

Awareness and Perception of Ethical Issues in Library Service Delivery by Librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan, Nigeria: A Phenomenographic Study

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Abstract Service delivery which is at the core of the establishment of libraries all over the world should be guided by ethical principles so that patrons' information needs can be effectively addressed without bias, fear and corruption. Thus, in as much as librarians have the professional responsibilities of providing effective and efficient library services, they must be guided by the ethics of the profession. This study therefore examined the awareness and perception of ethical issues in library service delivery by librarians in The Polytechnic of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study was phenomenographic in nature and 5 professional librarians were interviewed. The qualitative data from the interview were analysed in line with conventional qualitative data analysis procedures. Results showed that there was a high level of awareness of the ethical issues by the librarians. Their responses also revealed a favourable response indicating that ethical issues should be taken seriously. The prominent inhibiting factor that could affect the librarians from upholding code of ethics was conflict of interest. It was recommended that the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria with the collaboration of the Nigerian Library Association should conduct periodic capacity building training for librarians on how to handle ethical dilemmas.

Keywords Awareness, Perception, Ethical issues, Library service delivery, Polytechnic, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Service delivery is at the core of the establishment of libraries all over the world. It is very important for patrons to have access to information services that will assist them in meeting their various information needs. As such, a library that toys with service delivery could run the risk of negative perception by users and possible user apathy. This underscores the need for libraries to ensure that the information services they provide satisfy their users. However, in as much as librarians have the professional responsibilities of providing effective and efficient library services, they must be guided by the ethics of the profession. Fernandez-Molina (2000) observed that libraries participate in a certain social mission and act in accordance to a given sets of values. Thus, the process of achieving their goals has much to do with following an ethical conduct, which recognises information professionals as moral agents who are responsible before themselves and the larger society.

Librarians have the capacity of influencing the lives of individuals and consciousness of the society through

information provision. Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP 2012) noted that librarians are usually the link between information users and the information they require and therefore occupy a privileged position which carries responsibilities. In order for this privileged position not to be abused it is essential for librarians to perform their duties and responsibilities taking into cognisance that ethical standards must be maintained.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy and a term that is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition. Ethics can also be viewed as a system of moral principles that affect how people make decisions and lead their lives. Ethics leads to a set of rules of conduct for specific situations; basic ethical principles guide the development on standards for specific professions and groups (Kaddu, 2007). The branch of ethics that focuses of professionals like librarians is called professional ethics, which is also an aspect of applied ethics. Onoyeyan et al (2014) opined that professional ethics relates to moral rules that influence a professional's actions or behaviour in the discharge of their professional responsibilities. Onoyeyan et al (2014) also noted that professional ethics help professionals to choose what to do when faced with a problem of work that raises a moral issue.

Professional ethics are general principles of professional behaviour which should be followed by members of the

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profession in order to act in an appropriate, moral way and to avoid the risk of misconduct (IFLA, 2012). The codes of ethics could provide general principles guiding how librarians should go about to render their services and the role of the librarians in the community they serve. The code of ethics could also include specific guidelines on the role and responsibilities of the librarian towards the users, the resources, colleagues, profession and their employers. It is expected that information professionals like the librarians should abide by these codes in order not to be involved in wrongdoings that could be detrimental to their careers and the profession.

It is important that librarians should be guided by some code of ethics in the discharge of their duties for obvious reasons. Librarians are often faced with ethical dilemmas that put them in a position where professional ethics could be violated. Onoyeyan *et al.* (2014) defined ethical dilemma as a situation where there is a conflict between principles and a choice of action that needs to be determined. Stueart and Moran (2002) listed some ethical dilemmas that might be confronted by librarians as; using an employer's property for personal use, accepting benefits, influence peddling, divulging confidential information, outside employment or moonlighting and post-employment conflict of interest.

