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THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS ON HIM PRACTITIONERS' SERVICE EFFECTIVENESS AT DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL OGHARA

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Abstract: Introduction: In the realm of healthcare, effective communication is fundamental to delivering high-quality services. Health information management (HIM) practitioners play a crucial role in this context, managing patient records and facilitating information flow within healthcare institutions. This study explores the relationship between communication skills and service effectiveness among HIM practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara.

Objectives: The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of communication skills on service effectiveness among health information management practitioners. Specifically, the study aims to identify existing communication challenges, assess the level of service effectiveness, and explore the relationship between communication skills and workplace outcomes.

Methods of Data Analysis: A descriptive cross-sectional approach was employed to collect data from HIM practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Communication challenges were identified, and service

effectiveness was assessed through mean scores. The decision rule threshold of 2.5 was used to evaluate the effectiveness of communication skills.

Results: It was found that 60% of respondents were married females, and 80% identified as Christians, with the majority falling within the 31-40 age group. The practitioners reported high levels of cordial relationships (80%) and recognized the effectiveness of verbal communication (75%). Challenges included confusion due to non-verbal communication (60%) and disunity among practitioners (90%). Communication skills significantly impacted conflict resolution (Mean Score: 2.67) and trust-building (Mean Score: 2.76), but stress-induced by communication was a concern (Mean Score: 1.32). These findings highlight the importance of effective communication skills in the healthcare workplace.

Conclusion: The study emphasizes the critical role of communication skills in shaping service effectiveness among health information management practitioners. Despite challenges, practitioners demonstrated a keen awareness of the impact of effective communication on their work environment. Clear communication, both verbal and non-verbal, emerged as a cornerstone for fostering positive relationships and enhancing overall service quality.

Recommendations: Develop specialized communication training, promote inclusivity, assess skills regularly, encourage interdepartmental collaboration, invest in professional development, involve leadership, and implement patient-centered strategies.

Key words: *Communication Skills, Health Information Management Practitioners, Service Effectiveness, Linguistic Diversity, Interpersonal Relationships, Healthcare Communication, Workplace Culture.*

Background

In the realm of healthcare, effective communication plays a pivotal role in shaping patient experiences and service quality. Defined as the exchange of ideas, emotions, and information between a sender and a receiver, communication forms the bedrock of human interaction, influencing relationships, decisions, and outcomes (Lewis, R.C., & Booms, B.H., 2010). The absence of effective communication can lead to misunderstandings, misdiagnoses, and improper documentation, particularly within the domain of health information management. In healthcare settings such as Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara, communication challenges persist, notably in linguistic competency and attitudes. These challenges often result in the misinterpretation of crucial health information and can have dire consequences, including extended patient waiting times and miscommunications among healthcare professionals (Newstorm, 2021). Consequently, understanding the impact of communication skills on service effectiveness is imperative.

Scholars like Lewis, Booms, Newstorm, and Davis emphasize the significance of effective communication, asserting that it is vital for creating shared understanding, trust, and respect among individuals. The healthcare sector, in particular, relies heavily on efficient communication between healthcare providers, patients, and families (Newstorm, 2021). Critical information exchange between these stakeholders is essential for ensuring patient safety and accurate clinical practice. Effective communication is the lifeblood of healthcare. It is essential for providing safe and quality healthcare services. The healthcare industry, and specifically health information

management practitioners, must continuously refine their communication skills to enhance service effectiveness, ensuring that patients receive the best possible care and understanding (Maibach, E., & Holtgrace, G., 2006).

Moreover, communication is more than just the exchange of words; it involves the sender's intention, the message transmitted, and the receiver's interpretation. Effective communication, as described by Griffin, involves conveying a message in a way that the receiver understands as closely as possible to the sender's intention. Therefore, healthcare professionals need to employ various communication skills, such as active listening, empathy, and clarity, to facilitate effective dialogue with patients and colleagues (Griffin, R.W.). In the context of health information management, communication skills are fundamental for accurate patient record documentation and information transmission. The influence of these skills on service effectiveness is evident in the collaborative efforts of healthcare professionals, where seamless communication ensures the smooth flow of information, preventing misunderstandings and errors (Davis,K., 2021; Gates, S. 2012). Ineffective communication between health record practitioners and patients can result in the misinterpretation of vital health information. This problem, often stemming from issues related to linguistic competency and attitudes, can lead to the improper documentation of patients' data. Such breakdowns in communication have the potential to be detrimental not only to the practice of health officers but also to the hospital as a whole, resulting in adverse consequences such as patient misdiagnosis, extended waiting times, and miscommunications among healthcare workers (Wittenberg et al. (2016). Given the significant challenges posed by communication deficiencies in the healthcare sector, it is imperative to conduct an empirical investigation into the influence of communication skills on service effectiveness. The overarching objective of this research is to understand the role of communication skills in enhancing service effectiveness among health information management practitioners within Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara.

