

PERCEPTION OF DRESS CODE AMONG LIBRARIANS IN KASHIM IBRAHIM LIBRARY, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

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Abstract

This study assessed perception of dress code among librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Three (3) research questions guided this study to include type of dress code librarians prefer to wear to the offices; what is the perception of academic librarians towards dress code policy and Impact of Dress Code on Librarians' Self-Perceptions. The research method adopted was survey. The population of this study comprised of all the academic Librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library, A.B.U, Zaria. The total numbers of the respondents were ninety eight (98). The data related to the research questions were analyzed using frequency and percentage. The findings revealed that academic librarians preferred to dress in business casual attire. It also revealed that the Kashim Ibrahim Library at Ahmadu Bello University do not have a dress code policy, also that Dress code: present the right image (professionalism, competence). Dress codes enhance one's self-perception of their occupational attributes (confidence). It was concluded that academic librarians have a positive perceptions of dress code and preferred to wear business casual to office, even though it was revealed that no policy was in place for dress code in Kashim Ibrahim Library. The study recommend that Kashim Ibrahim Library should adopt or formulate a written or verbal policy that guides employees' appearance in the work place or developed more stringent dress codes that list accepted "do's" and "don'ts" for the work place among others.

Keywords: Librarians, Library, Dress code, Policy, Perception, Kashim Ibrahim Library

Introduction

Every workplace benefits from a proper dress code. Dressing cooperate and looking attractive is one of the valuable parts to build a good image, especially in the public service sectors, such as banks, hotels, and of course, libraries. The study of perception of dress code among librarians in universities can be viewed as a sociological inquiry into the social norms and expectations surrounding professional attire in academic settings. Dress codes are often used as a way to regulate and communicate professionalism in the workplace, and are particularly relevant in academic settings where librarians are expected to represent the intellectual and academic values of the institution.

Dress code which is sometimes known as workplace attire is a set of guidelines for what is appropriate to wear. Dress rules are determined by social expectations, standards and change depending on the situation, the occasion, and the goal. Dress codes of various countries and cultures will undoubtedly differ, with Western dress codes serving as a notable example. A dress code is a set of rules or standards regarding the appropriate attire for an office, hotel, library, etc (British Dictionary (2012). Similar to this, Heathfield (2020) defined a dress code as a set of guidelines that organizations create to help their employees know what to wear to work. Depending on the needs of the individual workplace and the customers it serves, dress codes might range from formal to business casual to casual.

The primary job of librarians is information dissemination. Likewise, CILIP (2012) posited that librarians play crucial roles because they frequently serve as the crucial link connecting information users and the information they need. As a result, they hold a privileged position that comes with corresponding obligations, and proper dress should not be overlooked. There's an adage that goes, "First impressions matter!" Although the phrase "don't judge a book by its cover" is frequently used, some librarians opine that what they do, not how they look, communicates their value. But most people do make a judgment based on how a person looks, dresses and greets when they first meet. According to Damarais and White (2016), first impressions are intricate puzzles. Before any physical contact takes place, they form in a split second and could last for several years. Sometimes they last forever, as in the case of once-in-a-lifetime meetings. Damarais and White further buttressed the point that how someone looks always is the first information the patrons conceived about somebody and therefore appearance matter in first impressions. Berek (2014) asserts that business has a significant role for dress code. It's common for an office or business to have a formal dress code so that it presents a professional image.

The way in which librarians dress can have a significant impact on how they are perceived by students, the faculty, and other stakeholders, and this can influence their effectiveness as educators and information Professionals. Given the importance of dress codes in academic libraries, there is a need to understand how academic librarians perceive and navigate these expectations. A study of this nature could

provide insight into the ways in which librarians construct and negotiate their professional identities, as well as the broader social and cultural factors that shape these perceptions.

Brief History of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria along with the Library

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), founded on October 4, 1962, is a public university in Zaria, Kaduna State, northern Nigeria. It is the largest university in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the second largest on the African continent, after the University of Cairo in Egypt, with over 35,000 students. The university was renamed in honor of the Sararduna of Sokoto, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, who was the first premier of northern Nigeria and the university's first chancellor (www.abu.edu.ng). Ahmadu Bello University's University Library System was established in 1962 and consists of the Kashim Ibrahim Library (the main Library) and eleven smaller satellite libraries located on the University's various campuses. The Library contains about 1.2 million book volumes and 66,000 magazine items in its collection. The University library has long been at the heart of research and study, playing an important role in the acquisition, processing, and lending of library materials, as well as responding to patron inquiries (www.abu.edu.ng/library).

