

FEE-BASED LIBRARY SERVICES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated fee-based library services and implementation in private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State-Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine current stage of fee-based services, benefits of fee-based services and challenges to implementation of fee-based library services in private universities in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the study comprised twenty-four (24) library staff in three (3) private universities in Akwa Ibom State. Since the population was manageable, total enumeration was used to capture all the aforementioned number of staff. Twenty (24) copies of questionnaire tagged “Fee-Based Library Services and its Implementation in Private University Libraries Questionnaire” was used to collect data out of which twenty (20) library staff representing 83.33% filled and returned. Data were analyzed using simple percentages in charts for data presentation. Findings from the study indicates that fee-based services were not extensively utilized in the private universities in Akwa Ibom State. The few services in existence were photocopying, membership registration, library card replacement, overdue fines, lamination, and binding. Findings also indicated that the staff acknowledged the advantages of fee-based services such as increasing revenue, enhancing service standards, and fostering innovation. Findings further revealed various challenges such as the absence of a policy framework, insufficient machines and equipment, resistance to change among some librarians, and user reluctance to pay for services. It was concluded that overcoming these challenges is imperative for the successful integration of fee-based library services in private universities. Based on the findings, it was recommended that private universities in Akwa Ibom State should establish a supportive policy framework on fee-based library services, allocation of resources for acquisition of necessary equipment, as well as awareness and demonstration of value for the services to the user community to engender greater participation and willingness to embrace fee-based library services.

Keywords: *Fee-based services, University Libraries, Library staff, Private Universities, Library Services*

Introduction

For decades, academic libraries have played a crucial role in collecting, organizing, preserving, and sharing information within the community they serve. These libraries serve as a vital resource for successful information collection, storage, retrieval, and dissemination,

ultimately fulfilling the diverse information needs of their users. As rightly observed by Idhalama and Krubu (2018), the library's role of satisfying the information needs of its users is key and must be handled as such if there must be effective and desirable outcomes. Information plays a vital role in the lives of human beings regardless of their location. Throughout the development of civilization, the need for information has only increased in order to navigate the challenges of daily life and satisfy personal curiosity. Libraries have played a significant role in providing access to this crucial information.

Emphasizing the role of libraries, Ifidon (2012), citing the United Nations (2003), posits that the role of libraries in learning is only the tip of the iceberg when compared to their overall uses for societal and national development, scholarships, catalyzing economic development, fostering social inclusion and cohesion, promoting concepts of civil centers and community services, encouraging working relationships among democratic institution and advancement of cooperation and understanding. Similar position is maintained by other scholars (Akidi & Chukwueke, 2019; Adetora, 2019; Okiy, 2020; Josiah & Mensah, 2023). In order for libraries to carry out their enormous duties effectively, it is crucial that they have access to adequate funds. Without sufficient financial resources, libraries may struggle to acquire new materials, maintain their facilities, and offer valuable programs and services to their patrons. This can ultimately impact the quality of education, research, and community engagement that libraries are able to provide. It's therefore important to recognize the vital role that libraries play in our society and to invest in their continued growth and development by providing them with the necessary funding and resources.

The primary responsibility of every academic library according to Hotsonyame (2023) is to serve the information needs of its parent institution, thus the faculty, staff, students, and its immediate environment. The primary goal of academic libraries is to attain self-reliance in their resources and deliver an outstanding level of services to engage a broader audience and foster the utilization of library resources. Information resources are essential in fulfilling the academic library's objective of addressing the varied information requirements of its users. To guarantee that library patrons can access vital information, paid services are implemented to enhance the library's holdings. Unfortunately, the high cost of providing effective library services has placed private universities at a disadvantage due to their limited funding sources. Compounding this issue is the challenge of purchasing foreign books and journals in foreign currencies. As a result, providing reliable information has become a challenging task for libraries.

Fee-based library services in Nigeria have been mooted for a while but only in a manner that makes its impact not too recognized. Umebali and Jude-Iwuoha (2019) define fee-based services as fee-attracting services offered by libraries, independent information professionals, library consultants and other knowledgeable and information industries. Fee-based library services are profit-oriented services (Igyuve & Ashaver, 2014; Ejezie & Okeke,

2021; Etukudo & Atanda, 2022). This implies that fee-based library services refer to the services that a library or information broker offers in exchange for payment. These services may include things like information consultation, translation, selective information sharing, staying up-to-date, bibliographic compilation, information repackaging, photocopying, internet access, and indexing/abstracting.

