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A Better Response Rate for Questionnaires: Attitudes of Librarians in Nigerian University Libraries

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Introduction

Questionnaires encompass a variety of instruments designed to enable the subject responds to written questions to elicit reactions, beliefs, and attitudes (McMillan and Schumacher, 1989). Questionnaire is a set of questions relating to the aim of the study and the hypotheses to be tested to which the respondent/subject is expected to answer in writing. The information to be generated through the use of the questionnaire could be about the feelings, beliefs, experiences or attitudes of the respondents or some other persons the information may as well be about things other than the persons (Okobia, 1998). Questionnaires can gather data from a large group relatively inexpensively, and may be a workable way to assemble a statistically significant pool of subjects (Questionnaire design, n.d.).

Response rate is a crucial factor in evaluating the reliability of survey results (StatPac Inc, 2005). In Nigeria, even highly-literate people are reluctant to answer questionnaires. They view the researcher as conducting research to enrich him- or herself in knowledge, status, or wealth, while the questionnaire is a burden on the subjects. The researcher may wait endlessly to receive enough replies before beginning data analysis (Ofo, 1994).

This study is a survey of the attitudes of librarians in Nigerian university libraries towards questionnaire completion. Its findings will give researchers, scholars, and professionals insight into how subjects react to questionnaires. This will help them increase the response rate as well as quality of data.

Methodology

Questionnaires were used to collect data from 57 librarians in three Nigerian university libraries: 22 librarians from Ambrose Alli University Library, Ekpoma, 24 from Delta State University Library, Abraka, and 11 from University of Benin Library, Benin City.

In order to ensure that relevant items were included in the questionnaire an extensive literature review literature was done and the questionnaire was given to experts in research methods to read and correct. The data was analysed to find frequencies.

Findings and Discussion

There were 31 (54.4%) male respondents and 24 female. Two respondents did not indicate their sex.

Table 1: Working experience

Years of experience	No	%
1-5 years	8	14.0
6-10 years	9	15.8
11-15 years	13	22.8
16-20 years	8	14.0
21-25 years	2	3.5
More than 25 years	15	26.3
No response	2	3.1

n = 57

Most respondents have worked for more than five years. A majority of them have worked long enough to be acquainted with the topic under investigation and must have received and completed a number of questionnaires during their careers.

Table 2: Number of questionnaires received per year

Number received	No	%
Below 6	12	21.1
6-10	18	31.6
11-15	7	12.3
16-20	3	5.3
Above 20	13	22.8
No response	4	7.0

n = 57

Most (18, 36.6%) respondents receive 6-10 questionnaires a year, followed by those who receive more than 20 (13, 22.8%). The relatively high number could be due to the fact that the respondents work in institutions where postgraduate students, as well as students who are in their graduating year, are expected to write projects, dissertations, or theses. Most of these use questionnaires to collect data. Some students turn to librarians for data. Another reason may be that some lecturers also administer questionnaires to librarians for their research.

Table 3: Number of questionnaires completed per year

Number completed	No	%

Below 6	17	29.8
6-10	31	54.4
11-15	10	17.5
16-20	5	18.5
Above 20	24	42.1
No response	2	3.1

n = 57

A majority of the respondents (31, 54.4%) complete 6-10 questionnaires per year, followed by those who complete more than 20.

Table 4. Response to questionnaires

Options	No	%
Yes	45	79.9
No	9	15.8
No response	3	5.3

n = 57

Respondents were asked if they respond to all questionnaires they receive. Most (45, 79.9%) respond to all questionnaires they receive from researchers. A majority of the respondents probably understand the purpose of the questionnaire and cooperate with researchers.

Table 5: Reasons for responding to all questionnaires

Reasons	No	%
To assist the researchers	31	68.9
It enables me contribute to knowledge	28	62.2
The outcome of the research will be beneficial to me/the profession/mankind	23	51.1
It is part of my professional obligation/obligatory	10	22.2
The questions/items are interesting	4	8.9

n = 45

Those who respond to all questionnaires were asked to indicate their reasons for doing so. Assisting researchers ranks first with (31, 68.9%).

