

TOWARDS A BETTER RESPONSE RATE FOR QUESTIONNAIRES: CURRENT TRENDS AMONG LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

**OLUTOYIN OLUKEMI OSO
AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, OYO, NIGERIA**

and

**GOODLUCK IFIJEH (Corresponding author)
CENTRE FOR LEARNING RESOURCES,
COVENANT UNIVERSITY, OTA, NIGERIA.
E-MAIL : goodluck.ifijeh@covenantuniversity.edu.ng**

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ABSTRACT

This study, through a questionnaire survey, examined the current questionnaire response rates of librarians in seven academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria. 58, out of the 80 questionnaires distributed were filled and returned. The study revealed that there was a high response rate to questionnaires among librarians (98%). Furthermore, the study showed that majority of the respondents (77.6%) indicated professional obligation and benefits of research as reasons for questionnaire completion. The study also found out that majority of the researchers who administered questionnaires to librarians were library and information science students and professionals. Length of questionnaires, request for very personal information, complex language, and poor questionnaire construction among others were identified as inhibitions to question completion among respondents. The paper concluded with recommendations that would help boost high response rate to questionnaires among librarians and other professionals.

Keywords: Questionnaires, Librarians, Academic Libraries, Nigeria, Research

INTRODUCTION

Questionnaire is an instrument of data collection which is mostly used by researchers. It is used for gathering factual data that is unique to individuals such as beliefs, experiences, level of knowledge, personalities, attitude or preferences of the respondents and helps in maintaining participants' privacy (Taylor-Powell and Hermann, 2000). Researchers administer questionnaires by hand, mail, telephone and online. An appropriate questionnaire design is equally essential to ensure that valid responses are obtained for the questions. Librarians as academics are aware of the importance of research and the implication of failing to publish in scholarly journals. In an attempt to

carry out a survey, opinions of the target population or respondents are of paramount importance. Decline in response rate to questionnaires has been found to pose a problem to scholars who intend to publish in reputable journals (Curtin et al. 2005; Steehte al. 2001). Curtin et al. (2005) observed that journal editors are increasingly becoming uninterested in manuscripts that are based on survey with low response rate. Questionnaire response rate helps in measuring standard and quality especially in researches that involve survey. Higher response rates brings about more accurate results and are also useful in evaluating survey data quality (e.g. Backston and Hursh 1963; Babbie, 1990; Biemer and Lyberg, 2003). Respondents have been found to be very reluctant in providing responses to questionnaires (Adomi, Ayo and Nakpodia, 2007). It is against this background that this research is aimed at identifying factors that could help increase the response rate of respondents especially librarians. The paper also fills the gap for the dearth of literature in the study of response rate to questionnaires among librarians in southwest Nigeria.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the current response rate of academic librarians to questionnaires
2. To determine academic librarians' reasons for responding to questionnaires
3. To identify the categories of people who administer questionnaires to academic librarians
4. To identify problems that inhibit response rate to questionnaires among librarians.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Validity and reliability of a research result depend largely on the response rate to questionnaires by respondents. It is evident that non-response to research questionnaire is increasing on a daily basis (Lyberg and Dean, 1992, Davey, 1996). From a post census survey conducted by Kulka et al (1991), it was discovered that among reported non respondents, 23.5 percent filled the form but never returned it, 37 percent never opened the envelope, 27 percent checked what was inside the envelop but didn't fill it and 12 percent of the non-respondents filled it but stopped halfway. Some factors responsible for poor response rate of respondents to questionnaires have been identified by past writers.

According to Ofo (1994), respondents are not often interested in responding to questionnaires because of their tight time schedule. Consequently, researchers wait endlessly for respondents to provide needed responses to questionnaires. Adomi et al (2007) while researching on questionnaire response rate also concluded in their findings that too long or irrelevant questions are some of the factors that militate against completion of questionnaire. On the contrary, studies conducted by Adams and Gale (1982) on Brigham Young University students (550 per treatment), discovered that lengthy questionnaires had better response rate than short ones. For instance, questionnaires with three pages produced the best return (46%) while the one-page

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version performed less well (41%) and the five-page version was significantly higher than the other two. They therefore concluded that the length of the questionnaire does not really matter if the culture of follow –up can be imbibed.

Edward et al (2002), while researching on increase in response to postal and electronic mail gave approaches to maximizing response rate by using incentives, pre-notification through telephone, sending reminder etc. The strategy of telephoning participants in their research yielded result as extra 41 responses were added to the initial return. Crask and Kim (1988) also identified some of the factors that affect participation which includes incentives, publicity, follow up procedures etc. Simplicity and friendly disposition of a questionnaire may determine the rate of response. Dillman, Reynolds and Rockwook (1991) identified factors that make a questionnaire to be unfriendly: long and complicated instructions, different graphics on the two sides of the form, row-column format requiring matching rows etc. Consequently, questionnaires that are straight-forward, easy to fill and not confusing usually have a greater return rate than complicated ones. Literature addressing issues on response rate to questionnaires especially among librarians are few. This study is an attempt to fill the gap.

