

## **Demographic factors as correlates of perception of ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Positive perception of the ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in polytechnics could motivate them to adhere to the ethics of library service delivery. However, reports from studies have shown that while some library personnel had a positive perception of some ethical issues, they also had negative perception of other ethical issues. Demographic factors could determine the type of perception that library personnel have towards ethical issues in libraries. Therefore, this study examined demographic factors as determinants of perception of ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the correlational type. The population of the study consisted of 169 library personnel of the Polytechnic, Ibadan, Oyo State, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos State and Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Ogun State. All the library personnel participated in the study and data were collected through the questionnaire. Results showed that out of the demographic factors, age ( $r=.228^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), marital status ( $r=.222^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), religion ( $r=.294^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and years of experience ( $r=.257^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) had a positive significant relationship with perception of ethical issues in libraries. Therefore, in planning workshops that will impact positively on the perception of ethical issues by the library personnel, these demographic factors should be put into consideration.

**Keywords:** Demographic factors, perception of ethical issues, library personnel, polytechnics, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The practice of librarianship, just like any other profession, is not immune from ethical dilemmas. This accounts for the introduction of codes of conduct by different local (Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria) and international (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) regulatory agencies in the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession. Pecho, Jadhav, Menon, Gadage, Montenegro and Das (2023) averred that LIS professionals should comply with ethical standards as a form of duty and responsibility placed on them by the dictates of the profession. Thus, it is expected that library personnel abide by these codes of conduct in order for them to be fair and just

when delivering services to their clientele (Phillips, Oyewole and Akinbo, 2018).

Over a decade ago, Hoq (2012) identified the ethical dilemmas that could confront library personnel as issues relating to accessibility of information, bias and equality in the treatment of users. Two years after, Mbofung and Popoola (2014) studied ethical issues in LIS that included privacy of information, equal treatment of users, censorship, equitable service delivery and intellectual freedom. Aluko-Arowolo, Onasote and Ehioghae (2014) also indicated that ethical issues in libraries centre on equal treatment of all information users, avoidance of bias in acquiring and evaluating information and in mediating it to other information users and respect for

confidentiality and privacy in dealing with information users. These components of ethical issues in libraries by Aluko et al. (2014) were studied in this research.

Equal treatment of users connotes that no user of a library should face discrimination due to their gender, financial situation, level of education, or religion. In terms of avoiding bias in the acquisition of information resources, this means that resources should be obtained to cover all necessary disciplines without favoring or discriminating against any one subject. Furthermore, avoiding prejudice in the evaluation of information resources implies that the various subject disciplines' information resources should be assessed fairly and justly. The necessity to maintain user data confidentiality to prevent data exploitation is upheld by respect for information privacy and confidentiality. The disposition of library personnel towards these ethical concerns could be a function of their perception of these ethical issues. This implies that perception could be an important determinant of attitude.

Goldstein (2018) defined perception as the process that involves the selection, organisation and the interpretation of information with cognitive prowess in order to create a meaningful comprehension of the environment. In other words, perception is like the mental image that an individual has towards an object, which could be positive or negative. Therefore, perception of ethical issues in libraries refers to how the library personnel cognitively assess the various ethical issues which could be favourable or not. If the perception is positive, the library personnel might abide by the ethical codes of conduct and if it is negative, they might not uphold the ethics of library service.

Adebayo and Mabawonku (2018) examined the perception of information ethics by librarians in four higher institutions in Oyo State, Nigeria and

reported both positive and negative perceptions. This connotes that while the perception of the respondents of some ethical issues in library service was positive; their perception of other ethical issues was negative. Ogun and Okubokeme (2024) noted that the perception of ethical issues could be determined by demographic factors. As a result, the pattern of result reported by Adebayo and Mabawonku could be a function of demographic factors like age, gender, religion, marital status, designation and years of experience.

