

ENFORCING TERTIARY SCHOOL LIBRARY RULES AND REGULATIONS: THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The tendency to flout library rules and regulations has become a common phenomenon amongst library users. The data is staggering and widespread, and the trend has failed to abate with its attendant consequences –man-hour, financial and material losses. This however, does not imply that there are no effective rules and regulations, but enforcing them has its own challenges. This paper was therefore designed to examine the challenges and factors apparently militating against the effective enforcement of library rules and regulations in a typical tertiary library setting. It was indeed obvious, that there are many administrative, logistic and legal challenges militating against effective ‘policing’ and enforcement of relevant library rules and regulations. As such, it is recommended that key policies be put in place to ameliorate the challenges of library rule violations, while funding and training/retraining of staff should be enhanced.

Key Words: *Library, Rules, Regulations, Enforcement, Discipline*

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INTRODUCTION

Every library user is expected to adhere to basic rules and regulations in the Library, as long as they desire to access the library services. For tertiary institution libraries, users must register to obtain a card with which he/she can access the services of the library. Such services range from book lending to reference material's access. Of course, beneficiaries must keep to the terms of the services rendered in order for the library to serve other prospective users effectively. In a nut shell, library discipline should be the watchword.

Secondly, when library books are issued, users must check the pages of the books and if pages are found missing, a report must also be made to the Librarian before leaving the Counter. The essence of this is to avoid been falsely accused of mutilating the book(s) as library book mutilation is an offence and users are required to handle books and other reading materials carefully. In addition, marking library books with pencil or ink, and tearing off book pages are prohibited.

On the other hand, noise making, drinking and eating in the library, defacing of library books/materials, tables and shelves are strictly prohibited. In fact, the prohibition of food and drinks is to avoid food remnants, as they are believed to attract insects and

other animals that may eventually turn to the books and other library materials (Jato, 2005). Afolabi, (1993) had emphatically asserted too that apart from climatic conditions, insects and other animals (like rodents), the greatest agents that deface books and cause wear and tear on library materials are human beings -library users/patrons.

It is also a standard rule that library membership card is nontransferable. Users are therefore expected not to lend their library cards to another for the sake of accessing library services. In the event of this, library facilities will be withdrawn for such an offender. More so, the library cards must be renewed yearly and in case a user loses his/ her card, a report must be made to the librarian for the issuance of the duplicate card. Similarly, if holders of library cards are relocating, they must sign the routine clearance forms that clears them and confirms that they have no pending issue with the library.

However, as good as the rules and regulations, amongst others, appear to be, the question remains how well are they adhered to? How effective are the enforcement strategies? Of course, it is expected that violation of these rules attracts punitive consequences, yet, there are deviants. It is the deviant tendencies of users, especially students and staff collaborators that have become the basis of several related studies. Even Oyesiku (2012) had

acknowledged that the tendency to flout library rules and regulations has become a common and widespread phenomenon amongst library users. This does not, in any way, imply that rules and regulations are not effective, but the bone of contention is the challenges of enforcement.

This paper therefore, examines these challenges and factors militating against the effective enforcement of user rules and regulations in a typical tertiary library setting.

DOCUMENTED BREACHES

Academic libraries have been faced with varying degree of criminal behaviors in the use of their resources (Momodu, 2002). It is also a well known fact that some individual users of academic libraries display disruptive or criminal behaviors within the library and this often poses security challenges for the library (Lorenzen, 1996; Momodu, 2002; Ajegbomogun, 2004). The problem may not necessarily be in form of mutilation or stealing of the collection alone but disruptive users may cause problem to the library staffs hindering their performance and effectiveness (Lorenzen, 1996).

Acknowledging the enormity of the breaches, Jackson (1991), stated that the incidents of theft, non-return of materials and mutilation of library stocks are on the increase. In fact, a long list of delinquent activities of library deviants has been highlighted by Afolabi (1993) and Tefera (1996). These delinquent acts ranged from window book-throwing to waiting collaborators under power outage, page mutilation, book defacing, staff connivance, and improper book lending records; indicating the seeming endemic nature of library delinquency.

In a statement by Ifidon (2000), mutilation and theft in libraries is a menace that has persisted, and it is indeed a global problem and that the worsening state of libraries in Nigeria appears to have aggravated its intensity and the consequent detrimental impact. Reacting to the phenomena, Toka (2005) stated also that the theft of archival materials has become a problem of great proportions to the library resources and identified insiders and patrons as the types of theft that archives face. Hence the question: what factors induce this widespread phenomenon?

CAUSATIVE FACTORS

Experience has shown that student's delinquent behaviours in the library may stems from several

personality conflicts including laziness, poverty, inherent deviant tendencies, greed, and indiscipline. Others include ignorance, high library registration fees and loss of original card as reasons for using fake library cards, as well as security issues stemming from general lapses, underfunding, understaffing and orientation and training deficiencies.

It has also been observed that library users resort to delinquent behaviors because demand outstripped the supply of library materials and as such, there is competition for resources, which invariably tempts users to steal (Lorenzen, 1996), mutilate (Bello, 1998; Lorenzen 1996), or engage in illegal book borrowing. Lorenzen (1996) added that several other causes of theft and mutilation, included students' dissatisfaction or unfamiliarity with library services; lack of knowledge of replacement costs and time; lack of concern for the needs of others; and the assumption by students that library mutilation and theft isn't much of a crime.

In the same vain, Oyesiku (2012) listed the following as some of the factors encouraging library delinquency: lack of proper orientation; multiple copies of books in the circulation; lack of strategic warning signs against theft and mutilation; inefficient power supply period of temporary blackout usually encourage library delinquency among users; lack of trained security personnel; and lack of in-service training to adequately enlighten junior library staff on what library profession is all about. Jato (2005) added that reductions in library stocks and lack of commitment/dedication to duty by library staff, may also account for the incidences of theft and unlawful removal of materials in the library.

OBVIOUS LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Certain constraints have been associated with library delinquencies. For instance, book theft is viewed as somehow different from the theft of other commodities and as such, makes it very difficult to establish it in court that the culprit intended to permanently deprive the library of the books which is the requirement for a conviction for theft.

Secondly, there is the general lack of security in university libraries owing to facilities deficiency, staff inadequacy and inefficient/unreliable power supply. According to Olorunsola (1987), there exists a relationship between high rates of security problems and the growth of a University. In a related remark on library theft, Bello (1993) stated that book

theft has become a major security issue in libraries; particularly academic libraries where special collections are the most targeted. Ewing (1994) however, reminded all that theft is only one type of collection security breach as there is much to it.

Most disheartening, is the fact that not all the thefts are committed by clients. Some library staff can take materials out of the library without checking them out properly. Lorenzen (1996) classified it as the hardest type of theft to prevent, since library employees know how to defeat the security system.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that there are many administrative, logistic and legal challenges militating against effective 'policing' and enforcement of relevant library rules and regulations. These have been summarized to include the lack of detective barcode machines to aid security; improper shelving and shelve reading; improper utilization of catalogue index box; lack of efficient photocopy machines for user needs when necessary; lack of detailed library guide; lack of emphasis on user orientation; deficient policy formulation to guide against disruptive behaviors; and the lack of efficient disciplinary apparatus for staff and users. It is recommended therefore that key policies be put in place to ameliorate the challenges of library rule violations while funding and training/retraining of staff should be enhanced.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS