

A Systems Theory Approach To Understanding The Interrelationship Between Weeding Policies And Service Delivery In Academic Libraries

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Abstract: This study investigates the intricate relationship between weeding policies and service delivery in academic libraries within the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, employing a Systems Theory framework to elucidate the dynamics of these interrelated components. As academic libraries serve as vital support structures for teaching, learning, and research, effective collection management practices, particularly weeding, become essential to maintain relevant, accessible, and current resources. This research highlights significant challenges libraries face in this region, including insufficient funding and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder optimal service delivery. Through a comprehensive examination of existing literature, case studies, and empirical analyses, the study reveals that structured weeding policies contribute to enhanced user satisfaction, increased resource accessibility, and improved operational efficiency. By systematically removing outdated and irrelevant materials, libraries are better positioned to offer up-to-date collections that align with the academic needs of their users. Furthermore, the study advocates adopting systems thinking within library management practices to foster collaborative decision-making and community engagement. Finally, it identifies critical areas for future research, including exploring user engagement in weeding processes and the systemic implications of collection management on library efficacy. This research provides practical recommendations for improving weeding policies. It contributes to the theoretical discourse surrounding library and information science, promoting a nuanced understanding of the interplay between collection management and service delivery in academic settings.

Keywords: Weeding Policies, Service Delivery, Academic Libraries, Systems Theory, Collection Management

INTRODUCTION

The role of academic libraries within higher educational institutions is crucial, as they serve as information hubs that facilitate teaching, learning, and research. The dynamics of academia necessitate that these libraries not only curate their collections effectively but also ensure their resources are relevant, accessible, and up-to-date. This is particularly vital in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, where academic libraries play a pivotal role in supporting the educational aspirations of diverse academic communities.

Background of the Study

Nigeria's South-South region, comprising six states—Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers—has witnessed significant educational development in recent years. Academic libraries within this region are integral to the educational framework, providing access to a wide range of resources that support various academic programs. According to Osei (2021), the effective operation of these libraries is often hindered by insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel, leading to challenges in service delivery.

Service delivery in academic libraries encompasses the timeliness, accessibility, and relevance of information services provided to users (Ekere et al., 2020). As libraries adapt to the rapidly evolving information landscape, the need for effective service delivery has never been more pressing. This is particularly true in South-South Nigeria, where students and researchers require constant access to current and comprehensive resources to support their academic endeavors (Nwajei & Afebende, 2021).

In this context, weeding policies emerge as a critical facet of collection management. Weeding, or the systematic removal of outdated, irrelevant, or damaged materials from library collections, is essential for maintaining a collection that meets the evolving needs of users (Miller, 2014). Weeding ensures that academic libraries remain relevant and responsive to user demands, allowing them to provide space for new and pertinent resources while facilitating ease of access and utilization (Nwaogu & Ikoro, 2023). As such, effective weeding policies are not merely administrative tasks but strategic components that influence overall service delivery and user satisfaction in academic libraries.

In light of these considerations, this study explores the interrelationship between weeding policies and service delivery in academic libraries within the South-South region of Nigeria, applying a systems theory perspective to understand the systemic implications of effective management practices in these institutions.

Statement of the Problem

In academic libraries, effective service delivery is paramount to supporting users' educational and research needs. However, many libraries in South-South Nigeria face significant challenges stemming from inadequate weeding policies. Weeding, or the systematic evaluation and removal of outdated, irrelevant, or damaged materials from library collections, is essential for maintaining a collection that meets the current information needs of patrons (Hiller, 2018). Libraries that fail to implement effective weeding policies may find their collections cluttered with obsolete resources, leading to increased difficulty locating relevant materials. This can result in user dissatisfaction, as researchers and students are often frustrated by the presence of outdated or irrelevant materials in collections designed to support their academic pursuits (Owoyemi & Inah, 2019).

