



## Shelving Difficulties, Shelf Reading, And Shelving Staff At Academic Libraries in Kwara State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines shelves, shelf reading, and the challenges faced by shelf staff in four (4) academic libraries in Kwara State, Nigeria. A questionnaire was developed and used to extract data from various respondents. The results show that a majority of 48 (100%) respondents see shelving as inevitable in library practice. These institutions are the University of Ilorin, Ilorin; Kwara State University, Ilorin; Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin; and the College of Education, Ilorin. Sixty (60) copies of the questionnaire, i.e., fifteen (15) copies for each establishment, were given to the selected shelf staff in each case. Kwara State University has delivered ten (10) copies of the completed and usable questionnaire, Kwara State Polytechnic has delivered fourteen (14) copies, the University of Ilorin returned fourteen (14) copies, and the College of Education Ilorin returned ten (10) copies. The overall response rate was 48 out of 60, representing 80%. However, 34 participants (71%) saw the need to employ additional shelves, and 31 participants (65%) expressed dissatisfaction with users' arbitrary retrieval of books from shelves, along with frequent disorganization of shelves, as 42 participants (88%), while 37 respondents (77%) emphasized user boycott of the library catalog in retrieval of materials, among other challenges identified. Recommendations were made for improvement.*

**Keywords:** *shelves, shelf reading, challenges, Nigerian academic libraries*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a number of state, federal, and private universities associated with academic libraries. Academic libraries provide literature support to aid learning, teaching and research. They are referred to as the heart or nerve center of institutions of higher learning, where all academic activities revolve. Many academic libraries in Nigeria are experiencing difficulty shelving their books due to heavy usage and a lack of staff. It is not uncommon to see the book shelves disorganized and untidy. This study aims to examine the challenges faced by library staff involved in shelving and shelf-reading.

Academic libraries are libraries attached to institutions of higher education such as universities, technical institutes, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, and colleges to support the teaching and research mission in order to support teaching, learning, and research (2005). Singh and Kaur (2009) emphasized that technology as well as research institutes are referred to as the heart centers of parent institutions. Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities, which comprise students, lecturers, and researchers, in order to support their teaching, learning, and research needs. Scholars have emphasized 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 center 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 any 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) argue that many academic libraries in Nigeria are experiencing difficulty shelving their books due to heavy usage and a lack of staff. Thus, it is not uncommon to see the book shelves disorganized and untidy. Staff attitude, coupled with the boring routine task of shelving, is often cited as the reason behind this problem. (Aliero, 2003). Attitude is often described as inclinations, feelings, prejudices, preconceived notions, fears, and convictions about a specific issue (Taiwo, 1998). The aim of this study is to examine the challenges faced by library staff members who are involved in shelving and shelf-reading are to establish their strengths and weaknesses, as the case may be, and to proffer appropriate recommendations for improvement.

### Definition of terms

The following recurrent terms are defined for clarity:

Shelving, Shelf Reading, Shelving Staff, and Challenges

- a. shelving: the act of organizing books by call numbers in sequential order and placing them on the library shelves in their proper locations.
- b. Shelf Reading: the process of going through the library's collections to see if any books are incorrectly shelved, missing, or stolen. Shelf reading has saved libraries a great deal of time and resources by locating books that may have otherwise been lost.
- c. Shelving staff: library staff members who are actively 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 library staff members are involved.
- d. Challenges: difficulties encountered by shelving staff in the course of carrying out shelving duties.

**Table 1: Respondent Gender Distribution**

Institutions	Response rate	Gender/Frequency	Percentage (%)
University of Ilorin	14	M. 7. F. 7	29
Kwara State University	10	M. 6. F. 4	21
Kwara State Polytechnic	14	M. 7. F. 7	29
Kwara state College of Education	10	M 4. F. 6	21
Total	48	24. 24	100

**Table 2: How Often Do You Shelve in Your Library?**

S/N	Institutions	Once daily	Twice daily	Once a week
1	University of Ilorin	3	9	2
2	Kwara State University, Malete	1	8	1
3	Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin	3	11	-
4	Kwara State college of Education, Ilorin	2	8	-
	Total	9(19%)	36(75%)	3(6%)

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading on the shelves is the process of reading the call numbers on the books in the library and making sure that they are in the correct order. Shelving has been described as organizing books by contact numbers and placing them in their correct places on library shelves. The act of reading on the shelf varies from library to library. Reading shelves and racks can be brutal and boring, and because it is a chore, employees can develop a negative attitude towards it. Bauer (1999) noted that library users' perception of shelving staff as lower in the hierarchy of library staff can also influence their attitude.

The literature abounds with library-related aspects, such as the organization of library resources or the use of classification schemes in resource management. However, the current resources on the shelves, the reading on the shelves, and the challenges it faces seem scarce. Shelving has been described as the process of organizing books by contact numbers and placing them in their correct places on library shelves, while reading on the shelf is the process of reading the call numbers on the books currently on the shelves of the library and making sure that they are in the correct order. Agboola (1984) remarked that shelving is a crucial component of a library's job that can decide users' happiness or frustration with regard to accessing library items, emphasizing the importance of these two basic activities in the routine of the library.

