

Circulation Activities In Tertiary Institutions In Nigeria: A Discourse On Circulation Transactions Of Yaba College Of Technology Library

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Abstract

Circulation of Library materials is central and imperative in every Library operation. This study looks into the activities that make up circulation of Library materials, and discusses the processes and procedures for the registration of Library clientele, charging and discharging services, statistical records of books discharged. The study reviewed how this has impacted on the Circulation services in the Library noting the advantages and. Concludes that circulation activities reflect, compliment and promote the services and image of the Library and need to be given priority attention and manned by competent staff.

Keywords: Circulation services, library materials, books discharge, clientele

1. Introduction

The hallmark of Library service is the aggregation and dissemination of materials containing information. Matthew and Okeagu (2009) pointed out in relation to the late President Yar'adua's Seven Point Agenda that the key to the success of the agenda is knowledge. They added that "once knowledge is discovered and made public, with the Library facilitating, there is no marginal cost to sharing it with more users. There is this common saying that knowledge is power. However, knowledge that is domicile in an individual and not made public is useless.

In his description of the position of the academic Library in the present information age, Omekwu (2010) stated that academic Libraries are critically situated in the environment of global change and transformation. This statement underscores the roles of academic Libraries and Libraries in general at a time and age of globalization. Echezona (2007) support the description that information dissemination or communication is a need comparable with other basic human needs. In essence, an uninformed person, to put it mildly is "half alive" or not living fully if not a living corpse.

The beauty of Library operations is not only in the ability to provide needed and useful materials containing information for the community, but also to be able to make them accessible to the clientele as and when needed, which is what circulation is all about. Anunobi and Moneke (2008) expressed the opinion that when the needed resources are provided, it is necessary that they are fully exploited through effective use within or outside the library. They went further to say that the effective use outside the Library requires an acceptable lending arrangement. They referred to the publication of the Library Association of 1992 which emphasized that academic Library services should be designed in a way that the bulk of the resources should be available for loan to staff and students in quantity and for the period commensurate with their different needs.

Though circulation section is the first port of call in any Library, there has been no detailed publication about the transactions that transpire therein. It is as a result of this absence of adequate documented record that ignited the desire for this paper to serve a reference for practicing and up-and-coming Librarians and the general public.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Wikipedia (2012) stated that library circulation or library lending comprises the activities around the lending of Library books and other materials to users of a lending Library. A circulation or lending department is one key departments of a Library." It further stated that "the main public service point is the

circulation desk or loans desk, usually found near the main entrance of the Library. However, the transactions of this section have not enjoyed wide coverage in many professional journals like other operations of the library such as cataloguing and classification, serials, reference service, information and Communication Technology etc. thus, little has been published about this important section of the Library. Literature further reveal that the activities of this section is either mentioned in passing or captured under the general discussion on Readers' or Reference Services. In recognizing the importance of the services of the circulation section of the Library, Olamigoke (1999) further agreed with the assertion of Wikipedia that traditionally, the circulation and reference desks are Library patrons' first points of call for information and enquiries. As the first port of call, the responsibility of projecting the image of the Library in good light rests squarely on the staff at the circulation desk. This requires good human relations.

Alokun, (2003) identified the enormity of this responsibility when he expressed the opinion that a Library is supposed to be readers' oriented and users' friendly and Library services are supposed to focus on users' needs that it is the responsibility of the Library to strive and satisfy those needs promptly. The emphasis on "needs" above refers to information relevant to Library patrons contained in the resources of the Library. Madukoma (2011) referred to the description of information by karki (2006) who described it as a power resource as equal to other natural resources. In many cases, it is more important than other resources. The possibility of adequately delivering service as pointed out above commences from the circulation desk. It is often said that first impression lasts long; the circulation desk therefore, should be handled by competent staff that have good communication and human relation skills and a friendly disposition. The efficacy of service delivery at the circulation desk has been greatly enhanced by the presence of the current obtainable and available technologies.

