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# **Application of Interpersonal Communication in Reference and Information Services in University Libraries**

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## **Abstract**

The study dwells on application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries. Four research questions in line with the objective of the study were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design with the total population of 1,116. The sample size of the study was 330 students while 16 reference staff were studied without sampling due to their manageable size. Data was collected using questionnaire. A total number of 346 copies of questionnaire distributed were correctly filled and returned by the respondents who comprised entire reference staff, postgraduates and undergraduates' library users of university of Nigeria, Nsukka; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Data were analyzed using mean scores. Result shows that face to face communication, simplified language, customer relations were among the major interpersonal communication patterns in reference services in university libraries. It was found that interpersonal communication to a great extent contributes to effective reference and information services in university libraries by making exchange of message easier, and enhancing understanding of users information needs. Major hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services include inability to frame queries correctly, lack of adequate listening skills, stereotype and interiority complex of librarians, etc. Strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication include carefully listening, right framing of reference queries and many more. The study recommended effective user education program while reference staff should be well educated to be able to communicate effectively with users of different background.

**Keywords:** Reference Services, Information Services, Interpersonal Communication, University Libraries

## **Introduction**

Establishing a well equipped university library is a prerequisite for operational effectiveness and efficiency of the university. University library is the life wire that sustains and upholds intellectual activities of the university. It is established to support academic programs such as teaching, learning, research and other activities involving human intellect, knowledge,

innovation and creativity. University library is an intellectual resource centre of the university, established to play a supportive role of enhancing knowledge frontier of students, teaching and non-teaching staff of the university. University library is established, managed and funded by the academic institution to meet the information, research and curriculum needs of its students, faculty members and other members of the university community. Staff, students, researchers and other members of academic institution depend so much on the university libraries in order to meet their information needs.

According to Onyewusi and Oyeboade (2009), university library is an intellectual centre of the university system that provides the users with material assistance and an enabling environment that facilitates teaching, learning and research. University library maintains its position as intellectual heart of the university. Ugwuanyi (2004) states that the role of academic library is to engage people in academic and research work which is the essence of the academic institution. However, university library plays supportive role to university educational activities. Anyim (2015) posits that academic libraries provide necessary resources and services especially; reference and information services to enable libraries meet the needs of its teeming clientele and also interpret information sources to library users or show them how to access those sources. University library ensures that the information needs of staff are met and also facilitates use of the literature and other information resources through reference and information services.

According to Janes (2002), reference services were adopted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to several forces and trends occasioned by proliferation of information resources within and outside the library; complexities in various information resources; difficulties for users to locate the resources they need within the collection, and an increase in the number and diversity of people using libraries leading to a wider range of information needs, enquiries, and sophistication in the search for information. Retting (1993) states that reference and information services are collection of information services provided to the public by the reference librarian; adequate guides to the library's resources; and a high degree of interaction between the reference librarian and the clientele.

Reference and information services however, involves direct and personal assistance within the library environment to persons in search of specific educational, social, cultural, economical, political and other kinds of information. According to Janes (2002), reference and

information services include direct and personal aid that a library gives to library patrons in search of information for whatever purpose, and also various library activities that aimed at making information easily available to patrons. Ademodi (2011) states that reference and information service involves working with individual information users who have difficulty articulating or even understanding their own information needs. University libraries engage in reference and information services for the purpose of providing a wide range of services and facilities, which will enhance exploitative use of the library resources and services through the medium of personal assistance and self-direction, instructional guide; referral; ready reference; directional; interlibrary loan, quick reference guide; literature search; Current Awareness Services; Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI); information brokering and document delivery. To meet the users information needs, today's reference librarians need to not only understand but also embrace current and emerging technologies affecting reference functions and the information needs of library users. In any capacity librarians provide reference services, they should take cognizance of the major changes in libraries – changes that stem from countless cultural, economic, legal and social developments that have impacted, and continue to impact, our work (Mitchell, 2008). Information needs and expectations are continuously changing in the rapidly changing information scenario; therefore, libraries need to re-orient their collections, services, and facilities to keep pace with these advancements.

