CIRCULATION SERVICES IN FESTUS AGHAGBO NWAKO LIBRARY: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The primary objective of any Library is to make its books and non-book materials readily available to its patrons on demand. In the traditional library setting, circulation services department is the gateway through which the library renders this service to its patron, This paper examined the circulation practices in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library. The numerous problems and challenges of the Department were highlighted. The paper recommended a number of strategies that could be adopted to improve circulation services in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Keywords: ***Circulation Services, Browne Charging System, KOHA, OPAC, FANL.***

Introduction

Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library was established with its parent body in 1982. It is the university library of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The Library now occupies its present magnificent two-story building with a usable floor area of 40,000sq. metres. The Library was named after the first Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. Festus Aghagbo Nwako. It was commissioned on 20th, April 2008 by the then Hon. Minister of Education Dr. Igwe Aja-Nwachukwu and opened for services in January, 2009.

It has a sitting capacity of three thousand users when fully utilized. The library holding is about 500,000 volumes of books excluding journals, theses and dissertations and documents. The Circulation Department of the library which is as old as the Library had between 2013 and 2017 academic sessions registered 56,196 readers. The total number of books on Loan from 2013-20th March 2017 academic years is 33,912 volumes.

The Circulation Librarian is part of the professional team working in the library to bring the required desire of users to fulfillment. According to Ujuanbi (2008) circulation services is a part of the library system that enables the library to achieve its goals. The Department is a major interface between the library and the users. The Circulation Department is the first point of call for every user and circulation being a major player in reader's services easily knows the needs of the users and what the library has. The only direct contact that library users have with the library is at the circulation point. That is why the Department and the Reference Section are referred to as the image of the library.

Functions and Procedure in Circulation Department

The main purpose of the Circulation Department according to Saliu and Abdussalam (2012) is to fulfill the library's service mission by meeting user information needs. They further explained that all checkout procedure are established on the basis of

service to patrons. Therefore functions of the desk staff of the Library typically include the following:

- **Registration of Users:**

  The library serves the entire university community comprising of faculty members, students and researchers. All users of the library must register to use the library resources. The library requires its users to register in order to identify those persons who have the right to use the library, to give a user some special form of identification, to allow the charging out of materials, and to facilitate the issuance of letter of introduction to other libraries. The registration fee presently is N500 (Five hundred Naria). Staff registration and identity card is valid for a period of five years; whereas that of students is renewable every year. The borrower's tickets of all patrons expire yearly and are renewable each academic session. It is not transferable to another person.

Patrons are given Koha Online registration form, and borrowers' tickets to fill. This form contains basic information about the users, such as name of the students or staff, faculty, department, date of birth, gender amongst others. All the forms and cards are filled and duly signed by the student or staff, and their Head of Department/Dean of the Faculty identify them. Upon completion, the form is returned to the circulation department where it is processed. When the user is fully registered, he is issued with borrowers' ticket which entitles him to borrow whenever he so desires. A fully registered member is also issued with an identity card with which he is allowed to use the library.

- **Charging of the Library Materials to the Registered Patrons:**

Charging according to Reitz (2004) is defined as record the Loan of a book or other items from the circulation collection of a library. He further defined discharging as cancelling the record of a loan upon return of the borrowed item and payment of any overdue fine. It also refers to the library's record of such a transaction, including the identity of the borrower, the title, and call number of the item and its due date. Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library lends library materials to its users.

- **Charging System in Use in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library**

Out of numerous charging systems such as automated circulation control systems, KOHA circulation charging system, Manual circulation control system, the Newark system, the Gaylord system and Browne Issue system, FANL uses modified Browne\KOHA online charging system. Under the Browne Charging system, each library book on the shelf is equipped with a date due slip and a book pocket with two book cards inside it. The book pocket and book cards bear the call number, accession number, author and title of the book for identification. It also has column for borrower's name and department. Each reader has a number of borrower's tickets which bear the user's name, address, phone number, e-mail

address and the date of validity of the tickets.

