



Overdue books and Fines; an attitudinal dimension of a health sciences library in Sri Lanka.

K.P.K. Dambawinna,
University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Email: Kamanid@pdn.ac.lk,

Abstract

The Library of the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Peradeniya still experiences the problem of overdue books and overdue fines since its inception in 2007, irrespective of strategies being implemented. In Sri Lanka attitudinal survey of Health Sciences students has not been done before. This study was conducted in order to revise and devise the overdue policy, to ascertain the books needed in multiple copies and to formulate further strategies to reduce the rate of late returns. The study ascertained the present attributes of the overdue policy, the prominent subject areas and titles of overdue books in 2011, and the attitudes of the students towards the reasons for late returns, measures taken by the library to minimize late returns, overdue fines and further strategies to be implemented to reduce rate of late returns. Survey method was employed. Data were collected from documentary evidences and using questionnaires. A purposive sample was selected from a population of 671 students to get attitudes of different user groups. 200 questionnaires were returned from a purposive sample of 220. The research explored about the present overdue reminders, lost item bill, fine amounts, and payment method etc.

The prominent subject areas of the overdue books were radiology, pharmacology, nursing and physiotherapy. The book which had most frequently gone overdue was Imaging Atlas for Human Anatomy by Jamie Weir. The Library has only 3 copies of this book each under Lending, Scheduled reference and Reference. Regarding attitudes of the students the majority (95%) agreed that due to inability to come to the faculty when clinical/lectures / practical are held outside the faculty premises was the main reason for late returns. But a minority (20%) agreed with the reasons specified as "selfishness" and "no adverse effect than a fine" as the reasons for late returns. The majority (93%) stated that categorization many copies under lending was helpful to reduce late returns. But only 48% stated that verbal reminders were helpful where as others stated otherwise; not helpful (36%) and not sure of the value (16%). In the context of attitudes towards the overdue fine 95% agreed that fine is a punishment which compels the borrower to return the books on time. But 85% disagreed that present fine is inadequate to compel the borrowers to return materials on due date. The attitude "Since fine has no effect, it should be removed" was not agreed by 70% of respondents. Students expressed their attitudes on the given strategies which are planning to be implemented. All stated that increasing copies of all demand books would be helpful to reduce late returns. 40% stated that suspension of borrowing privileges on unsettled fine would not be helpful. Cancellation of library membership



on unsettled lost item bill was accepted as not helpful by 47% while 34% stated as helpful. Study assisted to find the titles of the books which should be purchased in multiple copies. Study concluded that some attributes of the policy should be changed to implement more serious strategies to reduce rate of late returns. Some new measures should be in cooperated in to the policy as punitive measures to encourage students to return borrowed materials on time.

Keywords- overdue books, overdue fines, reader delinquency, health sciences library, Sri Lanka, attitudinal survey.

Introduction

The library of the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences is the seventh library of the library system of university of Peradeniya which consists of eight libraries. After its inauguration in 2007, 2011 is the year when the library had the maximum number of students. Up to end of 2011 it had 671 registered members and 1950 materials. The library is kept open from Monday to Saturday from 8.00 am. to 5.00 p.m. Materials are on five degree courses offered by the faculty; Nursing (NUR), Medical Laboratory Science (MLS), Radiography/Radiotherapy (RAD), Pharmacy (PCY) and Physiotherapy(PHY). They are housed under different loan categories as Lending (L), Scheduled reference (SR), Reference (R) and Permanent reference (PR).Lending books are issued at any time to students for one week. The SR books are issued after 2.00 p.m for one night. Those should be returned before 9.00 a.m. next day. References are issued for photocopying purpose at any time. Those should be back before 5.00 p.m. on the same day.

The library is more effective and efficient when the materials are readily accessible and available at the right time of an information seeker. Therefore the books on loan should reach the library shelves on the due date enabling the next reader in the queue to consult it. A reader

keeping the borrowed book beyond the loan period may hinder another reader access the book on the required time. As such not returning books on time is an action of delinquent readers. The problem of overdue books dates back to the inception of libraries.