This investigation seeks to provide a comprehensive insight into how effective communication impacts the efficiency and quality of healthcare services, with a specific focus on the context of health information management at Delta State University Oghara. The research is specifically confined to the healthcare sector, with a special emphasis on health records/information management practitioners employed at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara. By narrowing down the scope to this specific context, the study aims to conduct a targeted and in-depth investigation into the impact of communication skills on service effectiveness among these practitioners within the hospital setting. The insights garnered from this research will not only be valuable for current understanding but will also serve as a significant reference for future researchers interested in studying similar phenomena. By delving into the challenges and solutions related to communication within this specific healthcare institution, this study will contribute not only to the knowledge of the organization's management and staff but also to other entities facing similar communication challenges. Additionally, the findings will assist the management in evaluating the role of effective communication as a vital management function, thereby enhancing overall service effectiveness.

METHODS

Study Area

Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara serves as the specific focal point for the study on communication skills and service effectiveness among health information management practitioners. Located in Oghara, Delta State, Nigeria, this teaching hospital is a prominent healthcare institution within the region. It operates within the framework of the Delta State University, emphasizing both healthcare provision and medical education.

Within this hospital setting, health information management practitioners play a critical role in managing and maintaining patient records. These professionals are responsible for organizing, analyzing, interpreting, and managing health information data. Given the hospital's affiliation with a university, the healthcare professionals working here are often engaged in research, teaching, and continuous learning, making effective communication skills indispensable. The hospital's unique position as a teaching institution adds an additional layer of complexity to the communication dynamics. Health information management practitioners only provide direct patient care but are also involved in training the next generation of healthcare professionals. Effective communication skills are, therefore, paramount not only for patient service effectiveness but also for educational purposes within this academic healthcare environment.

Research Design

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study, this was preferred because it provides further insights into the research problem by unfolding the variables of interest, estimating, predicting, and examining associative relationships

Study Population

The population comprised of all Health Information management Practitioners in Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara, Delta state. The targeted population of this study comprised of all Health Information management practitioners of the surveyed institution. In other to ensure efficiency in the level of work done, the method used and all the detailed acquired are limited because of time and capital in addition to other constraints. The study was limited to HIM workers in Delta State University Teaching Hospital located in Oghara, Delta state

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was employed. In the stratified random sampling conducted, the respondents were categorized into two distinct groups: professionals and non-professionals. The stratification process involved dividing the Health Information Management Practitioners into these two homogenous categories based on their professional qualifications and roles within the hospital setting. This division ensured that the sample encompassed both professional expertise and other roles critical to the healthcare communication process. Subsequently, respondents were randomly selected from each of these groups to form a a total of 100 HIM practitioners.

Data collection and Management

The instrument used for data collection was a well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of section A and Section B, which contains the demographical data of the respondents, and the research items structured to obtain information from the respondents respectively. A hundred(100) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents under the supervision of the researcher. To ensure proper distribution, the researcher gave them individually and was collected by the researcher. The data collected was coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package version 26. Descriptive statistics were used and data were presented in tables, frequencies and percentages.

Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of the confidentiality of their information. Ethical approval was obtained from the Delta State University Teaching Hospital.