Uhegbu and Unagha (2007), added their voice to the importance of these technologies by saying today, globalization, new information and communication order, information and communication technology and millennium development goals (MDGS) have contributed immensely in reshaping, redirecting and refocusing public Library services and operations. It suffices to say that these technologies have as well affected academic Library services and operations likewise.

CIRCULATION ROUTINES

There are numerous types of circulation control in use in different types of Library depending largely on size and convenience. Prominent among these are the following: the Browne, system, the Newark system, the Ledger system and the book Card system. The Library under study uses the Newark system which provides that the borrower tenders his/her registration card, collects and completes the borrowers' cards and slips at the circulation desk.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CIRCULATION TRANSACTIONS SYSTEM

For a circulation system to be functional and effective, it must address the followings:

1. charging and discharging of materials timely and with ease
2. show the eligibility of a borrower to enjoy the facility
3. facilitate overdue alert and notices of return
4. work out overdue fine when overdue books are returned
5. provide for the reservation of books in high demand
6. keeping statistical records of discharged books and registered users

These range of services are carried out at the circulation desk of Yaba College of Technology Library are hereby discussed in detail.

FUNCTIONS OF THE CIRCULATION DESK STAFF

Circulation desks officers in the library perform multifarious duties which include but not limited to those identified by Wikipedia (2012) below:

- Lending materials to Library users
- Checking in materials returned
- Monitoring materials for damage and routing them to appropriate staff for repair or replacement
- Troubleshooting circulation technology, i.e. Library circulation software, scanners, printers etc.
- Collecting statistics on Library use, i.e. patron transactions, material checkouts, etc.

REGISTRATION OF USERS: PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

In every Library, there are ways through which users are admitted and granted access to the resources

therein. These vary to some extent from one Library to the other. This discussion borders on the ways by which Yaba College of Technology's Library carries out the user registration. The College community comprises various categories of users who are registered under terms relating to their categories. These categories of users include: Staff, Students (Full Time and Part Time) and External Users (Researchers). The registration requirements and procedures of the categories listed above are described as follows:

REGISTRATION OF STAFF

Registration is not compulsory to members of staff but any staff of the institution that desires to register with the Library must be on permanent appointment with the College. He/she is required to submit a photocopy of his/her letter of appointment to the Readers' Services Librarian who approves and endorses it and passes it on to the Circulation Librarian for registration. The staff is then issued with the Library Registration Card to complete, sign and stamp with his/her Head of Department and a guarantor who must be a staff of the College. Having completed the processes, the staff returns the card to the Circulation Desk with two (2) identical passport size photographs for the issuance of identity card. This will enable him/her to borrow a maximum of six (6) books from the Library for a period not exceeding (4) weeks.

STUDENTS REGISTRATION

There are two types of students' registration, namely: returning and new students.

REGISTRATION OF RETURNING STUDENTS

They are expected to renew or regularize their registration at the inception of their second year, this involves the following steps:

- Present the Library identity card issued during the first registration to the staff at the circulation desk.
- Collect previous Library registration card
- Validate it with the HOD's signature and stamp
- Return it to the circulation desk for filing

In case the returning student failed to register in the course of his/her first session and desires to do so at the beginning of the second year, he/she is required to tender the receipts of payment of school fees of the first semester of the first year alongside that of the second year with the bank teller to the staff at the circulation desk. The student is then issued a registration card to complete sign and stamp with his/her Head of Department and a guarantor who must be a current staff of the College. Having fulfilled this condition the card is returned to the circulation desk with three (3) identical passport size photographs, he/she obtains a white Library identity card to fill and immediately return it and then come back for the laminated card within a week.

REGISTRATION OF NEW STUDENTS

This set of students' registration procedure is largely the same as that of the returning student that failed to register in the first year. The difference being that, since they are new, it is required that they present their school fees receipt or bank teller (original) with the original print out of their course form which are endorsed and other processes follow as discussed under returning students above.

