

## LIBRARY POLICIES AND OVERDUE MATERIALS IN DELTA STATE POLYTECHNIC LIBRARIES, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study reported library policies and overdue materials in polytechnic libraries in Delta State which are located at Ogwashi-uku, Ozoro and Otefe-Oghara. Questionnaire, observation and interview were used for data collection. Simple percentage was used for data analysis, on the sample of three hundred registered library users which consisted of one hundred and fifty male and one hundred and fifty female users this was to ascertain if gender difference has any contributing effect. The study revealed that factors such as low fines, insufficient copies of relevant materials, insufficient library opening hours among others as responsible for users negative attitude towards overdue policies. The study concluded that library staff and Librarians enforce library policies without fear of favour and in fairness and that library orientation be made compulsory for users to be registered.*

**Keywords:** *Library policies, overdue materials, librarians*

### INTRODUCTION

The library is a multipurpose establishment and a driving force in the realization of the aims and objectives of any higher institution of learning. It can be regarded not only as a reading centre but also a teaching and service agency. The library is the central laboratory of the whole academic institution of learning. Academic libraries are regarded as fundamental and integral to higher educational systems. Adamu (1999) noted that students who have not learnt how to make use of books are not truly educated. Even though a library is the center for information, it is often not extensively used by students, despite its storage of all sorts of materials ranging from serial publications, magazines, pamphlets, research publications, CD-ROMs to mention but a few on different disciplines. Worse still, their unlawful removal from the shelves, refusal to return materials when due, disregard for library due notices sent out, influence of senior Librarians on library staff to halt collection of due fines has gravely affected the services of the library. Therefore, academic libraries have created policies to ensure that users conduct themselves properly and library resources are used effectively. Policies are a set of rules having the force of law, prescribed by a superior or competent authority, relating to the actions of those under the authority's control. They are principles designed to control or govern the conduct of a people (Okoro and Udoumoh, 2007). Montuiloff (1990) opined that

academic libraries should formulate policies to ensure effective use of their information resources. Hill (1999) stated that there are no single, all encompassing library policies; instead, library policies tend to address specific issues, including overlapping and contradictory ones. A policy is a statement of the means for realizing the goals of an academic library which are usually the goals of the library's parent body. Since policies guide decision making, they ensure that the decisions of the institution are kept in line with their philosophies (Clarke, 1999).

Thus, when we speak of "library policies" we mean by this phrase, the code which regulates and guides the behaviour of library users not minding their gender differences. Policies deal with such questions as "how man ought to live or behave", or what is the good life for man? It would therefore be a mistake to regard policies as a purely academic study, having no intimate connection with the daily lives of men. It is generally assumed that when we know what the good life is, we will naturally act in such a way so as to achieve it. Plato, as cited by Joad (1977) noted that "if a man knows what the good life is, he will not act immorally". From this standpoint, he argues that evil is due to lack of knowledge. Aristotle, in the same book by Joad (1977) showed a more realistic view of human nature by introducing into his discussion of ethics, the notion of moral weakness or lack of self control.

He argues that knowledge of what we ought to do is not sufficient without the kind of self-discipline necessary to ensure that we do it, for we can be too easily led astray by the pleasures of other forms of behavior. Therefore, we must receive a sound training in good habits when we are young, so that when we come to understand what the golden rule means, we will also have the self-control to follow it. Libraries being an integral part of an institution or organization, in their bid to serve people, would be faced with problems of both male and female users' behaviour that should be addressed to ensure the effective delivery of services and full access to facilities.

Professional Librarians exercise independent judgement in the course of providing library service. This implies that a Librarian adhere policies, but may also deviate from policies when professional judgement indicates that they should. Service to library users cannot be overemphasized. Readers' services section of an academic library is charged with the responsibility of lending materials; this service attracts many users to the library. Users of academic libraries are free to borrow materials for home use. The level, extent and number depend on the library's policies. Loan period are also a matter of policy. Some users do not return materials when due. The researcher intends to determine the extent of library policy effect on overdue material.

Circulation of materials is a paramount and basic service of the library no matter the type of library. Circulation policies clearly states who borrows from the library, how many books may be borrowed at a time and for how long

the borrowed item may be in the users' possession. Academic library permit extensive borrowing than other types of libraries. Staff of these Polytechnic Libraries is allowed to borrow four books at a time for three weeks while students are allowed to have two books at a time for two weeks. The problem of overdue materials is common in these polytechnic libraries. Available circulation records in the libraries under study have revealed the incidences of overdue. Thus, this study is aimed at investigating if library policies influence the incidence of overdue material and to know what factors influence book overdue in polytechnic libraries.

