Staff Attitude to Shelving and Shelf Reading in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

This study examines the attitude of shelving staff in three selected academic libraries in Abeokuta, Nigeria. A questionnaire was developed to elicit data for the study. 35 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the identified shelving staff in the selected libraries. Only 28 copies of the questionnaire were found useful and were used for the analysis. Out of the total respondents 13(46.4%) were male while 15(53.6%) were female. The result reveals that a majority (57.1%) of the shelving staff have a positive attitude to shelving and do not see users as constituting a burden to them. However, their only grievance is that other senior library staff should be involved in shelving. Recommendations were made to improve upon the attitude of the shelving staff in academic libraries.

In spite of the advent of technology, libraries still rely on their human resources to put books used by their users back on the shelves. Books shelved promptly and correctly usually improve the image of the library and also create an environment of good customer service. Hence the importance of shelving and shelf-reading cannot be overlooked in any library. Without accurate shelving of books, effective library operation would be impossible for library staff and their patrons (Power 1999). Moreover, accurate and timely shelving means service to patrons and it is something that is expected in any library. Unfortunately, many academic libraries in Nigeria are experiencing difficulty shelving their books due to heavy usage and lack of staff. Thus, it is not uncommon to see book shelves disorganized and untidy. Staff attitudes coupled with the boring routine task of shelving are often cited as reasons behind this problem. (Aliero 2003) Attitude is often described as inclinations, feelings, prejudices, preconceived notion or fears and convictions about any specific issue (Taiwo 1998). It is therefore the aim of this study to examine the attitudes of library staff who are involved in shelving and shelf reading.

Literature Review.

Though literature abounds on organization of library resources, such as using classification schemes in managing the resources, not much study has been conducted on staff attitude to shelving and shelf-reading, therefore literature available for this study is very scanty. Shelving is described as organizing books by call numbers and placing them in their correct locations on the library shelves; while shelf reading is the process of reading the call numbers on books that are currently on the library shelves and making sure that they are in the proper order. In stressing the importance of these two main tasks in libraries, Agboola (1984) pointed out that shelving is an important aspect of library work which can determine user satisfaction or frustration as far as locating library materials is concerned. Lyons and Rutherford (1998) on the other hand, noted that shelving is critical to the success of a library's service delivery strategies. Hence proper and accurate shelving and shelf-reading maintain patrons' confidence.

In most libraries in developing countries, shelving of books is done by junior staff. Corroborating this, Agboola (1984) acknowledged that in Nigerian libraries, the shelving of books is done by junior library staff under the supervision of professional librarians. In developed countries, shelving of books is done by part time shelvers (Rodgers 1998). However, shelving and shelf reading can be monstrous and boring and being a routine duty, staff can develop a negative attitude to it. Power (1999) observed that library users' perception of shelving staff as the lowest in the library staff hierarchy can also affect their attitude. Lyons and Rutherford (1998) in their review of the University of Queensland library's shelving operations reported that there used to be a long standing history of inter-personal conflict and dissatisfaction amongst the shelving staff before a solution was proffered.

Furthermore, Power (1999) emphasized that since shelving is time consuming and involves repetition of tasks, it requires motivated staff to effectively perform the task very well. In line with the above Aliero (2003) claimed that most inappropriate shelving is done by library staff themselves. He highlighted a number of reasons for this which includes ignorance, non-challant attitude, lack of supervision, under staffing and lack of motivation.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are;

1. to examine the attitude of shelving staffs to shelving in selected academic libraries.
2. to suggest possible ways of improving staff attitude.

Methodology:

Three academic libraries located in the Abeokuta metropolis were used for this study. These were University of Agriculture (UNAAB), Federal College of Education (FCE), and Moshood Abiola Polytechnic (MAPOLY), all in Abeokuta. All regular library staff of the institutions who normally participate in shelving were involved in this study. A total number of thirty-five shelving staff members ranging from library attendants to library officers were identified and involved in the study. Thirty-five copies of the questionnaire were administered. All thirty-five questionnaires were collected but only twenty eight were found usable representing 80% of the questionnaires administered.

The questionnaire has two parts. Part one sought information on such variables as educational qualification, sex, age, marital status, experience in shelving, training received in shelving, as well as views on the level of supervision of shelving staff. The second part of the questionnaire measured the individual's attitude to shelving.

Analysis of Results

The data obtained from the questionnaire reveals that 14(50%) of the respondents were from the University of Agriculture, 8(28.6%) from Federal Colleges of Education while 6(21.4%) were from Moshood Abiola Polytechnic. Out of the total respondents, 13 (46.4%) were male while 15 (53.6%) were female. 17 (60.7%) were married, 10 (35.7%) single, while 1 (3.6%) did not indicate his/her status. This reveals that majority of the respondents are family men and women who are expected to be responsible men and women in the society and therefore may reflect this trait in their attitudes to work.

