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FINE OR FAIR? UNDERSTANDING PATRON PERSPECTIVES ON OVERDUE CHARGES AT VALLEY VIEW UNIVERSITY'S LIBRARY

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Abstract: The circulation section of a library plays a pivotal role as the heart of the library's operations, facilitating the lending of materials to readers. As the primary point of contact for library visitors, it also serves as the institution's public relations department. The courteous and helpful assistance provided by the staff in the circulation section is instrumental in guiding visitors to the materials they seek, making it the face of the library to both the university community and the general public. The lending of library materials for private use is a fundamental service offered by the library, and the circulation section stands as a central hub for this purpose. Frequent visits to the circulation section by library patrons are the norm, as individuals come to borrow materials for their private use. This section of the library is bustling with various essential operations, including new member registration, book lending (charging and discharging), managing reminders for overdue materials, book reservations, membership card renewals, file creation, record keeping, statistical analysis, and interlibrary loan requests. These multifaceted functions collectively contribute to the efficient and effective functioning of the library and its service to the community. This paper delves into the critical role of the circulation section in the library, shedding light on its significance in shaping the library's image and its ability to cater to the diverse needs of its patrons. It emphasizes the operational intricacies and the various services offered by this section, underscoring its indispensable role in ensuring seamless access to library resources for the benefit of both the academic community and the wider public.

Keywords: Circulation section, Library operations, Lending services, Public relations, Library patrons

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Introduction

The circulation section in a library represents the hub or nerve- centre of the library's activities where lending out of materials to readers is facilitated. The circulation section is the first point of contact for anyone visiting the library and for that matter it serves as the Public Relations Department of the Library. Staff receive visitors courteously and assist them in locating the material they need. The circulation section projects the image of the library to the university community as well as the general public. Of all the library activities, the circulation of library materials for private or home use is a key service provided by the library. Almost all the library patrons visit the circulation section frequently or on a regular basis to get materials on loan for private use at one particular time or the other. At the circulation section, various operations are carried out; these include the registration of new members, lending (charging and discharging) of books, serving reminders for overdue books, reservation of books, renewal of membership cards, creating files, keeping records and files, taking statistics, and making interlibrary loan requests.

When library materials are not returned promptly, other library users cannot access them on demand. It is therefore essential just as it is mandatory that library materials are returned on time to the library since the materials may be needed by other users to conduct research or to complete an assignment.

Globally, the collections of any library, irrespective of its nature, are intended to satisfy day- to - day information needs of library clients and to utilise library collection depending on the core mission, objective, and vision of the parent institution (Demeka, 2005).

Steele (2001), reveals that academic library patrons have different requests and tastes for information which information professionals offer without fear or favour in the discharge of their obligations. Lamptey (2010), opines that library resources at the information desk / section might be given out to the registered library patrons who have formally been furnished with borrowers' cards or registered with the library. A study by Adomi (2003) affirmed that overdue fines are to constrain patrons to return borrowed materials on time. One of the key reasons why overdue fines are introduced in the library is to enforce library patrons to return all library materials in their custody on time so that other patrons can likewise obtain them when the need emerges.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Circulation of materials in the library system is one of the fundamental services being carried out by every library globally. There are policies on circulation services which spell out who is qualified to borrow materials from the library, the number of books that may be borrowed and for how long the books can be kept by patrons until they are returned. In the view of Edoka (2000), undergraduate students may be permitted to borrow up to four weeks, while graduate students and members of the academic staff are usually permitted up to six books for two months. The challenges of overdue materials are common in every sphere of academic libraries. The problem is that some patrons of the Walton Whaley Library of the Valley View University do not like to return library materials when the dates are due while others do not want to pay overdue charges. Additionally, the majority of users complain about insufficient materials at the circulation section while others complain about the kind of materials kept at the reserve section and the duration of time that such materials are permitted on loan.

Reviewing of the literature revealed that several authors such as Aloa (2002; Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Town-Treweek, 2007; Arthur, 2012) carried out similar studies on library fines and overdue charges in public and private

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universities elsewhere. However, in Ghana, little or no research attention has been paid to patrons' attitude and perception towards overdue charges. It is in the light of this that the study was carried out to investigate patrons' attitudes and perceptions towards overdue charges.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows;

- To find out how frequently users borrow materials from the library,
- To determine patrons' attitude and perception towards overdue charges,
- To identify why library users keep materials beyond the due dates,
- To explore measures that can be taken to retrieve overdue materials.