REGISTRATION OF EXTERNAL USERS

Library services are extended to external users/ researchers who are neither student nor staff of the College. This group is required to pay a token to enable them have access to the Library and the materials therein. The token will depend on the length of time the user/ researcher intends to use the Library. Their registration is done at the Polytechnic Librarian's Office. After paying the token, a temporary pass that expires with the time frame applied for is issued to the researcher.

LOSS OF LIBRARY IDENTITY CARD

Reports of loss of Library identity cards are made by students at the circulation desk daily because the circulation Librarian is responsible for the replacement of lost Library identity card on the following terms:

- That the student presents a sworn affidavit and or a Police report to that effect
- Prove of payment for replacement from the Polytechnic Librarian's office and
- Provision of a recent passport size photograph

After fulfilling the above terms, the student is issued another white identity card to complete and told

either to wait and collect the replacement or return for it later.

CLEARANCE OF GRADUATES AND RETIRED OR SEVERED STAFF

As the custodian of the records of patrons, the responsibility to absolve them of any indebtedness rests with the circulation section. This accounts for the Polytechnic Librarian routing such requests from the Registry to the Circulation Librarian. This implies that, before any graduate, retiree or severed or late staff can be cleared to collect certificate or entitlement as the case may be, the records of the Library must be checked to declare them not guilty of indebtedness concerning Library property which falls under the jurisdiction of the circulation section.

KEEPING OF STATISTICAL RECORDS

The circulation desk keeps and maintains the statistical records of the following Library services involve books borrowed, register of full time and part time students, register of staff, cleared Graduates and overdue books. The statistical records listed below are kept for this purposes.

STATISTICAL RECORDS AND THEIR PURPOSES

TITLE OF RECORD	PURPOSE(S)
Books borrowed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to show the total number of books borrowed periodically 2. to show the subject area(s) where books are more frequently borrowed
Registration of Full Time & Part Time Students and staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to know the total number of fresh students registered 2. to know the total number of returning students that renewed their registration
Clearance of Graduates and Retired or severed or Late Staff	To show the number of cleared graduates and staff who are not indebted to the Library
Overdue books	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To show the record of books in the custody of Library clientele 2. to show the date due and the period the book is overdue in order to determine the fine

Fig 1

PROCEDURE FOR CHARGING, RENEWAL AND DISCHARGING OF LIBRARY BOOKS

Libraries formulate policies that guide their operations. Like other Library operations, charging, renewal and discharging of Library stock are guided by certain policies in order to enable the Library provide timely and efficient circulation services and prevent loss of materials. Among the policies of the Library relating to charging, renewal and discharging are the following:

- that registration with the Library is a prerequisite for the eligibility of a user to lend Library materials
- that the category of a user determines the number of books he/she can borrow
- that the category of a user also determines the length of time he/she qualifies to keep the borrowed material in his/her custody
- that at the expiration of the lending period (date due), the borrower is expected to return or renew the material in his or her possession
- that materials to be borrowed must be in good condition and must similarly be returned in good condition etc.

Each of the aforementioned services is hereunder discussed.

CHARGING OF BOOKS

This term is used interchangeably with lending or loans. It refers to the loaning out of Library resources particularly books to users who require them outside the walls of the Library. The processes involved in

charging of books in the Library under study are as follows:

1. the user identifies and retrieves the material(s) from the shelf of the Library
2. the user identifies and retrieves the material(s) from the shelf of the Library
3. he/she brings it/them to the circulation desk along with the Library identity card for students but staff are attended to on personal identification provided he/she is registered
4. the staff on duty certifies the fitness of the material for lending and
5. issues borrowers' slip(s) and the book (pink) card(s)
6. patron completes the slip(s) and the book card(s)
7. staff stamps the material(s) - slip(s) and the book card(s) with the date due stamp then releases them to the borrower and files the slips behind the borrowers registration card.

RENEWAL OF BORROWED BOOKS

This involves the borrower bringing back the material(s) he/she has borrowed to the circulation desk, and requesting that it/they be renewed.

