COMPLIANCE WITH IFLA DIGITAL REFERENCE SERVICE GENERAL GUIDELINES BY REFERENCE LIBRARIANS IN SELECTED FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to assess the degree to which reference librarians at selected Federal University Libraries in Northeast Nigeria adhered to the IFLA digital reference general guideline with regards to supporting the ideals of intellectual freedom and guideline on behavioral performance.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study was descriptive in nature and specifically examined the extent to which librarians' support the ideals of intellectual freedom and observe IFLA general guideline on behavioral performance of reference practitioners. Four Federal Universities from Northeast Nigeria were purposively sampled and 288 postgraduate students randomly selected served as sample for the study. A close-ended questionnaire was used for data gathering and the psychometrics obtained include; CRV=1 and r-coefficient α=0.89. Data collected was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages to descriptively answer the research questions while chi-square statistics at p ≤ 0.05.

Findings: The study results showed that, there is a minimum level of adherence to IFLA general guidelines. The hypotheses tested showed a significant relationship in the level of adherence to IFLA general guideline on intellectual freedom (χ2=0.0872 > 0.05) and to observe specified response policy of librarians based on their universities(χ2 = 2.4025 > 0.05). The study concluded that, librarians do not adhere to standards in service delivery and recommended strict enforcement on the use of standards in providing reference service delivery.

Implications: The research provides an in-depth analysis of reference librarians' adherence to IFLA general guidelines that promote maximal intellectual freedom, as well as their behavioural performance from the perspective of users. The study provides important insights into library users' perspectives on library services and offers recommendations for how these services might be enhanced to better meet users' requirements.

Originality: Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions were given in light of the results, such as ensuring rigorous conformity with globally accepted standards for reference services via the implementation of policies and processes by university administration and university librarians. Those most capable of providing useful reference services should be sought out and hired by university libraries. An evaluation team charged with gathering customer opinions is required to assure user satisfaction

Key Words: Reference Services, Standards, Guideline, IFLA general guidelines

Introduction

The evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) has resulted in major changes to reference services throughout time. Traditionally, information and reference services were delivered in-person inside the library building, via telephone, or in writing.

However, the traditional face-to-face reference services delivery approach has been badly disrupted by lockdowns, isolations, self-quarantines, and physical and social distance in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drastically altered all kinds of physical and social human connections. It is crucial that reference librarians and information searchers

be conversant with the most prevalent means of real-time communication in the library given the current situation (Abubakar, 2021).To ensure reference librarians effectiveness and improve user-librarian interaction through reference services, the American Library Association's (ALA's) Reference User Services Association (RUSA) and the International Federation of Library Association's (IFLA) established standard regulations to ensure delivery of high-quality services(Shachaf, 2008).

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) is internationally recognized as the library and information profession's voice. IFLA has developed diverse sets of standards across all areas of library resources and services. One of IFLA's ultimate goals is to establish, maintain, and adhere to the highest standards that promote high-quality library practices(IFLA, 2014). IFLA guidelines, with their wide range of styles and subtext, benefit the international library community to the greatest extent possible. The IFLA March 2008 digital reference guidelines acknowledges and incorporates the Guidelines for the Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers. The practitioner standard is divided into four primary parts: general guidelines, content guidelines, chat guidelines, and chat session guidelines. It is also uncertain if librarians who offer reference services follow these standards and how much effort they put. Furthermore, investigations have shown that no significant study has been done on adherence to reference service standards in Nigerian libraries, particularly in Federal University Libraries in Northeast Nigeria. Hence, it is difficult for these libraries to determine if they have met the aims and objectives, they set out to accomplish using conventional and digital reference services. It is difficult to ascertain whether these services are being offered properly, whether they are successful, and the challenges encountered in delivering them in delivering these services. Therefore, this study is important for assessing librarians' adherence to reference service standards to guarantee that the reference service at the chosen federal university libraries in Northeast Nigeria operates effectively.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

i. To what extent do librarians' support the ideals of intellectual freedom in conformity to IFLA general guideline during reference service delivery?

ii. To what extent do reference librarians in the selected Federal University Libraries comply to IFLA general guideline on behavioral performance?

Hypotheses

The study formulated and tested the following hypotheses to further establish statistical significance of the outcome at 0.05α.

$H_{01:}$There is no significant relationship in the level of conformity with IFLA general guidelines to support the ideals of intellectual freedom

$H_{02:}$There is no significant relationship in the adherence of IFLA guideline on behavioral performance of reference practitioners

Literature Review

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Reference Section proposed a project plan at the IFLA 2001 Conference in Boston to assess and track the automated standards and policies for reference purposes. In 2002, IFLA published digital reference guidelines that provide librarians with the basis needed for effective reference and information services. Shachaf and Horowitz (2008)observed that librarians slightly adhere to IFLA reference guidelines. The authors added that users contentment and compliance with IFLA reference service guidelines show no relationship.