A book remains in the borrowers procession beyond the due date of return is referred as an overdue book. Meta Glossary (2006) defined the overdue book as “If a book is still checked out after the stamped inside, it is overdue and subject to fines”. Overdue Fine is the amount of penalty imposed to a reader for keeping borrowed materials beyond the loan period; after the due date of return. Fines in libraries are diverse depending on general material designation (GMD): whether CD, video, monograph etc., loan category, status of the reader and type of library. It also may vary on payment method, amounts and fine free but bill of lost. The basic purpose of imposing overdue fines is to encourage the borrower to return the books on time enabling available stock can be used as many users as possible at required times. Fine is also a global phenomenon which is as old as libraries. Many researchers have been conducted on overdue books and overdue fines. Olatunji (2010) investigated the attitudes of users on library overdue fines in Nigerian



Academic Libraries. Findings indicated that information available in expensive materials were unaffordable to buy. But these were specific to students needs. Hence they kept books over the due date. He concluded that budget inadequacies & shortage of library materials must be addressed to meet the information needs of the users. Ajayi & Okunlola (2005) surveyed student's perceptions of increases in fines imposed by the management of Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. Analysis of questionnaires showed that the respondents perceived the increase as a welcome measure, which made the library books more readily accessible and available. He concluded that the fines should be imposed to meet the information needs of the users. He recommended that periodic review of the measures should be carried out and it was essential to automate the circulation operations of the library. Sri Lankan authors have not written much about the perceptions of the university students regarding overdue books and overdue fines. This study addressed that gap also. The Library of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences is being taken many measures since past four years to curb the problem

Methods and Materials

Survey method was employed. Data regarding library policy on overdue books and overdue fines were obtained from the policy document. Data regarding the overdue books were collected from the fine record book maintained at the library. It contained title, author/s, accession number, class number of the book and name & registration number of the borrower, due date of return, date of return, fine amount, date of the fine record and the bill number of the settled

of overdue books. Some are overdue reminders, overdue fines, renewal opportunities and placing many books in lending collection. Nevertheless fines and overdue books are still a mysterious problem to the library. This condition created the need to study the problem deeply to find out further strategies to minimize late returns and fines. The study attempted to ascertain the prominent subject areas and titles of the books which were highly overdue in 2011. It helped developing the collection with demand books. The research explored the present library policy on the over dues and overdue fines. Hence it assisted in revising and devising the overdue and fine policy in the library and formulates further strategies to curb late returns. It also investigated the attitudes of the students on

- i. the reasons for not return the borrowed books on time,
- ii. measures taken by the library to prevent late returns of borrowed books,
- iii. Overdue fines,
- iv. Further strategies planning to be implemented to reduce the rate of late returns.

fines. The data collecting instrument to obtain the attitudes of the students was a self-administered questionnaire. It contained four sections addressed to get perceptions on the reasons for late returns, measure adopted by the library to prevent late returns, overdue fines and further strategies planning to be implemented in future. Each section contained ten variables and three options either as agree, disagree & undecided or as helpful, not helpful & not sure of the value.



Respondents were asked to tick off the relevant option for each variable. At the end of each section respondents were allowed to write down any other attitude if they wish. In order to ascertain attitudes in different user groups a purposive

sample was selected by analyzing the fine record book. The profile of the students who had overdue fines in 2011 was shown in table 1.

Table 1- The profile of the students who had overdue fines in 2011

Batch	Number of students in each disciplines of the degree courses					
	MLS	NUR	PCY	PHY	RAD	Total
2005	10	5	1	09	5	30
2006	3	15	4	11	7	40
2007	7	17	10	9	17	60
2008	9	14	15	37	30	105
2009	10	29	8	8	10	65

Hundred and ten (110) students who had overdue books in 2011 randomly selected in proportionate to the above values covering all batches and all five disciplines. Another 110 students who had no fines in 2011 were selected proportionately covering all batches (2005-2009) and all disciplines. Questionnaires were hand delivered by

the researcher in January 2012 to all 220 students by marking registration number on a separate paper. 100 Students with fines returned the duly filled questionnaires. From other 110 students 100 completed questionnaires were taken for analysis of data. Response rate was 90.9%. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis.

Results.

1.Prominent subject areas of the books which were highly overdue in 2011

There were 300 books were overdue in 2011 as shown in table 2.