This study will be beneficial to students in academic libraries and library staff in general because it will provide data on the extent to which library policies could influence the incidences of overdue materials, and the various factors that could possibly be responsible for book overdue. Also, it will be of interest to researchers since it will serve as a reference point to them as they conduct further investigations. It will provide library management with data that could lead to a more meaningful gender-directed enforcement of library policies, having in mind the rules governing conduct in the library, conditions for using the library and ensuring that library resources are available to all and shared on a fair basis, as well as Increase information in gender studies programmes concerning male and female behaviours in relation to laws and especially to library policies and add to the literature of library policies effect on overdue materials in Polytechnic Libraries

To address the problem of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do library policies influence the incidence of overdue materials in polytechnic libraries?
- What factors influence book overdue in Delta State polytechnic libraries?

### **LIBRARY POLICIES**

The rightness or wrongness, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of policies deals with principles of good conduct. The subject matter of policies is human actions. It is concerned with the norms of acceptable conduct Uduigwomen (1995). The essence of library policies is to enable users understand the reasons behind the approval or disapproval of not only his actions but those of other users of the library. Human beings, as we are aware, will not willing accept sanctions against those attitudes and actions they cherish unless it is clearly pointed out to them why such attitudes or actions are not approved by the library. This means that policies take serious view of the reasons behind the prohibition of certain acts and the approbation that goes with certain other acts. The task of policies be it in libraries or any organization, is to explain moral good. They are not the norms, principles or values that

stand in need, and are capable of explanation, but rather the actual facts from which they are abstracted.

Library policies define the library's identity in relation to its parent institution, its services to users and its staff. This formal framework aims at promoting the exploitation of the services provided and their upgrade, as well as rendering the library's operations in general more effective. Thus, the notification, implementation and revision of library policies are considered essential within the scope of strengthening its role. The Delta polytechnic Libraries have spelt out policies on library materials loaned out and effective date of return. Only registered users are entitled to borrow materials from the library. Borrowing privileges differ depending on the membership category. The borrowing privileges for general books are as follows:

**Users' Category For Borrowing Library Materials**

<b>Membership category</b>	<b>Borrowing privileges</b>	<b>Days</b>
Non academic staff	4 books	21
Academic staff	4 books	21
Students	2 books	14

Any material not returned or renewed within 60 days of the date due will be considered lost. To encourage timely return of library materials and to provide optimal sharing of the collections, fines are charged for overdue items. Borrowers are responsible for returning or renewing items by the due date. If items are not returned within the due date, fines become retroactive to the overdue day at the rate of N5.00 (five naira) per book per day. In case of loss or damage, the staff/student will be charged three times the current price of the item. In case of reserved material that are allowed for two hours, if not returned within the allocated time, a fine of N5.00 for each extra hour will be charged.

Revill (1978) opines that library policies describe what one should expect when dealing with the library. He further stressed that it is forbidden for library users to lend library tickets to someone else and pass on library books to other people. Failure to comply with these regulations usually result in payment of heavy fines. Library management should ensure that in every academic year, Librarians offer series of library orientation courses on library use, rules and users conduct. This is to help check the level at which users violate library regulations as well as educate patrons on the use of libraries. Since violation of the library policies may lead to inconvenience for other users and attract fines or other penalties, users are expected to carefully read and absorb the content and comply, accordingly.

Policies on borrowing of library materials, do not attempt to cover every eventuality, but it recognizes the fact that there are often cases when a strict interpretation of the rules is not justified. For example, although fines are levied for the late return of books, there may be a good reason for the late return (e.g. sickness, or unavoidable and unforeseen absence). In such cases

finer would be reduced or waived altogether. If users foresee difficulty in returning books on time or in answering a recall notice promptly, they could speak to the library staff about the problem as soon as possible. That users may not have finished with a book is not acceptable as a reason for not returning it when recalled. The borrowing entitlement for each category of user is spelt out in each library. However, regulations should allow a Librarian to grant special facilities to any user. To sum up, library regulations help to ensure that users get the books they need, within a reasonable time. If these policies seem to be preventing users from using the library as fully as possible, they can be made as flexible as can be, without hindering other users. In return, libraries expect users to help by keeping libraries informed of changes of address, returning books promptly (especially when they have been recalled), and not lending ticket or library books to anyone else.

Adomi (2003) in a research on users attitude to overdue fines, noted that staff of the university, refused to pay fines. Their refusals were on the ground that the borrowed books were used to teach students, so they need not pay fines. The study also showed that some users were satisfied with library fines because it forces library users to return books promptly and giving others access to these materials. Other users were dissatisfied with the payment of fines. Fifty percent of users preferred to pay fines and hold on to important library materials. Sheer greediness or lack of consideration for others who may have need for these same materials, is responsible for this attitude. Forty six percent of users from his study indicated that circulation staffs do not always collect fines for overdue books showing that some library staff does not strictly enforce the payment of fines on defaulting students. This attitude of library staff encourages borrowers to keep books beyond due dates.

