Annals of Library and Information Studies
Vol. 62, June 2015, pp. 90-93

Dealing with difficult patrons in libraries: a case Study of some libraries in Ondo state Nigeria

Oyeronke Adebayo[a], Michael Fagbohun[b], Odaro Osayande[c] and Emmanuel Shola Owolabi[d]

[a,c]Center for Learning Resources, Covenant University PMB 1023 Canaan Land Ota, Ogun State Nigeria.
Email: oyeronke.adebayo@covenantuniversity.edu.ng, odaro.osayande@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

[b]Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, College of Education University of Ibadan, Ibadan Oyo State Nigeria.
Email: fathmikky@yahoo.com

[d]Center for Learning Resources, Landmark University, PMB 1001 Omu – Aran,Kwara State Nigeria
Email:manuelprince01@yahoo.com

Received 21 November 2014, accepted 28 May 2015

A survey of sixty five library staff in six libraries in Ondo state of Nigeria on how the libraries manage difficult library patrons revealed that having good interpersonal skills and conducting regular library orientation progrmames for new users were effective in managing difficult library patrons.

Keywords: Library patrons, Library staff, libraries, Ondo State

Introduction

The library is a service oriented institution and the desire of every librarian is to satisfy their users to the best of their ability. Working in a library environment where patrons vary in terms of abilities and skills can be very challenging. Fulfilling the needs of different patrons who possess different dispositions is not very easy. The ability to remain calm, cool, collected and patient can be difficult especially when patrons go against laid down rules. Library staff, especially those at the front desk, circulation and reference sections, must possess the abilities to handle different types of patrons.

Exhibition of difficult behavior comes in various forms depending on the disposition of the individual. It includes being abusive, arrogant, sarcastic and sometimes physically assaulting a library staff. The most common reason for difficult behavior is needs not being met as expected by the patron.

Quinn[1] posited that it is not uncommon for librarians to encounter a difficult patron at one time or the other in their career. Patrons visit the library for various reasons including for borrowing books, studying, locating information, preparing academic assignments etc. If the patron needs are not met, there is a possibility that the patron will display difficult behavior.

Some of the qualities of frontline library staff are to be mentally alert, courteous and being patient when dealing with patrons. They have to remain calm even under stressful situations. As observed by Ifidon and Okoli[2], most library staff have gone through traditional trainings and have refused to change and adapt with the new situations in libraries. Abel and Issa[3] averred that library activities are becoming more sophisticated as the sources of knowledge proliferate and the devices for the retrieval of specific item of knowledge become increasingly varied. To this end, it has become mandatory for library staff to acquire necessary skills that will help in providing effective service for library users.

Effective communication skills are essential when dealing with library patrons on daily basis. Richards[4] identified three ways of preparing to deal with difficult patrons: (1) create and update policies that reduce problems and protect staff and patrons, (2) develop communication skills to handle variety of situations and, (3) train all staff on how to deal with difficult patrons. Khan and Zahid[5] noted that while communicating with difficult patrons, it is good to encourage them to disclose the problems they are facing.

Satisfying a users' need can be a very daunting task most especially in Nigeria where libraries are faced with dwindling financial resources. Most libraries cannot acquire current information resources and they cannot afford state-of-the-art equipment that will facilitate easy access and utilization of library

resources and where these facilities are available, most patrons may not have the required skills to handle the equipment to get what they want. Furthermore, most libraries in Nigeria are not conducive for reading as they are not well equipped with temperature regulating gadgets such as air conditioners. Stress and frustration owing to these limitations result in library patrons exhibiting difficult behaviour.

Review of literature

Fagbola et al[6] stressed that the library is a conduit for information serving a wide spectrum of information seekers. Matthews[7] posited that the total purpose and focus of a 21st century library is the customer. According to McGuire[8] a library exists primarily to:

- to disseminate books and information for free or close to free;
- to archive information;
- to provide a community space for people to interact around information; and
- to give people the tools necessary to manage information in a sensible way.

Some library patrons may exhibit difficult behaviors if they are frustrated owing to information needs not being met. McGuigan[9] posited that constant changes in the formats of information and various types of information tools can confuse patrons while Osa[10] stated that the inability of a library staff to fulfill patrons' information needs can bring about frustration. Blessinger[11] opines that patrons are usually not angry with the library staff but with the situation.

Table 1 lists the internal and external factors causing library patrons to become angry and aggressive as identified by Gannon-Leary & McCarthy[12].

In order to reduce the rate at which patrons exhibit difficult behaviors, Graham[13] posited that there is a need for the following:

- Library must have rules.
- Rules must have enforcement guidelines.
- There must be consistency in rule enforcement.
- Staff should avoid negative or disparaging language.
- Staff needs to understand that safety is up to them.
- Must have a way to document problems, so trends can be used to justify budgets.
- Have staff training.
- Have a good relationship with local police.
- Libraries to have a monitoring system such as closed circuit television(CCTV).
- Have right managers in the right positions.
- Have a periodic review of policies and procedures, and change them when necessary.

