited in Okoye (2013) identified two types of competencies for librarians these include: professional competencies which relate to the knowledge in the areas of information resources, access to technology, management, research and the ability to use these areas of knowledge to provide library and information services. The second competency is personal competencies which comprises of a set of skills, attitude and values that enables librarians to work and communicate effectively and also focus on continuing learning throughout their career.

Canadian Association of Research Libraries (2010) outlined a competency model for librarians. The area of competencies is grouped into seven categories:

1. Foundational knowledge
2. Interpersonal skills.
3. Leadership and management
4. Collection development
5. Information literacy

6. Research and contribution to the profession
7. Information technology skills

In summary, in order to deliver effective and efficient information services, it is required of librarians to acquire certain competencies in their daily professional activities.

Literature Review

Okoye (2013) examined the competencies of professional librarians in Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 89 academic librarians in South East of Nigeria Federal Universities. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire. Sixty-three (63) responses were received giving a response rate of 70%. The data were centered on knowledge based and skills based acquisition. Data were analyzed by frequency and percentages. Findings of the study revealed positive correlation between acquired and applied knowledge and place of work respectively. The study found no correlation between acquired and applied skills from library schools and place of work respectively.

The study further found out that elements of knowledge such as metadata development, software development and digital technologies were acquired from library schools by 44.54%, 30.17% and 14.10% of librarians respectively. Skills such as website development, web page design, web page maintenance and data management where acquired from library schools by 25.17%, 15.66% and 30.17% of librarian. The paper recommended that the curriculum of library schools should be revised to make the content reflect prevailing demands of the profession.

Ojedokun (2014) conducted a study to determine information literacy competence of librarians in South West Nigerian university libraries. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Convenience sampling technique was used to select 65 respondents from 4 Federal, 2 States and 1 private university from the 34 universities in South West. Data were collected through the administration of questionnaire while descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that librarians were weak in knowledge of each of the steps in the information process, from identifying the concepts to using the results. The researcher recommended regular training and retraining of librarians through professional development workshops. They should have regular access to the internet and the curriculum of library schools should be reviewed with particular emphasis on the practical components.

Methodology

The study was carried out using descriptive survey. The choice of descriptive survey was because the study examined competencies of librarians in delivery of information services in Federal University of Technology (FUT), Minna and Ibrahim Badamasi University (IBBU), Lapai Libraries in Niger State. The study involved collecting data and answering questions on the views and opinions of librarians on their competencies in delivery of information services. The population of the study comprised of 27 and 13 librarians in Federal University of Technology and Ibrahim Badamasi University Libraries respectively. Since the population of the study was not large all the librarians in both Federal University of Technology and Ibrahim Badamasi University libraries were used. The research instrument adopted for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to elicit information on the level of librarians' competencies in delivery various information services to library users, level of application of competencies in information service delivery, the sources of acquisition of competencies by librarians towards service delivery and challenges hindering librarians from improving their competencies towards service delivery. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the results of the study. A total of 40 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. However, 31 copies were returned and correctly filled.

Table 1: Level of Competencies in Delivery Information Services to Library Users

S/NO	COMPETENCIES	VERY HIGH	HIGH	LOW	VERY LOW
1	Conduct search interview through manual medium.	4 (13%)	22(71%)	5(16%)	0%
2	Conduct search interview through online medium.	5(16%)	9(29%)	17(55%)	0%
3	Conduct user education programme.	13(39%)	10(32%)	9(29%)	0%
4	Sound knowledge on how to use various reference sources.	8(26%)	19(61%)	3(10%)	1(3%)
5	Effectively communicate orally and in writing.	10(32%)	21(68%)	0%	0%
6	Ability to develop innovative new services and market the library to the university community.	5(16%)	17(54%)	9(29%)	0%
7	Preserve and manage research data.	3(10%)	11(36%)	17(54%)	0%
8	Knowledge on institutional repositories and open access journals.	4(13%)	17(55%)	10(32%)	0%
9	Conduct research and make presentation in conferences and seminars.	4(13%)	62%	25%	0%
10	Knowledge on how digital resources are acquired, managed and accessed.	5(15%)	5(16%)	17(56%)	4(13%)
11	Participate in library professional association activities.	6(19%)	19(61%)	6(20%)	0%
12	Knowledge on major trends such as web 2.0, research 2.0	4(13%)	14(45%)	13(42%)	0%
14	Develop and maintain a web.	5(16%)	8(26%)	17(55%)	1(3%)