Moreover, inadequate weeding practices can lead to several operational inefficiencies within libraries, including wasted space, increased maintenance costs, and diminished accessibility to pertinent information (Daniel, 2020). Chibundu (2021) notes that libraries with outdated collections may also struggle to provide the quality of service expected in modern educational environments. Consequently, ineffective weeding not only hampers service delivery but potentially undermines the credibility of academic libraries as essential information resources within the institution.

Additionally, a notable lack of research focuses on the systemic relationship between weeding policies and service provision in academic libraries, particularly in South-South Nigeria. While the existing literature recognizes the significance of collection management practices, including weeding, few studies have systematically explored how these practices interrelate with service delivery outcomes (Okonkwo & Asogwa, 2022). This gap in the literature limits the development of evidence-based strategies that can enhance librarian practices and improve the overall user experience. Exploring weeding policies from a systems theory perspective could provide valuable insights by emphasizing the interconnectedness of library practices and service delivery, leading to more effective management frameworks (Magara et al., 2022).

Addressing the challenges posed by inadequate weeding policies and investigating the systemic relationship between these policies and service provision in academic libraries is critical. This study aims to fill the existing research gap and contribute to improved library practices and enhanced service delivery in educational institutions across the South-South region of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the role of weeding policies in enhancing service delivery within academic libraries in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. To achieve this overarching aim, the study is structured around the following specific objectives:

1. To Assess the Impact of Weeding Policies on Service Delivery in Academic Libraries:
 - This objective seeks to evaluate how the implementation of effective weeding policies influences various facets of service delivery in academic libraries. This includes understanding how weeding practices can enhance user satisfaction, streamline access to relevant materials, and improve overall library efficiency. Assessing this impact will provide insights into the importance of maintaining current and relevant collections to meet users' academic needs, as highlighted by the work of Ranjbar & Asghar (2020), who emphasized that well-managed collections directly contribute to user engagement and satisfaction.
2. To Explore How Weeding Practices are Integrated into Broader Collection Development Strategies:
 - This objective aims to investigate the relationship between weeding and collection development strategies within academic libraries. By analyzing how weeding practices are aligned with the broader goals of collection management, including acquisition, preservation, and the continuous assessment of library resources, the study can elucidate the systematic nature of effective collection management practices. The integration of weeding into collection development is critical, as observed by Miller (2019), who argued that a proactive approach to weeding ensures that library resources remain aligned with current academic trends and user demands.

The study endeavors to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the significance of weeding policies in academic libraries, offering practical recommendations for enhancing library services through systematic collection management and demonstrating the interconnectedness of weeding and overall service provision.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the relationship between weeding policies and service delivery in academic libraries. The following research questions will guide the investigation:

1. How do weeding policies influence the quality of library collections?
 - This question seeks to examine the extent to which weeding practices affect the overall quality and relevance of library collections. Understanding this relationship is essential for ensuring that libraries maintain collections that meet the current needs of their users. As Morrison (2021) notes, effective weeding can lead to a more curated collection that enhances user experience by providing access to timely and relevant resources. Additionally, recent studies have highlighted how clear weeding criteria can significantly improve collection quality, helping libraries prioritize high-demand materials while removing outdated items (Dunn, 2022).
2. In what ways do weeding policies contribute to enhanced service delivery?
 - This question focuses on the mechanisms through which weeding policies impact library services. By investigating how systematic weeding leads to improved access, resource allocation, and overall user satisfaction, the study aims to illuminate the broader implications of effective collection management. Research by Hsieh & Bishu (2020) suggests that weeding not only frees up physical and digital space but also enhances the discoverability of resources, thereby improving service delivery. Furthermore, effective weeding practices can reduce the workload on library staff, allowing them to focus on user engagement and support services (Becker & De Groote, 2022).

These questions are designed to yield insights into the critical role those weeding policies play in shaping the quality of library collections and in enhancing the service delivery capabilities of academic libraries.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study on weeding policies in academic libraries extends into two primary domains: implications for library management practices and policy formulation, as well as contributions to the body of knowledge in library and information science.

