

Full Length Research Paper

Shelving, shelf reading and the challenges of shelving staff in academic libraries in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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This study takes a look at shelving, shelf reading and the challenges faced by shelving staff in four (4) academic libraries in the government owned tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. These institutions are the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti and the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti. A questionnaire was developed and used to elicit data from the various respondents in the institutions covered by the study. Sixty (60) copies of questionnaire, that is fifteen (15) copies per institution, were distributed to the identified shelving staff in each case. Federal University, Oye-Ekiti turned-in fourteen (14) copies of filled and useable questionnaire, Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti turned-in ten(10) copies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti fourteen(14) copies and College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti twelve (12) copies. The total response rate was 50 out of 60, representing 83.3%. The results show that majority 49(98%) of the respondents see shelving as inevitable in library practice and 27 respondents (54%) claimed that shelving was neither tasking nor rigorous. However, 29 respondents (58%) saw the need for the employment of additional shelvers, 26 respondents (52%) frowned at users' arbitrary retrieval of books from the shelves, coupled with the frequent disorganization of shelves as opined by 45 respondents (90%); while 30 respondents (60%) hammered on users' boycott of library catalogue in retrieving materials among other challenges identified. Recommendations were made for improvement as appropriate.

Key words: Shelving, shelf reading, academic libraries, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a number of state, federal and private universities associated with academic libraries. Likewise, there are a number of polytechnics and colleges of education all associated with academic libraries to provide literature support to aid learning, teaching and research for the parent institutions. Nigeria's university system is been supervised by the National Universities Commission

(NUC), a parastatal body under the Federal Ministry of Education; while the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) supervise polytechnics and colleges of education respectively.

Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions,

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colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes (Akporhonor, 2005). Singh and Kaur (2009) stressed that the preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the teaching and research mission of their parent institutions.

Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprised students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Very often academic libraries are referred to as the heart or nerve centre of institutions of higher learning where all academic activities revolve.

Shelving remains a daily human routine in virtually all libraries in spite of the current state of technology. In other words, libraries still rely on their human resources to put books used by their users back on the shelves. Books shelved promptly and correctly usually boost the image of the library and also create a welcoming environment of good customer service. Hence, the importance of shelving and shelf-reading cannot be ignored in any library, be it academic or otherwise. Without accurate shelving of books, effective library operation would be impossible for library staff and their patrons (Power, 1999).

Moreover, accurate and timely shelving enhances service to patrons and is a requisite that is expected in all libraries. Onifade et al. (2010) opined that many academic libraries in Nigeria are experiencing difficulty shelving their books due to heavy usage and lack of staff. Thus, it is not uncommon to see book shelves disorganized and untidy. Staff attitudes coupled with the boring routine task of shelving are often cited as reasons behind this problem (Aliero, 2003). Attitude is often described as inclinations, feelings, prejudices, preconceived notion or fears and convictions about any specific issue (Taiwo, 1998). It is therefore the aim of this study to examine the challenges faced by library staff members who are involved in shelving and shelf reading to establish their strength and weakness as the case may be and proffer appropriate recommendations for improvement.

Definition of terms

The following recurrent terms are defined for clarity:

Shelving, Shelf Reading, Shelving Staff and Challenges

1. Shelving: the act of organizing books by call numbers in sequential order and placing them in their correct locations on the library shelves

2. Shelf Reading: the process of checking through the library collections to ascertain improperly shelved, missing or stolen books. Shelf reading has saved libraries a great deal of time and resources by locating books that may have otherwise been lost.

3. Shelving Staff: library staff members who are engaged in the shelving routine. This varies from library to library. In some libraries it is solely the schedule of the junior library staff while in some libraries both junior and senior staff members are involved.

4. Challenges: difficulties encountered by shelving staff in the course of carrying out shelving duties.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature abounds on related aspects of librarianship, such as the organization of library resources, or using classification schemes in managing the resources. However, current resources on shelving, shelf-reading and its challenges, seems scanty. Shelving has been described as the act of organizing books by call numbers and placing them in their correct locations on the library shelves; while shelf reading is the process of reading the call numbers on books that are currently on the library shelves and ensuring that they are in the proper order. In stressing the importance of these two main tasks in the library routine, Agboola (1984) stated that shelving is an important aspect of library work which can determine users' satisfaction or frustration as far as locating library materials is concerned.