The ethical dilemmas listed by Stueart and Moran could be illustrated in different ways. Ethical principles would be violated if a librarian converts the library's information resources to private use. Also if a librarian takes several books in the library home for the personal use of his children or wards. An acquisition librarian might also be faced with a decision of accepting benefits or not, especially from vendors and publishers in return for continuous patronage which is hoped to be unwavering regardless of the circumstances. It is also possible for a reference librarian to fall into the situation of influence peddling if he allows his romantic interest for a user which is not returned to stand in between himself or herself and service delivery. A circulation librarian could be pressured to divulge vital private information about his patron for cash or monetary reward. A librarian might also be presented with a moonlighting situation where he offers his professional expertise outside the library during his official hours for pay. A post-employment conflict of interest might if a librarian upon resignation or retirement from the library now uses the skills and abilities he acquired to stand in the way of his former library.

CILIP (2014) also highlighted some issues that should be of concern to information professionals. These are: concern for the public good in all professional matters, including respect for diversity within society, and the promoting of equal opportunities and human rights; concern for the good reputation of the information profession; commitment to the defence, and the advancement, of access to information and ideas and work of the imagination. Others include: provision of the best possible service within available resources; concern for balancing the needs of actual and potential users and the reasonable demands of employers; equitable

treatment of all information users; impartiality, and avoidance of bias, in acquiring and evaluating information and in mediating it to other information users; and respect for confidentiality and privacy in dealing with information users. Other issues border on concern for the conservation and preservation of our information heritage in all formats; respect for, and understanding of, the integrity of information items and for the intellectual effort of those who created them; commitment to maintaining and improving personal professional knowledge, skills and competences and, respect for the skills and competences of all others, whether information professionals or information users, employers or colleagues.

Most times, professionals are not fully conscious of the ethical implications of their actions. Their behaviour is often shaped most significantly by customs and habits (Fernandez-Molina, 2000). It is critical that librarians should be aware of the ethical issues in library service delivery and also develop a positive perception towards them so that they will be in a good position to abide by the code of ethics of the profession. Library personnel can become aware of ethical issues through attendance at conferences and workshops organised by associations or the library. Awareness on ethical issues will also be enhanced if library schools make it mandatory for librarians-in-training to offer courses on ethics in service delivery (Fallis 2007). Literature search revealed that few studies have been conducted on the awareness and perception of ethical issues of service delivery in libraries by library personnel within the Nigerian context. A few of these studies seem to have concentrated on librarians in universities with non on polytechnics. This underscores this study in the polytechnics in Nigeria.

Polytechnics in Nigeria are another level of tertiary institutions besides the university system. These institutions provide technical education that help produce middle-level human resources for the nation's economy (Tella, Owolabi & Attama 2008). This study will be conducted in the Polytechnic of Ibadan. The Polytechnic, Ibadan was established in 1970 from the erstwhile Technical College, Ibadan under the provisions of a principal Edict cited as The Polytechnic, Ibadan Edict 1970. The Polytechnic Library today has about sixty thousand (60,000) textbooks, over two thousand (2000) journal titles and over twenty-two thousand (22,000) issues of journals.

The librarians that work in this library have the responsibilities of providing library services to different categories of users' in diverse disciplines of science, arts, technology, and management studies, and the likes. Considering the work environment of librarians in the polytechnic, it is imperative to examine their level of awareness and perception of ethical issues of information service delivery.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What is the level of awareness of ethical issues in library service delivery by librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan?
2. What are the various ethical issues in library service delivery that the librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan are familiar with?
3. How did the librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan get to know about the ethical issues in library service delivery?
4. What is the perception of the librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan of the ethical issues in library service delivery?
5. What are the inhibiting factors that could affect the librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan from upholding the ethics of the profession?