Research Questions

The research questions are;

- How frequently do users borrow materials from the library?
- What are the attitude and perception of patrons towards overdue charges?
- What are the reasons for patrons keeping library materials beyond the due dates?
- What measures can be taken to retrieve overdue materials?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine patrons' attitude and perception towards overdue charges using the Walton Whaley Library as a case study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature was reviewed along with the following subheadings;

The Frequency of Borrowing Materials from the Library

Harinarayana, Vasantha, Swamy, and Kumar (2008) carried out a study on measuring the effectiveness of library services of selected College Libraries in Mysore City. The findings reported that most of the patrons went to the library to study, and furthermore to borrow library materials. Pushpalatha and Mallaiah (2009) did a similar study on information resources in the Chemistry Department at Mangalore University Library. The results revealed that most of the users visited the library to acquire books, though; others went to consult periodicals and other reference materials. In a related study by Uganneya and Idachaba (2005), it was disclosed that circulation obligations, as well as information technology services of the University of Agriculture Library, Nigeria, were insufficient. According to the results, the frequency of use of the library was too low, which demonstrated that the patrons of the library were not contented with library services.

Attitude and Perception Towards Overdue Charges

Adomi (2003) carried out a study on university library users' attitudes towards overdue charges at the University of Benin and Delta State University both in Nigeria. The results indicated that users' attitude towards overdue charges in both universities were positive.

As indicated by the discoveries, the respondents hinted that the introduction of overdue fines constrained them to return borrowed materials from the library on time.

Bhatt (2011), highlighted on students' perception of library fine in Islamic College of Science and Commerce Library of Jammu and Kashmir. The findings established that the majority of the users were satisfied with borrowing benefits, for example, the loaning time frame and the sum charged. In a similar survey carried out by

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Ayayi and Okunlola (2005) at Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Nigeria, disclosed that students perceived the increase in overdue fines as a decent measure which would make library books promptly accessible to every library user. A study by Arthur (2012) on users' attitude towards the imposition of library fines at the Catholic University College, Ghana, revealed that users sometimes failed to return their borrowed materials from the library on time due to forgetfulness, which implies that it is one of the critical causes of overdue fines. The study also revealed that majority of the respondents chose to keep library materials and pay for an overdue fine rather than returning their overdue books. A survey of Hazarika and Gohain (2013), on the attitudes of the borrowers in college libraries in Lakhimpur District of Assam, India, revealed that 56.94 % of the respondents were aware that overdue fine is a measure imposed against library defaulters, followed by 45.83 % respondents who expressed their satisfaction with the number of books that the library allows for borrowing. Additionally, the findings reported that 57.87% of the respondents were in agreement with the lending period of 15 days, while 37.50 % of the respondents did not agree to the statement. However, 4.63 % of the respondents did not express their opinions on any of the statements.

Dambawinna (2013) carried out a similar study on overdue books and fines: an attitudinal dimension of a health science library in Sri Lanka. The findings of the study reported that out of 220,210 (95.5%) of the respondents established that overdue fine constrains borrowers to return library materials when the date is due. Interestingly, the outcome of the study revealed that all the respondents were of the view that increasing copies of all demanded books would be useful to reduce the late return of such books when they are acquired.

Reasons for Keeping Materials Beyond the Due Dates

Ayayi and Omotayo (2004) took a study on appraisal of security measures in Hezekiah Oluwan Sanni Library, Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria. The findings revealed that a significant number of patrons considered some books so essential to their field of study that they want to keep the materials and pay for fines as opposed to returning them without thinking about the necessities of their colleagues. In a similar study by Anderson (2008), it was revealed that majority of the respondents at the University of Canterbury Library disclosed that they did not return the library materials on time because they were still using them.

Edewor (2010 a) did a study on staff users and overdue fines in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries. The finding of the study revealed that even some members of the staff prefer to keep library materials until they have finished all that they want to do before returning the materials to the library. In related studies by Murugathas (2009) and Aloa (2002) on students and overdue books in a medical library at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, and University of Jaffna Medical Library respectively, enumerated some reasons why library patrons keep borrowed books beyond the due dates as; "users inability to finish with the book(s), forgetfulness, timeconsuming during renewal/return procedure as well as difficulty to return library materials on Sundays", while others considered library materials relevant as a result found it difficult to return them.

