THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS OF LIBRARIANS IN NORTH CENTRAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract
This study investigates the emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills of librarians in North Central University libraries in Nigeria. The primary objectives were to evaluate the levels of emotional intelligence among librarians, identify the conflict resolution strategies they employ, and explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution capabilities. Utilizing a cross-sectional design and stratified random sampling, data were collected from a representative group of librarians. Findings revealed that librarians generally exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence, particularly in areas such as adaptability, empathy, and self-awareness. However, there is a noted need for improvement in proactively seeking solutions to conflicts. While librarians demonstrated a strong appreciation for effective communication and often sought assistance when faced with challenging situations, a tendency to avoid conflicts was evident. The study underscores the pivotal role of emotional intelligence in facilitating peaceful conflict resolution, fostering collaboration, and shaping effective problem-solving approaches. Based on these insights, the study recommends comprehensive programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence, dispelling common misconceptions, and providing conflict resolution training through workshops, seminars, and coaching sessions. Such initiatives would equip librarians with essential skills in self-awareness, empathy, and communication, ultimately promoting a positive and productive work environment.
Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Management, Skills, Librarians.

Introduction
In the ever-evolving landscape of academic libraries, librarians stand at the forefront of numerous interpersonal interactions, managing a diverse range of relationships and professional encounters. The ability to effectively navigate emotions and resolve conflicts is paramount to maintaining organizational cohesion and fostering an environment conducive to learning. Conflict, defined by Brackett (2020) as a disagreement between parties or a situation where one party feels its interests are being harmed, is often viewed as a two-edged sword. While conflicts can stem from structural factors such as resource scarcity or differing roles, they can also arise from incompatible perspectives, attitudes, personalities, communication styles, values, and personal grievances.

Unresolved conflicts can have detrimental consequences on the productivity and well-being of librarians, along with the overall quality of library services. As such, conflict resolution has become a critical competency in this dynamic ecosystem. Elvin (2022) describes conflict resolution as a process aimed at mitigating the negative aspects of conflicts while enhancing the positive

outcomes. Librarians skilled in conflict management can cultivate trust, innovate library services, and make better decisions, thereby benefiting the organization significantly.

Effective conflict resolution strategies are essential as identified by Oluyemisi (2022), who categorized five approaches: dominating, avoiding, integrating, and complying. The choice of strategy can significantly impact whether a conflict is constructive or detrimental. Moreover, the frequency of conflicts often matters less than how they are managed, emphasizing the need for an understanding of the underlying factors that influence conflict dynamics to promote collaborative relationships.

Conflicts within libraries, often fuelled by the fast-paced and fluid nature of these environments, demand that librarians possess the necessary skills to reconcile differing approaches and viewpoints. An increasingly recognized tool for managing these complexities is emotional intelligence (EI). EI posits that emotions should not be suppressed but acknowledged and integrated into personal and professional development.

Originating in the 1990s as a psychological construct distinct from general intelligence, EI encompasses four key domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management. John Mayer's conceptualization highlights an individual's ability to acknowledge and understand both their own emotions and the sentiments of others, which is crucial for effective interpersonal interactions in professional settings. High EI is associated with better conflict management, as those with emotional awareness can effectively navigate challenging situations and foster collaboration among colleagues.

Brackett (2020) emphasizes that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better at interpreting and utilizing emotional data, which enables them to engage more effectively in conflict resolution, particularly in stressful work situations. Furthermore, the capacity for emotional regulation and empathy enhances librarians' relationships with a diverse array of library users, thereby directly influencing the quality of service they provide. As university libraries face unprecedented challenges in today's uncertain climate, librarians must adopt proactive approaches and exhibit initiative in their roles to thrive and contribute meaningfully (Ma & Liu, 2019).

Bearing in mind, the varied services librarians deliver to patrons with differing backgrounds and needs, emotional intelligence has become essential for managing these interactions successfully. Despite the wealth of research on emotional intelligence in leadership contexts, academic libraries have yet to fully realize its potential benefits. There is a notable lack of practical guidance on enhancing EI within the library profession, necessitating an exploration of emotional intelligence as a strategic tool for conflict resolution.

Statement of the Problem

Librarians play a crucial role in facilitating scholarly engagement, knowledge dissemination, and research support services within academic libraries. Their effectiveness is not only governed by their technical skills but also by their ability to navigate interpersonal relationships and resolve conflicts. Despite the critical importance of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills in creating a supportive work environment and promoting organizational success, there remains a significant gap in research addressing the emotional intelligence profiles of librarians and their implications for managing conflict.

In university libraries, including those in North Central Nigeria, conflict is pervasive, disrupting operations and adversely affecting the well-being of librarians. A weak understanding of librarians' emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills inhibits the development of effective strategies for managing conflicts, ultimately detracting from the overall work environment. Therefore, a thorough investigation into the emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills of librarians at North Central University Libraries is essential.