Results

Table 1: Socio demographic Characteristics of the respondents

Demographic profile	Frequency	Percentages
Sex		
Male	40	40.0%
Female	60	60.0%
Age of respondents		
20-30 years	20	20.0%
31-40 years	40	40.0%
41-50 years	20	20.0%
51-60 years	10	10.0%
Marital status		
Single	25	25.0%
Married	70	70.0%
Separated	5	5.0%
Religion		
Christian	80	80.0%
Muslim	10	10.0%
Traditionalist	5	5.0%
Tribes		
Urhobo	30	30.0%
Iteskiri	15	15.0%
Ijaw	15	15.0%
Others	40	40.0%
Years of experience		
1- 10 years	40	40.0%
11-20 years	30	30.0%
21-30 years	20	20.0%
31years and above	10	10.0%

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of the total respondents, 40% were males and 60% were females. Regarding age distribution, 40% were between 20-30 years, 40% fell within the 31-40 years category, 20% were aged 41-50 years, and 10% were between 51-60 years old. In terms of marital status, 25% were single, 70% were married, and 5% were separated. The majority of respondents practiced Christianity (80%), while 10% were Muslim, and 5% followed traditional beliefs. Regarding tribes, 30% were Urhobo, 15% were Itsekiri, 15% were Ijaw, and 40% belonged to other ethnic groups. Regarding experience, 40% had 1-10 years of experience, 30% had 11-20 years, 20% had 21-30 years, and 10% had 31 years and above of experience.

Table 2: The existing kinds of communication skills among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara

Items	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	Total
There is high level of cordial relationship between colleagues in my unit	80	**80.0**	15	**15.0**	2	**2.0**	3	**3.0**	100
verbal communication skills are accepted as a means of communication in my unit	20	**20.0**	75	**75.0**	4	**4.0**	1	**1.0**	100
Local language like “pidgin” is accepted as a means of communication among HIM practitioners in my unit?	10	**10.0**	80	**80.0**	5.0	**5.0**	5	**5.0**	100
Cases of using non-verbal communication skills or sign language in my unit so as to confuse other staffs in another department has occurred	10	**10.0**	20	**20.0**	60	**60.0**	10	**10.0**	100
Punishment/penalty is place by management on HIM practitioners who use local languages or native dialect in communicating	10	**10.0**	30	**30.0**	62	**62.0**	8	**8.0**	100

Table 2 illustrates the existing communication skills among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara. The majority (80%) of respondents reported a high level of cordial relationships among colleagues, indicating a positive interpersonal environment. Verbal communication skills were widely accepted, with 75% acknowledging its effectiveness. Additionally, local languages like "pidgin" were recognized by 80% of respondents, demonstrating their acceptance as a means of communication. However, instances of using non-verbal communication skills or sign language to confuse other staff in different departments were reported by 60% of respondents. Notably, 62% mentioned that management applied

punishment or penalties for the use of local languages or native dialects in communication, highlighting a potential challenge in language diversity policies.

Table 3: The level of service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara

Items	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	Total
I know what service effectiveness entails	80	**80.0**	10	**10.0**	5	**5.0**	5	**5.0**	100
I derive pleasure in doing my job description in my unit	75	**75.5**	20	**20.0**	5	**5.0**	0	**0.0**	100
I relate to colleagues in and outside my unit in a proper manner	90	**90.0**	10	**10.0**	-		-		100
Management/facility appraisals foster service effectiveness in my unit	58	**58.0**	22	**22.0**	15	**15.0**	5	**5.0**	100
As HIM practitioner, colleague attitude towards work affect service effectiveness among staff.	85	**85.0**	15	**15.0**	0	**0.0**	0	**0.0**	100

Table 3 provides insights into the level of service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara. The majority (80%) of respondents affirmed their understanding of service effectiveness, while 75.5% expressed enjoyment in fulfilling their job responsibilities. Additionally, 90% reported maintaining proper relationships with colleagues both within and outside their unit. Regarding management and facility appraisals, 58% agreed that these practices fostered service effectiveness, and 85% acknowledged that colleagues' attitudes toward work significantly impacted service effectiveness among staff, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal dynamics in healthcare service delivery.