Measures that Can be Taken to Retrieve Overdue Materials

The study of Edewor, (2010 b) on staff users and overdue fines in Nigerian Polytechnic Libraries disclosed that 58.5% of the respondents confirmed that fines are disciplinary measures against library offenders while 22% conceded that the fines motivated them to return borrowed materials from the library on time. Green (2008) posits that "more patrons might visit the library if they were not punished with a fine". Jessop (2011) indicated that overdue charges are strategies used to have library materials back to the shelves.

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Edoka (2000) reiterated that fines imposed on overdue materials were not sources of income for the library but to serve as a deterrent to patrons who did not obey the borrowing rules in the library. The findings of Murugathas (2009) on ways of dealing with over dues at the University of Jaffna, gave some recommendations as sending notices as well as permitting users to renew borrowed materials even if they were very overdue. Surprisingly, there were diverse perspectives on overdue fines, with 56% agreed that fines were useful and welcome, another 34% concurred that fines were not helpful and intensely hateful, whereas 10% of the respondents were undecided to the statement. Abareh (2001) and also Adomi (2003) highlighted that those fines imposed on users for missing library materials and borrowers cards were only designed as disciplinary measures to instill discipline among borrowers.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method was used for the study. The descriptive survey was considered appropriate for the study because previous studies employed this method to collect information about the respondents' thoughts, attitude, views, interest, and problems (Orodho & Njeru, 2004).

Population

The population of the students of Valley View University (VUU), Oyibi Campus as at the time of carrying out this study was two thousand, two hundred and five (2205), consisting of 1022 females and 1183 males. The target population for the study comprised students who registered in the library and were qualified to borrow materials. The population of the registered members of the library was three hundred and eighty-six (386) students.

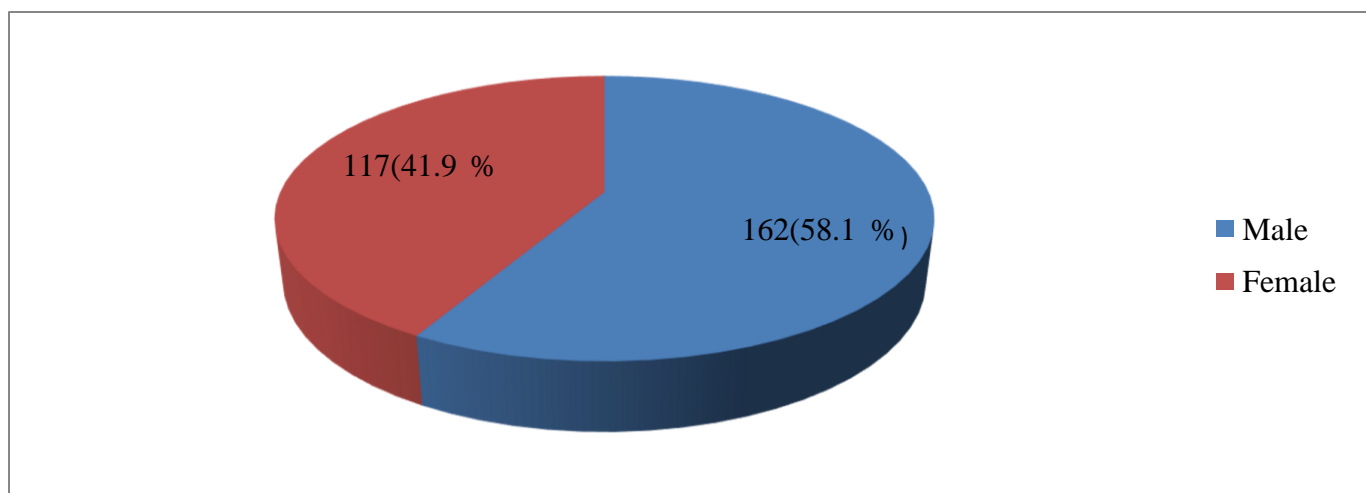
Sample and Sampling Technique

According to Mungenda and Mugenda(2003), the simple random sampling technique provides an equal opportunity for each member to be part of the study. A total of two hundred and eighty- four (284) students were randomly selected from the 386 registered members, using the simple random sampling technique. The sample comprised one hundred and seventy-four (174) females, whereas two hundred and twelve were males (212); Valley View University Library Statistics (2015-2016).