Table 6: Reasons for not responding to all questionnaires

Reasons	No	%
Lack of time	5	55.6
Topics/items are not interesting/relevant	5	55.6
It is not obligatory	4	44.4
Lack of reminders/follow-up by researchers	4	44.4

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Some questionnaires are too lengthy	3	33.3
Forgetfulness	1	11.1
Some questionnaires ask questions that are too personal	1	11.1
I am not sure my responses will be kept secret	1	1.11

n = 9

While sending a large number of questionnaires to subjects is laborious, there are small details that can improve response rate (Boynton, 2004). "Lack of time" was the most common reason why some respondents do not complete all questionnaires. "Topics are not interesting/relevant" was also a common response. In constructing questionnaires, researcher should ask whether each question is necessary. Unneeded questions create work for the researcher and can harm response rate (*Wikipedia,* 2006).

"Lack of reminders/follow-up by researchers" attracted 4 (44.4%) responses. Follow-ups or reminders are a valuable tool for increasing response rates. Only 10 to 60 percent of those sent questionnaires respond without follow-ups. The need to follow-up on non-respondents to increase response rates is clear (StatPac, 2005).

Table 7: People and groups who send questionnaires

Category of people	No	%
Library and information science (LIS) students	46	80.7
Librarians/information professionals	28	49.1
Other students (non LIS)	23	40.4
Library and information science lecturers	22	38.6
Other lecturers (non LIS)	19	33.3
Institutions/organisations	15	26.3
Other professionals (non LIS)	13	22.8

Library and information science students rank first (46, 80.7%) as the group that respondents receive questionnaires from, followed by LIS professionals. In Nigeria, library and information professionals who work in academic libraries have academic status and must publish before they can be promoted.

That LIS (22, 38.6%) and non-LIS (19, 33.3%) teachers administer questionnaires is not unexpected, since most academics have a publication requirement (Adomi & Mordi, 2003). Questionnaire administration is required before some publications can be done.

Table 8: Means through which questionnaires are received

Means	No	%
Through personal contacts	47	82
By post	10	17.5
Via e-mail	6	10.5
Websites	2	3.5

n = 57

A majority of respondents indicate personal contacts as the means through which researchers administer questionnaires to them. Most researchers prefer to personally administer questionnaires to respondents, probably because they can retrieve them as soon as they are completed. It also provides an opportunity to answer questions. The response rate may also be higher than through other means of administering a questionnaire.

Table 9: General views about questionnaire completion

Views	No	%
It enables me to contribute to knowledge	39	68.4
I am always happy to complete questionnaires	15	26.3
It is boring to complete questionnaires	13	22.8
It is time-wasting	7	12.3

n = 57

Table 9 reveals the general views respondents hold on questionnaire completion. Most of them 39 (68.4%) see questionnaire completion as opportunity to contribute to knowledge.

Table 10: Problems militating against respondents questionnaire completion

Problems	No	%
Some questionnaires are too lengthy	29	50.9
Some questionnaires are not relevant to my field	22	38.6
Some questionnaires are not interesting/appealing	13	22.8
Too personal questions asked	10	17.5
Poorly constructed question	10	17.5
The language of some questionnaires are to high/inappropriate/technical	10	17.5
Some mail questionnaires are not accompanied with stamps and return envelopes	7	12.3
I am not sure my responses will be kept in secret	4	7.0
Reputation of the researcher/organisation	4	7.0
Relative importance of the study	2	3.5

n = 57

Many things compete for the staff time. It is not surprising that a majority of the respondents 29 (50.9%) see lengthy questionnaires as a problem. Questionnaires that are simple, straightforward, and not too long will increase response rate. Seven (12.3%) respondents cite mailed questionnaires that are not accompanied by return stamped envelopes as a problem. It is unethical for a researcher not to make provision for return of a mailed questionnaire by providing stamped return envelopes.

Conclusion

Questionnaires are a crucial method of gathering data for research and publication. They are a common and accepted means for scholars to seek answers to research questions. This study surveyed attitudes of librarians towards questionnaire completion in Nigerian university libraries. Although respondents receive several questionnaires each year, not all of them respond to all instruments, mostly because of lack of time. Most of those who do respond to all questionnaires do so because of the need to

assist researchers. LIS students and LIS professionals are the two main groups who send questionnaires to librarians. Most questionnaires the respondents receive are those that are personally administered. Questionnaires that are too long or that are not relevant to the recipient's field some of the problems that militate against completion. In the light survey results, it is recommended that:

- Professional associations and library administration should organize periodic workshops/conferences on answering questionnaires so that the staff can understand the nature and importance of questionnaires for research
- Researchers should be conversant with relevant literature on questionnaire construction and administration to enable them construct good questionnaires and also administer them in a way that will enhance response rate.

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