Table 2- Prominent subject areas of overdue books

Subjects	Number of overdue books
Anatomy/physiology	12
Chemistry/ Biochemistry	8
Hematology	6
Medical Laboratory Sciences	14
Microbiology	18
Neurology	2
Nursing	44
Nutrition/ Dietetics	7
Orthopedics	12
Parasitology	2
Pathology	8
Pharmacology	45
Physiotherapy	30
Promotion of Health	18



Radiology	65
Research Methods	4
Sports Medicine	3
Statistics	2

The books which were most frequently overdue were as follows.

Imaging Atlas for Human Anatomy by Jamie Weir, Grant's Atlas of Anatomy by M.R. Anne, Clinical Orthopedic

Rehabilitation by B.S Brent, A guide to radiological procedure by S. Chapman, Clark's positioning in Radiography by S Whitely and Text book of Medical Surgical Nursing by S.C. Smeltzer.

2. Present library policy on overdue books and overdue fines

Overdue book is defined as a lending book or any Scheduled Reference book not returned on or before the due date of return as specified in the date stamp and any book issued for photocopying purpose but not returned on the same day. Overdue reminder is sent to the borrower within one week period after the due date of return. If no response to the overdue notice within two weeks period of the overdue reminder the item is considered as lost and lost item bill is issued to the borrower.

Overdue fine is calculated from the next day of the due date of return until the date of return within 2 weeks of the overdue notice. No grace period is given for any book but weekends and holidays are excluded. Overdue fine amount for a lending book is 5 Rs. per day and 10 Rs for a Scheduled reference book. It is 40 Rs. 30 Rs, and 20 Rs. for lending, Scheduled Reference and Reference

respectively for the books taken out for photocopying purposes. After return overdue books the fines could be settled at any time. It is remain as the same until it is settled. None of the privileges is suspended on unsettled fine except withholding degree certificate. If the book is lost the borrower should immediately inform the library. The overdue fine is calculated up to the date the borrower informs the library regarding lost. Borrowing Privileges are suspended until lost item bill is settled. Lost item bill can be settled later. The list of students with unsettled fines and lost item bill is prepared before issue of library clearance .But if either overdue fine or lost item bill is not settled issue of the degree certificate is withheld. Payments can be made to the Bank of Ceylon, Peoples' Bank and to the shroff counter of the University



3. Attitudes of the Students

3.1. Attitudes of the students towards the given reasons for not returning the borrowed books on time.

Table 3-Perceptions of the students towards the reasons for late returns.

Reasons	Respondents(%)		
	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Forgetfulness.	73	25	2
Selfishness and not concern on others.	20	56	24
Insufficient loan period to finish with the book.	78	11	11
Inability of the photocopying centre to finish photocopying before expected time duration.	71	17	12
On some days no time to visit the library due to lectures/ practical /clinical held outside faculty.	95	1	4
There is no serious adverse effect on the borrower rather than a fine.	20	43	37
Due to insufficient copies of some books getting a book is difficult.	90	10	0
The borrowed book is shared with the fellow students	69	14	17
Students don't come to the faculty when no lectures/practical is scheduled in the faculty.	83	17	0
Maximum usage of the book should be taken before return the book	68	17	15

(95%) agreed that the reason for not returning books on time was due to the fact that on some days no time to visit the library due to lectures/ practical /clinical held outside faculty. 90% felt that due to insufficient copies of some books was the reason. Other most frequently cited reasons were; Students not coming to the faculty on some days when no lectures or practical scheduled at the faculty (83%), Insufficient loan period to finish with the book (78%), forgetfulness (73%), inability of the photocopying centre to finish photocopying (71%), maximum usage be taken before return (68%) and borrowed book is shared with the other students (69%). 56% disagree with the

reason "selfishness". A minority (20%) agreed with "selfishness and "no adverse effect on the borrower than a fine" as the reasons for late returns. Aloa (2002) in his study questioned the medical students of University of Ilorin as to why they kept borrowed books overdue. The majority (55.73%) stated that they had not finished with the book. Forgetfulness, time consuming renewal/return procedure and books were due to return on Sundays were the other most frequently cited reasons. According to Zaki (1994) selfishness may cause some students in Ahmadu Bello University library, prefer to keep a useful book beyond due date. But findings of Ahiakwo (1987) in his



survey to examine the attitudes of faculty members of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria identified that forgetfulness of library obligation and

personalization of resources were primary factors which influenced the faculty members to retain books beyond the due date.