The staff attending to him/her will check the records and retrieve the borrower's slip(s) and book card(s), discharge it/them and charge them out again stamping it/them with a new date due. The design of the slip provides borrowers with three renewal opportunities, though that does not restrict them from coming to renew subsequently as long as there is no request for the material from other users.

DISCHARGING OF BOOKS

Books are discharged when a borrower returns them to the circulation desk on or before the date due without requesting for renewal. Before discharging a book, the actions below are observed for the safety of the book:

- borrower must tender his/her Library Identity card if he/she is a student
- staff on duty examines the book to ensure that it is returned in good condition
- retrieves the borrower's slip(s) and book card(s)
- Ascertain the date due and crosses it out in the presence of the borrower.
- If overdue, fine is calculated for the defaulter
- If it is for renewal, it will first be discharged and then charged out
- If returned, the book card is inserted in the book pocket and the book is passed to the stack for onward transmission to the shelves

BOOK RESERVATION

At the circulation desk, books are reserved if there is request for it. Books are sometime recalled from borrowers if there is need for it.

FILING OF RECORDS

The records that are kept at the circulation desk include: users' registration cards book/pink cards and book/borrower slips. These are filed in trays in ways that facilitate easy and quick access for the staff. Each of these is filed as discussed below.

USERS' REGISTRATION CARDS

These are cards that show data of registered users. They reflect details about the patron in relation to their name, address, department, course of study and school among other details. They are filed first, according to department in alphabetical order and under each department; every registered patron's card is filed alphabetically by surname.

BOOK/PINK CARDS

These are cards that are attached to each processed Library book and it contains the relevant bibliographic details of the book. Provision is made for date due stamp on the card to enable the circulation desk monitor defaulters. They are filed chronologically by accession number irrespective of the date due on them.

BOOK/BORROWER SLIPS

The Library uses the Newark system in the loaning out of its materials whereby book slips are in the custody of the Library and dispensed to borrowers as and when the need arises, as against the Browne style which dispenses borrowers' slips to users pending the need for them. In other word, in the Newark system, the Library holds the book slips and gives them to borrowers when they want borrow materials, while the Browne system gives them to users in anticipation of the need for them. The book slip is issued

to a user at the circulation desk at the point of borrowing a book(s) so as to capture details of the book(s) and that of a user who wants to borrow from the Library. The slips, when completed are filed behind the registration card of the borrower.

IMPACT OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY ON CIRCULATION ACTIVITIES

Technology has helped to enhance the library system; library operations such as circulation, cataloging, acquisitions, and serials have changed significantly due to technology. Circulation control is often the first activity a library considers automating. In addition to loan transactions, an automated circulation system can perform the following tasks: tracking of circulation materials, checking for excessive number of books checked out, detecting delinquent borrowers, printing out overdue notices, printing out fine statements, enabling rapid access to location or status of items, preparing statistical data of circulation activities, and providing a multiple branch libraries network support.

Omekwu (2010) stated that the duality operates in traditional and technological paradigms, explaining that the technological paradigm Is not limited by time and space but rather seamless, dynamic, interactive and integrative and that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the engine that creates the seamless, dynamic, interactive and integrative capacities and possibilities. ICT is a broad term that covers wide range of technologies. It is the convergence of computers, communication and microelectronic-based techniques.

The technologies and devices like Radio, Telephone, Telegraph, Fax, TV, Telephone, Mobile phone, Internet, WWW, Email, LAN, ISDN, Videoconference and Satellite communication Techniques are major part of the ICT. With the help of LAN, Yaba College of Technology library easily shares the information base on the facilities. Telephone and another device play important role in library services like SDI, Inter library loan, reference services, and online information retrieval. ISDN has increased the capacity for data transmission which facilitated introduction of new services such as E-mail, Fax etc. Cheaper data storage media has increased the storage capacity of libraries. The Library is no exception to this development. There are avalanche of software packages designed to cater for Library operations. Each of these software packages seeks to provide convenience in Library services.