Statement of Problem

The study was prompted by the fact, that dress code from librarianship perspective in Nigerian context has not previously been reported. However, Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou (2016) states in their previous study, that how general public as well as specific user groups negatively portray the image of librarians has been a concern to academic libraries for decades. This concerns is attested to by one of the researchers who experiences such during encountered with library users and who also heard about it from coworkers with whom they were collaborating. The majority of these instances happened while the researcher and his coworkers were wearing casual attire while at work. To address these concerns, librarians could potentially rethink of how they present themselves through dress codes and/or establish a more distinctive professional identity that accurately portrays what a librarian represents. In addition, the problem also stems from the lack of clarity and consistency in dress code policies, which can lead to confusion and uncertainty among librarians as to what is expected of them in terms of professional attire. This lack of clarity can result in librarians dressing in a manner that may be perceived as unprofessional or inappropriate, which can have negative consequences to their professional reputation and effectiveness in the workplace. This prompts the researchers to look into the perception of dress code among Librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What type of dress code do Librarians prefer to wear to the offices in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

2. What is the perception of Librarians towards dress code policy in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
3. What is the impact of dress code on librarians' self-perceptions in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

Types of Dress Code in an Organization

There are different types of dress code, and each one is suited for specific kinds of work and work environments or functions. The three most common ones are formal, business casual, and casual dress code (Carrier Education and Developments, 2020). Similarly, Lisa (2017) submitted four key types of dress code as follows:

- i. Formal dress: According to Lisa, formal business dress is necessary for various professions. Professionals in the legal and financial fields as well as other customer-facing positions like public relations may fall under this category. Some workplaces have rigorous dress regulations that state loudly what kinds of suits and skirts, what colors of ties, and how high employees must wear their heels. For the most part, formal business attire consists of suits for both men and women. In addition to wearing appropriate accessories like the right shoes and tights, professional workplace dress for both men and women calls for proper grooming.
- ii. Business casual: business casual is a style of dress that allows people to wear casual clothes that are professional in nature but not overly formal such as suits and ties (Carrier Education and Developments, 2020). Business casual is a polished, put-together appearance that can include slacks or chinos, button-down shirts without jackets, casual skirts or dresses, but excludes things like flip-flops, shorts, and sleeveless tops. The purpose of having a business casual dress code, according to Susan (2016), is to enable employees to work comfortably in the office. Nevertheless, one still require one;s staff to present a professional image to clients, prospective workers, and visitors from the surrounding area. For this dress code, business casual attire is required.
- iii. Casual dress code: This is the type of clothing that is better essential for organizations who would prefer to do away entirely with dress rules and permit employees to wear virtually anything. You can typically dress casually by wearing your regular clothes, such as jeans and t-shirts. A casual dress code will never be the same as a business casual one in many ways. Among other things, it's crucial to note that shirts with or without collars are the norm and jeans are worn every day (Susan, 2016).
- iv. Uniforms: Some places of employment have uniform requirements. These tend to be most prevalent in service professions, like those of an airline flight attendant, or in public service positions, like those of a firefighter, police officer, or security guard in a high-profile institution. Workers may quickly be recognized by customers because of their uniforms, which makes them stand out.

Dress Code Policy for Academic Librarians in Universities

Dress code policies have been a long-standing topic of discussion in the workplace, and academic libraries are no exception. Dress code policy in librarianship refers to guidelines or rules that specify the type of clothing and appearance that is expected of librarians while they are performing their duties. The purpose of a dress code policy is to maintain a professional image, enhance effectiveness and to promote a sense of identity among librarians. There has been a growing body of literature on the perceptions of dress code policies among librarians and the impact of these policies on their professional identity and effectiveness. According to Singh and Kenneth (2014) organizations have dress policies for four reasons; to promote unity and cohesiveness, to represent a certain attitude or culture, to discourage the creation of subgroups, and to maintain safety, particularly in industry and manufacturing. The literature demonstrates the psychological, sociological, economic, and safety ramifications of workplace attire. In a studied conducted by Sharkey as cited in Jayasooriya, (2021) he posited that Dress-downpolicies or more relaxed dress codes are intended to promote worker productivity, save employees money, and improve work quality. However, several studies have found that if employees dress casually, they may believe themselves to be in a casual, relaxed, and "laid-back" environment, and that consistently relaxed dress leads to relaxed manners and relaxed morals (Singh and Kenneth (2014). According to Goby (2011), more often than not, organizations have a strong strategic effort and regard workplace dress policies as an important component in developing or reinforcing a supportive, open, pleasant, or even entertaining organizational culture. The literature suggests that dress code policies are viewed as important for establishing professionalism in academic libraries, but that there is a need for clearer and more consistent policies that are inclusive of different cultures and backgrounds.

Impact of Dress Code on Self Perceptions of Librarians

According to a lot of research on impression creation, professional attire and look can have a significant impact on one's job and produce favorable or positive interpretative inferences. Wearers use appropriate attire to manage and influence the impression of others (Peluchette, Karl, and Rust, 2006 in Cathelain, 2015). According to Frederik (2013), individuals can use clothing to either reveal or conceal their identities, as well as to make assumptions about the identities of others based on their attire. Clothing can also communicate certain characteristics of an institution or company. As such, it is essential for librarians to carefully consider the clothing they wear while at work. Jayasooriya, (2021) posits that dress code is also an important concern in the work environment. As a result, it's crucial for librarians to think carefully about their job attire. Sampson (2016) recognized dress code as a key part of nonverbal behavior and communication. Since nonverbal and verbal communication comprise an individual's values, attitudes, interests, lifestyle, social and personal ties, and personality (Sampson, 2016), it is evident that an employee's wardrobe is important in establishing communication links in a professional setting. Some studies have shown that formal dress code have a negative impact on interpersonal

communication, whereas informal attire removes natural communication barriers (Nath, Bach, and Lockwood, 2016).

The study carried out by Thusithakumari and Weerasinghe (2021) revealed that dress codes are an identity and they reflect self-image, therefore its the proper time for librarians to consider their dress code at work. It further revealed that Librarian's dress varies from country to country and it is a symbolic language to make interactions between the community and the librarian among others. This study suggested that a librarian should not adhere to the idea of uniformity in dress, but rather, in accordance with specific library rules, processes, and programs, it is required to take demographic factors and the condition of the region or particular country into consideration. In a study on the impact of workplace dress on employee self-perceptions, Peluchette and Karl (2007) found that respondents felt most authoritative, trustworthy, and competent when wearing formal business attire, but friendliest when wearing casual or professional casual dress. In addition, respondents who indicated a preference for either formal business or business casual attire (compared to those who preferred casual attire) felt more creative. A substantial amount of studies has demonstrated that an employee's dress has a relationship with his or her job performance and related features (Slepian, 2015; Sampson, 2016; Nath et al., 2016)

Research Methodology

Research method used for the study was survey. 115 Academic Librarians make up the study's total population, which was obtained from the quality Service Section of Kashim Ibrahim Library, ABU Zaria. Since the population was not large, the researcher used the entire population for the study in order to avoid under coverage of the population. Bernard (2012) opined that if the population of the study in research is less than two hundred (200), the entire members of that population can be used. Questionnaires were the research tool employed in this study to gather data. The instrument was presented to research experts to scrutinize from the facial point of view and also to ensure that the content correspond with the research questions, hence strengthening its appropriateness. Descriptive statistics were used in the study to display and analyze the data. Tables, frequency distributions, and percentages were used in the analysis. The benchmark for the nominal percentage answers was set at 50%. Any response that was lower than the specified percentage was considered negative.

Findings and Discussions

Type of dress code librarians prefer to wear to the office.

In order to identify the types of dress code librarians prefer to wear to the office in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the respondents were asked to tick the one most appropriate from the options provided. The data collected in this regard were analyzed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Type of dress code librarians prefer to wear to the office

Type of dress code	Frequency	Percentage
Casual dress code	28	29
Business Casual dress code	56	57
Formal dress code	14	14
Uniforms dress code	0	0
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023

Table 1. Shows the types of dress code librarians prefer to wear to the office in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It revealed that business casual dress codes were the most preferred wear by Librarians in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, with a response rate of 56 (57%), followed by casual dress codes with a response rate of 28 (29%), followed by formal dress codes with 14 (14%), and uniform dress codes with 0 (0%), respectively.

It can be inferred that librarians at Ahmadu Bello University's Kashim Ibrahim Library preferred to dress in business casual attire. Align with this finding, Peluchette and Karl (2007) found that in their study on dress preference, about half of the respondents showed a preference for business casual attire (48 percent), followed by formal business (28 percent) and casual (24 percent) attire. This result is consistent with Susan's (2016) argument that the goal of a business casual dress code is to allow employees to function comfortably in the workplace while yet seeming presentable and professional. This preference may be due to their desire to project a professional image while maintaining a certain level of comfort and flexibility in their attire. It also suggests that there may be an established dress code or cultural norm within the library that encourages this type of attire. Understanding the preferences of librarians in terms of dress code can help institutions to establish guidelines that reflect the needs and desires of their staff, as well as contribute to a positive workplace culture.