On his part, Namara (2010) in Idhalama and Krubu (2018), see fee-based services as a series of activities involved in ensuring that librarians continue to meet the needs of their customers and live the right value in return. Libraries and other information centers have a responsibility to their clients that can only be fulfilled through sufficient financial resources. This can be achieved through offering fee-based services. This entails that, in order to enhance their reputation and stay competitive, Nigerian university libraries should consider adopting fee-based services. By doing so, they can provide their users with access to a wider range of high-quality resources and services that may not be available through traditional means.

A study by Nuhu and Jafaru (2022) fee-based electronic information services in Nigerian federal university libraries, focused on their impact, challenges, and potential solutions. Their findings revealed that only the University of Lagos has partially implemented services like internet access and laptop lending, which increased income and user patronage. Fee-based library services offer a solution to the financial constraints that academic libraries face in providing effective and efficient service. They provide multiple sources of funding to support the improved resources and services needed to meet the latest trends in education, society, technology, and research.

In a recent study, Odusanya, Afolabi, Ogunkeyede & Olaseigbe (2024) examined the impact of fee-based library services on service delivery at two private universities in Osun State. Findings revealed that these services included computer typesetting, consultancy, online searching, internet browsing, and fines for overdue items. In their submission, Adetona and James (2023) note that fee-based library services should not be solely for profit, but rather to partially recover costs with little or no profit motive. It suggests that modest fees should be charged to avoid losing customers.

Fee-based library services in private universities play a crucial role in providing students and faculty members with access to a wide range of resources and support. These services are designed to enhance the learning and research experience by offering a variety of materials, technologies, and expertise. Academic libraries now recognize that fee-based products and services are essential for funding, improving user satisfaction, and attracting current and potential users.

Statement of the Problem

The economic downturn that is affecting many parts of the world, including Nigeria, has resulted in reduced funding for both public and private agencies, including libraries.

Additionally, there has been a decrease in international assistance from donor agencies, which has had a significant impact on libraries in Africa, where these agencies played a crucial role in building and renewing collections. As a result, some libraries are struggling to maintain their services and implement new programs. This is particularly challenging in the digital age, where recurrent spending is necessary for equipment maintenance and the updating of electronic resources. In today's academic landscape, university libraries are facing significant challenges due to financial constraints. These challenges, which include lack of technical and ICT compliance, manpower shortages, inadequate internet connectivity, and poor financing, are placing immense pressure on the core of all universities. Even government-owned university libraries struggle to secure funding, let alone private universities. With the high demand for information products and services in various formats and limited funds, libraries need to explore alternative sources of funding and introduce more user-centered services to sustain traditional services. It is concerning to note that many private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State have not yet embraced the crucial trend of adopting fee-based services, which is jeopardizing their provision of information services and sustainability. Upon conducting a preliminary assessment, it has been observed that the fee-based services offered by some of these libraries are limited to user registration fees, charges for lost or overdue books, and photocopy fees. A thorough literature search reveals that there is a lack of scholarly research specifically focused on fee-based library services in Akwa Ibom. While there are studies on libraries and information services in Nigeria as a whole, there is a notable absence of research that specifically addresses the state of fee-based library services in the South South Region, particularly in Akwa Ibom. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity for further investigation thus the imperative for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at achieving the following objectives;

1. Explore the current state of fee-based library services in private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Analyze the benefits of fee-based library services to private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Ascertain the challenges to implementation of fee-based library services in private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

