



EMPATHY, RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE OF LIBRARIANS IN PUBLIC ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN SOUTH –EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study explored Empathy and Relationship management and Job Performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South-East, Nigeria. The study articulated two research objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses. It employed a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 667 and a sample size of 316 derived from William Bill (2004). A structured questionnaire was used for collecting data. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean standard deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed a significant relationship between Empathy, relationship management and Job Performance of Librarians in public academic libraries in South-East Nigeria. This implies that librarians who demonstrate understanding, compassion and concern for the feeling and experiences of others are more likely to establish interactions with users and colleagues, thereby enhancing their job performance. The study recommended that library administrators should promote a workplace culture that values empathy by organizing interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence training and management of public academic libraries should strengthen relationship management among librarians by encouraging teamwork, effective communication and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Empathy, Relationship Management, Job Performance, Emotional Intelligence, Academic Libraries, Librarians, South-East, Nigeria.



Introduction

Academic libraries are indispensable to the realization of the teaching, learning, research and community service mandates of higher education institutions. They provide access to information resources, facilitate knowledge creation, support scholarly communication and contribute to institutional excellence. Librarians, as the custodians and managers of these information resources, are expected to deliver efficient, timely, and user-centered services. The effectiveness of academic librarians, therefore, depends largely on their job performance. In the contemporary workplace, technical skills alone are no longer sufficient for effective job performance; emotional and interpersonal competencies have become increasingly important in organizational effectiveness. Among these competencies are empathy and relationship management which are dimensions of emotional intelligence. These two dimensions which Coleman (1995, 1998) identified as the most directly relevant to the library, are fundamentally a service profession involving constant human interaction.

Empathy refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately respond to the emotions, feelings, and perspectives of others. It involves placing oneself in another person's situation. According to Castillo-Gualda, et al., (2021), empathy is the capacity to understand and appropriately respond to the emotional experiences of other individuals through accurate emotional perception and perspective-taking. Similarly, Schlegel and Mortillaro (2022) described empathy as the ability to identify, understand, and respond constructively to the emotional states of others while maintaining appropriate emotional boundaries. Empathy comprises both cognitive and affective components. Cognitive empathy refers to understanding another person's feelings and perspective, whereas affective empathy involves sharing or responding emotionally to another person's experiences. In academic libraries, empathy enables librarians to understand the emotional and informational needs of diverse categories of library users.

According to Schlegel and Mortillaro (2022), relationship management is the ability to utilize emotional information effectively to develop constructive interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and facilitate cooperative interactions. Similarly, Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey (2021) described relationship management as the capacity to apply emotional intelligence in managing interpersonal interactions through empathy, effective communication, constructive



feedback, and conflict resolution. Individuals who possess strong relationship management skills are better able to influence others positively. Williams-Ilemobola, et al, (2021) explained that relationship management enables librarians to build positive interpersonal relationships, resolve workplace conflicts, and maintain harmonious interactions with colleagues and library users.

Ibironke, et al., (2020) defined job performance as employee's capacity to perform effectively in agreement with the job requirement to achieving the organization's goals and objectives. Similarly, Medina-Garrido, Biedma-Ferrer, and Ramos-Rodríguez (2023) defined job performance as the degree to which employees effectively execute work responsibilities and contribute to the attainment of organizational goals through efficient utilization of their competencies and organizational resources. They argued that high-performing employees consistently demonstrate commitment, responsibility, adaptability, and quality service delivery, thereby improving organizational productivity and effectiveness.

An academic library is a dynamic and indispensable hub of knowledge, learning and intellectual exploration within educational institutions. It is a repository of scholarly resources carefully curated to support the diverse academic pursuits of students, faculty and researchers with its extensive collection of books, journals, electronic data bases and multimedia materials, an academic library provides an environment that fosters critical thinking, research excellence and collaborative learning. Beyond its physical and virtual walls, the academic library stands as a gateway to information, bridging the gap between tradition and innovation and playing a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of institutions worldwide.