The significance of standards and guidelines cannot be overstated, as digital reference creates new issues and challenges (Fullerton, 2002). Similarly, librarians who follow digital reference guidelines while interacting with users via a chat reference service can help improve service and user satisfaction. Hence, it is apparent that the adherence to these standards will support or bring forth high-quality practices, make reference services a lot

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easier and bring about user satisfaction (Kwon & Gregory, 2007). American Library Association (2006), states that "the standards are designed to offer a complete framework utilizing an outcomes-based approach, and institutions are invited to utilize these Standards as they best relate to their local purpose and vision. Due to various public service traditions in different countries, libraries in each country have varying reference procedures and user expectations. A crucial aspect of this discussion is to understand that with the advancement of new technology, librarians will be able to redefine their services. These guidelines aim to unite different cultures through some basic criteria, which will free the worldwide library community to express themselves freely (Stasselova, 2010).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance and benefits of adhering to the guidelines, as well as how such adherence can significantly improve user service and satisfaction. (Kwon & Gregory, 2007; Nilsen, 2005; RUSA, 2020; Ward et al., 2004).Several studies on adherence to reference standards (Zhuo, Love, Norwood, & Massia, 2006; Ronan, Reakes, & Ochoa, 2007; Pomerantz, Luo, & McClure, 2006, Shachaf, & Horowitz, 2008and Azmi, Noorhidawati & Aspura, 2017) found that, only few scholars have conducted studies on the use of standards in reference and information services. Ronan, et al., (2007)pointed out that while most of

the reference librarians are courteous and responsive to reference transactions, they do not adhere to critical aspects of the guidelines that promote effective service delivery.

Methodology

A descriptive research design, which enabled the study to collect, analyze, and describe data on the level of adherence to IFLA general guidelines was employed. The sample size for the study was 1459 (MAU=385, ATBU=403, UNIMAID=414 and FUK=257) postgraduate students from four Federal Universities in North-East Nigeria. Purposive sampling method was used to select the four Federal Universities in Northeast Nigeria with a sample size of 288. Postgraduate students were selected using a simple random sampling technique, this is because they are continuously in need of information as researchers. A questionnaire was used for data collection and responses were rated using five-point Likert scale. The Lawshe's method of content validity was applied to establish the content validity ratio, which gained a CVR=1 while, Cronbach Alpha was employed to establish the homogeneity of the questionnaire and r-coefficient index=0.89 was obtained. Descriptive statistics; frequency counts and percentages were used to answer the research questions while, chi-square was applied to test the hypotheses at $p \leq 0.05$.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Adherence to IFLA General Guidelines on ideals of intellectual freedom

s/n Items	Responses *n=288*				
	SA (5)	A (4)	UD (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
	ƒ %	ƒ %	ƒ %	ƒ %	F %
1 Reference librarians provide uninhibited access to information.	2 0.69	2 0.69	13 4.51	136 47.22	135 46.88
2 All necessary information is made available with a lot of flexibility.	0 0.00	1 0.35	6 2.08	134 46.53	147 51.04
3 Reference librarians are dedicated to providing patrons with the most effective help possible.	7 2.43	1 0.35	12 4.17	132 45.83	136 47.22
4 Reference librarians maintain impartiality and refrain from making value judgment about the topic matter	2 0.69	2 0.69	11 3.82	139 48.26	134 46.53
5 Reference librarians support the ideals of intellectual freedom.	1 0.35	5 1.74	9 3.13	132 45.83	141 48.96

Source: Research Data

The study found that reference librarians restrained patrons access to information as often patrons do not have access to required

information as indicated by nearly all the postgraduates' students, it was also established that all necessary information is often not made

available and reference librarians conduct themselves with a lot of rigidity. Similarly, it was established that reference librarians are not dedicated to providing patrons information needs rather; they always provide services with favoritism and making wrong determination on users queries, which interfere with the ideals of intellectual freedom. A test of statistical significance on the level of conformity with IFLA general guideline on the ideals of intellectual freedom based on the university librarians using chi-square at p ≤ 0.05.The results are presented as follows.

Table 3: Chi-Square Summary

	Observed Frequency						Expected Frequency							
Var.	A	D	SA	SD	U	GT	A	D	SA	SD	U	GT	χ2	Sig.
ATBU	2	129	6	157	16	310	1.89	145.38	6.23	139.43	17.05	310	0.0872	0.05
FUK	2	84	5	78	14	183	1.11	85.82	3.67	82.31	10.06	183		
MAU	1	189	6	129	16	341	2.08	159.92	6.84	153.37	18.76	341		
UNIMAID	2	135	6	151	17	311	1.9	145.85	6.24	139.88	17.11	311		
GT	7	537	23	515	63	1145	7	537	23	515	63	1145		

The results showedχ2 = 0.0872 (12, n=288) = p≤ 0.05. The chi-square result gained is greater than the p-value (χ2=0.0872 > 0.05) with a degree of freedom (df=12) and a sample size (n=288), which means that there is no strong evidence at p to uphold the hypothesis. Therefore, the study reject the null hypothesis therefore, there is a statistical significant relationship in the level of conformity with IFLA general guideline on intellectual freedom among university reference librarians. This is a proof that, reference services provided to patrons is often carried out in a similar manner across all universities rather; adherence to standards depends on the university.