Adomi (2003) notes that users who have Senior Librarians as friends or relation prevail on circulation staff to either reduce or outrightly waive fines. Some libraries have, in fact, abolished fines for overdue books. Ifidon (1999), counsel that it is not wise to do this, because some dishonest users prefer to hold on to good books and pay overdue fines later. Such users may even allege that a book is lost. To deter this type of anti social behaviour, such culprits may be requested to replace the book or pay twice the current price. It seems that changing hours may increase library users' attitude towards observing library borrowing regulations. Edoka (2000) carried out a study in which he observed that convenient hours are crucial factors in making library policy observable. Policies on borrowing and returning of materials may be strictly adhered to if libraries are opened during convenient hours, including weekends. From his findings, users agree to the fact that library opening hours should be extended at weekdays and be opened during the weekends.

The length of time that libraries are opened determines whether library materials may or may not be used, and thus, indirectly determines the degree

of physical accessibility to materials in traditional libraries. It therefore, follows that a user may not return materials on time because the hours of the library are not convenient. From Edoka's study, libraries were opened from 8am to 10pm, Monday through Friday, 9am to 4pm on Saturdays and none on Sundays. This was because it was difficult to find staff on Sunday, and the anticipated use is not seen as great enough to justify the opening. According to Aguolu O. and Aguolu E. (2002), these typical library hours are unsatisfactory, because libraries are heavily used evenings and at weekends by students. This, they noted, is one reason why users resort to holding on to library materials, and thus not observing policies of prompt return of library resources.

Libraries charge fines for materials that are lost, mutilated, stolen and kept beyond due dates. These fines are meant not only to generate monies for libraries but also to serve as deterrent for users who take library rules for granted. Jato (2005) noted that users refuse to return borrowed books for fear of not getting such materials again. Zaki (1994) noted that meagre library fines and the number of users who can easily afford to pay for books kept beyond the due dates are major contributing factors. For example, the N5.00 (five naira) fee per day is ridiculously low penalty. Raising the amount would help persuade users to return overdue books and thus observe the regulations pertaining to the return of books.

Nwalo, (2003) in agreement, stated that in light of the present inflation rate in Nigeria, it would be unrealistic for any library to charge five naira per day as overdue fine. Books are scarce and, if found, are very expensive. In academic libraries, some users could borrow a book recommended for them in class and keep books for a whole session. Because the overdue fine is exceedingly low compared to the purchase price of the book, some users would be happy to pay the fine at the end of the academic year. This contradicts Udoh's (2004) assertion that when a fine is too much, it will serve as a further deterrent to students from returning library books. He further stated that there may be a relationship between high fines, material losses, and loan policies, especially for books in heavy demand. It is often cheaper and easier for a user to fail to return books than pay fines. Low fines, it would now seem, is another reason for the non observance of some of a library's borrowing policies.

The reviewed literature embraced the importance of library policies in academic libraries, factors influencing book overdue in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries and library policies effect on overdue books. Work reviewed were studies done outside and inside Nigeria with emphasis on university libraries. Not much has been done on polytechnic libraries in and outside Nigeria. This research shall therefore, provide students and staff with basic information on library policies effect on overdue materials. The gender approach to the problem of library policies is a gap in our knowledge which this study hopes to fill.

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was used for this research. The population for this study is the actual library users' who are registered and frequent users of the Delta State polytechnic Libraries at Ogwashi-uku, Ozoro and Otefe Oghara. Three hundred (300) library users were sampled. This consisted of one hundred users from each school. The composition was fifty male and fifty female from each school. The convenience sampling technique was used.

The data collected from the distributed questionnaire were analysed using simple percentages, the discussion of findings were guided by users responses from the distributed questionnaire as shown below.

**Table 1: Questionnaire Administration**

Institution of respondent	M users	F users	Cum %
Delta State Polytechnic Ogwashi-Uku	50	50	33.3
Delta State Polytechnic Otefe Oghara	50	50	33.3
Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro	50	50	33.3
Total	150	150	100