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 1 indicates the responses of the respondents on their level of competencies in delivery of various information services to library users. The respondents rated three of the items as their high level of competencies. These are; conduct search

interview through manual medium (71%), ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing (68%), conduct research and make presentation online (62%), participate in library and professional activities (61%), sound knowledge on how to use various reference sources (61%)ability to develop innovative new services and market the library to the university community (54%), knowledge on institutional repositories and open access journals (55%).From the table 1, it was observed that majority of the librarians were not highly competent in delivery of various library services. Also, some respondents indicated that their ability to acquire, manage and access digital resources (56%), preserve and manage research data (55%), and develop and maintain a web (55%) was low. This calls for serious concern by the library management because most library users now utilize digital means in satisfying their information needs. This finding agrees with (Ojiegbe 2010) who affirmed that library staff in University of Abuja and University of Jos were not competent in providing effective professional library related services using ICT.

Table 2: Level of Application of Competencies in Information Service Delivery

S/NO	Application of Competencies	Frequently Used	Often Used	Rarely Used	Not Used
1	Conducting search interview through manual medium.	5(16%)	19(61%)	7(23%)	0%
2	Conducting search interview through online medium.	2(7%)	10(32%)	19(61%)	0%
3	Communicate effectively verbally and in writing.	14(45%)	17(55%)	0%	0%
4	Conducting user education programme	5(16%)	26(84%)	0%	0%
6	Developing innovative services and market the library to the university community.	6(19%)	16(52%)	5(16%)	4(13%)
7	Preserving and managing research data.	2(1)%	4(13%)	8(26%)	17(55%)
8	Managing institutional repositories and open access journals.	5(16%)	4(13%)	13(42%)	9(29%)
9	Conducting research and	6(19%)	16(51%)	9(30%)	0%

	making presentations in conferences and seminars.				
10	Participating actively in library professional activities.	8(25%)	15(48%)	8(27%)	0%
11	Developing and maintaining library web.	4(12%)	4(13%)	17(55%)	6(20%)
12	Communicating and publicizing library services to users using web 2.0 technology.	5(16%)	13(42%)	10(32%)	3(10%)
13	Consulting reference sources in providing reference services.	6(19%)	12(39%)	13(42%)	0%
14	Acquiring, managing and accessing digital resources.	7(23%)	8(26%)	16(51%)	0%

Source: **Field Survey, 2018**

Table 2 showed that majority (84%) of the respondents confirmed that they often applied their competencies in the area of conducting user education programmes. This could be as a result of their collaboration with faculty members in teaching first year students' information literacy in their various universities. This study is in line with Bhattin (2010) who observed that librarians in university library in Pakistan participated to a high level in various information literacy programmes in their universities. Other services librarians indicated a high level of proficiencies were conducting search interview through manual medium (61%), communicate effectively orally and in writing (55%) and developing innovative services, market the library to the university community (52%) and conducting research and making presentations in conferences and seminars (51%). Also from the findings 55% of the respondents affirmed that librarians were not used to preserving and managing research data and this service is very useful because when data are preserved and managed they can be reused by researchers in conducting their research. This study is in disagreement with Yoon and Schultz (2017) who stated that there was high level of research data management services by librarians in academic libraries in United State of America. In addition, librarians in the study area reported that they rarely conduct search interview through online medium (61%), develop and maintain library web (55%) and acquire, manage and access digital resources (51%).This implies that librarians applied their competencies more in delivery of traditional library services even

though library users now prefer to source information from sources that are timeless, boundless, virtual and easy.