While reference and information services are largely a reactive service that is assistance or the service provided when asked for by the users, libraries have also played a key role in providing information services in anticipation of user needs. This assistance involves understanding of reference questions which according to Chowdhury (2001) ranges from the simple fact-finding type to complex questions requiring consultation, and often analysis, of one

or more information sources. This involves a personal discussion between a user and the reference librarian. Through the interview the reference librarian not only tries to understand the specific information need(s), but also collects information about the user, such as the user's subject knowledge, the purpose of finding the specific information, and so on. Based on the reference interview, the reference librarian is often able to filter the retrieved information in order to pick up the most appropriate source(s) for the given user at a given point of time.

Akoh and Udensi (2013) posits that reference service is one of the most professional aspects of the librarian's responsibilities in which all librarians must properly understand and be able to offer personal assistance to users in the pursuit of information. However, reference and information services are carried out by the reference librarian who is expected to be a good communicator that links library users to the information resources of their choice or provides appropriate information services to satisfy users' information needs through the medium of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication is an interactive process through which man exchanges information with his fellow man in the society in a manner that engenders mutuality, rapport and understanding. Interpersonal communication in reference services is the process through which information, knowledge, idea, message are interpreted and conveyed from reference librarian to library user or from library user to reference librarian with perfect understanding of each other in a consistent manner. Yildiz (2012) posits that the social function of interpersonal communication is stressed in the human relations perspective of organization by capturing the hearts and minds of organizational members (librarians and users) for effective coordination of organizational action in the pursuit of collective organizational goals. Similarly, Owoeye and Dhunsi (2014) states that interpersonal communication is an indispensable force towards achieving individuals and organizational goal, an objective that facilitates the sharing of information, experience and knowledge, transmission of ideas, decision making, coordination and interpretation of activities.

Interpersonal communication as the exchange of meaning between individuals through a common system of symbols, emotions, thoughts and knowledge is transferred throughout the process of sharing of ideas, feelings, thoughts and messages with others on mutual basis (Yildiz, 2012; Ojomo, 2004; Ifidon and Ugwuanyi, 2013). Interpersonal communication could also be

defined as a means by which two or more people interact, send and receive information or a process of using language and non-verbal cues to send and receive messages between individuals that are intended to arouse particular kinds of meaning (DeFleur and Dennis, 2002).

For communication to serve its purpose, it must be effective and interpersonal. The foregoing shows that interpersonal communication is very essential in reference and information services for effective service delivery. It is the life wire of every vibrant organization especially university libraries. It is the highest common factor for all those who congregate in libraries, especially in reference section where teaching, learning, research, querying and answering questions forms the bedrock of their functions. Studies show that interpersonal communication is a pre-requisite for effective reference services in university libraries because it is a process of conveying ideas, opinions, attitudes, feelings, sentiments, beliefs, or impressions on others.

Interpersonal communication makes swapping of information, feelings and impart from one person to another through verbal and non-verbal means easier. This underlines the crucial fact that interpersonal communication is not only apprehensive about 'what' is pronounced, i.e., the language employed, but 'how' it is pronounced, e.g., the nonverbal messages sent, such as tone of voice and facial expressions. Interpersonal communication can be seen as the process of interacting simultaneously with another and mutually influencing each other, usually for the purpose of managing relationships. Application of effective interpersonal communication in reference and information service has the capacity for enhancing exchange of information and giving the users impression that the librarians are concerned about their information needs. According to Yusuf (2011), interpersonal interaction with library patrons cannot be isolated from library operations as this enables librarians engage in face-to-face interaction and articulate the information needs of users more clearly for effective rendering of précised and effective information services. The result is that when the reference librarian utilizes interpersonal communication in his or her reference interaction, it leads to quick attainment of users' information needs. Interpersonal communication is very essential in reference and information services as it enables reference librarians to enhance their relationship with the users through which their information needs are understood and provided with relative ease.