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Data was collected through the structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was in six sections. Section A dealt with the respondents bio-data; Section B concentrated on the frequency that users borrowed materials from the library, while Section C gathered information on users attitude and perception towards overdue charges; Section D focused on why users kept materials beyond the due dates, and Section E covered measures that can be taken to retrieve overdue materials. The questionnaire was structured using the four-point Likert Scale which was rated as follows: Strongly Agree (SA),= Agree (A) = Disagree (D) = Strongly Disagree = SD.

A total of two hundred and eighty-four (284) questionnaires were administered to the selected students, out of Respondents were requested to indicate their gender and the results are shown in Figure 1 .



Sources: Field data , 2017

this number, two hundred and seventy-nine (279) copies were duly completed and found valid for the study, representing a high response rate of 98%.

Method of Data Analysis

According to Thanuskodi (2012), the analysis of data is the final approach in the research process, and it is the link between raw data and significant results leading to conclusions. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0 version) was used to analyse data collected from the field.

RESULTS

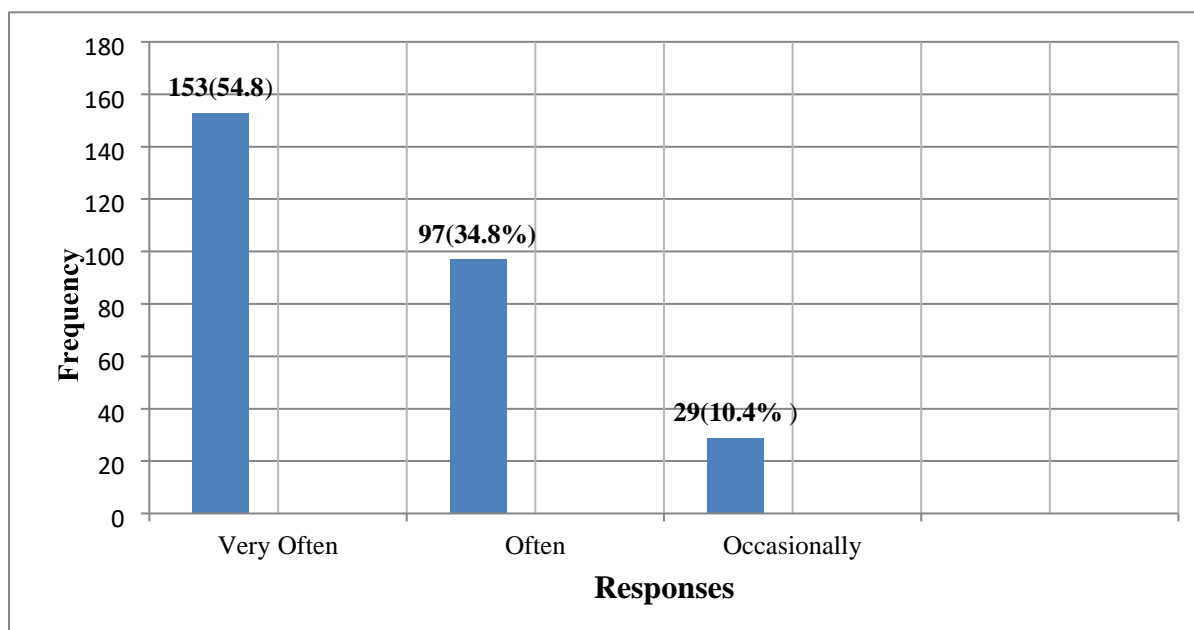
Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

From Figure 1 above, the findings indicate that out of the total number of 279 respondents captured for the study, 162 (58.1%) were males, whereas 117(41.9%) were females. The findings confirmed statistics from the circulation section of the Walton Whaley library that more of the male students borrow materials from the library than their female counterparts.

Figure 2: Frequency of Borrowing Materials from the Library

The respondents were asked to indicate their frequency of borrowing materials from the library. Figure 2 presents the summary of the respondents' views.