A librarian is a person who works professionally in a library prevailing access to information and sometimes social or technical programming, or instruction on information literacy to users. The role of the librarian has changed much overtime; with the past century in particular bringing many new media and technologies into play, from the earliest libraries in the ancient world to the modern information hub, there have been keepers and dissemination of the information held in data stores. Roles and responsibilities vary widely depending on the type of library, the specialty of the librarian and functions needed to maintain collections and make them available to its users.

A librarian is responsible for organizing, managing and providing access to information resources in a library setting and acquiring books, journals, databases and other materials for the library collection, as well as cataloguing and classifying them for easy retrievals by library users.



Librarians also assist library patrons in locating information resources and provide guidance on how to use them effectively. They may develop and derive programs and services that meet the needs of the community, such as literacy programs, book clubs or cultural events.

Both competencies are theoretical positions for professional performance, yet their specific relationship with the job performance of librarians in academic libraries in South east Nigeria has not been empirically established. In light of the foregoing, this study investigated empathy, relationships, and job performance of librarians in academic libraries in South East Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness and efficiency of university libraries can be enhanced by the performance of librarians. However, observations indicate that some librarians in university libraries exhibit poor interpersonal relationships, ineffective communication skills, low emotional responsiveness and inability to maintain cordial relationships with users and colleagues. These challenges often result in user dissatisfaction, workplace conflicts, reduced teamwork and low organizational productivity. Librarians are expected to possess professional competencies, emotional intelligence capabilities such as empathy and relationship management may also determine their effectiveness and job performance. Librarians who lack users information needs, while poor relationship management hinder teamwork and organizational cooperation. Despite the theoretical relevance of empathy and relationship management to library practice and despite the growing evidence linking emotional intelligence to job performance in related profession, very few studies have specifically investigated these two emotional intelligence dimension of job performance of librarians in public academic library in South East Nigeria. This gap in literature provided the primary motivation for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to determine the relationship between empathy, relationship management and job performance of librarians in the public academic libraries. The specific objectives are to:

1. investigate the relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.
2. find out the relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.



Research Questions

This research provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were formulated for this study.

Ho₁: There is no significant relation between empathy and job performance of librarians in academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Empathy refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately respond to the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of other people. It enables individuals to appreciate situations from another person's perspective without necessarily sharing the same experiences or emotions. Empathy facilitates effective interpersonal relationships, enhances communication, promotes cooperation, and supports ethical decision-making in both personal and professional settings (Papachristou et al., 2026). The concept of empathy has evolved from being viewed solely as an emotional response to being recognized as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, affective, and behavioural processes. Cognitive empathy refers to understanding another person's thoughts and perspectives, affective empathy involves sharing or resonating with another person's emotional experiences, while compassionate or behavioural empathy entails taking appropriate actions to alleviate another person's distress (Zaki, 2024). Together, these dimensions enable individuals to develop meaningful relationships and function effectively in social and organizational environments.

According to Akanbi and Olatunji (2024), empathy is the ability to identify the emotional conditions of others, understand their viewpoints, and demonstrate concern through supportive and appropriate responses. Empathetic individuals develop stronger interpersonal relationships because they are more attentive to the emotional needs and expectations of those around them. Similarly, Okeke and Eze (2022) define empathy as an individual's capacity to understand and



appreciate the emotional experiences of others without becoming emotionally overwhelmed. They maintain that empathy encourages mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation among organizational members, thereby reducing interpersonal conflicts and promoting harmonious workplace relationships.

Otor and Jato (2023) noted that empathy enhances employees' interpersonal effectiveness by enabling them to understand colleagues' emotional needs and respond constructively during workplace interactions. Thus, emotionally intelligent employees who display empathy achieve higher levels of collaboration, teamwork, and overall job performance. Consequently, empathy is regarded as an indispensable competency for effective leadership, teamwork, customer service, conflict resolution, and organizational performance (Adebayo & Ojo, 2023).