3. Literature Review

The ethical issues in library practice have generated a measure of interest by researchers. Though, literature search reveals that the studies conducted on awareness and perception of librarians of the ethical issues are sparse. Available studies still provide valuable insights on the issue. Juznic et al (2001) conducted an investigation in Slovenian public libraries where researchers posed as patrons in order to collect the information they needed for the research. They purposely requested materials on suicide, necrophilia (a pathological attraction to dead bodies, especially sexual attraction or intercourse or a pathological fascination with death) and photographs of corpses. The librarians' verbal and non-verbal responses and the quality and appropriateness of the received materials were evaluated. The results showed that the librarians were not shocked by the questions posed, and did not appear to recognize that they were encountering an ethical dilemma. The implication of this result is that the librarians may not be aware of the ethical issues in information service delivery that was why they did not express shock of decline to provide such information materials.

Ball and Oppenheim (2005) surveyed the attitudes of librarians and library science students in the United Kingdom to ethical issues in the profession. The questionnaire was the data collection instrument and the practicing librarians that participated in the study were 100. Results indicated that majority of the respondents (74%) were aware of the CILIP's code of ethics. In addition, (55.7%) of the practicing librarians indicated that they had a positive perception of the code of ethics as they agreed that their colleagues who violate the CILIP's code of ethics should be disciplined. Majority of them also agreed that personal attitude should not interfere with the provision of library service.

Mbofung and Popoola (2014) studied the legal and ethical issues of information service delivery and library information science professionals in university libraries in Nigeria. The authors used a questionnaire for data collection

from 429 practicing professionals in 24 federal universities in Nigeria. The instrument was prepared using excerpts from International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions/Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (IFLA/FAIFE) Intellectual Freedom Statements. Their findings showed that most of the respondents were aware of the ethical principles that relate to: enforcement of restriction permitted by law; selection of library materials representing all points of view, individual taste and void of interest; restriction of access or censorship involving use of filtering software; confidentiality, privacy and response to queries. Others include: exclusion of materials because of race, nationality, political, social, moral or religious views or partisan or doctrinal approval or pressure; adherence to institutional policies and professional development.

Onoyeyan et al (2014) conducted an assessment of ethical concerns among practicing librarians in Nigeria. The study population consisted of 50 professional librarians in three selected universities in Ogun State Nigeria; namely Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) Ago Iwoye and Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo. The questionnaire was the tool for data collection. Results showed that most of the respondents (93.2%) were aware that librarians are professionals and have a code of ethics they must follow. They identified the ethical issues faced by librarians in practice as intellectual property right issues, issues of information accuracy and selection decision. Their findings further revealed that most of the respondents (95.4%) had the perception that ethics showed be learned like any other library skill, (88.7%) noting that copies of the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) code of ethics should be given to licensed libraries free of charge.

Matingwina (2015) study titled; "ethical dilemmas confronting information professionals in the 21st century: a Zimbabwean perspective" where 58 practicing librarians were sampled and questioned to find out the ethical issues that they faced. The major ethical issues they cited include: (i) equitable access to library materials; (ii) accuracy of information provided; (iii) protection of intellectual property; and (iv) protection of personal privacy and confidentiality. The respondents indicated that the most prevalent ethical issues confronting the information professionals were protection of personal privacy and confidentiality (94%) and equitable access to library materials (94%). On the challenges in applying ethical principles, majority of the respondents (78%) identified lack of local policies as a challenge. Other prominent challenges include; conflicting interest between key information stakeholders, lack of reading resources and complexity of ethical codes.

In a recent study, Luo (2016) studied ethical issues in reference service through an online survey that yielded 212 valid responses from reference librarians in the United States of America. Results showed that more than 60% of the reference librarians indicated that they were either moderately or very familiar with the ALA's code of ethics.

This level of awareness could be the reason why they were able to recognize the ethical issues that they faced which included copyright issues and confidentiality and privacy issues, the two most common. Majority also noted that they became aware of these ethical issues through the MLIS courses they took on ethics. Other avenues of awareness are; continuing education on ethics, state training, self learning and professional influence of associations. Thus, it can be deduced from the review that the awareness of the ethical issues in library service delivery has been improving over the years.