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the emotional intelligence levels of librarians in North Central Federal University Libraries in Nigeria.
2. To analyse the conflict resolution strategies employed by librarians in North Central Federal University Libraries in Nigeria.
3. To investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence levels and conflict resolution skills among librarians in North Central Federal University Libraries in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Recent studies have unveiled the intricate relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies across various organizational contexts. Jordan and Troth (2018) conducted a comprehensive survey revealing substantial positive correlations between cooperative conflict resolution techniques and heightened emotional intelligence levels, thereby illuminating EI's vital role in shaping conflict resolution approaches in workplace settings. Moreover, Ma and Liu (2019) highlighted that targeted interventions to enhance emotional intelligence can foster more effective conflict resolution strategies, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and wellbeing.

Strategies for Managing Conflicts in University Libraries

In today's volatile environment, librarians must demonstrate proactivity and commitment to delivering high-quality services. Gola and Martin (2020) noted that as librarians regularly engage with patrons from diverse cultural and emotional backgrounds, the ability to manage emotions effectively is essential. Despite a solid research foundation regarding the role of emotional intelligence in leadership teams, library practitioners have yet to tap into its potential fully. Elvin (2022) also pointed out the imbalance in library literature, as practical guideposts for enhancing EI at work remain scarce. Therefore, the intersection of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution is a critical area that warrants further investigation within academic libraries.

Conflict Resolution Skills

Conflict resolution skills encompass a range of abilities essential for managing disagreements and fostering collaboration. Ma and Liu (2019) explained that the key skills include active listening, empathy, clear communication, problem-solving, and negotiation. In library settings, these skills are applied when librarians address differing opinions within teams, manage conflicts with patrons, and facilitate discussions during policy changes. For instance, active listening helps acknowledge patrons' concerns, while empathy promotes understanding among staff during disputes.

To effectively address conflicts, Biswas (2019) pointed out that librarians can employ various research methods and strategies. Surveys can identify common stress points, while focus groups and workshops provide platforms for open dialogue. Professional development training on conflict resolution equips librarians with essential techniques, while role-playing exercises allow them to practice scenarios in a supportive

environment. Establishing mediation programs where trained librarians assist in resolving staff conflicts can further promote a harmonious workplace. By leveraging these skills and strategies, librarians can enhance cooperation, improve service delivery, and create a constructive library atmosphere.

Examining existing research on librarians in Nigeria, particularly within university libraries, reveals valuable insights into professional development, emotional intelligence training, and conflict management. Several studies highlight the importance of continuous professional development for librarians in Nigerian universities. Research has shown that many librarians partake in various training programs to enhance their skills and keep abreast of technological advancements. A study by Obi & Nwafor (2019) emphasized the role of formal education, workshops, and online courses in improving librarians' competencies. It concluded that ongoing professional development is crucial for librarians to effectively serve academic communities.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as essential for effective librarianship, yet research in Nigeria is limited. However, a study by Adeyemi and Fabunmi (2020) explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and the job performance of librarians. Their findings suggested that higher levels of emotional intelligence correlate with improved service delivery and interpersonal relationships in the library setting. They advocated for incorporating EI training into professional development programs to enhance librarians' capabilities in handling stress and understanding patrons' needs.

Conflict management in university libraries has become a focal point in recent research. A study by Uhegbu et al. (2021) examined conflict management strategies employed in Nigerian academic libraries, identifying communication, mediation, and negotiation as key techniques. The authors argued that proper training in conflict resolution can help librarians manage disputes effectively, thereby fostering a more collaborative learning environment. These studies collectively underscore the critical need for enhanced training and development programs for librarians in Nigeria, emphasizing the interconnections between professional growth, emotional intelligence, and effective conflict management in promoting a positive library environment.

Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional design, this study gathered data to capture a snapshot of librarians' emotional intelligence levels and conflict resolution skills. A stratified random sampling technique ensured a representative sample, categorized by job roles and years of experience. The validated Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) assessed emotional intelligence across domains such as self-awareness and relationship management. Data collection conveniently took place via electronic surveys distributed through email and online platforms, ensuring anonymity. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, revealed insights into the interplay between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills among 243 librarians from North Central University Libraries in Nigeria.

Sample Size of Federal University Libraries in North Central Nigeria

University	State	No. of Librarians
University of Ilorin, Ilorin	Kwara	32
University of Abuja, Gwagwalada	FCT	30
Federal University, Lokoja	Kogi	22
University of Agriculture, Makurdi	Benue	24
Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo	Benue	10
University of Jos, Jos	Plateau	35
Federal University, Lafia	Nasarawa	30
Federal University of Technology, Minna	Niger	35
National Open University of Nigeria	FCT	25
Total		243

Results and Discussion of Findings

Response Rate

A total of 243 questionnaires were returned, achieving a 100% response rate attributed to diligent follow-up and a two-week response window. This exceeds the conventional threshold for reliable analysis, highlighting the robustness of this research.

