

WHY MEDICAL STUDENTS KEEP BOOKS OVERDUE: A STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA

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Abstract

In the University of Jaffna Medical Library, one hundred and twenty randomly selected medical students who had overdue books were surveyed using a questionnaire with the objective of identifying reasons for keeping borrowed library books overdue; to find out how they perceive the eight given measures against overdue books; and for seeking methods to reduce number of overdue books. A majority of the books which were overdue had been borrowed for reading for clinical classes. Being overdue was fairly high in the subject of orthopedics, followed by microbiology. Results revealed that the major reason for keeping books overdue is students being unable to finish reading. The books on high demand were overdue since the numbers of copies available in the library were not enough to satisfy students' needs. Students were in favor of sending reminder notices as a means of discouraging overdue books, followed by providing renewal opportunities. Students suggested increasing number of copies of demand books, extend the opening hours of the library and extend the loan

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period as feasible solutions. The need for an extended loan period and increasing the number of copies will require further investigation. Purchasing e-books is another alternative for some textbooks.

Key words: Overdue books, Overdue fines, Medical library, Medical students.

1. Introduction

Medical Faculty Library of University of Jaffna was established in 1978 along with the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine of this University. It is a branch of the University main library. Teaching hospital, Jaffna is situated about seven kilometers away from the faculty. Library has about 13,000 books, 2800 bound volumes of periodicals and 21 current periodical subscriptions. Most of the latest editions of medical textbooks are housed in the overnight lending section of the library. As of November 2008, the library had 744 registered readers, comprising 652 students studying for the Bachelor of Medicine-Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), 26 students following allied health science course comprising nursing, medical laboratory technology and pharmacy, 12 post graduate students and 54 teaching and non-teaching staff members. Of the 652 MBBS students, 293 (45%) were females and 359 (55%) were males.

The efficient and effective management of library resources play a vital role in medical education. In this regard, concern about library overdue books is not new. Overdue book is defined as follows.

“If a book is still checked out after the date stamped inside, it is overdue and subject to fines”. (Williams and Staff, 2007).

As in most libraries, several measures for handling overdue materials have been put in place. These measures include provision for renewals; reservation facility; charging overdue fines; sending overdue notices to the defaulters; refusing them further loan and publishing their names on the library notice board. However the incidence of overdue books, particularly among students, is

still a problem. This situation denies other readers access to needed library books on time.

2. Objectives

The study aimed (i) to identify the reasons for keeping borrowed library books overdue; (ii) to find out how do they perceive the eight given measures against overdue books; and (iii) to find out other steps the students would like the library to take to reduce overdue books.

3. Research Methodology

It was mainly based on a questionnaire survey. Questions relating to the issues identified during the literature review were drawn up and pre-tested on ten MBBS students with overdue books as a pilot study (These students were later excluded from the study). Following the students' responses, the questions were reworded to produce the questionnaire. This was used for data collection. It consisted of more structured and few open ended questions. The data were collected for a three months period in year 2008 during the academic sessions.

Only MBBS students who had overdue books from the reference section were considered for the study. To identify the overdue books for the study, the library's issue records (consisting of slips) were searched for students' overdue books. Taking only one (the one most overdue) for each couple of issuing slips was collected at the issuing counter when they returned books. This way, 240 slips were collected. From the 240 overdue slips in the record, 120 were randomly selected for the investigation. Using the information on the 120 slips, students' personal information and information on books in the questionnaire was completed. The partially completed questionnaires were then distributed through each batch representative explaining the importance of the study. They were requested to collect the completed questionnaires from each batch and return to the library within a week, after which the returns were analyzed.

4. Results and discussion

Of the 120 questionnaires distributed, 100 had been returned after completion, resulting a response rate of 83%.

4.1 Profile of the overdue books.

4.1.1 Gender

Males constituted the majority of the registered student readers (55% from the population), and they had 46 % of overdue books. Of the registered female student readers (45%), 54% had over dues. Therefore the survey showed that female students keep books overdue more than male students.