Objectives of the study

- To identify who are difficult patrons;
- To find out steps taken by library staff when faced with difficult patrons; and
- To find out ways of helping to deal with difficult patrons.

Methodology

The study was conducted in six libraries in Ondo state of Nigeria that include The National Library of Nigeria, Federal University of Technology Library, Ministry of Justice Library, Ondo State Library Board, Ondo State Public Library and the Library attached to Ondo State House of Assembly. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the entire study population comprising sixty five (65) library staff. Fifty two filled in questionnaires were returned out of which forty eight were found usable (74%

Table 1—Factors for patron displeasure

Internal factors	External factors
Illness/pain	Not wanting to lose face among peers/members of opposite sex
Bereavement	Being ignored by staff
Divorce/marital problems	Dismissive action of staff
Alcohol/drugs	Delays in receiving attention/service
Stress of assignments/exams	Queue/line jumping
Stress specific to times of the year	Noise
Money worries	Disruptive behaviour of other customers
Hunger/lack of food	Lack of staff to help
Lack of knowledge	Perceived lack of interest in staff
Past experience	Tardiness for appointments
Insecurity/feeling threatened/vulnerability	Being criticized or blamed
False or unrealistic expectations	Response to a stressed out staff member
Personality type (i.e., individuals who are impatient,competitive, stress junkies who get easily upset over small things).	Copying another customer's response.

response rate). Four questionnaires were not usable as they contained incomplete information. The data was interpreted using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Table 2 shows the number of library workers in each of the library sampled and the number of questionnaires administered and retrieved.

Analysis

Respondents profile

Majority of the respondents [21 (43.8%)] were from the Federal University of Technology; Akure, 11 (22.9%) from Ondo State Library Board, 5 (10.4%) from Ondo State House of Assembly, 4 (8.3%) from Ministry of Justice and National Library of Nigeria; Akure and 3 (6.3%) from Public Library; Ondo.

Sixteen (33.3%) respondents were in the age group 31 to 40 years while 29.2% belonged to the age group 40 to 50 years, 20% belonged to 51 to 60 years and 16.7% of the respondents belonged to the age group 20 to 30years.

Thirty one (64.6%) respondents were males while 17 (35.4%) were females. Eleven (22.9%) were Library Assistants, nine (18.8%) were Library Officers, 12.5% were Library Portals and Higher Library Officers, 10.4% were Chief Librarians, 8.3% were Librarian I and 6.3% were Assistant Librarians while 4.2% were Librarian II and Senior Librarians.

Eleven (22.9%) respondents had 1 to 5 years of working experience, fifteen (31.3%) had 6 to 10 years working experience, nine (18.8%) had 11 to 15 years working experience, five (10.4%) had 16 to 20 years working experience while eight (16.7%) had 20 or more years of working experience.

Table 2—Questionnaires distribution and responses

Libraries	No. of library workers	Questionnaires administered	Usable questionnaires
Federal University of Technology, Akure	23	23	21
Ministry of Justice Library	4	4	4
National Library of Nigeria, Akure	12	12	4
Ondo State House of Assembly Library	5	5	5
Ondo State Library Board	11	11	11
Public Library Ondo	10	10	3
Total	65	65	48

Difficult patrons

About 92 two percent of the respondents considered students making noise in the library as difficult patrons. Making noise in the library can be very distractive especially to patrons who are reading and consulting different information resources. In recent times, it is common for libraries to create a space for patrons who may wish to discuss or have group chats with either colleagues or other library patrons. This space is supposed to be noise proof, and may have gadgets such as a satellite television and Internet enabled computers.

Table 3 gives the respondents feedback on who makes a difficult patron. It is also very important to make sure that all library patrons take part in library

Table 3—Difficult patrons

	Disagree N	%	Agree N	%
Those who make noise in the library	4	8.4	44	91.7
Those who don't comply with library rules	18	37.5	30	62.5
Those who are never satisfied with library services	22	45.9	26	54.2
Those who don't make adequate enquiries before searching for information	8	16.7	40	83.3
Those who can't make use of the OPAC/WEBPAC	13	27.2	35	72.9
Those who receive phone cells in the library	31	64.6	17	35.4
Those who bring eatables into the library	6	12.5	42	87.5
Those who don't return books when due	9	18.8	39	81.3
Those who mutilate or vandalise library resources	8	16.7	40	83.3
Those who don't know what they want	11	22.9	37	77.1
Those who are rude to library staff	6	12.1	42	87.9
Those who want to make use of resources that library doesn't have	14	29.2	34	70.8
Those who sleep in the library	13	27.1	35	72.9
Those who throw tantrums when not satisfied with the library resources	9	18.8	39	81.3
Those who will not give you time to search for what they need	11	18.8	37	81.2
Those who get angry with basic library rules and procedures	10	20.9	38	79.2
Those who report library staff to management directly	14	29.2	34	70.8
Those who dress indecently	17	35.4	31	64.6
Those who can't use modern technologies	20	41.6	28	58.4
Those who don't come for library orientation	13	27.2	35	73

orientation process. This will go a long way to help familiarize patrons with the Do's and Don'ts of the library.