- **Borrowing\Charging**: The library user searches for needed book(s) from the OPAC/Manual catalogue cabinet through the author, title or subject catalogue, ISBN by copying the call/location number or other vital information and moves to the stacks area either Arts or Science reading halls where books are shelved according to class number. The user selects the book(s) he/she wants to borrow from the shelves with the aid of class number from the catalogue and the shelf guide pasted on each shelf. Patron presents his/her library identity card and borrower's ticket at the circulation desk for verification. The borrower fills inside the two book cards and a date due slip, his\her name and department. Circulation staff checks whether the user can still borrow additional books or has outstanding overdue book(s) not yet returned. Sequel to that, the circulation assistant stamps the date due on the date due cards and date due slip of the particular book and hands it over to the borrower
- **Filling of Cards:** The assistant brings the blue date due card, puts it inside a borrower's ticket and files them in chronological order on the loan tray. (Considering the date due first before alphabetical order while filing). He then files the white date due card separately on another loan tray in (A-Z) alphabetical order (Adeoti-Adekeye 2005).

Number of Books Chargeable:

The number of books that can be borrowed varies depending on the status of the user. At the FAN Library for instance, undergraduate and postgraduate students are allowed a maximum of two (2) books at a time for fourteen days (two weeks) while lecturers and other senior staff can borrow four books for period of one month (30) days). Junior staff are entitled to two books for period of fourteen days (two weeks). The reason for setting limits on the number of books that can be borrowed and length of time a borrower can keep library material(s) is to make the limited materials available to as many users as possible.

- **Discharging of Returned Book:**

When a book is returned, the circulation assistant examines the returned book(s) thoroughly to see whether there was any damage. The assistant then looks at the date due slip of the book to know the date the book was due. In the case of an overdue, a fine is imposed on the reader. The assistant then traces the borrower's ticket holding the particular book card from the loan tray under the appropriate date. When he/she finds it, he removes the ticket with the book card from the loan tray. The same process is followed for the white book cards trays. When these details are in order, he then disengages the book card from the reader's borrower ticket and cancel the date due in both book cards and date due slip. He places the blue and white cards into the

book pocket of the particular book, and gives the reader his or her borrower's ticket.

- **Overdue Fines and Notices:**

  Books borrowed must be returned promptly on the due date. When an overdue material is identified, notice is usually sent to the borrower. If the borrower does not respond to the first notice, second and third notices may be sent after which the accrued fine is calculated and the borrower is requested to pay. A fine of twenty naira (N20.00) per day per item is charged on an overdue item on students and junior staff, and fifty naira (N50.00) fine on lecturer and non teaching senior staff. Two days of grace may be given to the defaulter who returns his\her overdue book(s) on or before seven days. Imposed fine is meant to discourage unnecessary delay of library materials so that other users will have access to them. Constant request for books on loan may warrant recall. Such materials are placed on reserve. The essence is to stop the current user from renewing the item and to ensure that every library user can have access to them.

- **Processing Reservations:**

Users often request that material(s) be held for them after they have been returned by another borrower. Users are usually requested to fill out a reserve request form and when the borrowed is returned, the user is informed through his contact address or phone and the book is set aside and held until it is picked by the user who has requested for it. The book cannot be reserved for more than two weeks.

- **Collecting Statistics on Library Use:**

For the purpose of annual reports and self evaluation, Festus Aghabo Nwako Library Unizik, Awka embarks on taking statistics of users and of stocks. Statistics is normally taken on daily basis, which in turn makes it easy to arrive at yearly figures. Library statistics helps the library to know the number of registered users and number of users in the library within a day, week, month and year and also the number of materials consulted and actually borrowed. In other words, patron transactions and materials checked out are recorded. The number of over used or damaged books sent to the Bindery Section, and replaced books are recorded. This enables the Library Management to determine the strengths and weaknesses of its collection.

- **Shelving and Shelf Reading of Consulted/Returned Materials**

When loaned materials are returned to the circulation desk, and when the library books that have been consulted are left on the tables, they are re shelved if no requests have been made for such books. There is also general shelf maintenance through shelf reading by the staff of various departments of the library. Shelf reading is the act

of shelving books on the shelf according to their call-numbers. It is a routine work done every morning by every staff of the library before retiring to one's department. In the process, all the overused or damaged books are retrieved, recorded and send to the Bindery Department for necessary repairs.

- **Attending to External Users of the Library:** The external readers may on the presentation of identification card and an introduction letter from their various institutions be allowed to use the Library. The bearer must have been cleared by the library porter\security who would have referred him to the Circulation Librarian for endorsement. An external user may apply for external reader membership to the University Librarian through the Circulation Librarian. Such reader could be registered only by the approval of the University Librarian.

Clearance of Library Users:

It is the duty of the Circulation Department to clear the library user/patrons after making use of the library. The clearance is in two stages. One is clearing users or patrons after making use of the library for the day. The user is thoroughly searched by the porters/security before leaving the library. This is to ascertain whether the user is going out with any of the library materials intentionally or perhaps by mistake. The second phase is after graduation or retirement of a staff of the university. Clearance certificate is issued when the user is cleared.