Importing shelves and reading shelves cannot be overstated in terms of how they have assisted countless patrons in finding books by keeping collections tidy and organized. Reading on the shelves undoubtedly helps to discover books out of order by Library of Congress contact number, address, etc.; put

books on shelves in the wrong place; books placed on top of other books outside of ledgers, or books that have fallen behind a row of books on a shelf; books with damaged or missing call number labels; and possibly books on the shelves in the collection are owned by another library. While shelf reading statistics are kept differently in each library, the act of reading on the shelf varies only slightly from library to library. Rack reading is an integral part of maintaining any kit. The number of times the set should be read on the shelf is determined by its size and how frequently it is used by the patrons. Reading on the shelves helps keep the number of missing books low and makes it easier for patrons to find books that should be in the library. Reading the shelf also helps give the set a professional look and helps prevent set damage.

On the other hand, Lyons and Rutherford (1998) have pointed out that shelves are critical to the success of library service delivery strategies. Hence, correct, accurate, and readable shelves on shelves maintain customer confidence. In most libraries in developing countries, junior staff put books on the shelves. Agboola (1984) acknowledged that in Nigerian libraries, books are stored by junior library staff under the supervision of professional librarians. In developing countries, part-time employees store books on shelves (Rodgers, 1998).

However, reading shelves and racks can be brutal and boring, and because it is a chore, employees can develop a negative attitude towards it. Bauer (1999) noted that library users' perception of shelving staff as lower in the hierarchy of library staff can also influence their attitude. Bauer further emphasized that because racking is time-consuming and involves repetitive tasks, it requires motivated employees to do the job very well. In line with the above, Aliero (2003) claimed that most unsuitable shelves are done by the library staff themselves. He highlighted a number of reasons, including ignorance, indifference, lack of supervision, lack of employment, and lack of motivation. Perception of shelving staff as lower in the hierarchy of library staff can also influence their attitude. Bauer further emphasized that because racking is time-consuming and involves repetitive tasks, it requires motivated employees to do the job very well. In line with the above, Aliero (2003) claimed that most unsuitable shelves are done by the library staff themselves. He highlighted a number of reasons, including ignorance, indifference, lack of supervision, lack of employment, and lack of motivation.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To study the frequency of use of shelves in the academic libraries that was sampled.
2. To check the frequency of reading on the shelf in selected academic libraries.
3. To identify the challenges facing workers on the shelves and
4. To suggest ways to mitigate challenges to improve performance

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

Four academic libraries in Kwara State, Nigeria, were used for this study. All regular library employees from institutions that participate in reading shelves participated. Sixty (60) copies of the questionnaires were given, but forty-eight (48) were found to be usable.

#### **Analyze the data and highlight the results.**

Most libraries sampled from shelves twice daily, in the morning and afternoon. Ilorin University and Kwara State Polytechnic have equal number of shelves for males and females. There is a gender balance (24 males and 24 females) on the shelves overall in the four tertiary institutions surveyed.

Table 1 show that Ilorin University and Kwara State Polytechnic have an equal number of shelves for males and females in their libraries. However, there is a gender balance (24 males and 24 females) on the shelves overall in the four tertiary institutions surveyed.

Table 2 shows that most libraries sampled from shelves twice daily, in the morning and afternoon, where 36 (75%) out of 48 answers indicated, while 9 (19%) are stored once per day and only 3 (6%) are stored once a week.

Table 3 shows that 6 (12.5%) of the respondents claimed that they had not been trained in how to rack and read on the shelves when taking over the service, while 42 (87.5%) admitted their training.

Table 4 indicates that 43 (90%) of the respondents read the shelves every semester, while 5 (10%) of the respondents claim that they read each session.

Table 5 shows that respondents (Shelvers) realize the importance of shelf reading in library practice with all 48 respondents (100%) stating that reading on the shelf is very important and no one disputes it.

Table 6 revealed the challenges faced by the shelving staff while unloading their daily routine on the shelves as detailed and discussed as follows:

**TABLE 3: WERE YOU TEACHED/TRAINED HOW TO SHELVE AND SHELF READ ON DUTY?**

S/N	Institution	Yes	No
1	University of Ilorin	12	2
2	Kwara State University, Maletе	9	1
3	Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin	13	1
4	Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin	8	2
	Total	42(87.5%)	6(12.5%)

**Table 4: How Frequently Do You Shelf Read in Your Library?**

S/N	Institutions	Every semester	Every session	Annually
1	University of Ilorin	14	-	-
2	Kwara State University, Maletе	10	-	-
3	Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin	10	4	-
4	Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin	9	1	-
	Total	43 (90%)	5 (10%)	-

**Table 5: How important is Shelf Reading in Library Practice?**

S/N	Institutions	Very important	Not important
1	University of Ilorin	14	-
2	Kwara State University, Maletе	10	-
3	Learn State Polytechnic, Ilorin	14	-
4	Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin	10	-
	Total	48 (100%)	-