4.1.2 Composition (level of study)

Table 1. Composition of the respondents with overdue books.

Year of students	No.of. Respondents (%)
1 st year	Nil
2 nd MBBS	04
3 rd MBBS Part I	36
3 rd MBBS Part II	50
Final MBBS	10

Table 1 shows that out of 100 MBBS students, 50% were in 3rd MBBS part II, 36% in 3rd MBBS part I, and less than 15% were from other batches.

4.1.3 Subject-wise distribution

Table 2. Subject-wise distribution of overdue books

Subject	Number of books
orthopaedics	26
microbiology	18
pathology	12
psychiatry	10
community medicine, surgery, and medicine	8
pharmacology and paediatrics	4
other	1

The fairly high percentage of overdue books in orthopaedics, microbiology and pathology indicated a need to purchase additional copies of books, which can be done after a follow up evaluation study of the book collection of these areas. The number of days by which books were kept overdue ranged from one to twenty eight days averaging eight days.

4.2 Purpose of borrowing library books which were overdue.

Table 3 shows the purpose of borrowing library books which were kept overdue. As expected, these overdue books had been borrowed for various purposes, reading for clinical classes and exam preparation being the top two reasons.

Table 3: Purpose of borrowing library books which were kept overdue.

Purpose	No. of responses (%)
Reading for clinical classes	54
Exam preparation	33
Additional reading for lectures	11
Project work or Seminar	02

4.3 Reasons for being overdue

Table 4: Reasons given for not returning borrowed library books as due.

Reason	No. of responses (%)
Not finished with the book	43
Because of competition to get hold of one	26
Teaching hospital is far away from the library	14
Return and renewal procedures discouraging	09
Forgetfulness	04
Student is not in the University area	04

From Table 4, it is evident that most students (43%) kept books because they had not finished with them. The result confirmed the findings of the previous study carried out by Aleo (2002). It was followed by 'competition', difficulties in reaching the library (distance), and drawbacks in return and renewal procedures. The result emphasizes the need for computerizing the library activities especially the process of circulation. At the moment library activities are being automated. When completed, its inbuilt overdue books reminders, & return and renewal procedures could make activities painless.

This study revealed that only 4% of the overdue books were so because of forgetfulness. But a previous study conducted by Ahiakwo and Obokoh (1987) showed significantly opposite results. However, that particular study concerned faculty members rather than students.

The respondents were also asked whether there are any other reasons to keep the books overdue. The following reasons were given by the respondents. Four per cent (4%) of them stated that they circulated the book among their friends. Friends had not returned those books on time. Six per cent (6%) said that they are able to visit the library only after lectures, and by that time, the library is closed. They requested to extend library hours. As an immediate result of this finding, the closing time of the library was extended from 4 pm. to 6 pm.

Two students mentioned that the books have to be referred throughout the semester, but they could not afford to purchase it.

4.4 Subject areas essential to be improved in the library collection.

The respondents were asked to suggest three subject areas which have to be improved in the library collection, and were asked to mark the priority order as 1, 2 and 3. Accordingly, Table 5 shows the priority order of subject areas to be improved in the present medical library collection. The subject orthopaedics scored highest rank. It is in parallel with the result given at section 4.1.3.

Most students purchase books on major medical streams - medicine, surgery, paediatrics, gynaecology etc. But rarely students purchase minor appointments like orthopaedics, ophthalmology, haematology, etc. For these, almost all the students depend only on the library collection. It is an important point to consider when purchasing new books.

Table 5 : Subject areas to be improved in the library collection

Subjects	Rank			Total rank order
	1	2	3	
Orthopedics	30	04	06	104
Medicine	12	6	10	58
Microbiology	14	2	2	48
Surgery	06	10	10	48
Pathology	10	08	02	48
Psychiatry	02	14	04	38
Pharmacology	04	08	04	32
Hematology	02	04	06	20
Community Medicine	-	06	02	14
Forensic Medicine	02	04	-	14
Parasitology (Atlas)	-	02	04	08
Gyn & Obs	-	2	2	06
Pediatrics	-	02	02	06

4.6 Students' perceptions of eight given overdue measures.

As shown in Table 6, students were most favorably disposed to sending reminder notices as a means of discouraging overdue books, followed by facilitating renewals, charging overdue fines, publishing defaulters' names on notice boards, refusing further loans, and increasing fine rates.