However, inadequate application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services can slow down progress to a very great extent. For instance, research findings by Ifidon and Ugwuanyi (2013) reveal that inadequate structured of reference queries

can lead to bridge of understanding and misconstrue or meaning hindering accurate information provision to users. There are other factors that pose a hindrance to effective utilization of interpersonal communication on the aspect of reference librarians. According to Katz (2002), frustration due to poor working conditions constitutes barriers to effective utilization of interpersonal communication in reference services. He explains that if the reference librarians are not happy with the system they work for, are not well-motivated and work without commensurate remuneration, there is a tendency to take it out on clients through transfer aggression. Several studies have also identified stereotype and inferiority complex among reference staff and users as factors that hinder effective utilization of interpersonal communication. However, McKay, Davis and Fanning (2003) opine that stereotypes in reference services introduce background noise and interference in communication which makes decoding of queries posed by stereotyped patrons nearly impossible, because the reference librarian has a bias towards such individual or group. Yusuf (2011) in like manner, also posits that inferiority complex makes it difficult for reference librarians to handle difficult questions from supposedly high knowledgeable clients which in turn make them feel inferior to this group of users.

For effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services, Kneen (2011) suggests that maximum attention should be employed during interaction by removing distractions during communication, being patient and not over hurry to move out without exploiting the full message or information the sender is passing to you, listening to understand rather than to oppose, asking questions to encourage the talker and show that you are listening, and holding your temper during communication to enhance effective dissemination of information

### **Statement of the Problem**

The relationship that exists between library users and librarians is very crucial in meeting the information needs of the users. Interpersonal communication aimed at establishing appropriate social attitudes in reference and information services by creating friendly atmosphere between the reference librarians and the users helps in providing accurate and objective information that meet the users' information needs. Interpersonal communication enhances reference librarians' understanding of users information needs.

Inadequate interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university library affects patronage. Users are scared of using the library where the reference librarians are not approachable. Poor interpersonal communication culminates to misconstrue of users' queries or information needs which makes it difficult to provide appropriate information timely and objectively. The resultant effect of inadequate interpersonal communication is that the objective of the university library of supporting teaching, learning and research activities of the university is hindered.

It was observed that relationship among library users and reference librarians in federal university libraries in South East Nigeria are poor. This could be attributed to inadequate application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services. As a result of this state of affairs, users become afraid of patronizing reference and information services which therefore affects the university's teaching, learning and research objectives.

Studies indicated that university libraries in South East Nigeria provide reference and information services but it is not empirically known the extent of application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services. To the best of researcher's knowledge, no study has been carried out on this topic which makes the researcher to embark of the study.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to assess interpersonal communication in reference and information services in federal university libraries in South East Nigeria. Specifically, the study is intended to:

1. Identify the patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries
2. Examine the extent of application and contribution of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries
3. Identify hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries
4. Determine strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:



1. What are the patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library?
2. What is the extent of application and contribution of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library?
3. What are the hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library?
4. What are the strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library?

## **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The total population of the study is 1,116 librarians and registered users in federal universities in south east Nigeria. The population is made up of 471 registered users and 6 reference staff of University of Nigeria, Nsukka Library; 309 registered users and 5 reference staff of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike Library and 320 users and 5 reference staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Awka Library. The sample size of this study is 330 (Three hundred and thirty) registered users of the above universities. Based on the above, the researcher chose 141 (30%) registered users of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library (NAL), University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 93 (30%) from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU) and 96 (30%) from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, (UNIZIK) while 16 reference librarians were all used without sampling.

In the first stage, multi stage sampling technique was used in selection of three federal university libraries that provide reference and information services out of five federal university libraries in South East Nigeria. In the second stage, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to draw 30% of registered users from three federal university libraries while the reference staff of the institutions was entirely selected without sampling. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. 346 questionnaires were distributed to the users of the library and reference staff, 336 were correctly filled and returned which were used for the study. The study

used frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and ranking as statistical measures for data analysis.