The import of shelving and shelf reading cannot be overemphasized as it has helped countless numbers of patrons find books by keeping the collections neat and in order. Shelf reading no doubt helps to discover books out of order by Library of Congress call number, title etc; books shelved in the wrong location; books placed on top of other books outside of bookends, or books that have fallen behind the row of books on the shelf; books with damaged or missing call number labels and perhaps, books shelved in the collection but owned by another library. While the statistics of shelf reading are kept differently in every library, the act of shelf reading varies only slightly from library to library. Shelf reading is an integral part of maintaining any collection. How often a collection should be Shelf-read is determined by its size and how frequently it is used by patrons. Shelf reading helps keep the number of missing books low and makes it easier for patrons to find books that should be in the library. Shelf reading also helps to give a collection a professional look and helps to prevent damage to the collection.

Lyons and Rutherford (1998) equally observed that shelving is critical to the success of a library's service delivery strategies. Hence, proper and accurate shelving and shelf-reading guarantee patrons' confidence. In most

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by gender.

S/No	Institutions	Responses	Gender/Frequency		Percentage (%)
1.	Fed. University Oye-Ekiti	14	M (7)	F (7)	28
2.	Fed.Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti	10	M (6)	F (4)	20
3.	Ekiti State University Ado-Ekiti	14	M (6)	F (8)	28
4.	College of Education Ikere-Ekiti	12	M (6)	F (6)	24
	Total	50	25	25	100

Table 2. The responses to the question-How frequently do you shelve in your library?

S/No	Institutions	Once daily	Twice daily	Every other day	Once a week
1.	Fed. Univ.Oye-Ekiti	7	6	1	-
2.	Fed.Poly,Ado-Ekiti	4	6	-	-
3.	Ekiti State Uni.Ado	3	11	-	-
4.	College of Educ.Ikere	8	4	-	-
	Total	22 (44%)	27 (54%)	1 (2%)	-

libraries in developing countries, shelving of books is done by junior staff. Agboola (1984) buttressing this claim acknowledged that in Nigerian libraries, the shelving of books is done by junior library staff under the supervision of professional librarians. In developed countries, shelving of books is done by part-time shelvees (Rodgers, 1998).

Shelving and shelf reading can be monstrous and boring and being a routine duty, staff, no doubt, in the process faces one challenge or other while carrying out the task. Power (1999) observed that library users' perception of shelving staff as the lowest in the library staff hierarchy can also affect their attitude. Power further stressed that since shelving is time consuming and involves repetition of tasks, it requires motivated staff to effectively perform the task very well. In line with the above, Aliero (2003) claimed that most inappropriate shelving is done by library staff themselves. He highlighted a number of reasons for this which includes ignorance, nonchalance attitude, lack of supervision, under staffing and lack of motivation.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine how frequently shelving is done in the academic libraries sampled.
2. To examine how often shelf reading is carried out in the said academic libraries.
3. To identify the challenges faced by shelving staff members and
4. To recommend ways of ameliorating the challenges for better performance.

METHODOLOGY

Four (4) academic libraries in the government owned tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, with one located at Oye local government area, two within the state capital at Ado-Ekiti and the fourth at Ikere-Ekiti in Ekiti South Local Government Area of the state were used for this study. These are Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti and the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher in each institution, assisted by a researcher in each case and retrieved without stress thereafter.

DATA ANALYSIS AND HIGHLIGHT OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study are as highlighted below, using descriptive statistics as discussed in Tables 1-6 hereunder.

Table 1 shows that the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti and the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti have equal number of male and female shelvees while the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti has more male shelvees and the Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti has more female shelvees in their respective libraries. There is however gender balance (25 males and 25 females) of shelvees on the whole in the four tertiary institutions surveyed. One can infer from the above that both male and female shelvees can shelf and must be duly motivated to function efficiently and effectively.