Relationship management is one of the major dimensions of emotional intelligence and refers to an individual's ability to establish, maintain, and strengthen positive interpersonal relationships through effective communication, collaboration, conflict resolution, influence, and teamwork. It involves applying awareness of one's own emotions and those of others to foster healthy interactions that promote cooperation and the achievement of shared goals. According to Goleman (2021), relationship management encompasses the competencies required to inspire others, influence behaviour positively, manage disagreements constructively, work collaboratively, and develop meaningful interpersonal connections. Individuals with strong relationship management skills are able to communicate effectively, build trust, resolve conflicts diplomatically, and create environments that encourage cooperation and high performance.

Similarly, Miao, Humphrey, and Qian (2021) explained that relationship management represents the behavioural application of emotional intelligence through interpersonal interactions. It enables individuals to coordinate group activities, influence colleagues positively, and sustain harmonious working relationships that facilitate effective task accomplishment. Employees who effectively manage workplace relationships are generally better positioned to obtain support, exchange knowledge, and collaborate successfully in achieving organizational objectives. From another perspective, Lee, Sun, and Kim (2024) argued that relationship management extends beyond interpersonal friendliness to include the ability to cultivate high-quality professional relationships that enhance cooperation, mutual trust, and psychological safety. Such relationships encourage employees to communicate openly, solve problems collectively, and adapt more effectively to workplace challenges.



In relation to job performance, relationship management enables employees to interact effectively with supervisors, colleagues, clients, and other stakeholders while maintaining positive working relationships. Employees with strong relationship management skills are generally more cooperative, adaptable, and capable of resolving workplace conflicts without disrupting productivity. These competencies contribute to improved task performance, organizational citizenship behaviours, customer satisfaction, and overall effectiveness at work. Furthermore, Assefa (2024) reported that relationship management significantly predicts employee performance because individuals who effectively manage interpersonal relationships communicate more clearly, handle difficult situations diplomatically, encourage teamwork, and sustain positive work relationships that enhance performance and productivity.

Job performance is a multidimensional concept that describes the extent to which an employee successfully performs the duties, responsibilities, and behaviours expected by an organization. It reflects how effectively individuals utilize their knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies to accomplish assigned tasks and contribute to organizational objectives. According to Koopmans (2021), job performance refers to the collection of behaviours and actions that employees exhibit in carrying out their work responsibilities to achieve organizational objectives. Importantly, job performance extends beyond task completion to include behaviours that promote organizational effectiveness, adaptability, cooperation, and professional responsibility.

Academic libraries are integral to supporting educational programs, meeting the needs of students, teachers and researchers. They are central for the accreditation process, with national bodies assessing institutions based on their library holdings. Particularly in universities, academic libraries are central to the learning environment, providing spaces for independent work, research and creative endeavours. In essence, academic libraries serve as the epicenter for intellectual Exploration knowledge acquisition and scholarly pursuits within the educational landscape, guided by the diligent effort of academic libraries.

Empirical Review

The following empirical studies are considered related to the study at hand;

Affiong, Geraldine and Dickson (2023) investigated the correlation between dignity, empathy, and employee productivity among workers in private hospitals in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study aimed to determine the relationship between employee dignity, empathy, and employee productivity. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population consisted



of employees of private hospitals in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, from which 233 respondents were randomly selected. A structured self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated before administration, while data were analysed using the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that empathy had a strong positive and statistically significant relationship with employee productivity, particularly with task accomplishment ($r = 0.843$, $p < .001$) and service quality ($r = 0.402$, $p < .001$). The study concluded that empathy is an important determinant of employee productivity and recommended that organizations should institutionalize workplace policies that encourage empathy as a means of improving employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

Asumah (2022) investigated the relationship between employee relationship management and employee performance in non-profit-making organizations in Ghana and Nigeria. The study sought to examine the applicability of Elton Mayo's Human Relations Theory by determining the influence of employee relationship management dimensions, including communication, teamwork, conflict and grievance resolution, mutual trust, and shared goals and values, on employee performance. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population comprised employees in the education and health sectors in Ghana and Nigeria, while 454 respondents participated in the study through a web-based survey. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire, and the data collected were analysed using multiple regression analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. The findings revealed that employee relationship management had a positive and statistically significant influence on employee performance. Specifically, communication, conflict and grievance resolution, and shared goals and values significantly predicted employee performance. The study recommended that managers in educational and health institutions should strengthen employee relationship management practices to improve employee performance.



Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The choice of this design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the nature and extent of the relationship between empathy, relationship management and job performance of librarians in academic libraries in South-East Nigeria. The design enabled the researcher to collect data from the respondents and establish whether variations in empathy and relationship management were associated with variations in the job performance of librarians. The population of the study comprised 667 professional librarians working in academic libraries in South-East Nigeria. The study was limited to academic libraries in universities. A sample size of 316 respondents was determined from the study population using the statistical formula developed by William Bill (2004). The selected sample was considered adequate for representing the population and generating data for the study. The respondents were selected from the identified academic libraries across the study area.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Empathy, Relationship Management and Job Performance of Librarians in Academic Libraries in South-East Nigeria Questionnaire” (ERMJPLQ). The questionnaire was structured in accordance with the objectives and research questions of the study and contained items designed to obtain information on empathy, relationship management and job performance of librarians. A total of 316 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants. The use of research assistants facilitated the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires from the various institutions covered by the study. At the end of the data collection exercise, 258 copies of the questionnaire were properly completed and found valid for analysis. This represents a valid response rate of approximately 81.6%, which was considered adequate for the analysis. The data collected were coded, organised and analysed in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean, were used to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted as the decision point, such that items with a mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed, while items with a mean score below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed. For the hypotheses, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to determine the relationship between the independent variables empathy and relationship management, and job performance of librarians. The use of



PPMC was appropriate because the study sought to establish the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables under investigation.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria?

Table 1: Relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria

Items	Mean	Decision
I understand the feelings of library users when they seek information assistance	2.95	Accepted
I show patience when users struggle to express their information needs	3.18	Accepted
I put myself in the position of users to better understand their needs	3.29	Accepted
I respond kindly to users who appear confused, stressed or frustrated	2.96	Accepted
I am sensitive to individual differences among library users	3.15	Accepted
I show concern when colleagues experience work-related difficulties	3.00	Accepted
I listen attentively to users and colleagues before responding	3.20	Accepted
Weighted Mean	3.10	Accepted

With a weighted mean value of ($\bar{x} = 3.10$), the librarians indicated that empathy relates to their job performance. Specifically, the respondents noted thus: I show patience when users struggle to express their information needs ($\bar{x} = 3.18$), I put myself in the position of users to better understand their needs ($\bar{x} = 3.29$), I am sensitive to individual differences among library users ($\bar{x} = 3.15$), and I listen attentively to users and colleagues before responding ($\bar{x} = 3.20$), I understand the feelings of library users when they seek information assistance ($\bar{x} = 2.95$), I respond kindly to users who appear confused, stressed or frustrated ($\bar{x} = 2.96$), and I show concern when colleagues experience work-related difficulties ($\bar{x} = 3.00$). These items were considered acceptable because their mean values are equal to or greater than the criterion mean of 2.50



Hypothesis One

There is no significant relation between empathy and job performance of librarians in academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.

Table 2: PPMC on significant relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria

Variable	N	R	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remark
Empathy		.041		
Job Performance of Librarians			.004	Reject
Total	258			

Table 2 reveals the summary of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria and obtained a correlation coefficient of .041 which indicates a positive relationship and is statically significant at $p = .004 < 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis which assumed that there is no significant relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria?