4. Methodology

The method adopted for this study was phenomenography. This is a method that is used to determine how individuals view various aspects of a phenomenon in their environment based on their experience, conceptualisation, perception and understanding (Bowden et al, 1992 and Marton, 1986). The basic assumption of phenomenography is that individuals base their understanding of a particular phenomenon on the meaning they attach to it which is influenced by their feelings and perception (Svensson, 1997). Reed (2006) pointed out that in phenomenography, experiences are described through a set of categories of description based on how individuals conceptions. This method was deemed appropriate as it would provide an understanding into how librarians in The Polytechnic Ibadan, Oyo State Nigeria view the ethical issues in librarianship.

5. Participants

The participants in this study are the librarians in The Polytechnic of Ibadan, Oyo State Nigeria. Five librarians who had obtained a minimum of a master's degree were purposively selected for the study as key informants based on their job description as staff in charge of the readers' section. The Participants will be referred to in this study as;

First Participant: TPILR1 (The Polytechnic Ibadan Library Respondent 1)

Second Participant: TPILR2 (The Polytechnic Ibadan Library Respondent 2)

Third Participant: TPILR3 (The Polytechnic Ibadan Library Respondent 3)

Fourth Participant: TPIL4 (The Polytechnic Ibadan Library Respondent 4)

Fifth Participant: TPILR5 (The Polytechnic Ibadan Library Respondent 5)

6. Data Collection

The research instrument used for data collection was semi-structured interview. This instrument was selected because of its flexibility and the fact that it also provides detailed, accurate and clear conceptions of what the

participants' think of the phenomenon under scrutiny, which in this instance ethical issues in librarianship. The interview which was carried out on the 15th of February 2017 between 1pm to about 2:45pm was conducted in English by one of the researchers. Before each interview, the researcher sought for the permission of the participants to record the interview session with a smart device. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the responses they provided. Though the researcher approached the interview session with some key questions, the interviewees were allowed to follow any line of discussion, resulting in some meaningful deviations that provided useful insights into the topic of interest.

7. Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interview were analyzed following the typical and conventional qualitative data analysis procedures. The researchers transcribed the mp3 recordings of the participants interviews verbatim to familiarise themselves with the data in hand. Once the transcription was thoroughly carried out, the researchers read the transcripts several times, in search of salient and recurring ideas emerging from the data. Certain quotations from the reviewed summary were selected to illustrate each category.

8. Results and Discussion

After an analysis of the interview data, the researchers came up with five categories of views revealing the librarians responses to the research questions that were posed. These categories include themes suggesting;

- High level of awareness of the ethical issues in library service delivery
- Familiarity with various ethical issues in library service delivery
- Awareness of the ethical issues in library service delivery through different sources of information
- Favourable perception indicating that the ethical issues must be taken seriously by all stakeholders
- Different inhibiting factors affected the librarians from upholding the ethics of the profession

In the next section, each of these categories is explained, illustrated in light of the data collected from the study and also discussed with the assistance of literature.

Category 1: High level of awareness of the ethical issues in library service delivery: The interview sessions had some recurring themes and one of it was that all the participants were aware of the ethical issues in library service delivery. These are some of the straightforward comments of the participants;

TPILR1...Yes...

TPILR2...Yes I am aware...

TPILR4...Sure...

This indicates a high level of aware of the ethical issues by

the librarians, attesting to the fact they are not ignorant. This corroborates the findings of Mbofung and Popoola (2014) that studied the legal and ethical issues of information service delivery and library information science professionals in university libraries in Nigeria and reported that most of the respondents were aware of the ethical principles that relate to library service provision. Results from the study by Onoyeyan et al (2014) on the assessment of ethical concerns among practicing librarians in Nigeria also support the findings of this study as almost all the respondents were aware that librarians are professionals and have a code of ethics they must follow. On the other hand, the results of the study disagrees with the findings of Juznic et al (2001) that conducted an investigation in Slovenian public libraries and discovered that the librarians may not be aware of the ethical issues in information service delivery. This is because their reactions to the request made by patrons revealed that they seem to be oblivious of the unethical nature of the requests made. The situation might have changed now as the study was conducted more than fifteen years ago.