Components of ICT as it relate to circulation activities

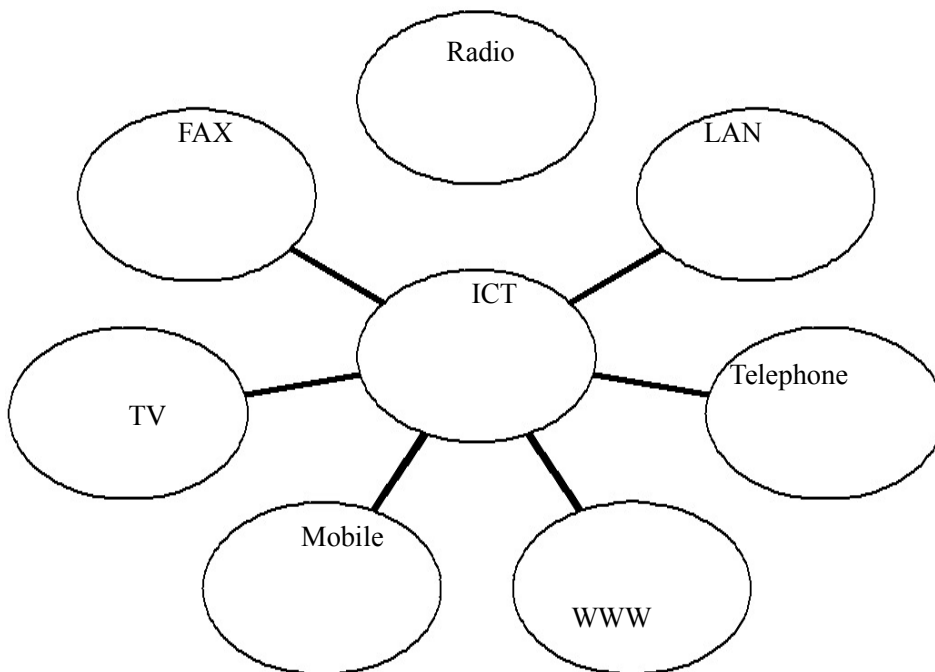


Fig.2 Components and Devices of ICT in the library

Asides other operations of the Library that have been transformed by the use of computer technology, ICT have also made circulation of materials easier and faster both for the staff and clientele of the Library. Yaba College of Technology subscribes to and uses the LibPlus Library Manager Software package. This software has been integrated into Newark system.

CHALLENGES

Every service has its attendant challenges which are appreciated by the operators or providers of such services. Circulation transactions are therefore not exempted from challenges relating to the service provided. These challenges include but not limited to the following:

- a. The pressure of work during the period of students' registration creates avenue for avoidable errors like improper and or incomplete documentation
- b. Filling errors occur when a user's registration card is filled under a department different from his or hers, which often times occur during registration period
- c. Redeployment of registered staff is a challenge because, the Library is not usually carried along by the College and the concerned staff so as to update the record accordingly in preparation for the users future transactions with the Library
- d. Harassment of circulation staff by some clientele who deliberately refuse to understand and comply with relevant Library rules.
- e. Failure of some students to register with the Library within the stipulated time and their desire to use the Library as their registered colleagues thereby causing unnecessary stress
- f. Loss of book or pink cards (either deliberately removed or it fell off) prevents charging out of such books as and when the users need them

CONCLUSION

The circulation desk, as the public relation section of the Library, plays a frontline and pivotal role in promoting its image. Through this section, Library operations are made accessible to the general public. It therefore follows that the sensitive nature of this section requires competent man power to operate it. The need to equip it adequately need not be overemphasized. Nevertheless, the available facilities at the circulation desk of the College Library have to a very large extent enable the staff attends to the clientele adequately. It is often said that Oliver Twist is never satisfied, which accounts for saying that there are still lots to put in place to take the circulation desk to the higher level, particularly in the area of electronics, exemplified by the presence of functional Information and Communication Technology equipment.

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