Table 3: Relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria

Items	Mean	Decision
I maintain positive working relationships with library users	3.26	Accepted
I build cooperative relationships with colleagues	3.35	Accepted
I communicate clearly and respectfully with others work	3.30	Accepted
I handle interpersonal conflicts in the library constructively	2.66	Accepted
I encourage teamwork and collaboration among library staff	2.87	Accepted
I influence others positively to achieve library goals	3.10	Accepted
I give and receive feedback in a respectful manner	3.10	Accepted
Weighted Mean	3.09	Accepted

With a weighted mean value of ($\bar{x} = 3.09$), the librarians indicated that relationship management relates to their job performance as follows: I maintain positive working relationships with library



users ($\bar{x} = 3.26$), I build cooperative relationships with colleagues ($\bar{x} = 3.35$), I communicate clearly and respectfully with others at work ($\bar{x} = 3.30$), I influence others positively to achieve library goals ($\bar{x} = 3.10$), and I give and receive feedback in a respectful manner ($\bar{x} = 3.10$), I handle interpersonal conflicts in the library constructively ($\bar{x} = 2.66$) and I encourage teamwork and collaboration among library staff ($\bar{x} = 2.87$). These items are considered acceptable because their mean values are greater than the criterion mean value of 2.50.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the significant relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria

Variable	N	r	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remark
Relationship Management		.393		
Job Performance of Librarians			.003	Reject
Total	258			

Table 4 reveals the summary of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria. The table indicated a correlation value of .393 which indicate indicates a positive relationship and statistically significant at $p = .003 < 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis which assumed that there is no significant relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria.



Discussion of Findings

Research question one investigated the relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria. The corresponding hypothesis showed that there is a significant relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria. This is an indication that empathy has a way of enhancing the job performance of librarians. The finding from the study agrees with that of Fejoh et al., (2018) who investigated empathy and psychological well-being as predictors of job performance among workers of tertiary institutions in South-West, Nigeria and discovered a significant relationship between empathy, psychological well-being, and workers' job performance. The findings revealed that empathy had a significant positive relationship with workers' job performance..

Relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries

Research question two investigated the relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria. The study revealed a significant relationship between empathy and job performance of librarians. The corresponding hypothesis further showed that there is a significant relationship between relationship management and job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South East, Nigeria. this implies that good relationship capability impacts job performance of librarians. The finding from the study is in agreement with that of Asumah (2022) who investigated the relationship between employee relationship management and employee performance in non-profit-making organizations in Ghana and Nigeria. The findings revealed that employee relationship management had a positive and statistically significant influence on employee performance.

Conclusion

Librarians interact regularly with library users, colleagues and other stakeholders, making interpersonal competencies such as empathy and relationship management important for effective service delivery. The study was therefore to establish whether these empathy and relationship management competencies are significantly related to the job performance of librarians and to provide empirical evidence that could guide library administrators in improving staff effectiveness.



The study concludes that emotional intelligence competencies, particularly empathy and relationship management, are significantly related to the job performance of librarians in public academic libraries in South-East Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that librarians who are able to understand and respond appropriately to the feelings, needs, and perspectives of library users and colleagues are more likely to perform their duties effectively. Empathy therefore plays an important role in enhancing the quality of librarians' interactions, service delivery, and overall job performance. Furthermore, librarians who possess good relationship management skills are better positioned to establish and maintain positive relationships with colleagues, library users, and other stakeholders. Such positive relationships can promote effective communication, cooperation, teamwork, and a conducive working environment, which ultimately contribute to improved job performance. It is therefore important for library management and relevant professional bodies to encourage the development of these competencies through appropriate training, workshops, and staff development programmes

Recommendations

1. Library administrators should promote a workplace culture that values empathy by organizing interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence training that equips librarians to demonstrate understanding, compassion, and responsiveness in their interactions with users and co-workers, thereby improving service delivery and job performance.
2. Management of public academic libraries should strengthen relationship management among librarians by encouraging teamwork, effective communication, conflict resolution, and collaborative decision-making through regular team-building activities and leadership development programmes to enhance overall job performance.



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