### Findings of the study

Data collected from questionnaires was presented and analyzed using mean scores. The analysis was done in line with the four research questions that guide the study. A total of three hundred and forty six (346) copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents but three hundred and thirty six (336) were returned. This indicates a percentage of 97.11% return rate which the researcher considered appropriate for use.

### Research Question One: What are the patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library?

**Table 1:** Mean responses on the patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information service.

N=336

N	Patterns of Interpersonal Communication	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	R	D
	Face to face communication	160	110	144	22	3.21	1 <sup>st</sup>	HE
	Simplified language	115	168	32	21	3.12	2 <sup>nd</sup>	HE
	Customer relations	121	148	48	19	3.10	3 <sup>rd</sup>	HE
	Adequate attention to details	122	143	42	29	3.07	4 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Concise and précised information delivery	131	125	52	28	3.07	4 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Mutual Interaction	130	127	50	34	3.04	5 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Attentive listening during reference services	98	180	30	28	3.04	5 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Oral interview method	122	134	48	32	3.03	6 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Adequate rapport between reference staff and users	122	132	43	39	3.00	7 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Objective counseling	115	144	40	37	3.00	7 <sup>th</sup>	HE
	Friendly tone and facial expression of reference staff	117	129	58	32	2.99	8 <sup>th</sup>	HE

**Hints:** 00-059= Very Low Extent (VLE). 100-249= Low Extent (LE). 250-349= High Extent (GE). 350-400= Very High Extent (VHE).

Table 1 shows mean ratings of respondents on the patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information services. The analysis of data shows that university libraries utilize face to face communication pattern in reference and information services with a mean weight of (3.21), closely followed by simplified language (3.12) and customer relation (3.10). However, there are other patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information services that record high mean scores of above (2.99) and above which include mutual interaction, concise and précised information delivery. Analysis reveals that face to face communication ranked highest among other patterns while Friendly tone and facial expression of reference staff with the mean score of 2.99 was lowest in the ranking.

**Research Question Two: What is the extent of application and contribution of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library?**

**Table 2:** Mean responses on extent of application and contribution of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries.

**N=336**

S/N	Application and Contributions	VGE	GE	LE	NA	Mean	R	D
12	It makes exchange of message easier	152	125	31	28	3.19	1 <sup>st</sup>	GE
13	It enhances librarians' understanding of users information needs	128	134	49	25	3.09	2 <sup>nd</sup>	GE
14	It facilitates accurate and objective information provision	120	136	49	31	3.03	3 <sup>rd</sup>	GE
15	It enhances mutual interaction	110	142	60	24	3.01	4 <sup>th</sup>	GE
16	It enhances quick answers to users' queries	120	130	48	38	2.99	5 <sup>th</sup>	GE
17	It encourages timely provision of information	116	130	46	44	2.95	6 <sup>th</sup>	GE
18	It enhances familiarity	108	124	50	54	2.85	7 <sup>th</sup>	GE
19	It cultivates confidence in staff and the users	96	100	75	65	2.68	8 <sup>th</sup>	GE
20	It facilitates enthusiasm	93	99	76	71	2.65	9 <sup>th</sup>	GE
21	It reduces stress in reference transaction	90	94	88	64	2.62	10 <sup>th</sup>	GE

**Hints:** 00-059=Not At All (NA). 100-249= Low Extent (LE). 250-349= Great Extent (GE). 350-400= Very Great Extent (VGE).

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of respondents on extent of application and contribution of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries. Analysis reveals that application of interpersonal communication contributes to a great extent in reference and information services. Among the highest ranked means scores includes making exchange of message easier (3.19), enhancing librarians' understanding of users' information needs (3.09), facilitating accurate and objective information provision (3.03) and enhancing mutual interaction (3.01).