Source: Field study 2011

**Table 2: Questionnaire results**

Items	SA		A		D		SD	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Opening hours affects overdue	50 (33.3)	52 (34.7)	45 (30)	43 (28.7)	30 (20)	31 (20.7)	25 (16.7)	24 (16)
Policy on special materials affect overdue	100 (66.7)	106 (70.7)	44 (29.3)	35 (23.3)	3 (2)	4 (2.7)	3 (2)	5 (3.3)
Penalty for defaulters should be strict	106 (70.7)	108 (72)	35 (23.3)	33 (22)	4 (2.7)	3 (2)	5 (3.3)	6 (4)
Adequate materials on loan	9 (6)	4 (2.7)	18 (12)	2 (1.3)	107 (71.3)	101 (67.3)	16 (10.7)	43 (28.7)
Policy on penalty affects overdue	100 (66.7)	96 (64)	39 (26)	38 (25.3)	8 (5.3)	8 (5.3)	3 (2)	8 (5.3)
Adequate opening hours	2 (1.3)	3 (2)	10 (6.7)	9 (6)	97 (64.7)	101 (67.3)	41 (27.3)	37 (24.7)
Adequate fine charges	25 (16.7)	24 (16)	31 (20.7)	30 (20)	43 (28.7)	45 (30)	50 (33.3)	52 (34.7)
Increased in numbers of books borrowed	115 (76.7)	101 (67.3)	52 (34.7)	101 (67.3)	15 (10)	3 (2)	2 (1.3)	3 (2)
Availability of materials	3 (2)	4 (2.7)	3 (2)	2 (1.3)	100 (66.7)	101 (67.3)	44 (29.3)	43 (28.7)
Loan duration affects overdue	107 (71.3)	101 (67.3)	20 (13.3)	2 (28.7)	9 (6)	4 (2.7)	16 (10.7)	2 (1.3)
Librarians, more lenient with female users	115 (76.7)	111 (74)	20 (13.3)	28 (18.7)	13 (8.7)	8 (5.3)	2 (1.3)	3 (2)
Library opens at weekends	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	81 (54)	68 (45.3)	69 (46)	82 (54.7)

Source: Field study 2011

Fines are meant to generate monies for libraries, they are also supposed to serve as deterrent to defaulters who may have kept materials beyond due dates. From the study, library policies are one factor that influences book overdue. This finding has actually proved Aguolu O. and Aguolu E. (2002) assertion that loan or circulation policies may cause inaccessibility to library materials.

The study also showed that circulation staff do not collect fines from student. When library staff do not collect fines, they encourage borrowers refusal to return due books, attitudes which should be discouraged at all cost. This finding corroborates with Adomi's (2003) assertion that circulation staff do not always collect fines for overdue books and users who have Senior Librarians as friends or relation often prevail on circulation staff to either reduce or out rightly waive fines. There was almost a general consensus that Librarians/library staff show preference for female students. Female are weaker sex and may tend to attract sympathy. Enforcing policies would be very effective if staff do not show preference to students based on gender differences. Female users often times are caught contravening library policies. It is not as if their male counterparts do not do same.

The fact that many female students more often go unpunished would encourage them to continually not comply with library policies. This agrees with Hisle's (2002) assertion that regulations are to guide users' conducts as well as the use of library materials. Library opening hours determine the degree of physical accessibility to materials. It therefore follows that users may not return library materials when due because library opening hours are insufficient. Aguolu E. and Aguolu E. (2002) assert that typical library hours are unsatisfactory because libraries are heavily used at evenings and weekends. The study also revealed that increased number of books on loan could possibly help users comply with library policies.

This as earlier noted is because there are no multiple copies of relevant text, and the fear of not being able to get these materials again when returned. These corroborate Nwalo (2003) and Udoh (2004) studies that if fines are exceedingly lower than the purchase price of the book, some users would gladly hold on to books till the end of the academic year and pay fines, and if very high, would serve as further deterrent to students from returning library books, thus disobeying library policies.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It was established that the libraries provide an encouraging environment for reading. The present economic situation in the country has, however made it difficult for libraries to buy all relevant materials. Multiple copies of relevant materials should be made available in libraries, when finances permit. The extent to which male and female users complied with library policies was very low. Male and female users indicated they had, refused to return books when recalled and dismissal of defaulters is an extreme action. This could be as a result of students' attachment to themselves and ignorance of their actions. Library sanctions should be enforced on all users without fear or favour to enable total compliance with library policies. Librarians as well as library staff should enforce library policies even if their wades and relatives are involved and not minding users gender differences.

Libraries should be opened at sufficient hours on weekdays and weekends to give users enough time with these materials instead of keeping them beyond due dates. Attendance at library orientations should be made a condition for registering users with the library. This would enable student know what libraries expect of them. Policies should be publicized as much as possible through post bills, flyers etc. This would curb defaulters' claim of not being aware of the policies. Use of libraries should be taught by Librarians who are professionals in Library Studies courses and should be credit earning. If these suggestions are considered and implemented by libraries and their parent institutions, users' attitude to library policies on overdue would be improved and library services enhanced

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