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Sources: Field data, 2017

The findings indicated that out of 279 respondents, 153(54.8%) borrowed books very often, while 97(34.8%) and 29(10.4%) of the respondents indicated often and occasionally respective

Table 3: Attitude and Perception Towards Overdue Charges

The researcher sought the views of respondents regarding their attitude and perceptions towards overdue

Responses	SA	A	D	S D
Increase copies of demand books	51(18.3%)	87(31.2%)	48(17.2%)	93(33.3%)
Charges should be discontinued	84(30.1%)	56 (20.1%)	66(23.6%)	73(26.2%)
Positive perception of an overdue fine	88(31.5%)	65(23.3%)	72(25.8%)	54(19.4%)
A negative perception of an overdue fine	76(27.2%)	88(31.5%)	58(20.9%)	57(20.4%)
A charge is a good measure against offenders	72(25.8%)	54(19.4%)	92(32.9%)	61(21.9%)
Waste of time at the counter to pay fine	49(17.6%)	64(22.9%)	79(28.3%)	87(31.2%)

charges. The responses were displayed in Table 3 below.

Reasons	SA	A	D	S D
Overdue charges are too high	51(18.3%)	87(31.2%)	48(17.2%)	93(33.3%)
Keeping books beyond the date and pay charges	76(27.2%)	87(31.2%)	61(21.9%)	55(19.7%)
A penalty for offenders is too flexible	71(25.4%)	56(20.1%)	91(32.6%)	61(21.9%)
Forgetfulness	104(37.3%)	56(20.1%)	67(24.0%)	52(18.6%)
Return and renewal procedure is cumbersome	51(18.3%)	87(31.2%)	50(17.9%)	91(32.6%)
The demand for the book is high	80(28.7%)	83(29.7%)	62(22.2%)	54(19.4%)
Because of inadequate copies on the shelves	68(24.4%)	75(26.9%)	79(28.3%)	57(20.4%)

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Not finished with the book(s)	55(19.7%)	96(34.4%)	62(22.2%)	66(23.7%)
The book is very useful	63(22.6%)	72(25.8%)	85(30.5%)	59(21.1%)
Because overdue charges are very low	67(24.0%)	69(24.7%)	56(20.1%)	87(31.2%)

Sources: Field data, 2017

The findings revealed that 88 (31.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed to have a positive perception towards the overdue charges, while 92(32.9%) disagreed with the statement. Another 87(31.2%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that overdue charges are a waste of time.

Table 4: Reasons for keeping Materials Beyond the Due Dates

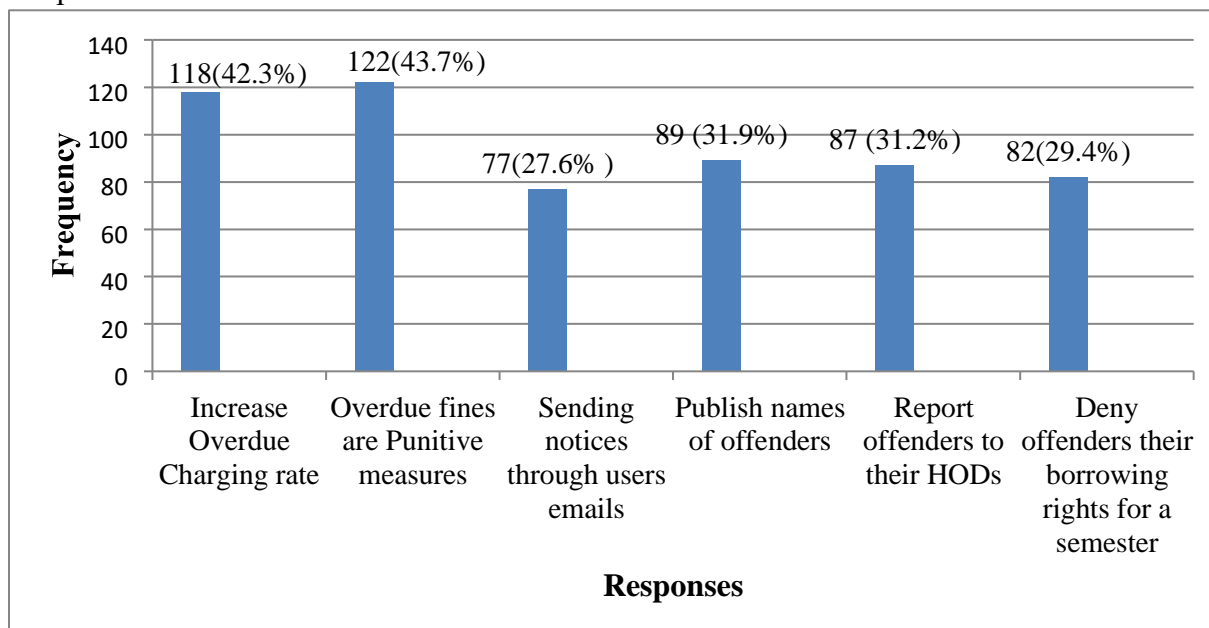
The respondents were again asked to express their opinions on reasons for keeping library materials beyond the due dates.