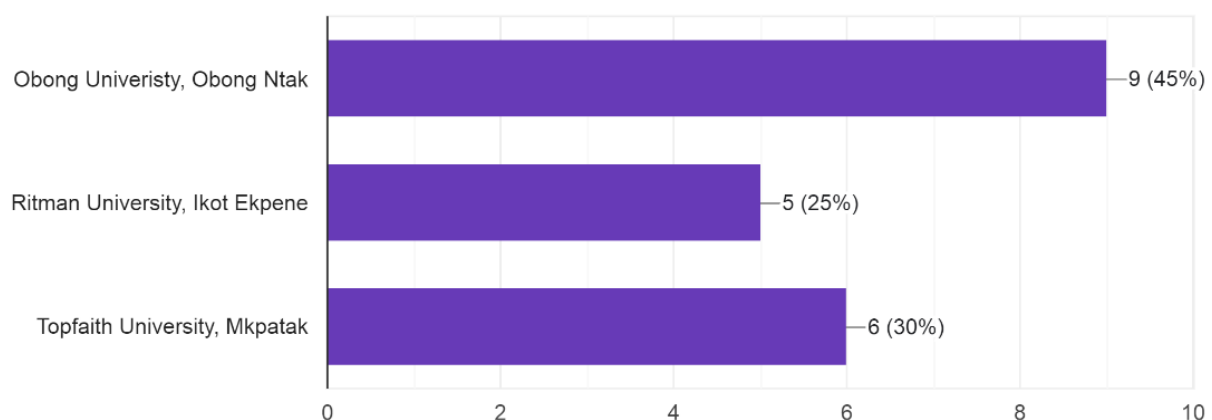
The study used a descriptive Design. The population of study comprised all the twenty-four (24) library staff in private universities in Akwa Ibom State. There are three (3) private universities in Akwa Ibom namely; Obong University, Obong Ntak, Ritman University, Ikot Ekpene, and Topfaith University, Mkpatak. Obong University, Obong Ntak has twelve (12) library staff, Ritman University, Ikot Ekpene has five (5) library staff, and Topfaith

University, Mkpatak has seven (7) library staff. Since the population was manageable, census technique was used to select all the twenty-four (24) library staff. Questionnaire was used as an instrument for Data collection. It was administered online using 'Google form' thus the library staff filled and submitted through the same medium. Twenty (20) of the respondents' staff representing 83.33% filled and returned the questionnaire. The questionnaire included current stage of fee-based services, benefits of fee-based services and challenges to implementation of fee-based library services in private universities in Akwa Ibom State. The study employed the use of descriptive statistical analysis to analyze the data. The researchers consequently generated frequency counts and percentages in charts for data presentation and analysis.

Results and Discussion of Findings

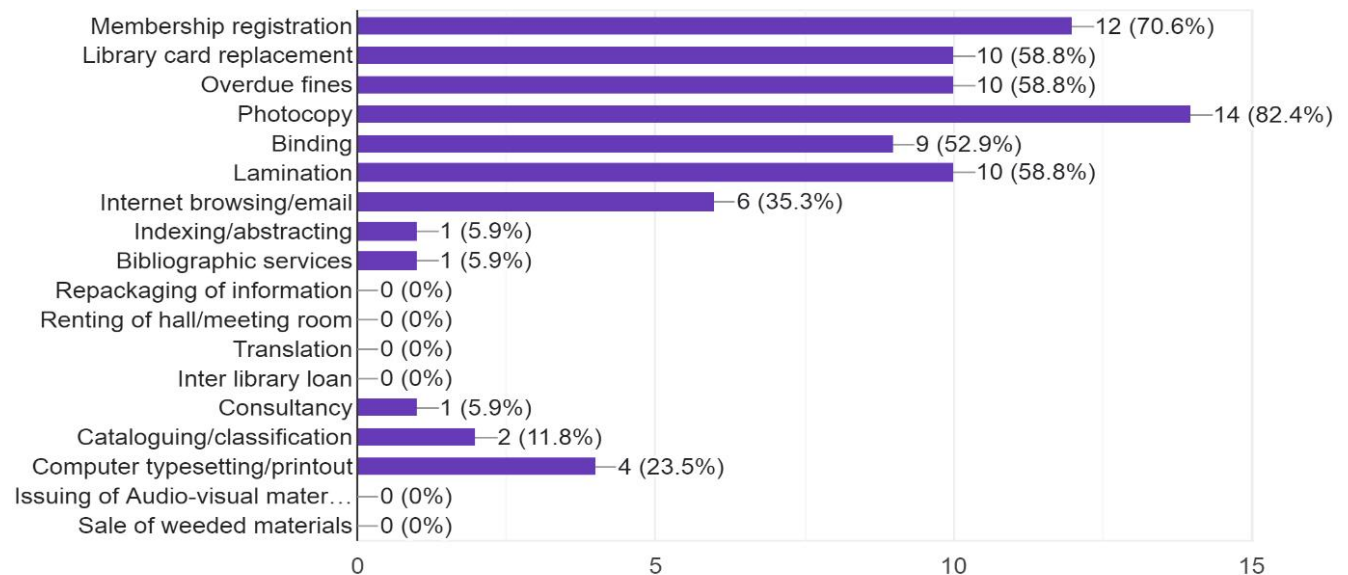
This section presents result and discussion of the findings of the study.