This study offers substantial implications for library management practices, particularly regarding the formulation of effective weeding policies. By providing empirical evidence on how weeding influences collection quality and enhances service delivery, the research can inform library administrators and collection managers on best practices for collection maintenance. Insights from this study can help library managers develop clear and systematic weeding policies that align with institutional goals and user needs. As noted by Osunlaja and Adediran (2021), well-defined weeding criteria can significantly enhance decision-making processes regarding collection management. Understanding the impacts of weeding can enable libraries to allocate resources more efficiently, as a focus on maintaining vibrant and relevant collections can lead to better financial and spatial planning in library environments (Curzon, 2022). Ultimately, effective weeding practices also highlight the importance of user engagement in the weeding process, suggesting that incorporating user feedback can strengthen library-community relations and improve user satisfaction (Day & Rader, 2022). This, in turn, enhances the overall library service delivery framework and encourages user retention.

In terms of contributions to the existing body of knowledge in library and information science, this study addresses the gap in empirical research concerning the role of weeding in academic libraries. The research findings will deepen the understanding of the intersections between collection management and user services, thereby advancing theoretical frameworks in library science. By grounding the study in recent data and user feedback, this research adds empirical support to the theoretical discussions around collection management and its relevance in a rapidly changing information landscape (Saad & Alghamdi, 2023). Such evidence-based insights can inform future research and practice in the field. Furthermore, the study may facilitate the development of a conceptual framework for weeding policies in academic libraries that can be adapted for various contexts and institutional needs, serving as a guideline for other libraries seeking to enhance their collection management practices. Finally, the findings of this study may catalyze further research on topics related to collection management, user experience, and service delivery in libraries, thereby fostering a deeper exploration of the strategic role of weeding in academic settings (Fitzgerald & Bhattacharya, 2023).

This study is significant for its potential to influence library management practices, enhance policy formulation, and contribute to the broader academic discourse within library and information science.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's Systems Theory of Organization provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how various elements within an organization interact as part of a larger whole. Initially developed in the 1940s, this theory posits that organizations are open systems that continuously interact with their environments and adapt to changes. According to Bertalanffy, systems can be defined by their structure, function, and processes, with a focus on the interdependence of various components (Bertalanffy, 1968). In the context of libraries, systemic thinking emphasizes the importance of integration across different functional

areas, such as administration, collection development, and user services. This approach encourages library professionals to consider how their decisions and practices affect the organization as a whole, fostering a more holistic perspective on library operations.

Applying systemic thinking to libraries promotes collaboration and a unified vision that can enhance overall effectiveness. For instance, when libraries adopt a systems approach, they can better align their services with community needs and institutional goals, leading to improved resource allocation and user satisfaction (Lowry, 2022). This integration ultimately helps libraries navigate the complexities of modern information environments, responding effectively to both challenges and opportunities.

Weeding Policies in Academic Libraries

Weeding policies in academic libraries refer to the systematic process of evaluating and removing materials from the library's collection based on specific criteria (Gregory & Farkas, 2018). The primary purpose of weeding is to ensure that collections remain relevant, current, and usable, contributing to the library's overall effectiveness in meeting user needs. Weeding not only helps maintain the quality of the collection, but it also frees up space for new materials, enhances access to relevant information, and minimizes user frustration associated with outdated or irrelevant items.

Existing literature highlights the impact of weeding on academic library collections. A study by McCabe (2021) emphasizes that regular weeding contributes to higher circulation rates, as updated collections are more likely to attract user engagement. Additionally, a survey conducted by Johnson (2020) found that academic libraries that actively implement weeding policies experience improved user satisfaction and increased usage of their resources. These findings underscore the crucial role weeding plays in the overall health of library collections and its direct correlation with service quality.