Table 1: Adherence to IFLA General Guidelines on behavioral performance of reference practitioners

s/n	Items	Responses									
		SA (5)		A (4)		U (3)		D(2)		SD(1)	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
1	Reference librarians acknowledge receipt of patron queries and respond as soon as possible.	2	0.69	2	0.69	19	6.6	133	46.18	132	45.83
2	Reference librarians provide prompt service in response to patron inquiries.	6	2.08	2	0.69	13	4.51	134	46.53	133	46.18
3	Reference librarians follow all copyright rules and license agreements for both online and print resources.	9	3.13	1	0.35	12	4.17	132	45.83	124	43.06
4	Reference librarians use effective search techniques.	6	2.08	2	0.69	19	6.6	136	47.22	125	43.4
5	When addressing inquiries from patrons, reference librarians exercise professional politeness and respect.	3	1.04	1	0.35	14	4.86	139	48.26	131	45.49

The study found that reference librarians usually fail to acknowledge receipt of patron queries and delay responses to inquiries. The study also established that, services are provided without acknowledging all copyright rules and license agreements for both online and print resources hence most patrons gathered all kinds of materials without proper guidance. It was found that users are exposed to insufficient search techniques by reference librarians, which result from exercising their duties without showing professional politeness and respect. Chi-square was employed to establish relationship in the level of adherence to IFLA general guidelines in order to observe specified guidelines among the librarians based on the universities, the results are presented as follows.

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Table 4: Chi-Square Summary

Var.	Observed Frequency						Expected Frequency						χ2	Sig.
	A	D	SA	SD	U	GT	A	D	SA	SD	U	GT		
ATBU	2	129	6	139	16	292	1.79	136.95	136.95	131.34	16.07	292	2.4025	0.05
FUK	2	84	5	104	14	209	1.28	98.02	4.20	94.00	11.50	209		
MAU	1	189	6	105	16	317	1.94	148.67	6.37	142.58	17.44	317		
UNIMAID	2	135	6	167	17	327	2.00	153.36	6.57	147.08	17.99	327		
GT	7	537	23	515	63	1145	7	537	23	515	63	1145		

A test of independence was carried out to compare the level of conformity to IFLA general guideline to observe specified response policy among university librarians. The results showed χ2 = 2.4025 (12, n=288) = p ≤ 0.05. Since chi-square is greater than p-value (χ2 = 2.4025 > 0.05) with degree of freedom (df=12) and a sample size (n=288), the study reject the null hypothesis therefore, there is a statistical significant relationship in the level of conformity to IFLA general guideline to observe specified response policy among university librarians. This is an indicator that adherence to reference standards to support the ideal intellectual freedom in reference service provisions differ across the selected federal university libraries in Northeast Nigeria.

Conclusions

This study offers a comprehensive look into how well reference librarians adhere to IFLA general guidelines that support maximum intellectual freedom and on the behavioral performance of reference practitioners from the user's point of view. Insights into how library services are experienced and perceived by library patrons, as well as suggestions on how such services may be improved to better fulfil patron needs, have been collected from this study. The study found that there is a minimum level of adherence to IFLA general guidelines that supports the ideal of intellectual freedom and the behavioral performance of reference practitioners. Different universities seemed to have different patterns for the minimum level of compliance with standards.

Given the scarcity of prior research on reference evaluation in African academic libraries revealed by the literature review, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in this area of reference and information services. Libraries interested in evaluating librarians' adherence to the IFLA digital reference standards on intellectual freedom and behavioral performance of reference service practitioners may find the study's survey instrument helpful. They can conduct their own study using our poll as a starting point, and their findings can be compared to ours to provide a more comprehensive picture of reference evaluation in a variety of settings. The study may be applicable to the problems of other libraries in Africa and other developing nations. The detailed report of the study will help other university libraries in Africa plan and carry out assessment of their reference services.

Recommendations

The study provided the following recommendations:

1. There should be strict enforcement of standards to reference librarians in providing reference services to check the quality of services provided.

2. University libraries should recruit qualified reference services staff who are most qualified for effective reference service delivery.

3. To ensure user satisfaction, there is need to create a monitoring unit mandated with the responsibility of collecting feedback from users on their level of satisfaction with the services.

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