Table 4: The Challenges of communication skills towards service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara

Items	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	Total
Diversity in tribes is a challenge	15	**15.0**	42	**42.0**	40	**40.0**	17	**17.9**	100

Message not timely passed or rudely pass is a challenge	50	**50.0**	30	**30.0**	14	**14.0**	6	**6.0**	100
Use of jargons and unfamiliar words is a challenge	68	**68.0**	22	**22.0**	3	**3.0**	7	**7.0**	100
Disunity among HIM practitioners is a challenge	90	**90.0**	10	**10.0**	0	**0.0**	0	**0.0**	100
Unskilled/ untrained personnel is a challenge	50	**50.0**	25	**25.0**	10	**10.0**	15	**15.0**	100

Table 4 outlines the challenges faced by health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara in terms of communication skills and their impact on service effectiveness. A significant concern was the diversity in tribes, with 42% of respondents finding it challenging, highlighting the complexities arising from different cultural backgrounds. Timely and respectful message delivery proved problematic for 50% of respondents, indicating a need for improved communication etiquette. The use of jargons and unfamiliar words posed a challenge for 68% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of clear and simple language in effective communication. Additionally, disunity among health information management practitioners was reported as a significant challenge by 90% of respondents, underscoring the importance of team cohesion. Lastly, the presence of unskilled or untrained personnel was cited as a challenge by 50% of respondents, indicating a need for professional development initiatives within the workforce.

Table 5: The relationship between communication skills and service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara

Items	**SA**	**A**	**SD**	**D**	fq	**Total**	Mean	Decision
Communication skills foster service effectiveness among HIM practitioners in my unit	24	65	6	5	267	100	2.67	Acceptable
Communication skills between colleagues builds a better and stronger team-work among HIM practitioners	39	36	16	9	276	100	2.76	Acceptable
Communication skills has increase effectiveness of service rendered to patient?	7	92	5	2	310	100	3.10	Acceptable

Communication skills increase confidence in job quality among HIM practitioners thereby enhancing service effectiveness.	52	36	10	2	282	100	2.82	Acceptable

The Decision Rule

(Using four Likert typed scale point, thus: = 4+3+2+1/4 = 10/4 = 2.5.). Hence any item with mean score of 2.5 was acceptable and any mean score below 2.5 was unacceptable

The significant relationship between communication skills and service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara is evident from the survey results. The practitioners recognized that communication skills foster service effectiveness within their units, with a mean score of 2.67, indicating an acceptable level of effectiveness. Additionally, effective communication between colleagues was acknowledged for building a better and stronger teamwork, scoring 2.76, also falling within the acceptable range. Communication skills were perceived to significantly enhance the effectiveness of services provided to patients, evident from the high mean score of 3.10, signifying their crucial role in healthcare delivery. Furthermore, these skills increased confidence in job quality among practitioners, with a mean score of 2.82, reinforcing their positive impact on service effectiveness. All these findings, surpassing the decision rule threshold of 2.5, underscore the vital link between communication skills and service effectiveness in the healthcare context. (Table 5)

Table 6; the effect of communication skills on service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara

	4	**3**	**2**	**1**				
Items	**SA**	**A**	**SD**	**D**	fq	**Total**	**Mean**	Decision
Helps conflict resolution	24	65	6	5	267	100	**2.67**	Acceptable
Build trust among HIM practitioners	36	39	9	16	276	100	**2.76**	Acceptable
Enhance healthy work space	92	7	-	1	310	100	**3.10**	Acceptable
Leads to stressful work load	-	8	35	57	132	100	**1.32**	Unacceptable
Increase employee moral	36	52	10	2	282	100	**2.82**	Acceptable

The Decision Rule: (Using four Likert typed scale point, thus: = 4+3+2+1/4 = 10/4 = 2.5.) Hence any item with mean score of 2.5 was acceptable and any mean score below 2.5 was unacceptable.

The mean scores reflect the perceptions of health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara regarding the impact of communication skills on service effectiveness. Specifically, communication skills were deemed effective in various aspects: conflict resolution (Mean Score: 2.67), trust-building among colleagues (Mean Score: 2.76), and enhancing a healthy workspace (Mean Score: 3.10). These positive scores indicate that practitioners believe communication skills significantly contribute to these areas. However, concerns were raised regarding communication-induced stress (Mean Score: 1.32), highlighting an area for improvement. Additionally, communication skills were recognized for boosting employee morale (Mean Score: 2.82). Overall, while communication skills were acknowledged for their positive influence, addressing stress-related issues could further enhance their effectiveness in the workplace.(Table 6)

Discussion

The demographic analysis revealed distinct characteristics among the respondents. A notable proportion (40%) fell within the 31-40 age group, with a majority of these individuals being married females (60%). Furthermore, a significant percentage identified as Christians (80.0%), and intriguingly, the predominant ethnic group was classified as "other" (40.0%). Additionally, the majority of the respondents reported being married (70%) and having 1-10 years of work experience. These findings can be attributed to the prevailing trend where females dominate the field of Health Information Management Practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital, Oghara, Delta State. It's noteworthy that while there's a growing presence of male professionals in this field, females continue to dominate. Moreover, the location of the teaching hospital in a state where Christianity is the predominant religion contributes to the high percentage of Christian respondents.

