

## **A Comparative Analysis of Users' Attitudes Towards Lending and Reference Services in Akwa Ibom State Public Library, Uyo and Cross River State Public Library, Calabar**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to compare users' attitudes towards lending and reference services in Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo and Cross River State public library, Calabar. To achieve the purpose of the study, two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Available related literatures were reviewed to provide direction and background information for the study. A four-point scale; "users' attitudes toward library services questionnaire" was trial-tested for the verification of the degree of reliability of the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was then administered to 400 respondents, 200 each in the Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo and Cross River State public library, Calabar. The data obtained based on the questionnaire were quantified and statistically analyzed. Independent t-test analysis was used to test each hypothesis. Each of the hypotheses was tested at .05 alpha level. The result of the analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between users' attitudes toward lending and reference services in Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo and Cross River State public library.

**Keywords:** Comparative analysis; users' attitudes; Lending, Services; reference services; public library; Uyo; Calabar.

### **Introduction**

Libraries generally provide a wide range of services and can be looked at from various angles, viz; as a collection of books maintained for a specific purpose or a combination of

purposes, arranged in a systematic order, adequately housed and made available for use. It can also be seen as an institution contributing its quota to the development of society through its collection of books and non-book materials; also as a complex system comprising of diverse categories of staff, books, journals, newspapers, audio-visuals, automated media, the buildings, etc. Libraries are not institutions, buildings, warehouses, stores, etc of materials, but are agents of educational, social, economic and political changes or revolutions in the society and their doors open to all who need them.

The library according to Collier's Encyclopedia (2000), is considered as a 'communication centre'. The mission of libraries is to make the contents of the world's accumulating literacy, intellectual and cultural heritage available quickly and inexpensively. The library fulfils its mission by collecting, organizing and preserving information and using this information to satisfy the needs of the users through its services.

If the public library is all these that has been said, what could be user's attitudes towards the services of Akwa Ibom State Public Library, Uyo and the Cross River State Public Library, Calabar? This is the question this study seeks to answer.

Public libraries are now acknowledged to be an indispensable part of community life, as promoters of literacy, providers of wide range of reading for all ages, and centers for community information services. The practice of opening libraries to the public has been known from ancient times and public libraries in recent decades have assumed a wide range of activities in the hope that by their very diversity they will attract increased patronage.

According to Sjolander (1995) services rendered to users, in the broadest sense include all library functions, since the ultimate aim of any library's activity is the satisfaction of users' needs. A distinction is normally made however, between technical services and public services. The technical services include administration, development of resources and organization of materials and are of indirect assistance to readers. The public services assist library users directly.

Creth (1995) stated that, library users desire a wide range of alternative, customized service options, self-service, and universal accessibility and availability. Users want convenient, easy, continuous service access, 24 hours per day, from anywhere. Users want the power to decide when, where and how to obtain access to a library service.

Aina (2004) stated that, the provision of reference service is an important function of a library. Readers are provided this service on request. People have different queries that need to be solved by the librarian. Hence it is generally a person-to-person service. In many cases it involves interviewing the reader to enable the reference librarian articulate the problem of the user clearly.

According to Akhinade (2002), the maximization of resources is one of the principles underlying the concept of library services. In line with this axiom, reference services are established primarily to facilitate the use of the library and its resources since the expectations of library users are high when sourcing and retrieving information, hence when the expectations of users are not met, they tend to exhibit negative attitudes towards such a library.

Reference services according to Whitaker (1977), allow information to flow efficiently from information sources to the enquirer. He added that, reference and information service as a theoretical discipline has the following: information seekers, reference librarians and information sources.

To this end, Brown (1994) stated that libraries have over the years designed standard bibliographic retrieval tools such as catalogues, indexes, abstracts and bibliographies geared

towards accessibility to the right book, by the right person and at the right time to help in effectiveness of the library. These tools are operated on certain assumptions about what users want to know about certain materials and the location of such materials.

However, in spite of these efforts Busayo 2004 noted that, these tools are grossly under utilized and library users are sometimes unable to find the needed information even when information is available in the library. These eventually result in user frustration, or dissatisfaction and low utilization of services in libraries.

Evans (1999) believed that adequate reference service can only be ensured by librarians with a specialized academic education, working on the provision of specialized information service in their narrow field to other subject specialists. He further argued that if the library fails to fulfill the information needs of the user, if the library only instructs the user in the use of the collection, and if the specific information contained within the library cannot be retrieved, the library as a separate entity in society serves few useful functions.

Jackaman (1989) in his book "Basic Reference Information Work" observed that many writers hold the view that reference theory is not just about enquiry work but is concerned with all aspects of reference and information service such as dissemination of information and reader instruction. Jackaman further added that three basic elements form the basis of reference service; the information source, the information seeker and the librarian and the subordinate element environment which correlates to the physical library building.

Aboyade (1997) maintained that there exists no very clear reference where users are personally helped to acquire library materials. It is believed that there is yet any study to arrive at the basic principles of reference service. Users' knowledge of reference is limited to short briefing in library use during orientation course. He maintained further that there is no distinction between doing and helping others to carry out reference services.

