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April 2010

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Edewor, Nelson, "Staff Users and Overdue Fines in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries" (2010). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 347.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/347>

## **Staff Users and Overdue Fines in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries**

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### **Introduction**

Payment of overdue fines is as old as libraries. When resources on loan are not returned on time, a fine is charge at a rate determined by the library. According to Adomi (2003), overdue fines are the amount a library user is charged for keeping borrowed material beyond the loan period. There is variation depending on the type of library and the status of the reader. Payment is usually done at the circulation desk: the library market place. Depending on the material type, fines can be hourly daily.

Fines are one of the ways libraries generate funds. Ifidon (1999) observes that fines for overdue books are a miscellaneous source of funding, along with the cost of replacing a missing book or borrower's card, sale of duplicates and publications, photocopying proceeds, and fees from subscription libraries. Abareh (2001) and Adomi (2003) regard payment for missing books and borrowers cards as punitive measures meant to serve as deterrents to delinquent library users and not necessarily avenues to generate funds for the library. In academic libraries across Nigeria, registration fees have been introduced. This is a reliable means of generating funds for the library. Prospective library users are required to pay an amount for a borrowers ticket or identity card before they are granted access to library facilities.

There is a plethora of literature on the concept of overdue fines. Though the works of Zaki (1994), Abareh (2001), Adomi (2003), Alafiatayo (1985), and Greenwood and McKean (1985) come quickly to mind, none of these authors has been written about staff users' attitudes toward overdue fines, particularly in polytechnic libraries. This study addresses this gap.

The objective of this paper is to discover the opinions and feelings of staff users toward overdue fines in Nigerian Polytechnic libraries; the challenges libraries face in enforcing payment of overdue fines; and whether payments of overdue fines have in any way contributed to the enhancement of library operations and services.

In the light of the above, Delta State Polytechnic Library Ozoro (DSPZ) and Delta State Polytechnic Library Otefe-Oghara (DSPT) provided data and institutional setting for this survey.

Brief background information showing the profile of the libraries surveyed is presented in the table below.

## Background

Library	Delta State Polytechnic (DSPZ) Library, Ozoro	Delta State Polytechnic (DSPT) Library, Otefe
Date established	2002	2002
Library stock {Books}	13,350	11,720
Staffing: Professional/Academic Librarians	8	6
Para-Professional	4	3
Admin./Secretarial staff	5	4
Library assistants, attendants	10	8
Registered staff user population	72	60

## Methodology

The survey research method was used. The population of staff users was drawn from Delta State Polytechnic Otefe-Oghara and Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro, both in Nigeria. The instruments used in data collection were a questionnaire and oral interviews. The sampled population of the study is teaching and research staff who were available as at the time of the researcher's visit to the selected polytechnics. A total of 100 questionnaires were administered. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## Findings and Discussion

Out of the 100 questionnaires administered to the respondents, 89 were completed. The completed questionnaires were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. These are distributed as follows:

Table 1: Percentage of Return Questionnaire

S/N	Respondents	Questionnaires returned	Percentage
1	Teaching Staff	62	69.7 percent
2.	Research Staff	27	30.3 percent
	Total	89	100 percent

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Discipline.

S/N	Discipline	Respondents	Percentage
1.	Business	38	42.7
2.	Engineering	13	28.1
3.	Agriculture	12	13.5
4.	Sciences	11	12.4
5.	Computer/Information Tech.	10	11.12
6.	Humanities	05	5.6
	Total	89	100 percent

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by discipline. Although the questionnaire was randomly administered, Business had the largest number with 38, or 42.7 percent, followed by Engineering, 13, or 28.1 percent.

Table 3: Distribution of Staff Users by Gender

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	71	79.8 percent
Female	18	20.2 percent
Total	89	100 percent

Nearly four-fifths of the respondents were male.

Table 4: Possession of Borrowers' Tickets by Staff Users

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	62	69.7 percent
No	27	30.3 percent
Total	89	100 percent

Nearly 70 percent of staff users have borrower's tickets. Further investigation revealed that those who do not have personal tickets make use of other staff users' tickets.