Challenges of the Circulation Department

Staffing: Presently, the department is understaffed. The same group of staff are expected to charge and discharge books, file book on loan cards, write overdue and reminder notices to library defaulters, gather consulted books from the reading halls and shelve them. They also take daily statistics, register users and answer simple user enquiries.

Mutilation/Theft of Library Materials:

This is a serious antisocial behavior which impairs the use library books both for present and future generation of library users. When a vital page of a book is torn, the usefulness of such materials is affected. The library has equally lost some its valuable book as a result of book theft.

Overdue Cases in the Circulation Department:

This refers to library patrons who fail to return books they borrowed despite the numerous overdue notices sent to them. A lot of library books are held by such defaulters. Some of the patrons refuse to pay overdue fine until they either retire as staff or about to graduate as students.

Impersonation of Borrowers: This refers to a situation where a library borrower uses another person's identity card and borrower's ticket to borrow books. Sometimes dubious readers superimpose their passport photograph on top of another reader's identity card and forged borrower ticket. Such defaulters are severely punished.

Filing of Book Cards in the Loans Trays: Some circulation staff are reluctant to file book cards in loan trays accordingly. After filing the blue book cards with their borrower's tickets chronologically by author and according to date due, some circulation staff fail or forget to file the white book cards in a separate loan tray meant for white book cards. Failure to withdraw the white book cards by some staff while discharging books on loan from loan tray affects keeping of accurate statistics.

Non Existence of Ramp, for Physically Challenged Patrons and Library Book Trolley:

Non existence of ramp specially meant for physically challenged readers and lack of trolley for carrying books from circulation department to the reading halls upstairs is a serious setback in circulation service of Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library. Physically challenged persons cannot enter the library with their wheel chairs through the normal stair case. Similarly library staff find it difficult using trolley to carry books to the reading halls due to non existence of the ramp.

Photocopy Services in the Library: The library users always wish to photocopy some vital information from library materials. Sometimes, they cannot do so because of power failure. Mischievous persons have capitalized on such situation to vandalize library materials.

Binding and Maintenance of Library Books:

Damaged books sent to the library are not returned on time because the library has few binders. The long delay of books in the bindery section hinders the use of such books.

Koha-Integrated Library System (ILS)

The Koha-ILS has not been fully integrated into the Circulation Department services because of some logistic problems. As a result circulation services in the library in not fully automated. The KOHA-generated ID card production is on-going but still faces the following challenges:

i. The production process is not fully automated and therefore takes a lot of time.
ii. Insufficient personnel in the production unit to handle the different processes.
iii. The consumables (ink) of the ID card printer currently in use are costly causing high cost of production.
iv. The capacity of ID card printer already in use can only produce one card at once therefore causes a lot of delay in issuing cards to numerous registered patrons.

Suggested Strategies to Meet the Challenges:

Towards overcoming the above challenges, the following strategies were suggested:

- The University Librarian in collaboration with the library management should inform the University management about the various challenges of the library.
- More staff should be employed for the

Circulation Department.

- New staff of the library involved in circulation services should be trained.
- The rate of mutilation and theft of library materials is on the increase. This paper recommends the deployment of CCTV in the various sections of the library.
- Both industrial training (IT) students, staff of the library, and the entire university community should compulsorily submit for security search before leaving the library.
- Multiple entrances in the library should be closed henceforth for proper security of library materials.
- Modern sophisticated photocopy machine and standby generator should be provided in the library for quick and urgent services. This will reduce the rate of theft in the library.
- Books sent to the Bindery section should be given urgent attention by the binders to avoid undue delay at the Bindery section. To this effect professional book binders should be employed to head and reorganize the bindery section of the library.
- Library Management should insist through University Management that all heads of Departments, Deans of Faculties, Director of School of Post Graduate Studies and other directors should subject their graduated students to library clearance before degree or certificates are issued to them.
- Ramp stare case should be constructed for physical challenged patrons. This is to enable them enter the library using their wheel chairs inside the library halls and circulation unit. The ramp will also enable library staff to carry library books with relative ease.

Conclusion

Circulation Department is the image maker of the library system. It is an essential public service unit if the library which cannot be neglected. Urgent step should be taken to revive the circulation services of Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library of Nnamdi Azikiwe Azikiwe University, Awka.

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