Lyle (1994) stated that, in reference service, librarians have traditionally given personal help to readers in making the best use of collections to satisfy their information needs. He added that the minimum standards for public library systems, 1966, stated that, the modern public library collects the printed and audio-visual materials needed to conduct the individual and group life of its constituency. It organizes and makes accessible its resources to be convenient and easy to use.

According to Harris (1998), reference service at the Newark Public Library is one of the most vital and visible expressions of the library's purpose and mission and is key to each of the library's four primary service roles: to serve as a center for information, formal education, research and independent learning. He defined reference service as personal assistance provided to users and potential users of information. Reference service takes a variety of forms including direct personal assistance, directories or signs, exchange of information in anticipation of users' needs or interests, and direct end-user access to an information system via telecommunication hardware and software.

For public libraries to render good, and quick reference and information service, they require extensive preparation behind the scenes. According to Usherwood (1996), reference librarians probably need to spend half of their time on such duties as evaluating materials for purchase, indexing, supervising staff, and public relations. He further stated that, when librarians are working directly with the public, the librarian's chief activity is ready reference or supplying the answers to brief factual questions. For answers to such questions librarian depend primarily on reference books such as; dictionaries, encyclopedia, almanacs, atlases, indexes, bibliographies and directories which are specially designed to be consulted for specific facts.

It is stated in the Academic American Encyclopedia that, in large public libraries a substantial quantity of information work is done over the telephone at the convenience of the library user. At the Milwaukee Public Library, for example, the ready reference section answers on average of three hundred and sixty (360) telephone questions per day, using its 'library on the wheel' – a collection of reference books placed on a turn table for convenience and speed. For more complicated questions, inquirers have an interview with the reference librarian.

According to Campbell and Shlechter (1998), guidance to individuals using the library might be traced back to 1876, when Samuel Greene spoke of 'The desirableness of establishing personal relations between librarians and readers in popular libraries'. From the ideas in this speech, both reference service and what was known as readers' advisory work developed.

According to Idiodi and Igbinosa (2003), reference service calls for skills and professionalism and when not properly applied at all stages of library operations result in some readers not getting what they want and leaving the library frustrated. This group of frustrated readers needs to be captured by librarians and given necessary help to enhance their satisfaction rate in the use of the libraries.

Also in a survey at the Wichita State University Library, Brown (1994) reported that the quality improvement techniques used by business organizations were adapted to improve the quality of their reference services. These techniques include; identifying the characteristics of customers and their needs; periodically evaluating service and identifying their limitations and improving on the services. She stressed that improvement should be a continuous process and reference service should be customer driven to maintain positive attitudes.

Another inevitable service provided by public libraries is loan services. According to Aina (2004), loan service is essentially a social service in which users of a library have the privilege of borrowing library materials either for reading or consultation. Apart from books, other resources in the library that can be loaned out include such materials as audiocassettes, slides, videotapes, films, projectors, cassette radio and video-machines. This service is usually granted for a short duration and by proper authentication by the authorizing officer. This implies that the library ought to have more than one material in that area before loaning, so as not to deny other users from having access to such materials. The lending departments that provide books for the general non-specialized readers, should give them the opportunity to choose the best and most useable books that are available at varying levels.

According to Weiss (2008), the fact that material is freely available clearly influences the borrowing experience, as readers cannot afford to buy all the books they want to read and also, they do not have space for all the books they want to read. For these group of people, the library fulfils an important function, that of supplying a large quantity of books that they can read and return with no problem of storage.

According to Collier's Encyclopedia (2000), the national inter-library loan code by American Library Association, defined inter-library loan as, transactions in which library materials are made available by one library to another for the use of an individual... they include provision of copies as substitutes for loans of the original materials. It has been estimated that over a million loan transactions take place each year among United States public libraries alone. And inter-library lending is probably even better developed in some European countries such as West Germany and in Britain, where notable service is provided by the national lending library for science and technology.

Tansley (1968) pointed out that, the great technological development which lies in the direction of instant and complete linking of library holdings through varied network has greatly influenced and increased users of the public library. He further pointed out that, with the growing use, even internationally of standard book numbers and cataloging data in machine-readable form, public libraries can communicate with one another bibliographically more effectively than ever before. The prospect for inter-library reference on a world wide scale is already bright.

Moran (2002) explained that the borrowing library is responsible for providing bibliographic information as fully as possible and should try to locate copies in its own region rather than concentrate requests on a few large libraries. He added that, borrowing is a privilege, and not a right, and the lending library decides whether a particular item should be provided.

Busayo (2004) on the other hand suggested that, public libraries should collect and organize books and related materials and make these available for use at home and in the libraries. Conditions of loan should be adequate to allow use of materials borrowed by not charging on loaned materials for home use and being as liberal as possible on the period of loan and the number of items lent.

**Methodology**

The research design adopted for this work was the survey method. The population of the study was made up of all users of the Akwa Ibom and Cross River States Public Libraries. The population consisted of registered users of the two libraries. According to the statistics obtained from these libraries in the year 2012, a total of 2023 were registered users. Out of this number, the Akwa Ibom State Public Library had 818 registered users while the Cross River State Public Library had 1205 registered users

A total of 400 registered library users were randomly selected from the study population. A break-down of the figure showed that 200 representing 50% were randomly selected from users of Akwa Ibom State Public Library, Uyo while another 200 representing 50% were randomly selected from users of Cross River State Public Library, Calabar. The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire, made up of two sections, A and B. Section A seek information on personal data of respondents. Section B gave users’ attitudes toward lending and reference services. Test-retest method of reliability was used to determine the reliability estimate of the instrument. The reliability estimate of the sub-scales range from 0.76-0.81. These values were considered high enough to justify the use of the instrument for the study.

**Hypothesis 1**

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between users’ attitudes towards lending services of Akwa Ibom State Public Library, Uyo and Cross River State Public Library, Calabar.

In order to test this hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was used on the scores measuring the difference between users’ attitudes toward lending services in public libraries in Uyo and Calabar. The result obtained is as shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

Result of the independent t-test analysis showing difference between users’ attitudes toward lending services in public libraries in Uyo and Calabar.

Public libraries used	n	X̄	SD	t-value
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AKS public library, Uyo	193	52.82	3.20	.627
CRS public library, Calabar	189	52.31	2.92	

$t_{cri} = 1.960$  Decision: Not significant at .05 alpha level.

The result of the independent t-test as shown on Table 1 revealed that the calculated t-value of 1.627 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at .05 level of significance, hence the null hypothesis is retained. It therefore follows that users' attitudes toward lending services in Akwa Ibom State public library are not significantly different from users' attitudes toward lending services in Cross River State public library. The mean of users' attitudes toward lending services ( $X = 52.82$ ) in Akwa Ibom State public library is slightly greater than the mean of users' attitudes toward lending services ( $X = 52.31$ ) in Cross River State public library. This implies that users' attitudes toward lending services in Akwa Ibom State public library is more positive than users' attitudes toward lending services in Cross River State public library, but the difference is not enough to be significant.

### Hypothesis 2

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between users' attitudes toward reference services in Akwa Ibom State Public Library, Uyo and Cross River State Public Library, Calabar.

In order to test this hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was used on the scores measuring the difference between users' attitudes toward reference services in public libraries in Uyo and Calabar. The result obtained is shown in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

Result of the independent t-test analysis showing difference between users' attitudes toward reference services in public libraries in Uyo and Calabar.

Public libraries used	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value
Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo	193	51.23	3.63	
Cross River State public library, Calabar	189	50.92	3.14	
				.864

$t_{cri} = 1.960$  Decision: Not significant at .05 alpha level.

The result of the independent t-test as shown in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t-value of .864 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at .05 level of significance. It therefore follows that the users' attitudes toward reference services in Akwa Ibom State public library are not significantly different from users attitudes toward reference services in Cross River State public library.

Although the mean of users' attitude toward reference services in Akwa Ibom State public library ( $X_1 = 51.23$ ) is greater than the mean of users' attitudes toward reference services in Cross River State public library ( $X_2 = 50.92$ ), the difference is not enough to be significant. This implies that the users' attitudes toward reference services in the Akwa Ibom State public library and Cross River State public library are almost the same.

### Discussion of findings

The result of the first hypothesis showed that users' attitudes toward lending services in Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo and Cross River State public library, Calabar is not significantly different. This finding seems to agree with Lyle (1994) who stated that once a

library has acquired and catalogued its books and other materials, its subsequent obligations are two fold: to lend these materials to the legitimate users of the library and to render full assistance to readers. Flexner (2001) also believed that the circulation department's primary function is to supply the library user books, pamphlets and other materials wanted to satisfy their needs. That whether it be small or large libraries, circulation or loan department needs to be well organized and efficiently administered in order to perform effectively. An ideal circulation system should be convenient for both users and the library; it must have fast charging and discharging, handle renewals simply, provide statistical information and routinize daily work.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that users' attitudes toward reference services in Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo is not significantly different from users' attitudes toward reference services in Cross River State public library, Calabar. The finding of this study seems to support Amah (1987) who says that the most important element in equipping a reference department of a library is an adequate and lively collection of quality materials plus a knowledgeable reference assistant with experience in using and providing the right book at the right time and in the right way. If the situation in the two public libraries were very different from what Amah (1987) had described, users' attitudes toward reference services would not have been as positive as it was found to be.

This study finding is also in consonance with the observation of Akinola, et.al. (2013) and Ofre, et.al (2004) that reference service is the personal assistance given by the reference division staff of library to users who are in need of information. They further say that reference services involve not only locating the information resources, but also sorting out relevant information from a mass of both relevant and irrelevant ones; and that failure to satisfy such needs may lead to user frustration or misinformation.

The respondents of the study admitted that the provision of reference service and lending service were high and available each 75% in the public libraries under study.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the study findings, it was generally concluded that, although there was a general positive users' attitudes toward library services, resources and facilities in Akwa Ibom State public library, Uyo and Cross River State public library, Calabar, users' attitudes toward lending and reference services in the two public libraries were not significantly different.

The study recommended that State Government should continue to provide current and adequate information materials in the public libraries so that materials will increase users' interest in making use of the libraries.

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