Service Delivery in Academic Libraries

Service delivery in academic libraries encompasses the practices and frameworks through which libraries provide resources, information, and assistance to users. Key concepts in service delivery include the establishment of user-centric services, efficient information dissemination, and the prioritization of user experience (Heinrich & Dupree, 2019). Effective service delivery frameworks often incorporate principles of customer service, accessibility, and responsiveness, ensuring that libraries meet the evolving needs of their diverse user populations.

The relationship between service delivery and collection management policies, including weeding, is significant. Research indicates that aligning collection management with service delivery strategies can enhance user experience and satisfaction (Baker, 2022). For instance, libraries that integrate their collection assessment processes with user feedback mechanisms are better equipped to make informed decisions regarding both acquisitions and weeding, ultimately leading to a more robust service offering.

Relationship Between Weeding Policies and Service Delivery

The connection between weeding practices and improved service delivery outcomes has been observed in various studies. Research findings demonstrate that effective weeding not only enhances the quality of library collections but also improves users' experiences and satisfaction levels. For example, Bandy (2023) conducted a study highlighting that libraries implementing systematic weeding experiences have reported increased user engagement and the successful attraction of new patrons. The study argues that by maintaining a relevant collection, libraries can facilitate more effective information retrieval and reduce the chances of user frustration caused by outdated materials.

Additionally, a comprehensive review by Rodriguez (2022) establishes a direct link between the implementation of weeding policies and increased circulation statistics. The review indicates that libraries that engage in regular weeding can maintain collections that are both current and relevant, thereby fostering higher usage rates among students and researchers. The insights gathered from these studies affirm that effective weeding practices contribute significantly to improving service delivery in academic libraries, ultimately enhancing their role as vital educational and research resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For this study, a secondary data analysis approach will be employed to explore weeding policies in academic libraries and their integration into service delivery practices. This involves systematically reviewing and synthesizing existing literature, case studies, institutional reports, and policy documents related to the topic. Secondary data analysis is particularly advantageous in this context as it allows for the utilization of previously collected data to draw new insights, reducing the time and resources typically required for primary data collection (Johnston, 2022). Moreover, the use of secondary data is beneficial when access to primary data is constrained, which is often the case in academic research contexts.

The justification for employing a literature review and case studies in data collection is multifaceted. A literature review facilitates a comprehensive understanding of existing research and theoretical frameworks surrounding weeding policies and service delivery in academic libraries, enabling the identification of gaps and trends (Webster & Watson, 2020). Furthermore, case studies provide in-depth, contextual insights into specific libraries' practices and illustrate how different institutions implement and benefit from weeding policies (Yin, 2018). By leveraging both methodologies, this study can create a robust and well-rounded analysis of the topic, combining breadth and depth.

Data Sources

The secondary data sources utilized in this study will encompass various types of materials relevant to weeding policies in academic libraries. This includes existing research articles, empirical studies, case studies, institutional reports, and policy documents from libraries within the South-South Nigeria region. Previous research will provide a foundation for understanding established theories and practices, while case studies will allow for the examination of specific instances of weeding implementation (Meyer, 2022).

The criteria for selecting case studies from academic libraries in South-South Nigeria will include factors such as the library's demonstrated implementation of weeding policies, diversity in institutional characteristics (e.g., size, type, and user demographics), and availability of documented evidence on their collection management practices. Libraries that have published reports or studies evaluating their weeding processes or have made their policies publicly accessible will be prioritized. This approach ensures a representative sample of practices that can effectively highlight the relationship between weeding policies and service delivery outcomes in the region.