Category 2: Familiarity with various ethical issues in library service delivery: The participants in the interview listed the various issues that they considered ethical in library service delivery. These are the words of some of the participants based on their level of familiarity with the issues:

TPILR1.....*The ethical issues include copyright and administrative concerns, information access, technology related issues and censorship...*

TPILR2...*In my own view the ethical issues that we are faced with are choice of materials, access to quality information, equality of treatment right, accuracy and censorship, copyright and data protection, intellectual freedom, use and misuse of information and the likes...*

TPILR3...*I think the ethical issues relate to equality of service, conflict of interest, and personal ethics...*

TPILR5...*The issues of fair selection, avoidance of politics, fair treatment of all cadres of staff in the library and user information privacy are all aspects of ethics that we should be weary of...*

The librarians really proved by their responses that they really are aware of the ethical issues in library service delivery. The list they provided presents different types of ethical issues that reflect a high level of familiarity with them. This concurs with the findings of Mbofung and Popoola (2014) where the respondents listed the ethical issues as enforcement of restriction permitted by law; selection of library materials representing all points of view, individual taste and void of interest; confidentiality, privacy and response to queries. Others include: exclusion of materials because of race, nationality, political, social, moral or religious views or partisan or doctrinal approval or pressure; adherence to institutional policies and professional development. In agreement with the result of this study, Matingwina (2015) who researched into the ethical dilemmas confronting information professionals in

Zimbabwe reported that the major ethical issues cited by the respondents included equitable access to library materials, accuracy of information provided, protection of intellectual property and Protection of personal privacy and confidentiality.

Category 3: Awareness of the ethical issues in library service delivery through different sources of information: In this category, the participants indicated how they got to be aware of the different types of ethical issues in library service delivery. The various information sources were clearly spelt out in some of their comments;

TPILR1...*I got to know about the ethical issues facing our profession through my colleagues, through reading and the Internet...*

TPILR2...*I learnt about them through the Internet and my friends and colleagues through the face to face method...*

TPILR3...*The various articles on information ethics that I read really enhanced my awareness of the ethical issues...*

TPILR4...*I was taught some of the issues in my studying of library and information science as a course...*

It can be deduced from the responses of the participants that the Internet and their colleagues were the prominent sources of information about the ethical issues in library service delivery. None of the participant indicates that they got to know about these issues through workshops and seminars organised by the library, professional association and the registration council like the Nigerian Library Association and Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria. Thus, it is quite obvious that these professional bodies and the management of the polytechnic library need to rise up to the occasion and fill this gap. It is however pleasing to know that these ethical issues are given attention in the library school, as one of the participants (TPILR4) alluded to this fact. This supports the findings of Luo (2016) where a significant number of the reference librarians that participated in the study pointed that they became aware of the ethical issues in reference service delivery through the MLIS course they took. The need for library schools to teach these ethical issues was also highlighted by Fallis (2007) who opined that courses in information ethics must be part of the education of information professionals.

Category 4: Favourable perception indicating that the ethical issues must be taken seriously by all stakeholders:

In this category, the perception of the librarians towards the ethical issues in library service was investigated. The responses of the librarians revealed a favourable perception indicating that the ethical issues must be taken seriously by all stakeholders. These were some of their comments:

TPILR1...*I feel that ethical issues are very important and they should not be ignored by the librarians...*

TPILR3...*There should be punishment for whoever violates the code of ethics...*

TPILR5...*My own perception of the ethical issues in information provision is that, ethical decisions are not easy to make and usually requires the ingenuity of a professional librarian or information provider to arrive at one that will be acceptable to the generality of other professionals. It may*

sometimes require the librarian to put aside his or her own personal preferences and beliefs...