Name of Institution



Source: Field survey, 2024

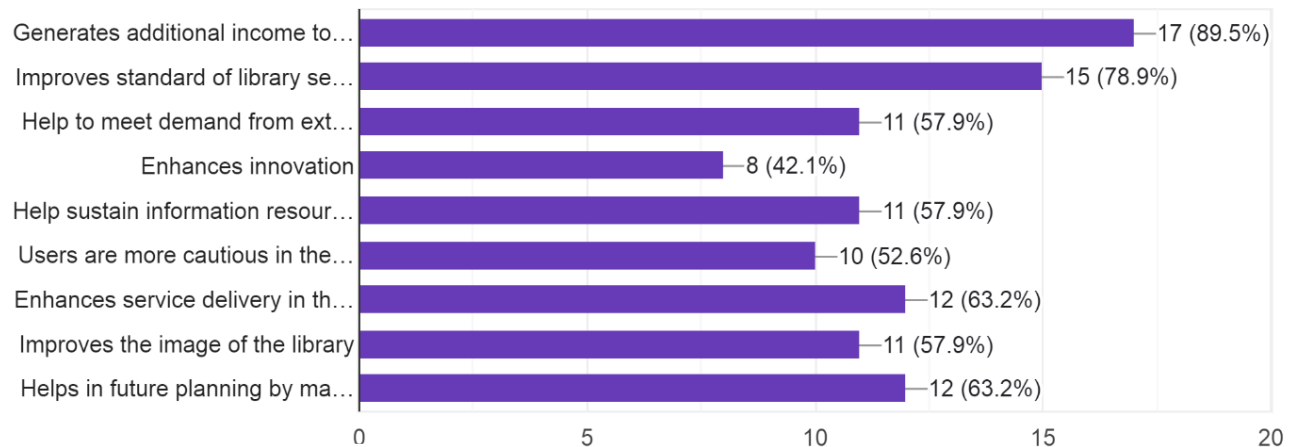
Research Question 1: What is the current stage of fee-based library services in private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State? Fee-based library services offered in my library include:



Source: Field survey, 2024

Figure 2 above indicates library staff response on the current stage of fee-based library services in the private universities under study; Membership registration 12(70.6%), Library card replacement 10(58.8%), Overdue fines 10(58.8%), Photocopy 14(82.4%), Binding 9(52.9%), Lamination 10(58.8%) were the highly utilized fee-based services indicating that the practices of fee-based library services is at the traditional stage in these institutions.

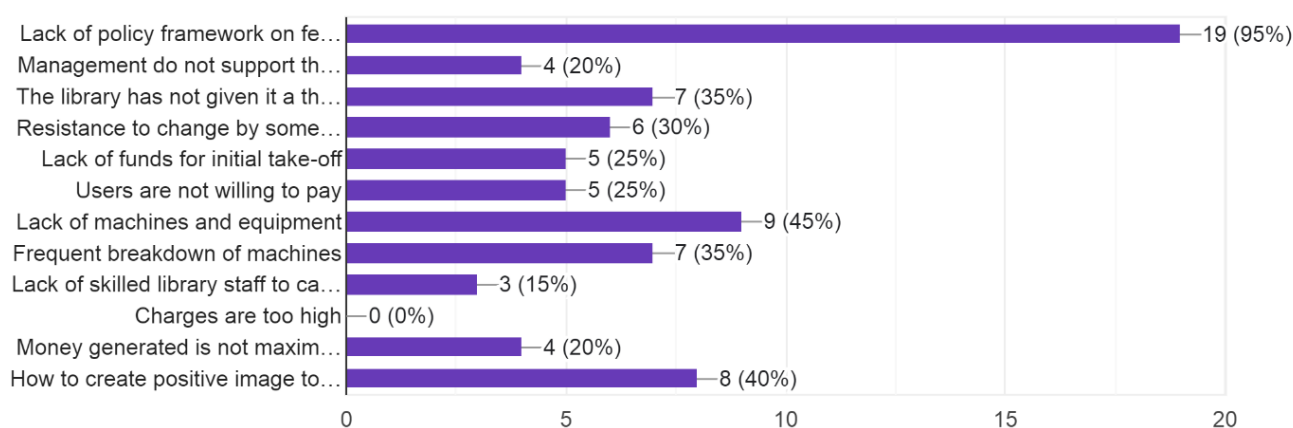
Research Question 2: What are the benefits of fee-based library services to private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State? The following are the benefits of fee-based library services