In terms of qualification 5(17.9%) had a West African School Certificate and its equivalent results, 15(53.6%) had a diploma certificate in librarianship while 8(28.6%) had other diploma certificates (not in librarianship). This implies that shelving staff in the selected academic institutions have enough educational background to help them in their shelving task. In terms of training, 16(57.1%)

received training in shelving while 12(42.9%) indicated that they were not trained for the task. Age wise, 1(3.6%) was below 20years, 18(54.3%) were between the age of 20 and 40 years and 9(32.1%) were above 40years. Also the implication of this was that the shelving staff were adults who should know the effect of disorganized shelves on library image.

The second part of the questionnaire was analyzed to determine the attitudes of the shelving staff. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on whether shelving is an enjoyable task or not. Table 1 reveals that a total of 16(57.1%) of the respondents agreed with the statement, 2(7.1%) respondents were undecided while 10(35.7%) of the respondents did not agree with the statement. This shows that the majority of the respondents had a favourable attitude to shelving in the selected academic libraries.

In response to whether the staff considered shelf-reading as an important aspect of shelving, 17(60.7%) respondents strongly agreed while a cumulative percentage of 92.9% of respondents agreed to the statement. This means that shelving staff know the importance of shelf-reading and therefore are not likely to handle this aspect of their job with levity.

In response to the statement: 'shelvers should not regard users as creating unnecessary problem for them', a cumulative of 82.1%

of the total respondents agreed while only a cumulative 10.7% of the respondents disagreed. This also lends credence to the fact that the shelving staffs in the selected academic libraries enjoy shelving and do not see it as a burden.

Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on whether every member of the library should be involved in shelving. A cumulative of 21(75%) of the respondents agreed to the statement while only a cumulative of 5(17.9%) of the respondents disagreed. This shows that shelvers are not happy that librarians were exempted from shelving.

Discussion

The study reveals that shelving staffs in the three selected academic libraries have positive attitudes to their work. This may be a result of maturity as most of the respondents are married adults who by virtue of their status in the society are supposed to be responsible people. They do not see users as constituting an unnecessary burden for them as 'the work of a shelving staff is never done' due to its repetitive nature. Their only grievance was that every other member of the staff including the librarians should be involved in shelving. This may be borne out of the perception that shelving staff are regarded as the lowest in library staff hierarchy (Power 1999).

Table 1:   Shelving of books is a very enjoyable task

Response	No. of respondents	%	Cumulative %
Strongly agree	6	21.4	21.4
Agree	10	35.7	57.1
Undecided	2	7.1	64.3
Disagree	6	21.4	85.7
Strongly disagree	4	14.3	100.0
Total	28	100	

Table 2: Shelf–reading is a very important aspect of shelving

Response	No. of respondents	%	Cumulative %
Strongly agree	17	60.7	60.7
Agree	9	32.1	92.9
Undecided	1	3.6	96.4
Disagree	1	3.6	100
Strongly disagree	-		
Total	28	100	

Table 3: Shelving staff should not regard library users as creating unnecessary problem for them

Response	No. of respondents	%	Cumulative %
Strongly agree	13	46.4	46.4
Agree	10	35.7	82,1
Undecided	2	7.1	89.3
Disagree	2	7.1	94.4
Strongly disagree	1	3.6	100
Total	28	100	

Table 4: Every member of library staff; senior, and junior should be involved in shelving

Response	No. of respondents	%	Cumulative %
Strongly agree	**16**	**57.1**	**57.1**
Agree	5	17.9	75.0
Undecided	2	7.1	82.1
Disagree	4	14.3	96.4
Strongly disagree	1	3.6	100
Total	28	100	

However, in order to improve the attitude of the shelving staff in the library as well as boost their morale, the following recommendations are proffered:

• Library management should give adequate training to shelving staff before they are assigned to shelves. During this training, the importance of accurate and timely shelving should be emphasized. In addition to this, training should also include health care talks because shelving entails repetitive actions which can cause muscle fatigue, strain on the eyes, neck and back.

• Motivation should be put in-place such as rewarding the most accurate and best shelving staff at the end of the year.

• Opportunity should also be given to shelving staff to contribute their input and develop a shelving policy for the library so that they can have a sense of belonging.

In conclusion, shelving and shelf-reading, being a vital part of a healthy library, needs motivated and dedicated staff to accomplish it accurately. Supervisors should not be too bossy and should be able to correct the shelving staff in love. Due to the monotonous nature of the shelving task it should be noted that shelving staff may only be able to maintain their concentration to detail for a few hours at a time. There are also some health factors to be considered as shelving staff may need to squat, kneel or sit on the ground to read the bottom shelf, lift and push heavy books and trolleys, and look up or stand on a small stool to read the top shelf. Therefore supervisors should know the strength of their staff and should be able to direct them to function at their optimal level.

In order to combat the psychological effects of status on shelving staff, they should be made to understand that librarians have more professional duties to attend to; every staff has his/her area of specialization which should be attended to so that the whole system will function and fulfill its goal. Innovations should be introduced to shelving; this will reduce the staff stress and negate any odd feelings. In addition equipment that can reduce staff stress should be acquired by the library management, and finally, volunteers can be involved in shelving.

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