Table 3: Sources of Acquisition of Competencies

S/NO	Sources	Great Extent	High Extent	Moderate Extent	Little Extent
1	Library schools.	10(32%)	21(68%)	0%	0%
2	On the job experience.	10(32%)	19(61%)	2(7%)	0%
3	Colleaques within the library.	6(19%)	14(45%)	11(36%)	0%
4	Colleaques outside the library.	3(10%)	10(32%)	8(26%)	10(32%)
5	Seminars.	4(13%)	13(42%)	4(13%)	10(32%)
6	Workshops.	6(19%)	14(45%)	2(6%)	9(30%)
7	Conferences.	6(19%)	9(29%)	9(30%)	7(22%)
8	In house training.	3(10%)	9(29%)	2(6%)	17(55%)

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Findings on Table 3 revealed that librarians to a high extent (68%) of acquired their competences from library schools. It is evident that librarians were able to demonstrate the skills they obtained in library schools to work effectively in their various libraries. This finding is in line with Okoye (2013) who discovered that there was positive correlation between acquired knowledge and applied competencies from library school and place of work respectively. Librarians also indicated that they acquired their competencies to a high extent through job experience (61%).This finding is in agreement with Ojiegbe (2010) who affirmed that majority of library staff acquired their competencies through personal experience.

Table 4: Challenges Hindering Librarians from Improving their Competencies towards Service Delivery

S/N0	Challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
1	Lack of technology literacy.	9(29%)	9(29%)	13(42%)
2	Lack of knowledge on new trends in library profession.	10(32%)	14(45%)	7(23%)
3	Poor funding.	19(61%)	12(38%)	0%
4	Lack of mentorship.	13(42%)	13(42%)	5(16%)
5	Inadequate practical training in library schools.	7(23%)	16(52%)	8(26%)
6	Lack of motivation.	16(52%)	14(45%)	1(3%)
7	Poor internet connectivity.	12(39%)	5(16%)	14(45%)

Source: Field Survey, 2018

As shown in Table 4, majority (61%) of the respondents indicated poor funding as one of the factors hindering librarians from improving their competencies towards service delivery. This is because librarians need funds to attend national and international workshops, seminars and conferences. Also, the library management need funds to subscribe to online data base where librarians can avail themselves by reading various literature sources on new trends in the library profession. This study is in line with Ojiegbe (2010) who observed that lack of fund was one of the major problem hindering competencies of librarians in effective service delivery. Furthermore, 52% indicated that there were not motivated to improve their level of competence towards service delivery. Motivation of librarians could be in the following forms: job security, financial incentives and reward, sponsoring librarians for library tour, conferences, workshops and seminars. Etc. This finding corroborates the findings of Adeoye and Ladipo (2017) who reported that motivation had influence on the level of performance of library employees.

Summary of Findings

The following findings were made:

1. Librarians in Niger State Universities had a high level of competence in delivering the following services: conducting search interview through manual medium, sound knowledge on how to use various reference sources, effectively communicate orally and in writing, ability to develop innovative new services and market the library to the university community and knowledge on institutional repositories and open access journals, conduct research and make presentations in conferences and seminars and participate in library professional activities. However, librarians were incompetent in conducting search interview through online medium, preserving and managing research data, acquiring, managing and accessing digital resources and developing and maintaining a web.

2. Librarians often applied their competencies in conducting user education, conducting search interview through manual medium, communicating effectively verbally and in writing, developing innovative services and marketing the library to the university community. Nonetheless, librarians rarely applied their competencies in conducting search interview through online medium while preservation and management of research data was not done.

3. Librarians majorly acquired their competence from library schools and job experience.

4. The major challenges faced by librarians that hindered them from improving their competencies were lack of fund and motivation respectively.

Conclusion

Librarians must realize that they must continuously improve their competencies in information service delivery in order to satisfy the information needs of their users and also compete with other information providers. It is also very necessary that their competencies should not be hidden but it should be applied in delivery of information services.

Recommendations

1. Efforts should be made by librarians to apply their competencies in innovative and electronic information services.
2. Library management should endeavor to make available funds for frequent training and development of librarians.
3. Library management should endeavor to motivate their librarians through financial reward, job security, sponsoring them for library tours, conferences, seminars and workshops.
4. Workshop seminars, and other skill enhancement should be periodically organized for training librarians

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