The perception of academic librarians towards dress code policy in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

The respondents were asked to identify whether or not if library's dress code policy was well defined in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University. Options were provided. Table 2 summarizes the relevant data obtained.

Table 1: Perception of Librarians towards Dress Code Policy

Dress Code Policy	Frequency	Percentage
Very well-defined	0	0
Somewhat well-defined	18	18
Not defined at all	80	82
Total	98	100.0

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows the perception of librarians towards the dress code policy at Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It was revealed that library's dress code policy was not defined at all with highest response rate of 70 (72%), followed by somewhat well-defined having response rate of 18 (18%), and Very well-defined with 0(0%) respectively.

It can be inferred that the Kashim Ibrahim Library at Ahmadu Bello University did not have a dress code policy. This lack of policy may have contributed to the variation in attire among the librarians and could have caused confusion or uncertainty regarding what was considered appropriate attire for the workplace. Additionally, the absence of a dress code policy may have contributed to the perception of a lack of professionalism or consistency in the workplace. This finding suggests that the library may benefit from implementing a formal dress code policy to provide clear guidelines and expectations for staff attire, which can help to promote a more professional and cohesive workplace environment. The results of a study by Singh and Kenneth (2014) posited that organizations have dress code policies for four reasons: to promote unity and cohesiveness, to represent a certain attitude or culture, to discourage the creation of subgroups, and to maintain safety, particularly in industry and manufacturing.

Impact of Dress Code on Librarians' Self-Perceptions

The respondents were asked to indicate the impact of dress code on librarians' self-perceptions in in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University. A list of the impact of dress code was provided for them. Table 3 summarizes the relevant data obtained.

Table 3: Impact of Dress Code on Librarians' Self-Perceptions

Impact of Dress Code on Librarians' Self-Perceptions	frequency	percentage
Appropriate attire is use to manage and influence the impression of others	80	82
Appropriate dress code improve individual's personality (socialability, attractiveness)	90	92
Dress code present the right image (professionalism, competence)	91	93
Dress code generate positive psychological benefits (trust)	41	42
Dress code enhance one's self-perception of their occupational attributes (confidence)	75	77
Dress code impact on how one operates within a work-defined role	69	70
Appropriate dress code facilitates effective role execution	61	62

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 shows the impact of dress code on librarians' self-perceptions at Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, with a 50 percent response rate above, where appropriate attire is used to manage and influence the impressions of others; appropriate dress code improves an individual's personality (socialability, attractiveness). Dress code: present the right image (professionalism, competence) Dress codes enhance one's self-perception of their occupational attributes (confidence). The dress code impacts how one operates within a work-defined role, and an appropriate dress code facilitates effective role execution. This finding highlights the importance of considering the role of dress code in creating a positive and effective workplace environment. By establishing appropriate dress code policies, organizations can help to ensure that employees are confident and professional in their roles, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and improved performance. Buttressing this submission Jayasooriya, (2021) posits that dress code is also a significant consideration in the workplace. As a result, it is crucial for librarians to think carefully about their job attire.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the analysis and summary of the findings of this study, it was concluded that Librarians have a positive perceptions of dress code and preferred to wear business

casual to office, even though it was revealed that no policy was in place for dress code in Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Majority of the respondents viewed dress code as important for maintaining a professional image and enhancing effectiveness. Arising from the finding the following recommendation are made:

1. University management should provide training and education to staff on the importance of dress code policies and how they impact professional identity and effectiveness. This should include information on cultural sensitivity and bias awareness.
2. Formulation of dress code policy: it is good that Kashim Ibrahim Library adopt or formulate a written or verbal policy that guides employees' appearance in the workplace or developed more stringent dress codes that list accepted "do's" and "don'ts" for the workplace. Professionals in Human resource development can play a key role in facilitating these efforts. Often this involves training managers to set an example by modeling appropriate attire for their employees and play a more active role in monitoring their employees' appearance, especially those who work directly with customers on a regular (Gilbert, 2003; Howard, 2006).
3. Library professionals should clearly state the essence of dress code in portraying the good image of librarians and library in general and Nigerian Library Schools should introduce professional and image management course in their curriculum.

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