Table 2 shows that most of the libraries sampled shelve twice daily, morning and afternoon as 27 (54%) out of 50 responses received indicated, while 22 (44%) shelve once daily and only one (2%) shelve every other day.

Table 3 revealed however, that only six (12%) of the shelvees claimed that they were not trained/taught how to shelve on assumption of duty, while 44 (88%) admitted being trained/taught.

Table 3. Were you trained/taught how to shelve on assumption of duty?

S/No	Institutions	Yes	No
i.	Fed. University Oye-Ekiti	11	3
ii.	Fed.Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti	9	1
iii.	Ekiti State University Ado-Ekiti	12	2
iv.	College of Education Ikere-Ekiti	12	-
Total		44 (88%)	6 (12%)

Table 4.How often do you embark on shelf reading in your library?

S/No	Institutions	Every semester	Every session	Every two yrs	Once in five yrs
a.	Fed. Univ.Oye-Ekiti	14	-	-	-
b.	Fed.Poly,Ado-Ekiti	9	1	-	-
c.	Ekiti State Uni.Ado	12	2	-	-
d.	College of Educ.Ikere	12	-	-	-
Total		47(94%)	3 (6%)		

Table 5. Do you consider shelf reading as being important in library practice?

S/No	Institutions	Yes	No
i.	Fed. University Oye-Ekiti	14	-
ii.	Fed.Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti	10	-
iii.	Ekiti State University Ado-Ekiti	13	1
iv.	College of Education Ikere-Ekiti	12	-
Total		49 (98%)	1 (2%)

Table 4 shows that 47 (94%) of the shelvees sampled claim that they embark on shelf reading every semester in their libraries while only three (6%) shelf read every session.

Table 5 revealed that the shelvees are mindful of the importance of shelf reading in library practice, as 49 (98%) of them affirmed while only one (2%) was against it.

Table 6 revealed the challenges faced by shelving staff (shelvees) while carrying out their daily shelving routine as hereunder highlighted and discussed.

1. 29 respondents (58%) out of 50 agreed that there was shortage of shelving staff while 21 respondents (42%) disagreed with this assertion.
2. 27 respondents (54%) disagreed that shelving was tasking and rigorous while 23 respondents (46%) agreed with this assertion.
3. 45 respondents (90%) claimed that shelves are disorganized frequently by users while 5 respondents (10%) disagreed with this assertion.
4. 17 respondents (34%) saw user's refusal to release

books during shelving hours as a challenge while 33 respondents (66%) disagreed with this assertion.

5. 30 respondents (60%) agreed that users boycott the Library Catalogue while searching for books while 20 respondents (40%) disagreed with this assertion.

6. 26 respondents (52%) claimed user's arbitrary retrieval of books from the shelves while 24 respondents (48%) disagreed with this assertion.

7. 12 respondents (24%) agreed that users' subject shelving staff to ridicule while shelving but 38 respondents (76%) disagreed with this assertion.

8. 11 respondents (22%) claimed that lack of supervision by the senior members of staff was a challenge while 39 respondents (78%) disagreed with this assertion.

DISCUSSION

The study shows clearly that the four tertiary institution libraries sampled, shelve mostly twice daily, that is, morning and afternoon as 27 respondents (54%) of the 50 sample population confirm this activity. On the other

Table 6. What challenge(s) do you face as a shelving staff (shelver) in your library? (Tick as many as you consider applicable/relevant).

S/N	Questions	FUOYE		FEDPOL		EKSU		COEIK.		Total & %			
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
1.	Shortage of shelving staff i.e. few hands to shelf	5	9	4	6	11	3	9	3	29	21	58%	42%
2.	Shelving is tasking and rigorous	7	7	6	4	6	8	4	8	23	27	46%	54%
3.	Shelves are disorganized frequently by users	13	1	8	2	14	-	10	2	45	5	90%	10%
4.	User's refusal to release books during shelving hours	4	10	4	6	7	7	2	10	17	33	34%	66%
5.	Users' boycott the Library Catalogue while searching for books	3	11	5	5	13	1	9	3	30	20	60%	40%
6.	User's arbitrary retrieval of books from the shelves	7	7	3	7	9	5	7	5	26	24	52%	48%
7.	Users' subject shelving staff to ridicule while shelving	1	13	1	9	6	8	4	8	12	38	24%	76%
8.	Lack of supervision by the senior members of staff	2	12	2	8	7	7	•	12	11	39	22%	78%

hand, 22 respondents (44%) claim that they shelf once daily, and only one respondent (2%) agreed to shelving every other day.