Table 5: Attitude of Staff User towards Overdue Fines

Attitude	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Amount fixed as overdue fine is adequate	10 (11.2 percent)	17 (19.1 percent)	62 (69.7 percent)
Overdue fines should be discontinued	72 (80.9 percent)	17 (19.1 percent)	- -
It is wrong to ask staff to pay for keeping borrowed books	52 (58.5 percent)	27 (30.3 percent)	10 (11.2 percent)
Overdue fines are punitive measure intended against library defaulters	52 (58.5 percent)	23 (25.8 percent)	14 (15.7 percent)
Prefer to keep a useful book beyond the due date	61 (68.5 percent)	28 (31.5 percent)	- -
Feel bad when asked to pay	58 (65.7 percent)	21 (23.6 percent)	10 (11.2 percent)
Consult with staff users on amount to be charged as overdue fines	48 (53.9 percent)	31 (34.9 percent)	10 (11.2 percent)

Table 5 is quite revealing. A large majority (62 or 69.7 percent) of respondents are undecided about the amount charged for overdue fines. This is not unconnected with the fact that staff users are in the habit of not paying their fines. They often want to know why they should pay fines (Adomi 2002). At DSPZ and DSPT libraries, defaulting staff users are required to pay NGN 20.00 daily fine for overdue material.

Just over 80 percent of respondents agreed that library fines for staff should be discontinued. This is in contrast with Adomi (2003) and Zaki (1994). The importance of overdue fines in enhancing the services of the library cannot be overemphasized. Overdue fines help check the activities of most library users. Nearly 60 percent of respondents agree that fines are a punitive measure against library defaulters.

Item 3 clearly shows that a majority (52 or 58.5 percent) of respondents agreed that it is wrong to ask staff users to pay fines. At the DSPZ library, fines are remitted to the polytechnic Bursary monthly. Overdue fines are a miscellaneous source of funds to the institution as a whole and not the library per se. The case is different at DSPT library, where the amount generated from fines is kept as petty cash and used to meet minor expenses of the library.

Item 5 indicates that only about one third do not like to keep important materials beyond the due date, while the rest prefer to keep useful books beyond the due date and without paying a fine. According to Zaki (1994), selfishness or lack of consideration for others may be responsible for this unethical attitude.

Table 6: frequency of payment of overdue fines by staff users

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Rarely	63	70.8
Often	19	21.4
Very often	07	7.8
Total	89	100

Table 6 show the frequency of payment of overdue fines by staff users. Most respondents rarely pay overdue fines. This finding corroborates Adomi (2003).

Table 7: Benefit of Overdue Fines

Benefit	Respondents	Percentage
A means of generating fund for the library	192	35.3
Compel users to return borrowed books on time	120	22.1
Serves as a corrective measure to delinquent users	115	21.1
Enhances timely access to library material	75	13.8
Enhances library services	42	7.7

Table 7 above multiple responses on the benefit of overdue fees. Between one-fourth and one-fifth affirm that fines compel users to return borrowed books on time. Generating funds for the library accounted for 192 (35.3 percent). This is in line with the views expressed by Ifidon (1999). Smaller numbers noted that overdue fines serves as corrective measure to delinquent users, help users to gain access to library materials, and enhance library services.

Table 8: Constraints in Payment of Overdue Fines by Staff Users

Constraints	Respondents	Percentage
Unwillingness of staff user to pay overdue fees	192	37.87 percent
Circulation staff under pressure from senior library staff to cancel or reduce overdue fees	115	22.68 percent
Circulation staff do not always collect fines from staff users	102	20.12 percent
Meager library fines discourage payment	98	19.33 percent

Table 8 reveals constraints associated with payment of overdue fines by staff users. More than one-third noted the unwillingness of staff users to pay. One-fifth affirm that circulation staff do not always collect fines from staff users. Others mentioned the meager amount charged and pressure on circulation staff to cancel fines.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The research concern of this study has been to determine the attitude of university staff users toward overdue fines. In spite of the benefits of fines, a variety of problems hinder the collection of such fines in Nigerian Polytechnic libraries. The study also revealed that university staff agree that fines compel users to return borrowed books on time, so that other users can have access to them. It is disappointing to know that some library staff are not able to enforce the payment of fines.

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Overdue fines should be enforced by libraries, with adequate support from parent institutions.
- Library users, irrespective of their status and influence, should be made to pay overdue fines by library management.
- Libraries should be in charge of the collection, control, and expenditure of overdue fines.
- Defaulting users should be denied the use of the library.

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