Data Analysis

The methods for analyzing the collected secondary data will include qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Qualitative content analysis will be employed to systematically categorize and interpret the information extracted from literature and case studies, allowing for a deeper understanding of the frameworks and practices associated with weeding policies (Schreier, 2014). Thematic analysis will involve identifying and analyzing recurring themes, patterns, and trends across the data sources, enabling the establishment of key relationships and insights related to the impact of weeding on service delivery in academic libraries (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To effectively assess the integration of weeding policies into service delivery practices, a conceptual framework will be developed based on the findings from the literature review and case studies. This framework will outline the essential components involved in the weeding process (e.g., criteria for selection, community engagement, and policy formulation) and how they interact with service delivery outcomes (e.g., improved user satisfaction, increased collection relevancy, and efficient resource management). By examining the connections between these components, the framework will provide a structured approach for evaluating and enhancing weeding practices in academic libraries.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Weeding Policies in Selected Libraries

In examining the weeding policies of selected academic libraries in South-South Nigeria, it is evident that while there is a commitment to maintaining relevant and up-to-date collections, practices vary significantly between institutions. Libraries such as the University of Port Harcourt Library and the Niger Delta University Library have developed comprehensive weeding policies that outline specific criteria for deaccessioning materials. These criteria often include factors such as the physical condition of items, usage statistics, relevance to current curricula, and the availability of digital alternatives (Ogunleye, 2021).

For instance, the University of Calabar Library implements a four-step process for weeding: evaluation of the collection, consultation with faculty, removal of obsolete materials, and reintegration of new resources. Annual assessments are conducted to ensure that the collection aligns with both academic objectives and student needs (Afolabi, 2023). Furthermore, many libraries are increasingly recognizing the importance of community input in the weeding process, engaging faculty and students in discussions about which materials should remain in the collection and which should be removed. Such participatory approaches aim to foster greater transparency and user satisfaction (Hudson, 2022).

In contrast, some libraries, like those with limited resources or administrative structures, show less formalized policies. Their weeding occurs sporadically, often driven by the availability of space rather than a strategic evaluation of the collection. This lack of structured policy can potentially lead to gaps in the collection that disadvantage users (Ibrahim & Okunlola, 2022).

Impact of Weeding Policies on Service Delivery

The implementation of structured weeding policies has been shown to positively influence service delivery outcomes in academic libraries within the South-South region. Libraries that engage in regular and systematic weeding practices report enhanced user satisfaction, increased circulation rates, and improved access to relevant information (Edet et al., 2022). For example, the research conducted by Momoh & Subair (2023) at the Akwa Ibom State University Library illustrated that libraries with active weeding policies experienced a significant reduction in user complaints regarding outdated resources and improved overall user experience.

One notable case study involves the University of Port Harcourt Library, which undertook an ambitious weeding project in 2021 that resulted in the removal of over 30% of its outdated materials. Following this project, the library documented a 25% increase in the circulation of remaining titles and positive feedback from users, who reported easier access to more relevant materials (Ogunleye, 2021). Another enlightening case is the Niger Delta University Library, which, through regular engagement with faculty and students, reshaped its collection to meet the educational mandates better, leading to higher student satisfaction and utilization of library services post-weeding initiative (Afolabi, 2023).

These outcomes underscore the critical relationship between effective collection management, specifically weeding policies and the overall user satisfaction and service delivery of academic libraries.

Systems Theory Perspective

From the perspective of Systems Theory, the findings highlight that weeding policies and service delivery are interconnected components of a larger organizational system in academic libraries. Systems Theory posits that an organization is more than the sum of its parts, emphasizing the interdependence of various elements (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In the context of academic libraries, weeding practices cannot be isolated from the overall goals of the institution. Instead, they should be viewed as integral to optimizing the library's service delivery, resource management, and user engagement.

The practice of strategic weeding enables libraries to adapt to changing educational demands and the evolving landscape of information access. By regularly evaluating and updating their collections, libraries can better align their resources with user needs, thus enhancing service delivery outcomes. The feedback loop created through user engagement in the weeding process allows libraries to continuously refine their collections in accordance with the demands of their user community, leading to a more responsive and adaptable organizational system.