Also, 44 respondents (88%) claimed that they were trained/taught how to shelf on assumption of duty, while six respondents (12%) claimed not to undergo such training. Likewise, 47 respondents (94%) embark on shelf reading in their library every semester, while only three respondents (6%) do shelf reading every session. Interestingly, 49 respondents (98%) considered shelf reading as being important in library practice while only one respondent (2%) disagreed with this claim.

Likewise, a number of challenges were identified ranging from shortage of shelving staff, (29 respondents, or, 58%), frequent disorganization of shelves by users, (45 respondents, or, 90%), arbitrary retrieval of books by the users from the shelves (26 respondents, or, 52%) and user's boycott of the library catalogue in searching and retrieving materials (30 respondents, or, 60%). The study equally revealed that the supervision of shelving staff by the senior staff members of the library was commendable as expressed by 39 respondents (78%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed some facts for which the following

solutions are being recommended:

1. More shelvers should be recruited by the concerned libraries to further enhance shelving and shelf reading and emphasize the importance of accurate and timely shelving.
2. Most shelvers 27 (54%) do not see it as tasking and rigorous, meaning that they are happy doing it and should be further motivated/ encouraged to shelve better through usual incentives such as confirmation of appointment, promotion, when due, on the job commendation when needed, as well as, training and re-training, and rewarding of the most accurate and best shelving staff at the end of each year.
3. Users, especially students, should be cautioned against frequent disorganization of shelves due to poor search habits coupled with non-consultation of the library catalogue for guidance/guide to their books of choice. This can be stressed during orientation or while teaching the use of the library as 45 respondents (90%) identified this as a challenge.
4. The use of the catalogue as a retrieval tool in addition to Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) should be stressed to users at every opportunity as 30 respondents (60%) claim users boycott of the catalogue because of the fact/assumption that users already knew where the books in their fields can be located in the library.

5. Arbitrary retrieval of books by users from the shelves in a bid to look for information because of the non-use of the library catalogue for direct linkage to the source should be discouraged and cautioned as 26 respondents (52%) claimed to this as a challenge.
6. Supervision of shelvers by the senior staff members is commendable and should be sustained as 39 respondents (78%) affirmed this action.
7. Library management should consider engaging students' shelvers (volunteers) to help with shelving and shelf reading as practiced in some institutions for a token fee.
8. Shelving staff must be cared for health-wise as they may need to squat, kneel or sit to read the bottom shelf, lift-up and push heavy books and trolleys, and look up or stand on small stools to read the shelf tops etc.
9. Their challenges should be promptly addressed to serve as impetus for optimum performance.

Conclusion

Shelving and shelf reading are inevitable tasks, if order is to be maintained in our academic libraries. Users make use of the library resources, particularly books, on a daily basis, and in most cases during weekends. Therefore, the need to promptly reshelve consulted materials cannot be over-emphasized, else other users might be denied the opportunity to locate and retrieve such materials with ease. Thus, shelving staff must be encouraged and motivated not to relent in carrying out this important daily routine, which tells much about the worth of a library. Shelving staff can be motivated through on-the-job commendation, confirmation of appointment/promotion, when due, in-house training and attendance of conferences, seminars, workshops and even study leave with or without pay, depending on the number of years served and the policy of the institution concerned. Their challenges should also be addressed to serve as an impetus for optimum performance.

It is a rule that library users are not allowed to shelve back consulted library materials, therefore, the shelvers must be up and doing as an unshelved material is as good as being lost to users. Shelving remains a sine qua non to the successful use of library resources.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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