**Research Question Three: What are the hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries?**

**Table 3:** Mean responses on hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication. N=336

S/N	Hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	R	D
22	Inability to frame queries correctly	150	139	29	18	3.25	1 <sup>st</sup>	A
23	Lack of passion on the reference services	155	130	25	26	3.23	2 <sup>nd</sup>	A
24	Lack of adequate listening skills	144	128	36	28	3.15	3 <sup>rd</sup>	A
25	Stereotype and interiority complex of librarian	129	139	38	30	3.09	4 <sup>th</sup>	A
26	Frustration due to poor working condition	130	121	50	40	3.06	5 <sup>th</sup>	A
27	Low self-esteem of librarians or users	127	135	42	32	3.06	5 <sup>th</sup>	A
28	Pride and pomposity of librarians or users	120	130	48	38	2.99	6 <sup>th</sup>	A
29	Inability to reciprocate one's questions	120	127	51	38	2.98	7 <sup>th</sup>	A
30	Use of ambiguous language terms	121	130	40	45	2.97	8 <sup>th</sup>	A
31	Lack of emotional control	118	122	62	34	2.96	9 <sup>th</sup>	A
32	Frustration due to family challenges	121	118	50	47	2.93	10 <sup>th</sup>	A
33	Physical distractions in the library environment	113	121	70	32	2.93	10 <sup>th</sup>	A
34	Mental deformities and other health challenges	101	137	61	37	2.90	11 <sup>th</sup>	A
35	Use of lengthy grammar	102	127	77	30	2.90	11 <sup>th</sup>	A
36	Academic stress and frustration	100	133	53	50	2.84	12 <sup>th</sup>	A

37	Lack of expression of one's need	105	126	49	56	2.83	13 <sup>th</sup>	A
38	Low level of education	104	107	65	60	2.76	14 <sup>th</sup>	A
39	Discrimination on certain user	96	105	78	57	2.71	15 <sup>th</sup>	A
40	Too much job stress of librarians	70	97	142	27	2.63	16 <sup>th</sup>	A
41	Cultural differences between staff and users	136	60	140	100	2.10	17 <sup>th</sup>	D

**Hints:** 00-059=Strongly Disagree (SD). 100-249= Disagree (D). 250-349= Agree (A). 350-400= Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 3 reveals the mean ratings of respondents on hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services. Analysis shows that the hindrances to effective use of interpersonal communication in reference and information services includes inability to frame queries correctly with the mean weight of (3.25), lack of passion on the reference services (3.23), lack of adequate listening skills (3.16) , stereotype and inferiority complex of librarians (3.06) and frustration due to poor working condition (3.06). The indication from the overall mean shows that inability to frame queries ranked highest. While cultural differences between librarians and users ranked lowest as hindrance to effective application of interpersonal communication with the mean score of (2.10).

**Research Question Four: What are the strategies for improving interpersonal communication for effective reference and information services?**

**Table 4:** Mean responses on strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication. N=336

S/N	Strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication	SA	A	D	SD	M	R	D
42	The reference librarian and users should listen carefully during reference queries	149	122	41	24	3.20	1 <sup>st</sup>	A
43	Reference questions should be framed objectively and accurately	135	152	26	23	3.19	2 <sup>nd</sup>	A
44	The reference librarian and users should be patient enough during reference	143	139	30	24	3.19	2 <sup>nd</sup>	A
45	Stereotype and inferiority complex should be avoided	136	142	31	27	3.15	3 <sup>rd</sup>	A