It is based on this backdrop that this study examines demographic factors as determinants of perception of ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria. Polytechnics within the Nigerian environment are higher educational institutions that train middle-level manpower that should facilitate the socio-economic development of the society. Polytechnic libraries support the polytechnics with information resources and services to promote teaching, learning and research. A study on ethical issues in libraries within the polytechnic setting is imperative, as it has the potential to generate results which could enhance service delivery and invariably, improve the ranking of polytechnics, especially in Southwestern Nigeria.

### **Statement of the problem**

Positive perception of the ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in polytechnics could motivate them to adhere to the ethics of library service delivery. As a result, the image of libraries could be projected in a positive light and that can also assist in sustaining user patronage. However, empirical findings have showed that while some library personnel had a positive perception of some ethical issues, they also had negative perception of other ethical

issues. This highlights a gap in the way and manner these library personnel view the various ethical concerns that could influence library services. This pattern of response could be determined by demographic factors. In order to empirically ascertain this, this study examined demographic factors as determinants of perception of ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the demographic factors of the library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria?
2. What is the perception of the ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria?

### **Hypothesis**

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between demographic factors and perception of the ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria.

### **Literature review**

Some studies have been carried out on the perception of ethical issues by library personnel. Phillips, Oyewole and Akinbo (2018) carried out a phenomenographic study on the awareness and perception of ethical issues in library service delivery by librarians in the Polytechnic, Ibadan, Nigeria. The semi-structured interview was the tool used for data collection and results showed that the librarians had a favorable perception of the ethical issues in library service delivery. One of the participant said

“...I feel that ethical issues are very important and they should not be ignored by the librarian...”. Another participant commented that “...ethical decisions are not easy to make and usually require the ingenuity of a professional librarian or information provider to arrive at one that will be acceptable to the generality of other professional. It may sometimes require the librarian to put aside his or her own personal preferences and beliefs...”.

Adebayo and Mabawonku (2018) studied how librarians in four higher institutions perceived information ethics in Oyo State, Nigeria. The 47 librarians that were studied came from two universities, one polytechnic and one college of education. The questionnaire was used to collect data and findings revealed that in as much as most of the respondents had a favourable perception of the norms (legal and ethical) guiding their activities, some also had a negative perception of intellectual property rights (mean=2.78, University of Ibadan, mean=2.86, Ajayi Crowther University, mean=2.67, Polytechnic of Ibadan and mean=2.71, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education).

Findings from the studies reviewed revealed that the perception of ethical issues in libraries by library personnel could be positive or negative. Demographic factors could explain the variations in the perception by the library personnel. Literature search showed that there seems to be a dearth of literature on the relationship between demographic factors and ethical issues in libraries. However, quite a number of studies had been carried out on the relationship between demographic factors and ethical issues in different subject domains which could provide an insight into what that of LIS could be. These studies are hereby reviewed.

Lindblom and Lindblom (2016) investigated the correlation between socio-

demographic factors and the acceptance of unethical behaviour in Finland. The survey design was used and the population was 3500 adults in Finland. Most of the respondents (36.7%) were individuals with vocational skills, while the least (4.6%) had academic post graduate degrees. Results showed that females had a high tendency to comply with ethical issues than the males. Age also had a relationship with adherence to ethical behaviours as older respondents had a higher propensity to comply than the younger ones.

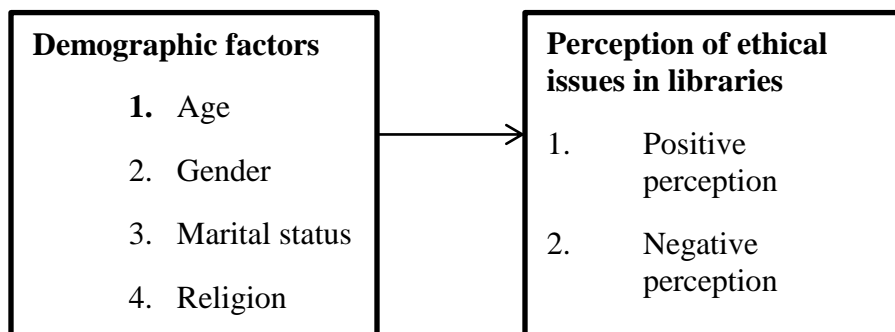
Ogoun and Okubokeme (2024) examined the impact of demographic factors on ethical compliance amongst 197 professional accountants in Rivers and Bayelsa states of Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was used and the questionnaire was deployed in collecting the data. Results showed that there was a negative significant relationship between gender and ethical compliance by the respondents ( $t = -1.072$ ,  $p = 0.028$ ). Age and level of education had a significant positive relationship with ethical compliance by the respondents ( $t = 9.812$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and ( $t = 4.419$ ,  $p = 0.0000$ ) respectively. The researchers concluded that demographic factors are important determinants of ethical compliance by the respondents.