Objective One: Emotional Intelligence Levels of Librarians

The findings highlight a significant awareness among librarians regarding the integral role of emotional intelligence (EI) in their professional responsibilities. High mean scores reflecting self-awareness, adaptability, and empathy indicate that librarians recognize the necessity of these attributes for effective engagement with patrons and colleagues. This aligns with the work of Gole and Martins (2020), who posited that emotional intelligence is crucial for professional effectiveness, particularly in service-oriented roles like librarianship, where interpersonal interactions are paramount. However, the noted lack of consensus regarding proactivity in conflict resolution underscores an area that requires enhancement. While librarians may possess the emotional tools to recognize and manage their own feelings and those of others, the ability to take initiative in resolving conflicts suggests a gap. As observed by Adeyemi and Fabunmi (2020), while emotional intelligence contributes to effective communication and relationship-building, it must be actively applied in conflict situations to prevent escalation and foster a collaborative working environment. Their research implies that emotional intelligence alone is insufficient; practical training in conflict resolution strategies is essential for librarians to leverage their EI effectively.

Objective Two: Conflict Resolution Skills Assessment

The findings indicate a unanimous recognition among librarians regarding the significance of conflict resolution skills and effective communication in preserving positive interpersonal relationships within their professional environment. This agreement aligns with existing literature, as librarians understand that maintaining constructive interactions is crucial for service delivery and teamwork in academic settings. However, the tendency to avoid conflicts appears to present a

challenge, highlighting an area that requires urgent attention. This avoidance may stem from a lack of confidence in managing disputes or discomfort with confrontational situations. Research by Folorunso and Akintayo (2022) supports this observation, indicating that while librarians demonstrate awareness of conflict resolution's importance, many do not engage directly in conflict situations due to fear of escalation or negative outcomes. Their study recommends exploring behavioral training that encourages librarians to embrace conflict as an opportunity for growth and resolution rather than something to evade. Moreover, the necessity for ongoing training in direct conflict engagement and resolution further underscores the need for structured professional development programs. Adejo and Okwu (2023) affirm this, suggesting that targeted training in conflict management equips librarians not only with the theoretical knowledge but also the practical skills required to navigate disputes confidently. They emphasize that such training can enhance not just individual librarian performance but also contribute to a healthier, more cooperative library environment, ultimately benefiting the entire academic community.

Objective Three: Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Conflict Resolution
The findings highlighting the strong agreement among respondents regarding the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on conflict resolution capabilities align with current literature emphasizing the profound role EI plays in interpersonal interactions, particularly in service-oriented environments like libraries. Respondents noted that emotional awareness equips librarians to better understand the perspectives of others, which is crucial in resolving conflicts effectively. For instance, research by Atay et al. (2020) illustrates that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to employ more adaptive conflict management strategies, primarily because they can recognize and regulate their emotions and those of others. This capability enables them to navigate sensitive situations with empathy and understanding, essential traits for librarians dealing with diverse patron needs and expectations. Furthermore, a study by Olayemi et al. (2021) focused on Nigerian university librarians and found a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and effective conflict resolution. Their research indicated that librarians who actively practiced self-awareness and emotional regulation were more adept at managing conflicts without escalating tensions. They emphasized that emotional intelligence training should be integrated into professional development programs for librarians, as it enhances their competency in handling disputes and fosters a collaborative workplace. The findings resonate with the broader academic discourse, confirming that emotional intelligence is a critical component of conflict resolution among librarians. This underscores the necessity of incorporating EI training in professional development frameworks to empower librarians in effectively managing conflicts and improving their service delivery.

Conclusion
In conclusion, effective conflict resolution skills are vital for librarians to navigate the complexities of both team dynamics and patron interactions within library settings. The application of skills such as active listening, empathy, clear communication, and negotiation fosters a collaborative environment and enhances service delivery. By employing research methods, including surveys, focus groups, and professional development training, librarians can proactively identify and address potential conflicts before they escalate. Additionally, implementing role-playing exercises and peer mediation programs further cultivates a culture of

constructive dialogue and mutual respect among staff. Ultimately, by honing these skills and strategies, librarians not only improve their own professional practice but also contribute to a more positive and engaging library experience for all users, thereby fulfilling the library's mission of serving the community effectively.

Recommendations

1. North Central Federal University management should establish training programs focusing on enhancing librarians' emotional intelligence, particularly areas such as empathy, self-awareness, and adaptability while providing resources that promote proactive conflict resolution skills.
2. University libraries should create a supportive environment that encourages conflict resolution training and a growth mindset, helping librarians address avoidance tendencies and enhance their conflict resolution capabilities.
3. Prioritizing emotional intelligence training within university libraries can bolster librarians' conflict management competencies, ultimately cultivating a more collaborative and harmonious work atmosphere.

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