Source: Field survey, 2024

Figure 3 above shows responses on benefits of fee-based library services thus; Generates additional income to the library 17(89.5%), improves standard of library services 15(78.9%), help to meet demands from external users 11(57.9%), enhances innovation 8(42.1%), help sustain information resources and equipment 11(57.9%), users are more cautious in the use of library facilities 10(52.6%), enhances service delivery in the 21st Century 12(63.2%), improve the image of the library 11(57.9%), and helps in future planning by management 12(63.2%). This result indicates that librarians are aware of the benefits associated with the implementation of fee-based library services.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges to the implementation of fee-based library services in private university libraries in Akwa Ibom State? Fee-based library services in my university include:



Source: Field survey, 2024

Figure 4 above indicates challenges to the implementation of fee-based library services in the universities under study; lack of policy framework on fee-based library services 19(95%), Management do not support the idea 4(20%), the library has not given it a thought 7(35%), resistance to change by some librarians 6(30%), lack of funds for initial take-off 5(25%), users are not willing to pay 5(25%), lack of machines and equipment 9(45%), frequent breakdown of machines 7(35%), lack of skilled library staff to carry out fee-based services 3(15%), money generated is not maximally used 4(20%), and how to create positive image to users 8(40%).

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study revealed that fee-based services are carried out at a low extent in Obong University, very low extent in Topfaith University, while in Ritman University they are not in existence at all. The major fee-based services available in the private universities studied include; Photocopy, membership registration, library card replacement, overdue fines, lamination and binding. This revelation collaborates that of Okeke, Urhiewhu, and Nwafor (2015) whose study of private universities in Anambra State revealed that fee-based library services were present in the three private universities, but to a limited extent. This finding also agrees with Ejezie and Okeke (2021) whose study on the availability, extent of use, and impediments to the use of fee-based services in federal academic libraries in South-East Nigeria revealed that, internet browsing/Email, fines for overdue items, library card replacement, and binding/lamination are the most commonly adopted services in federal academic libraries in South-East Nigeria.

The study also revealed that the library staff acknowledge the following as benefits of fee-based library services; Generates additional income to the library, improves standard of library services, enhances service delivery in the 21st Century, helps in future planning by management, help sustain information resources and equipment, help to meet demands from external users, improve the image of the library, users are more cautious in the use of library facilities and also enhances innovation. This finding aligns with those of Yusuf and Salau (2019), Nuhu and Jafaru (2022) and Odusanya, et al (2024), that the fee-based library services offered the universities had a beneficial impact on the libraries investigated and thus called for libraries to adopt fee-based services for self-sustenance. The finding also agrees with Idhalama and Krubu (2018) whose study indicated that incorporating fee-based services could enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of librarians and libraries when providing information services.

Furthermore, the study shows that implementation of fee-based library services in the private universities is impeded by the following challenges; lack of policy framework on fee-based library services, lack of machines and equipment, how to create positive image to users, library not giving a thought to fee-based library services, frequent breakdown of machines, resistance to change by some librarians, lack of funds for initial take-off, and unwillingness of users to pay for library services. The clear indication by 95% that lack of policy framework on fee-based library services is a challenge corroborates revelation by Okeke, Urhiewhu, and Nwafor (2015) that whose study found that there was no established policy for fee-based library services in any of the three university libraries in Anambra State, leading to disorganized management of these services. This scenario has therefore contributed significantly to the low level of adoption of fee-based services among universities under study.

Conclusion

The study revealed that fee-based services are not extensively utilized in the private universities in Akwa Ibom State. The few services in existence are photocopying, membership registration, library card replacement, overdue fines, lamination, and binding. While the staff acknowledge the advantages of fee-based services, such as increasing revenue, enhancing service standards, and fostering innovation, their implementation faces various hurdles including the absence of a policy framework, insufficient machines and equipment, resistance to change among some librarians, and user reluctance to pay for services. Addressing the obstacles associated with fee-based services is paramount for private universities to effectively implement and benefit from these offerings.

Recommendations

To effectively implement and derive benefits from fee-based services, private universities in Akwa Ibom State should address the challenges identified by this study. Consequently, the following recommendations are made:

- Establishment of a supportive policy framework for fee-based services.
- Allocation of resources for acquisition of necessary equipment for fee-based library services.
- Creation of awareness and demonstration of the value of fee-based library services to the user community so as to foster a more positive reception and greater willingness to embrace fee-based library services.

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