3.2. Attitudes of the students towards the measures taken by the library to prevent late returns of borrowed books.

Table 4 shows the perceptions of the students towards the measures taken at present to prevent late returns of borrowed books.

Table 4-Attitudes of the students towards preventive measures.

Measures	Respondents (%)		
	Helpful	Not helpful	Not sure of the value
Sending overdue reminder notices	76	8	16
Charging of overdue fines	64	20	16
Refusal of further issues until overdue book is return	72	22	6
Provision of return the borrowed book through somebody	90	3	7
Possibility of getting photocopies using R or SR book	92	5	3
Allowing renewals depending on availability of extra copies	76	4	20
Checkout CD version of books when available	90	4	6
Provision for group request to keep the book for a longer time among the group during clinical	90	8	2
Verbal reminders are made when students visit the library for other purposes.	48	36	16
Categorization of Many copies under lending and one copy under SR and R	93	3	4

93% stated that categorization of many copies under lending was helpful to prevent late returns. The majority accepted that all the measures except verbal reminders were helpful. Those were possibility of getting photocopies using SR and R copy (92%), provision of returning borrowed books through somebody (90%), Provision for group request to keep the book (90%), Checkout CD version of the book(90%), sending overdue reminders (76%), allowing renewals (76%), refusal of further issues (72%), charging of overdue fines (64%). Only 48 % stated that verbal reminders

were helpful while others stated otherwise ;not helpful (36%) and not sure of the value(16%). Murugathas (2009) found that the majority of Medical students of the Jaffna University stated that sending reminders (96%), allowing renewals (80%) charging overdue fines (56%) were helpful and welcome. Aloa (2002) found that medical students of University of Ilorin were most favorable (98.3%) for renewals as a measure of discouraging overdue books. Burgin & Hansel (1990) surveyed South Carolina public libraries and found that charging fines have no statistically significant effect on late



returns. But speedy notification and making the last notice a bill for the item

had some effect.

3.3 Attitudes of the students towards overdue fines.

Table 5 depicts the perception of the students towards the overdue fines. 95% agreed that the fine is a punishment which compels the reader to return the borrowed books on time. This attitude of the students complemented with the finding of Edewor (2010) in his survey with staff users of the polytechnic libraries in Nigeria where 58.5% agreed that “Fines are punitive measure intended against

library defaulters”. Adomi (2002) in his attitudinal survey with the students in University of Benin and Delta State University in Nigeria found that overdue fines encouraged users to return borrowed books on time. Bhatt (2011) found that 77.33% students agree that fine is a disciplinary measure intended against library defaulters.

Table 5-Perception of the students towards the overdue fines

Characteristics of Overdue fines	Respondents (%)		
	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Fine is a punishment which compels the borrower to return borrowed materials on time.	95	4	1
The present fine amount is inadequate to compel the borrower to return borrowed materials on time	13	85	2
Irrespective of the fines students prefer to keep materials until finish work with the book	36	50	14
Since fine has no effect on late returns, it should be removed	12	70	18
Calculating fines without providing a grace period is effective measure to reduce late returns.	57	17	26
Privilege to borrow books when the fine is not settled discourages the students to return books.	58	10	32
Overdue fines discourage the students to borrow books from the library.	50	42	8
Advantages of keeping a book beyond the due date is valued than paying a fine.	60	25	15
Feel guilty to be imposed with a fine	50	32	18
Privilege to settle the fine at the time of getting the clearance discourages the borrowers to return books on time	50	10	40

The majority of health students (85%) disagreed with the fact that “present fine amount is inadequate”. This may be due to the fear of the students for an increase of fines due to financial burdens. Bhatt (2011) revealed that 71.37% of Science, Commerce and Management students of Islamic college, Srinagar in India agreed

with “fine amount fixed is adequate”. Edewor (2010) reported that over 80% of staff of polytechnic libraries agreed that library fines for staff should be discontinued.

50% of the respondents disagreed with “irrespective of fines students prefer to



keep books”. The statement “Since fine has no effect on late returns, it should be removed”. was disagreed by 70% of respondents. But Bhatt (2011) revealed that 44.32% agreed that library fines should be scrapped than who felt it otherwise (31.20%) and undecided (24.46%). Mitchell (2005) in his study in Georgia Southern University cited that “ Some critics contend charging fines is

unethical, especially in public or school libraries, and meager results are not worth the harmful public relations fines incur”.