46	Reference staff should be well educated	134	140	38	24	3.14	4 <sup>th</sup>	A
47	Reference staff should avoid hostility to users	136	130	40	30	3.11	5 <sup>th</sup>	A
48	Pride and pomposity of reference staff and users should be put away during reference services	132	128	51	34	3.09	6 <sup>th</sup>	A
49	Physical distractions in the library should be avoided during reference communication	140	121	39	36	3.09	6 <sup>th</sup>	A
50	There should be adequate control of emotions during reference transaction	130	136	30	40	3.06	7 <sup>th</sup>	A
51	Reference Staff should be polite and social	118	148	42	28	3.06	7 <sup>th</sup>	A
52	Use of confusing language terms should be avoided	128	127	47	34	3.04	8 <sup>th</sup>	A
53	Judgmental statement should be avoided while responding to users queries	121	130	51	34	3.01	9 <sup>th</sup>	A
54	Reference queries should be concise and précised	122	130	49	35	3.01	9 <sup>th</sup>	A
56	Librarians should keep the mission of the library at heart during reference transaction	120	141	39	35	3.00	10 <sup>th</sup>	A
57	Reference staff and users should be focused during reference interview	120	132	45	39	2.99	11 <sup>th</sup>	A
58	Both reference staff and users should ask questions to enhance comprehension	116	125	50	45	2.93	12 <sup>th</sup>	A
59	The reference staff should put smiles on their faces during reference communication	100	105	90	41	2.79	13 <sup>th</sup>	A
60	Reference staff should demonstrate adequate confidence while conducting reference interview	100	114	67	55	2.77	14 <sup>th</sup>	A
61	Reference staff should not be sentimental while rendering their services	100	107	58	71	2.70	5 <sup>th</sup>	A
62	The Library should embark on effective user education	107	80	70	92	2.68	16 <sup>th</sup>	A

**Hints:** 00-059=Strongly Disagree (SD). 100-249= Disagree (D). 250-349= Agree (A). 350-400= Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 4 shows the mean ratings of respondents on strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication for effective reference services. The analysis reveals respondents' agreement on

the strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication for effective reference and information services which include that the reference staff and users should listen carefully during reference services with mean weight of (3.20), reference questions should be framed objectively and accurately (3.19), the reference staff and users should be patient enough during reference service (3.19), stereotype and inferiority complex should be avoided (3.15) and reference staff should be well educated (3.14). Analysis also revealed other strategies with the mean score of 2.68 and above.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### ***Patterns of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in your university library***

From the data collected and analyzed, it was found that patterns of interpersonal communication in references and information services in university libraries in South East Nigeria includes face to face communication method, simplified language method, customer relations method, adequate attention to details, concise and précised information delivery, mutual interaction among others. This is in line with the findings of Yusuf (2011) who asserted that interpersonal interaction with library patrons cannot be isolated from library operations as this enables librarians engage in face-to-face interaction and articulate the information needs of users more clearly for effective rendering of précised and effective information services. It was also discovered from the result that friendly tone and facial expression of reference staff are among interpersonal communication patterns useful in reference and information services. In line with findings, Hayes (2002) who asserted that facial expression synchronizes conversation and makes it smooth while lack of smiles and facial expression in any conversation results to communication boredomness.

### ***Application and contribution of interpersonal communication in reference and information services***

From the data collected and analyzed, findings show that application of interpersonal communication contributes to a great extent for effective reference and information services in university libraries by making exchange of message easier, enhancing librarians' understanding

of users information needs, facilitating accurate and objective information provision, enhancing mutual interaction and encourages quick answers to user' queries. Findings reveals that interpersonal communication makes the users feel at ease to communicate their needs to the reference staff and therefore helps the reference staff to perform more effective. In line with the findings, Yilmaz (2012) posits that the social function of interpersonal communication is stressed in the human relations perspective of organization by capturing the hearts and minds of organizational members for effective coordination of organizational action in the pursuit of collective organizational goals. Similarly, Owoeye and Dhunsi (2014) states that interpersonal communication is an indispensable force towards achieving individuals and organizational goal, an objective that facilitates the sharing of information, experience and knowledge, transmission of ideas, decision making, coordination and interpretation of activities.