METHODOLOGY

The survey method of research was adopted for the study. The researchers used the questionnaire as data gathering instrument. In order to ensure that relevant items were included in the questionnaire, it was given to an expert in research methods for necessary evaluation. A total number of 80 questionnaires were distributed to practicing librarians in 7 academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria. A total of 58 (72.5%) questionnaires were filled and returned. Collected data were analyzed descriptively using statistical tables where necessary and other statistical computations like percentage frequencies for an appropriate summary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Profile

27 (46.6%) respondents were male while 31 (53.4%) were females. 26 (44.8%) respondents were in the age group 31-40 years, 22 (37.9%) belonged to 41-50 years, 6 (10.3%) belonged to 51-60 years and 4 (7%) belonged to 60 & above.

11 (19%) respondents were Assistant Librarians, 18(31%) were Librarian II, 21 (36%) were Librarian I, 5 (8.6%) were Senior Librarians, 2 (3.4%) were Principal Librarians and 1 (2%) was Deputy University Librarian. 17(29.3%) respondents had 1-5 years working experience, 22 (37.9%) had 6-10 years working experience, 11 (19%) had 11-15 years working experience and 8 (13.8%) had 16 & above years of experience.

Table 1: Response rate of librarians to questionnaires

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Do you always respond to questionnaires?	57	98.3	1	1.7	58	100

Table 1 reveals that 57 (98.3%) of the respondents indicated that they provide required responses to questionnaires always, while only 1 (1.7%) responded to the contrary.

Table 2: Reasons for responding to questionnaires

Reasons	N	%
Professional obligation	45	77.6
Assistance to researcher	12	20.7
Benefits of the research	45	77.6
Academic interest	13	22.4
Relationship with the researcher	4	7
Incentives like money, joint authorship etc	-	-

Note that N is greater than 57 because respondents were allowed to make multiple choices.

The respondents were asked to give reasons for always responding to questionnaires. Table 2 reveals that professional obligation and benefits of the research were ranked as the highest reasons 45 (77.6%) respectively. Relationship with the researcher was ranked the lowest 4 (7%). No respondent indicated incentives as reason for questionnaire completion.

Table 3: Categories of people who send questionnaires

Categories of people	N	%
Library and information science (LIS) students	44	75.9
Librarians and information Professionals	41	70.7
Non LIS students	26	44.8
LIS Lecturers	30	51.7
Non LIS Lecturers	17	29.3
Others	8	13.8

Note that N is greater than 58 because respondents were allowed to make multiple choices.

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Table 3 shows that library and information science students ranked first (75.9%) as the group that respondents receive questionnaire from, librarians and information professionals ranked second (70.7%), LIS lecturers ranked third (51.7%) while others ranked lowest (13.8%).

Table 4: Librarians' opinions about questionnaire completion

Opinions	N	%
Completing questionnaires is time wasting	12	20.7
It helps one to contribute to knowledge	50	86.2
I am always happy to complete questionnaires	35	60.3
The process of filling questionnaires is boring	14	24.1

Respondents were asked to give their opinions on completion of questionnaires. Table 4 reveals that majority of the respondents (86.2%) agreed that completing questionnaires helps one to contribute to knowledge, 60.3% opined that they were always happy to complete questionnaires, 24.1% said it was boring to complete questionnaires, while 20.7 % posited that completing questionnaires was time wasting.

Table 5: Problems of questionnaire completion

Problems	N	%
Some questionnaires are not relevant to my field of study	8	13.8
Some questionnaires are too lengthy	46	79.3
Some questionnaires request for too personal information	22	37.9
The language used in some questionnaires is too complex	11	19
Some questionnaires are poorly constructed	9	15.5
Time required to complete questionnaire is too short	48	82.8

Table 5 shows the problems militating against completion of questionnaires among the respondents. 48 (82.8%) respondents indicated that time required to complete questionnaires was too short, 46 (79.3%) indicated that some questionnaires were too lengthy, while non relevance of questionnaires to respondents' field of study was ranked least (13.8%) among the problems militating against questionnaire completion.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined response rate and attitudes towards completion of questionnaires among librarians in academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria. In table 1, the study showed that the response rate of librarians was very high (98.3%). This high rate maybe because the respondents were academic librarians who not only work in research environments, but are researchers themselves. They therefore place high premium on questionnaire completion. The finding substantiates the result of the study of Adomi et al (2007) which posited that the response rate of librarians to questionnaire completion was high. More also, librarianship is about knowledge creation, organization and dissemination; librarians therefore consider questionnaire completion as part of the knowledge creation process. The table also revealed that 1.7% of the respondents indicated that they do not respond to questionnaires. The respondents indicated that lack of time and reminders were the reasons for their lack of response to questionnaire completion. This agrees with Edward et al (2002) who opined that tight time schedules of respondents and lack of reminders inhibited completion of questionnaires.