Dealing with difficult patrons

According to ninety two percent respondents, applying good interpersonal skills helps when faced with difficult patrons while a few (2.1%) of the respondents stated that arguing with difficult patrons is the best step (Table 4).

Interpersonal skill is all about effective communication and as opined by Okon[14], library managers have the responsibility to provide effective, efficient and relevant information to the users. Librarians need to be cautious when dealing with difficult patrons and it would help if library staff possesses good communication skills.

As for dealing with difficult patrons, all the respondents indicated that it is essential to organize library orientation programme for users periodically so as to familiarize the patrons with the library environment, rules, resources and facilities. This can be done for groups or individuals. Table 5 gives the other measures for dealing with difficult patrons.

Table 4—Steps to take when faced with difficult patrons

	Disagree N	%	Agree N	%
Argue with them	47	97.9	1	2.1
Enforce the rules	13	27.2	35	72.9
Use interpersonal skills	4	8.4	44	91.7
Call security	20	41.6	28	58.4
Refer them to a superior	17	35.4	31	64.6
Advise them to attend library orientation	10	20.9	38	79.2
Bend the rules	41	84.9	7	14.6

Table 5—Ways of helping to deal with difficult patrons

	Disagree N	%	Agree N	%	Total N	%
Organise trainings for library staff	4	8.4	44	91.7	48	100.0
Organise library orientation for users periodically	0	0.0	48	100	48	100.0
Provide a platform to receive feedback from users	2	4.2	46	95.9	48	100.0
Ensure the library environment is conducive for reading	2	4.2	46	95.9	48	100.0
Provide adequate security that will ensure safety of lives and property	4	8.4	44	91.7	48	100.0

Conclusion

Most library staff come in contact with a difficult patrons at one time or the other. Regular training of library staff, orientation programmes for library patrons and having well stocked and patron friendly libraries are some of the measures by which libraries can have satisfied library patrons.

References

1 Quinn B, How psychotherapists handle different clients: lessons for librarians, *Libraries Faculty Research*, (2007). Available at: https://repositories.tdl.org/ttu-ir/bitstream/handle/2346/484/fulltext.pdf?sequence=1 (Accessed on 12 November 2014).

2 Ifidon S E and Okoli G N, 40 years of academic and library service to Nigeria past, present and future. Paper Presented at the 40th Annual National Conference on 40 Years of Library and Information Service to the Nation, Topo, Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria (2002).

3 Abel K A and Issa, AO, Re-organizing the Nigerian public libraries system for effective services to the community. Available at: https://www.unilorin.edu.ng/publications/issa/Dr.%20Issa%2011.doc (Accessed on 12 November 2014).

4 Richards T, Dealing with difficult patrons: a presentation. Available at: http://www.warrenlibrary.org/district/files/Difficult_Patrons.pdf (Accessed on 11 October 2014).

5 Khan M T and Zahid A, Dealing strategies and outcomes for the difficult patron in the library environment, *Pakistan Library and Information Science Journal*, 45(1)(2014) 4 – 29.

6 Fagbola O, Uzoigwe C and Ajegbomogun V O, Libraries driving access to knowledge in the 21st century in developing countries: an overview, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, (2011), Paper 566. Available at http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/566 (Accessed on 13 January 2015).

7 Matthews S, Customer is the purpose, *21st Century Blog*. Available at: http://21stcenturylibrary.com/2011/01/26/customer-is-the-purpose/ (Accessed on 8 January 2015).

8 McGuire H, What are libraries for? (2011). Available at: http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2011/what-are-libraries-for/ (Accessed on 12 November 2014).

9 McGuigan G S, The common sense of customer service: employing advice from the trade and popular literature of business to interactions with irate patrons in libraries, *The Reference Librarian*, 36(2002) 75-76.

10 Osa J O, The different patron situation: contemporary-based training to empower frontline staff, *The Reference Librarian*, 36(2002) 75-76.

11 Blessinger K D, The nature of the problems, definitions, scope and extent, historical perspectives and diverse clientele, *The Reference Librarian*, 36 (2002) 75-76.

12 Gannon-Leary P and McCarthy M D, *Customer Care a Training Manual for Library Staff*, (Chandos Publishing; Oxford), 2010.

13 Graham W, MLA 2010: Black belt librarians: dealing with difficult library patrons, (2010). Available at: http://www.swissarmylibrarian.net/2010/04/28/mla2010-black-belt-librarians-dealing-with-difficult-patrons/ (Accessed on 12 January 2015).

14 Itohowo H, Effective communication and smooth administration of academic libraries in the 21st century: a new paradigm in Nigeria, Library *Philosophy and Practice*, 8(1) (2005). Available at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1068&context=libphilprac (Accessed on 15 September 2014.