The main goal of overdue reminders is to bring the materials back to the library, so that other patrons can check them out. Hoffman (1996) stated that publishing defaulters' names in local newspapers had proved useful to a public library. In a University setting, the corresponding method could be displaying names in student notice boards.

Table 6: Students' perceptions of eight given overdue measures.

Measures	Students' perceptions		
	Helpful & welcome	Not helpful and intensely hateful	Not sure of the value
Sending reminder notices.	96	02	02
Allowing renewals.	88	12	-
Charging overdue fines.	56	34	10
Publishing defaulters' names on student notice board	40	36	16
Refusing further loans.	18	64	14
Increasing fine rates.	12	70	16
Reporting to the Dean/Heads of Departments.	06	66	24
Taking extreme cases to Courts.	06	74	16

Students marked 'taking extreme cases to courts, increase the present fine rates, reporting defaulters' names to the Dean/Heads of Departments and

refusing further loans' as intensely hateful. One student suggested sending defaulters' names to relevant batch representatives rather than Institutional heads. Then all the batch mates could push those students to return books. The study showed the students were more favorably accepting sending reminder notices and allowing easy renewals. However, there is a need to complement preventive actions with punitive measures in some cases.

Very few students like to increase present fine rates too. This attitude of students complemented the survey conducted by Burgin and Hansel (1990) in a public library in which they found increasing fines did not have a statistically significant effect on overdue returns.

In addition to the above eight measures, a 52% of students made further suggestions on how to reduce overdue books. Table 7 shows the suggestions. Of these, 28% of the respondents urged the library to procure more copies of the titles on high demand. Twenty six per cent (26%) of them suggested extending the loan period of latest editions of textbooks. Fourteen per cent (14%) suggested increasing the loan period of the overnight reference collection by atleast 2-3 days time.

Table 7: Suggestions to reduce the overdue books.

Suggestions	Number of responses
Increase the number of copies of overdue books.	28
Keep latest editions of textbooks also in the normal lending area (Stack)	26
Extend opening hours of the library till 6 pm.	14
Overnight reference period should be extended at least by 2 days.	10
Improve renewal procedures.	06
Computerise library activities.	05
Inform the list of names with overdue books to the relevant batch representatives rather than sending to Heads/Dean	01

Therefore 40% of the respondents wanted an upward review of the present loan period. Lyons's (1981) study stated that circulation policies were constantly under scrutiny to make sure they adequately meet faculty and student needs as well as comply with the overall library policies. The library is unable to increase the duration of the loan period for the books in high demand due to the poor student to book ratios. Library is not in a position to purchase more number of copies of textbooks, where the incidence of overdue books was high, because of the financial constraints. In addition, new editions are released very frequently especially in the field of medical education. In this case, purchasing e-books would be a useful suggestion to cater multiple users as well as readily accessing new editions. All hard copies can be kept in the lending section. Also, suggestions made by respondents should further investigated.

5. Conclusion

The incidence of overdue books in the University of Jaffna, Medical library was fairly high in orthopedics, followed by microbiology. Majority of the overdue books were borrowed for reading for clinical classes. Most of the over due books investigated were so because students had not finished with them. The number of copies of some textbooks available in the library is not enough to satisfy the students' demands. Students were most favorably disposed to sending reminder notices as a means of discouraging overdue books, followed by providing renewal facility. The study makes it clear that many other factors are at work in encouraging the students to return materials on time rather than imposing on them to pay the fines. The study proved the necessity to computerise library activities, thus making these processes efficient and effective. Computerising will help activate controls such as limiting number of renewals, and regulating issual of overnight books at the same time allowing remote renewal and remote access to students' check-out records. Still, persuading students to cooperate in sharing books efficiently will remain an important task of the librarian.

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