(57%) of the respondents agreed with not providing grace period when calculating fines is effective. Many respondents agreed that the privilege to borrow books on unsettled fines (58%) and to settle the fines at clearance issue(50%) discourages the students.

4. Attitudes of the students towards further strategies to be implemented to reduce the rate of late returns.

The researcher planned some further strategies to minimize over dues. These were put before the students to get their attitudes. Table 6 displays the outcome.

Table 5- Perceptions of the students towards the strategies planning to be implemented.

Strategies	Respondents (%)		
	Helpful	Not helpful	Not sure of the value
Number of lending copies of all demand books should be increased.	100	0	0
Library should be kept open before 8.00a.m and after 5.00p.m.	86	2	12
Return bins should be set during closure of the library.	71	11	18
Renewal should be allowed via E-mail or online students account.	84	3	13
After a grace period the unsettled fine should be doubled.	48	32	20
Suspension of borrowing privileges when fines are not settled during specified period.	38	40	22
Suspension of library membership for a period if no response to the lost item bill during a specified time period	57	28	15
Cancellation of library membership if no response to the lost item bill during a specified time period	34	47	19
Overdue notice should be sent soon after the due date of return	74	18	8
Names of the students with overdue books should be	58	31	11



published in the student's notice board.			
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All respondents were in the opinion that increasing lending copies of all demand books would be helpful. Majority stated that expansion of opening hours (86%), Use of E- mail for renewals (84%), early overdue notices (74%), provision of return bins during closure of the library (71%) would be helpful. 38% of students felt that suspension of borrowing privileges on unsettlement of fines during a specified period was helpful while 40% felt the other way: not helpful. Rockwell (2010) in his survey found that 90% of the Librarians stated that a hold would be placed on patrons if fines were not paid.

Only 48% felt that doubling of fine amount after a grace period would be helpful. But 57% stated that suspension of library membership on unsettled lost item bill within a specified period would be helpful. 47% felt that cancellation of library membership on unsettled lost item bill would not be helpful. Though 58% felt that publishing defaulters names in students' notice board would be helpful, Hoffman (1996) stated that publishing names of defaulters in local newspapers had useful to reduce overdue books in a public library.

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Discussion and Conclusion

The study resulted in finding the titles of books which have undergone overdue once or more than once. It is one indication that those books have been used by the students. If there are no enough copies of such books action is taken to acquire some more copies. But it is not possible for any library to purchase many copies to have a copy for each user. One way of effective dissemination is to circulate the available stock to many users

as much as possible. In this context it is unethical to allow patrons to keep books over the given loan period. Hence the library should implement various strategies to get all the borrowers to return the materials on time. The loan period should suit the borrowers' convenience as well as the need of the next reader. Shontz (1999) cited that "loan period is the best compromise between the current user's convenience and future users' needs". In the Library of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences fine is a deterrent to delinquent reader but not a source of revenue. A proposal can be made to see the possibility of using fines as petty cash. Some students have further suggested making reading rooms where they can use the reference copy for group discussions may reduce borrowing of materials to some extent. Some suggested providing easy method for settling fines rather than going to a longer distance from the faculty would be helpful to them. But the researcher felt that it may not an encouragement but a discouragement to return books on time. Inconvenience involving in paying fines may encourage the students to refrain from being imposed with a fine. Some attitudes of the students may be related with the financial burdens and with fear of suspension of library membership. The library should give priority not only to acquire, organize and disseminate materials but also getting users to share the materials in demand. The following measures may be in cooperated in future to ensure timely return of borrowed materials. Introduction of convenient return and renewal procedures, provision of sufficient loan periods (may be 10 days), enhancement of positive attitudes on concern on others and sharing materials and photocopies, establishment



of proper photocopying service with expanded opening hours with efficient & sufficient machines, introduction of efficient overdue reminder procedure with immediate reminder soon after due date of return and another reminder before lost item bill is sent, Expansion of opening hours of the library in the morning and in the evening. Serious strategies as doubling of fines after specified period and suspension of library membership on unsettled lost item bill during specified period may be effective. The Strategies should be worked out always except on special circumstances such as ill health, during closure of the library due to staff strikes etc.

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