Sources: Field data, 2017

From Table 4 above, the findings disclosed that out of the total number of 104 respondents, (37.3%) strongly agreed that forgetfulness was the reason, followed by 96(34.4%) respondents who agreed that they intentionally kept the materials because they had not finished with the book(s). However, 93(33.3%) strongly disagreed with the statement that overdue charges are too hi

Figure. 3: Measures that can be taken to Retrieve Overdue Materials

Figure 3 sought the opinions of the respondents on measures that can be taken to retrieve overdue materials. Respondents' views were as follows:



Sources : Field data, 2017

The results revealed that out of 279 respondents, 118(42.3%) strongly agreed that the library should increase overdue charges, followed by 122(43.7%) who disagreed with the statement that overdue charges are measures to get library books back to the shelves whereas 89(31.9%) were of the view that the library should publish the names of offenders on the notice board.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

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The study was set up to investigate patrons' attitude and perception towards overdue charges at Valley View University. One of the objectives of the study was to investigate the patrons' frequency of borrowing books from the library. The findings showed that majority of the respondents borrowed books very often for their academic activities. The present study confirms the work of Arthur (2012) who reported that out of 300 respondents, 70(23.3%) borrowed books very often, followed by 64.0% who indicated that they borrowed books often while 12.7% did so occasionally.

It emerged from the findings that the majority of the respondents have a positive perception towards overdue charges. The result corroborates the findings of Adomi (2003) on university library users' attitudes towards overdue charges at the University of Benin and Delta State University, Nigeria, which indicated that users' attitude towards overdue charges in both University libraries were positive.

The findings of the study also reported that users kept library materials beyond the due dates. Their reason was attributed to forgetfulness, while others also indicated that they had not finished with the book(s). The study affirmed that of Hazarika and Gohain (2013) on the attitude of college library users towards overdue fine in Lakhimpur District of Assam, India. According to their findings, 72.22% of the respondents expressed that they kept library materials/books beyond the due dates because of forgetfulness, followed by 64.35% respondents who agreed that they kept library books beyond the due dates owing to their inability to finish reading, while another 56.02 % of the respondents disclosed that they kept library books beyond the due dates because they needed more days.

On measures that can be taken to retrieve overdue materials also revealed that 122(43.7%) disagreed with the statement that overdue charge is a measure to get library books back to the shelves. The present study is not in line with the study of Jessop (2011) which reported that overdue charges are strategies used to have library materials back to the shelves

CONCLUSION

Collecting overdue charges is one of the difficult tasks confronting all library staff at the circulation section of every library, though different libraries adopt various approaches in collecting an overdue fine from users. The findings disclosed that overdue charges are punitive measures used to get library books back to the shelves of a library. It was found out that some users intentionally kept library materials beyond the due dates on the pretext of forgetfulness or with the excuses that they had not finished with the book. Other reasons reported were the flexibility of overdue punishment and low charge for overdue books.

The findings indicated that the majority of respondents have a positive perception of overdue charges in the library.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- The circulation staff at the library should take both daily and weekly statistics of all the borrowed books; this will go a long way to assist them in knowing the strength and weakness of their collections.
- Again, during the borrowing process, users should be reminded of overdue fines, lending period, opening and closing hours of the library, borrowing privileges and the penalty on overdue books.
- Orientation should be carried out at the beginning of every semester for the newly admitted and registered students of the library to be aware of circulation policies.

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- There should be user education for both fresh and continue students as well as the university community.
 - Photocopiers should be available in the library; this will also help users not to keep books beyond the due dates since they can make copies of some relevant pages.
 - The management of the library should purchase more copies of books that are always in high demand.
 - Library policies should be published on the institution's website to educate users on overdue fines.
- Besides, the library should send WhatsApp messages to users, informing them on borrowing rights and also publishing offenders' names on the notice board to curtail overdue offences.

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