Moreover, adopting a Systems Theory perspective reveals the complexity of interactions between various stakeholders in the library ecosystem—librarians, faculty, students, and the broader academic community. Effective communication and collaboration among these groups are essential for fostering a cohesive and integrative approach to collection management. By recognizing the symbiotic relationship between weeding policies and service delivery, libraries can create a dynamic environment that effectively responds to the needs of their users while enhancing their operational efficiency (Lowry, 2022; Meyer, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Weeding Policies in Selected Libraries

The analysis of weeding policies in various academic libraries in the South-South region of Nigeria reveals several common strategies and practices. Many libraries, influenced by best practices from global standards, have developed formalized weeding policies that establish specific criteria for the removal of materials from their collections. Standard criteria include outdated information, low circulation rates, physical condition, relevance to curriculum, and redundancy (Amaechi & Udo, 2022). Libraries such as the University of Calabar Library and the Rivers State University Library have documented their weeding procedures, emphasizing community engagement and staff input to ensure that the needs of their user populations are adequately captured (Okwu & Ogbonnaya, 2021).

Our findings indicate that effective weeding policies are not only fundamental to maintaining the relevance of library collections but also serve to enhance overall organizational efficiency by freeing up valuable shelf space and improving user access to current information (Nwafor, 2022).

Impact of Weeding Policies on Service Delivery

The impact of weeding policies on service delivery has been notably positive among the libraries examined. A thematic analysis of several case studies suggests that libraries that actively engage in systematic weeding experience higher user satisfaction and improved service delivery outcomes. For instance, the University of Port Harcourt Library implemented a comprehensive weeding strategy that resulted in doubled circulation statistics over three years, as observed in their user engagement surveys (Eze & Iwu, 2023).

Additionally, case studies demonstrate successful models, such as the collaborative approach taken by the Niger Delta University Library, which involved staff training focused on collection assessment and user needs analysis. This approach not only informed better weeding decisions but also fostered a culture of continuous improvement in service delivery (Abang, 2023). Such successes underscore the importance of adapting weeding policies to the specific context and needs of library users.

Systems Theory Perspective

From the perspective of Systems Theory, the findings illustrate the interdependent nature of weeding policies and service delivery within academic libraries. Weeding is not merely an isolated function but rather a critical component that interacts with other library processes. When aligned with service delivery goals, weeding practices can significantly contribute to the overall efficiency and responsiveness of library services. According to Bertalanffy's Systems Theory, these practices can be seen as essential touchpoints that influence the library's adaptability to changing user needs and the academic environment (Lowry, 2022). Therefore, the integration of weeding policies within a wider systemic framework allows for a more holistic approach to library management, emphasizing continuous feedback loops and collaborative decision-making.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Key Findings

The analysis reveals that effective weeding policies are integral to enhancing the performance and relevance of academic libraries in the South-South region of Nigeria. Strong weeding practices not only improve the quality of collections but also correlate with increased user satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, adopting a systems perspective allows libraries to understand the interconnectedness of weeding processes and service delivery, facilitating a more comprehensive approach to library management.

Recommendations for Academic Libraries

To enhance service delivery through weeding practices, academic libraries should consider the following recommendations:

Develop Comprehensive Weeding Policies: Libraries should establish clear, evidence-based weeding policies that include criteria for decision-making alongside periodic reviews of these policies to accommodate evolving user needs (Gregory & Farkas, 2018).

Engage Users in the Weeding Process: Actively involve library users in the weeding process through surveys, feedback sessions, and discussions, ensuring that the collection reflects the interests and needs of the community (Johnson, 2020).

Integrate Systems Thinking: Libraries should adopt a systems thinking approach to library management by recognizing the interdependencies between weeding, collection development, and service delivery, thereby promoting collaborative strategies for improvement (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Training and Professional Sustainable Development: Invest in training programs for library staff focused on current trends in collection management, user engagement, and best practices in weeding to ensure a cohesive and informed approach to library services (Meyer, 2022). It develops and improves reality conditions through processes that depend on studying prior experiences and scientific developments to change the facts, understand them to make them better, and establish plans. In the broadest sense, sustainable professional development is a comprehensive activity for all sectors, whether in the state, organizations, public, or private sectors (Amanawa & Ogechi, 2024).

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