The responses from the participants indicate that ethical issues should not be pushed aside by the librarians. This result is similar to that of Ball and Oppenheim (2005) that surveyed the attitudes of librarians and librarianship students in the United Kingdom to ethical issues in the profession and reported that most of the practicing librarians had a positive perception of the code of ethics as they agreed that their colleagues who violate the CILIP's code of ethics should be disciplined. Majority of them also agreed that personal attitude should not interfere with the provision of library service.

Category 5: Different inhibiting factors affected the librarians from upholding the ethics of the profession:

The participants were asked to identify the inhibiting factors that could hinder them from upholding the ethics of the profession, a recurring theme was the issue of conflict of interest and the issue of personal ethics. Some of the comments of the participants are hereby presented:

TPILR4...In my own view, I consider the issue of conflict of interest as a challenge that could influence whether a librarian upholds the ethics of the profession or not. A librarian who allows himself or herself to display personal sentiments will in no time violate the code of ethics...

TPILR5...I feel that a librarian who has issues with personal values and virtues will find it very difficult to uphold the ethics of the profession...

This result shows that for librarians to uphold the dictates of the profession, they need to address the issue of conflict of interest and that of their personal ethics. This may involve serious sacrifices, but it should be done for the sake of their own personal integrity and that of the librarianship profession. Similarly, in the study conducted by Matingwina (2015) the majority of the respondents indicated that the challenges they experienced in upholding ethical principles included conflicting interest between key information stakeholders, lack of reading resources and complexity of ethical codes.

Table 1. Summary of codified results

Themes	Category	Sample
Awareness of ethical issues	High level of awareness	Yes I am aware
Familiarity with ethical issues	High familiarity	In my own view the ethical issues that we are faced with are choice of materials, access to quality information, equality of treatment right, accuracy and censorship, copyright and data protection, intellectual freedom, use and misuse of information and the likes.
Knowledge channels about ethical issues	Knowledge through different channels	I got to know about the ethical issues facing our profession through my colleagues, through reading and the Internet The various articles on information ethics that I read really enhanced my awareness of the ethical issues
Perception of ethical issues	Favorable perception	My own perception of the ethical issues in information provision is that, ethical decisions are not easy to make and usually requires the ingenuity of a professional librarian or information provider to arrive at one that will be acceptable to the generality of other professionals. It may sometimes require the librarian to put aside his or her own personal preferences and beliefs.
Factors hindering adhering to ethical issues	Different hindering factors	In my own view, I consider the issue of conflict of interest as a challenge that could influence whether a librarian upholds the ethics of the profession or not. A librarian who allows himself or herself to display personal sentiments will in no time violate the code of ethics. I feel that a librarian who has issues with personal values and virtues will find it very difficult to uphold the ethics of the profession.

9. Conclusions

The level of awareness of the ethical issues in library service delivery by the librarians that participated in the study was very high, indicating that they these individuals are conversant with issues of concern to their profession. The role that the Internet and their colleagues played in providing this necessary awareness is also very significant. The favorable perception of the librarians reveals their willingness to abide by professional code of ethics. The high

level of awareness and positive perception of the ethical issues by the library personnel will enhance library service delivery and could project the library as an institution committed to the support of good values and virtues.

10. Recommendations

In order to address the inhibiting factors highlighted by the participants and to further enhance the level of awareness

and perception of librarians on ethical issues, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) should ensure that all registered librarians in all libraries especially academic libraries have copies of the code of ethics.
2. Professional bodies like the Nigerian Library Association and LRCN should also organise periodic workshops that will train librarians on ethical issues in library and information services and also build their capacity in the area of information ethics.
3. The management of polytechnic libraries should build the competence of their staff in-house on these ethical issues through regular staff meetings and constant reminders on the value of updating their knowledge on ethical issues in librarianship.
4. Library schools in Nigeria need to sustain the high level of awareness by emphasizing these ethical issues in courses on information ethics and the likes so that librarians-in-training can fully comprehend them.

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