On the other hand, the results of other studies have also showed that demographic factors have no relationship with ethical issues. Stichter (2015) carried out a study on the relationship between demographics and ethical sensitivity of 156 accounting students in four institutions in South and Midwest of the United States of America. Findings showed that none of the demographic factors (religion, type of

university and personal interactions) were significant determinants of ethical sensitivity by the respondents. Lokman, Talib, Ahmad and Jawan (2018) carried out a study on the influence of demographic factors on ethical behaviours of 400 immigration officers in Malaysia. The questionnaire was the data collection instrument and results showed that the ethical behaviour of the respondents was not determined by their gender ( $t(322) = -0.569$ ,  $p = 0.570$ ), age ( $F(2, 321) = 0.391$ ,  $p = 0.677$ ) and their years of service ( $F(3, 320) = 1.064$ ,  $p = 0.364$ ).

Safavi, Ebrahim, Areshtanab, Khodadadi and Fooladi (2018) investigated the relationship between demographic characteristics and ethical reasoning of 180 nurses working in medical wards in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. The study was cross-sectional in nature and the questionnaire was the data collection instrument. From the findings, gender ( $p = 0.656$ ), age ( $p = 0.363$ ), work experience ( $p = 0.328$ ) and educational level ( $p = 0.331$ ) did not have significant relationship with ethical reasoning by the respondents as the significant values were more than 0.05. Aminnuddin (2019) studied demographic factors and religiosity dimensions as predictors of Islamic ethical work behaviour of 370 Malay Muslims who were teaching staff in Brunei. Findings showed that most of the respondents (98) were between the ages of 31-35 and majority (289) was of the female gender. Results also revealed that demographic factors like age, gender, marital status, educational level and work experience with the significant  $p$  value of 0.05, were not predictors of Islamic ethical work behaviour of the respondents.

### Conceptual model



**Fig. 1 Self constructed model on demographic factors and perception of ethical issues in libraries**

The model proposes a direct relationship between the independent variable which are demographic factors and the dependent variable which is perception of ethical issues in libraries. From the model, the demographic factors of interest are age, gender, marital status, religion, designation and the number of years spent in service. As for perception of ethical issues in libraries, it will be measured by type of perception that the respondents have which could be

positive or negative. It is assumed that the six demographic factors could determine perception of ethical issues in libraries.

### Methods

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the correlational type. The population of this study consisted of 169 library personnel in the three selected polytechnic in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Table 1 Population of the study**

<b>Num.</b>	<b>Polytechnic</b>	<b>Number of library personnel</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Ogun State	67	39.6
2	The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Oyo State	40	23.7
3	Yaba College of Technology, Lagos State	62	36.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>169</b>	<b>100</b>

The total enumeration technique also called the census method was used for this study. This technique was adopted because the number of the respondents was manageable and the researcher could collect data within the allotted time. Therefore, all 169 library personnel in the three polytechnic libraries took part in the study. The research

instrument that was used for data collection in this study was the questionnaire.

The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire was based on the use of simple descriptive statistical analysis of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation for research questions 1 and 2. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for the

hypothesis. The results were presented in figures and tables and inferences and recommendations were also drawn from them. The software that facilitated the data analysis was the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS).

### Results

A total of 169 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the library personnel in the three selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria and 148 were returned and found useful for analysis, giving a response rate of 87.6% (Table 2).