#### IV. Discussion:

The study shows that shelves are open mostly twice daily, that is, in the morning and afternoon. A number of challenges were identified, ranging from a shortage of shelving staff to frequent disorganization of shelves by users. The study equally revealed that supervision by senior staff members of the library was not commendable.. The study shows clearly that the four tertiary institution libraries sampled, shelves are open mostly twice daily, that is, morning and afternoon, as 36 respondents (75%) of the 48 sample population confirm this activity. On the other hand, 9 respondents (19%) claim that they shelve once daily, and only 3 (6%) agreed to shelve once a week. Also, 42 (87.5%) respondents claimed that they were trained how to shelf on assumption of duty, while 6 respondents (12.5%) claimed not to have undergone such training. Likewise, 43 respondents (90%) embark on shelf reading in their library every semester, while only 5 (10%) do shelf reading every session. Interestingly, 48 respondents (100%) considered shelf reading as being important in library practice, while none of the respondents (0%) disagreed with this claim. Likewise, a number of challenges were identified, ranging from shortage of shelving staff, 34 respondents (71%), frequent disorganization of shelves by users, 42 respondents (88%), and arbitrary retrieval of books by the users from the shelves. 31 respondents (65%) and users' boycott of the library catalog in searching and retrieving library materials, 37 respondents (77%). The study equally revealed that the supervision of shelving staff by the senior staff members of the library was not commendable as expressed by 32 respondents (67%).

**Table 6: What Are the Difficulties You Face as Shelves in Your Library?**

S/N	QUESTIONS	UNILORIN		KWASU		KP		COED		TOTAL/%	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Inadequate shelving personnel	9	5	9	1	9	5	7	3	34(71%)	14(29%)
2	Shelving is rigid and demanding	9	5	8	2	10	4	6	4	33(69%)	15(31%)
3	Shelves are frequently clustered by users	13	1	9	1	12	2	8	2	42(88%)	6(12%)
4	Lack of supervision by senior members of staff	7	7	7	3	10	4	8	2	32(67%)	16(33%)
5	Users' refusal to release books during shelving hours	6	8	5	5	9	5	3	7	23(45%)	25(52%)
6	Users arbitrary retrieval of books from the shelves	7	7	6	4	9	5	9	1	31(65%)	17(35%)
7	Users boycotting library catalog looking for books.	2	12	2	8	4	10	3	7	11(23%)	37(77%)
8	Users subject shelving staff to	3	11	7	3	9	5	7	3	26(54%)	22(46%)

ridicule during shelving.										
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## V. RECOMMENDATION

1. More staff should be recruited and stress the need for accurate and timely shelves. Users, especially students, should be warned against the frequent disorganization of shelves due to poor searching habits. Arbitrary retrieval of books by users from shelves in an attempt to search for information should not be encouraged.
2. Most of the 33 store employees (69%) see it as strict and demanding, which means they are not happy to do so and should be better motivated and encouraged by the usual incentives such as confirmation of appointment and promotion when they are on the job, in addition to training and retraining, and rewarding the most accurate and best staff on the shelves at the end of each year.
3. Users, especially students, should be warned against frequent disorganization of shelves due to poor searching habits and not consult the library catalog for instructions or guides on books of their choice. This can be emphasized during orientation or while teaching library use, as 42 respondents identified this as a challenge.
4. The use of the catalog as a retrieval tool as well as the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) of users should be emphasized at every opportunity given when 32 defendants boycotted the catalog users due to the fact that users already know where books in their domains might be located in the library.
5. Arbitrary retrieval of books by users from shelves in an attempt to search for information should not be encouraged because the library catalogue is not used to link directly to the source and cautioned as 31 respondents claimed that this is a challenge.
6. Shelving supervision by senior staff is commendable and should continue, as 32 respondents confirmed this measure.
7. The Library Administration should consider engaging students from the Library and Information Department to assist in reading shelves and racks, as is the practice in some institutions for a small fee.
8. Shelving staff should be taken care of from a hygienic point of view as they may need to squat, kneel, or sit to read the lower shelf; lift and push heavy books and carts; look up; or stand on small stools to read shelf surfaces etc.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Reading shelves and shelves are two indispensable tasks if we are to maintain order in our academic libraries. Shelving staff can be motivated through on-the-job praise and confirmation of appointment or promotion. Their challenges must also be addressed to serve as a driving force for optimal performance. Users make use of library resources, especially books, on a daily basis, and in some cases during weekends. Therefore, the need to immediately rearrange the consulted material cannot be overestimated or else other users may be denied the opportunity to easily locate and retrieve such material. Thus, shelf workers should be encouraged and motivated not to compromise on this important daily routine, which tells us so much about the value of the library. It is a rule that library users are not allowed to return consulted library materials, therefore, shelves must be ready, and to do with unshelved material is as good as losing it to users. Shelving remains an indispensable condition for the successful use of library resources.

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