#### ***Hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services in university libraries***

Result of data analyzed shows that hindrances to effective utilization of interpersonal communication in reference services are attributed to inability users to frame queries correctly, lack of adequate listening skills, stereotype and inferiority complex of librarians, lack of passion on the reference and information services, physical distractions in the library and frustration due to poor working condition among others. In agreement with the findings, Ifidon and Ugwuanyi (2013) who posit that inadequate structured of reference queries can lead to bridge of understanding and misconstrue or meaning hindering accurate information provision to users. The result of the study also agrees with Katz (2002) who opines that frustration due to poor working conditions constitutes barriers to effective utilization of interpersonal communication in reference services. He asserts that if the reference librarians are not happy with the system they work for or are not well-motivated as a result of poor remuneration, there is a tendency to take it out on clients through transfer aggression. The study also identified stereotype and inferiority complex of reference staff and users as one of the major hindrances to effective utilization of interpersonal communication. The research findings agrees with Mckay, Davis and Fanning (2003) who observed that stereotypes in reference services introduce background noise and interference in communication which makes decoding of queries difficult.



### *Strategies for improving interpersonal communication for effective reference and information services*

From the analyzed data, findings reveal strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication in reference and information services such as careful listening of reference staff and users during reference services, avoidance of stereotype and inferiority complex in reference services, objective and accurate framing of reference questions, reference staff and users should be patient enough during reference service and reference staff should avoid hostility to users. The finding of this study agrees with Kneen (2011) who suggests that maximum attention should be employed during interaction by removing distractions during communication, being patient and not over hurry to move out without exploiting the full message or information the sender is passing to you, listening to understand rather than to oppose, asking questions to encourage the talker and show that you are listening, and holding your temper during communication to enhance effective dissemination of information.

#### **Implications of the study**

This study has serious implications for libraries in Nigerian higher education institutions as the line between the use of interpersonal communication in reference and information services is still very obvious. In more developed countries these lines are virtually non-existent, because most academic libraries employ effective interpersonal communication as an undisputable requirement in reference and information services. In addition, this study has implications for the following groups:

#### **Implications for the University and Library Management**

The university management and staff will benefit from this research in terms providing adequate communication skills in reference and information services in the library coupled with the interpersonal communication workshop programmes which will be beneficial to both students and staff of the library.

### **Implications for Students**

Students will additionally benefit from this since the findings of this study can be used as a guideline by both the reference librarians and the university administration in the provision of functional, efficient and effective reference and information services that foster user satisfaction, information access, dissemination and retrieval.

### **Implications for Researchers and lecturers**

Researchers and lecturers will benefit from this study as it would serve as a basis for enhancement and effectiveness of further research works on application of interpersonal communication in reference and information services.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the most utilized patterns of interpersonal communication in reference services are face to face communication method, simplified language method, customer relations method, adequate attention to details, concise and precise information delivery and mutual interaction. However, it was concluded that application of interpersonal communication contributes to a great extent for effective reference and information services in university libraries by making exchange of message easier, enhancing librarians' understanding of users information needs, facilitating accurate and objective information provision, enhancing mutual interaction and encourages quick answers to user' queries. Perhaps, notable hindrances to effective application of interpersonal communication in reference services were discovered by the study such as inability users to frame queries correctly, lack of adequate listening skills, stereotype and inferiority complex of librarians, lack of passion on the reference and information services, physical distractions in the library and frustration due to poor working condition among others. The study also discovered strategies for enhancing interpersonal communication in reference and information services which include careful listening to reference staff and users during reference services, avoidance of stereotype and inferiority complex in reference services, objective and accurate framing of reference questions, reference staff and users should be patient enough during reference service and reference staff should avoid hostility to users.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

The reference staff and users should listen attentively to each other while reference query is going on to ensure effective reference services. Users should be enlightened on how to frame reference queries through user education program. Reference staff should be well educated to be able to communicate effectively with users of different academic and social background.

Information Literacy course should be made compulsory for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Additionally, seminar and workshop should be encouraged on the area of interpersonal communication.

The reference staff should be closely monitored by the library management to evaluate their interpersonal communication competencies during reference interaction. This will enable library management to initiate appropriate staff training that will enhance the staff interpersonal communication skill. By so doing, the reference staff would be able to help users articulate their information needs, provide answers to their queries and sustain their patronage.

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