Table 2 provided reasons for librarians' response to questionnaire. Majority of the respondents (77.6%) indicated that they responded to questionnaire completion due to professional obligation and benefits of the research. This may also be as a result of the professional background of the respondents. Librarians consider it a professional obligation to complete questionnaires. As information practitioners, they understand the benefits of research to academics in particular and the society in general. It is therefore not a surprise that majority of librarians are willing to complete questionnaires, even if the questionnaires are lengthy (Adams and Gale, 1982). Interestingly, contrary to the observation of Crask and Kim (1988), no respondent indicated incentive as motivation for questionnaire completion. Table 3 examined the categories of persons who send questionnaires to librarians. Library and information science students were ranked the highest (75.9%); librarians and information practitioners were ranked second (70.7%), while library and information lecturers were ranked third (51.7%). It is not a surprise that the highest ranked groups are all related to the library and information profession. Most times, researchers administer questionnaires to persons related to their fields of study; it is therefore expected that librarians would mostly serve as respondents for researches conducted by students, lecturers and professionals in the field of library and information science. Table 4 shows the personal opinions of respondents to questionnaire completion. 86.2% of the respondents opined that completing questionnaires helps to contribute to knowledge; and majority (60.3%) were always happy to respond to questionnaires. This agrees with the position of Lyberg and Dean (1992) who observed that the knowledge of the importance and value of a given research would help to increase the response rate of respondents. Table 5 indicated the problems inhibiting questionnaire completion. Lack of adequate time was ranked as the highest inhibition to questionnaire completion (82.8%).

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This is not unconnected with the tight job schedules of academic librarians. Secondly, researchers do not give adequate time to respondents to complete their questionnaires; Adomi et al (2007) observed that researchers are always in a hurry to collect completed questionnaires from the respondents. This results in partial and non completion of questionnaires. Another inhibition to questionnaire completion as indicated in table 5 is the length of questionnaires (79.3%). When a questionnaire is too lengthy, it wastes the time of the respondents. Consequently, respondents who have very busy job schedules would not want to complete such questionnaires. This finding is in contrast to the findings of Adams and Gale (1982) who in their study of young university students, concluded that lengthy questionnaires had better response rate to shorter ones. Adams and Gale made use of young university students who do not have tight job schedules as academic librarians. The contrast in the findings of this study compared to that of Adams and Gale maybe as a result of the diversities and complexities of the population used for the two studies. Other major inhibitions to questionnaire completion identified in table 5 include request for very personal information (37.9%), and use of complex language (19%).

NEXT STEPS TOWARDS BETTER RESPONSE RATE TO QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETION

Though this study revealed a high response rate to questionnaire completion among librarians, there is need for improvement, probably working towards one hundred percent completion rate. This is achievable if the following recommendations are implemented.

Firstly, researchers (especially students) should learn to structure and construct their questionnaires in simple and easy – to – complete formats. The use of complex and confusing languages should be avoided. Questions should be brief and straight to the point. This will reduce the length of the questionnaire. Researchers should take academic or professional courses on questionnaire construction and administration. These courses are available in higher institutions of learning and professional institutes.

Secondly, researchers should stop requesting for very personal information of respondents like name and age. For example, instead of requesting for the actual age of the respondents, researchers could make use of age brackets.

Thirdly, researchers should give respondents ample time to complete questionnaires. They should also send reminders to respondents periodically and inform respondents of the due date for collection of completed questionnaires.

Lastly, libraries as disseminators of knowledge and research findings should encourage their staff to always complete questionnaires. This can be achieved by the appointment of a research or questionnaire officer to help receive, distribute and monitor the completion of questionnaires among staff of the library.

CONCLUSION

Research findings are very important in societal evolution and developments. It is against this background that everything must be done to encourage researchers. One of the most important instruments for collecting data from a population in research is questionnaire. The questionnaire is a veritable platform through which the researcher seeks for answers to research questions. However, failure of respondents to complete questionnaires given to them frustrates the entire research process. This study investigated the attitude of librarians towards questionnaire completion. Though findings revealed a high response rate to questionnaires among librarians, the study advocated an improvement and identified inhibitions that need to be surmounted. Researchers should acquire better skills in questionnaire structuring, construction and administration. Librarians as knowledge keepers and disseminators should contribute to research by promptly completing questionnaires administered to them.

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