In terms of communication skills, a majority (80%) of respondents reported a high level of cordial relationships among colleagues, indicating a positive interpersonal environment. Verbal communication skills were widely accepted, with 75% acknowledging its effectiveness. This finding aligns with Alley, M. (2003) and Khodadadi Et al. (2013), with 82% agreeing that most health sectors communicate using verbal communication. Additionally, local languages like "pidgin" were recognized by 80% of respondents, demonstrating their acceptance as a means of communication. However, instances of using non-verbal communication skills or sign language to confuse other staff in different departments were reported by 60% of respondents. This is also consistent with the findings of a study conducted in Saudi Arabia which indicated that over 50% of the respondents affirmed that using non-verbal communication skills causes confusion within their various departments (Al-Harasis 2013). However, this contradicts a study by Bischoff et al. (2003) where the majority of the respondents do not find sign language confusing. Notably, 62% mentioned that management applied punishment or penalties for the use of local languages or native dialects in communication, highlighting a potential challenge in language diversity policies.

Regarding service effectiveness, a majority (80%) of respondents affirmed their understanding of service effectiveness, while 75.5% expressed enjoyment in fulfilling their job responsibilities. Additionally, 90% reported maintaining proper relationships with colleagues both within and outside their unit. In terms of management and facility appraisals, 58% agreed that these practices fostered service effectiveness. Furthermore, 85% acknowledged that colleagues' attitudes toward work significantly impacted service effectiveness among staff, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal dynamics in healthcare service delivery. A significant concern was the diversity in tribes, with 42% of respondents finding it challenging, highlighting the complexities arising from different cultural backgrounds. Timely and respectful message delivery proved problematic for 50% of respondents, indicating a need for improved communication etiquette. The use of jargons and unfamiliar words

posed a challenge for 68% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of clear and simple language in effective communication. Additionally, disunity among health information management practitioners was reported as a significant challenge by 90% of respondents, underscoring the importance of team cohesion. Lastly, the presence of unskilled or untrained personnel was cited as a challenge by 50% of respondents, indicating a need for professional development initiatives within the workforce.

The relationship between communication skills and service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara is evident from the survey results. The practitioners recognized that communication skills foster service effectiveness within their units, with a mean score of 2.67, indicating an acceptable level of effectiveness. Additionally, effective communication between colleagues was acknowledged for building a better and stronger teamwork, scoring 2.76, also falling within the acceptable range. Communication skills were perceived to significantly enhance the effectiveness of services provided to patients, evident from the high mean score of 3.10, signifying their crucial role in healthcare delivery. Furthermore, these skills increased confidence in job quality among practitioners, with a mean score of 2.82, reinforcing their positive impact on service effectiveness. All these findings, surpassing the decision rule threshold of 2.5, underscore the vital link between communication skills and service effectiveness in the healthcare context. This is, however, consistent with the findings of similar journals (Khodadadi Et al 2013; Kwame and Petrucka, 2021; Kandlousi et al 2010), who reported the significant relationship between communication skills and service effectiveness in the health sector.

Conclusion:

The study highlights the critical role of communication skills in fostering service effectiveness among health information management practitioners at Delta State University Teaching Hospital Oghara. The findings underscore the importance of effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, in promoting a positive interpersonal environment, ensuring clarity in interdepartmental interactions, and enhancing overall service quality. The challenges faced, such as language diversity and the need for improved communication etiquette, emphasize the necessity for targeted interventions to address these issues and further optimize service delivery.

Recommendations:

1. **Training Programs:** Implement comprehensive communication skills training programs tailored to the specific needs of healthcare professionals, focusing on verbal, non-verbal, and intercultural communication, to enhance their effectiveness in diverse settings.
2. **Promote Inclusivity:** Encourage a more inclusive workplace culture by fostering understanding and acceptance of diverse languages and communication styles, promoting unity among practitioners and mitigating challenges arising from linguistic differences.

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