**Table 2 Questionnaire administration and return rate**

Num.	Polytechnic	Distribution	Return
1	Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Ogun State	67	61
2	The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Oyo State	40	32
3	Yaba College of Technology, Lagos State	62	55
<b>Total</b>		<b>169</b>	<b>148</b>

**Research question one:** What are the demographic factors of the library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 3 presents results on the demographic factors of the library personnel of the selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Table 3 Demographic characteristics of the library personnel**

Demographic variables	F	%
<b>Age</b>		
21-30	27	23.0
31-40	33	22.3
41-50	54	36.5
51 and above	34	23.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	57	38.5
Female	91	61.5
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	29	19.6
Married	105	70.9
Widowed	14	9.5
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	81	54.7
Islam	58	39.2
African Traditional Religion	9	6.1
<b>Designation</b>		
Professional	60	40.5
Para-professional	88	59.5
<b>Years spent in the publishing firms</b>		
Less than 1	11	7.4
1-5	31	20.9
6-10	45	30.4
11-15	32	21.6
16-20	29	19.6

**N=148**

As shown in Table 3, a majority of the library personnel 54 (36.5%) were between 41-50 years of age, while the minority 27 (23.0%) were between 21-30 years of age. A high number of the respondents (61.5%) were of the female gender, while 57 (38.5%) were males. Well over three-fifths of the library personnel 105 (70.9%) were married, while a few 14 (9.5%) were single. Most of the respondents 81 (54.7%) practiced Christianity, while 9 (6.1%) practiced African Traditional Religion. There was more paraprofessional staff 88 (59.5%) than the professional staff 60 (40.5%). Majority of the library personnel 45 (30.4%) had spent between 6-10 years in the library, while 11 (7.4) had spent less than 1 year.

**Research question two:** What is the perception of the ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 4 presents results on the perception of the library personnel of the ethical issues in libraries.

Results were presented for the opinions of the respondents as regards the four indicators that make up the perception of ethical issues in libraries (equality of treatment of library users, avoidance of bias in acquiring information resources, avoidance of bias in evaluating information resources and respect for confidentiality/privacy of information). As regards equality of treatment of library users, a high number of the library personnel with a mean value ( $\bar{x}=3.74$ ) higher than the criterion mean of 2.5 were of the view that users should be treated the same irrespective of their gender. Similarly, most of the respondents ( $\bar{x}=3.73$ ) higher than the criterion mean of 2.5, held the opinion that service delivery should be devoid of bias occasioned by economic status. The second indicator measured avoidance of bias in

acquiring information resources and from the results, majority of the respondents ( $\bar{x}=3.66$ ) and ( $\bar{x}=3.53$ ) both with mean values higher than the criterion mean of 2.5 noted that acquisition of information resources should be determined by the number of students and how viable their disciplines are respectively.

Moreover, as regards avoidance of bias in evaluating information resources, most of the library personnel ( $\bar{x}=3.34$ ) with mean higher than the criterion mean of 2.5 noted that only the disciplines that contributed to the finances of the polytechnics should have their information resources evaluated. Also, a significant number of the respondents ( $\bar{x}=3.24$ ) with mean higher than the criterion mean of 2.5 pointed out that that the number of students should determine the information resources of the discipline to be evaluated. As for the fourth indicator that focused on respect for confidentiality/privacy of information, majority of the library personnel ( $\bar{x}=3.03$ ) with a mean value higher than the criterion mean of 2.5 saw nothing bad in documenting the interaction they had with library users for future reference, and others with a mean value ( $\bar{x}=3.36$ ) higher than the criterion mean of 2.5 felt that nothing was wrong if they declared the identity of library users to whosoever demands.

The results revealed that even when a high number of the respondents had the proper perception of equality of treatment of library users, majority did not have the expected perception of ethical issues like; avoidance of bias in acquiring information resources, avoidance of bias in evaluating information resources and respect for confidentiality/privacy of information (grand mean which is 3.24 is higher than the criterion mean of 2.5). Thus, majority of the library perception did not have the appropriate perception of the ethical issues in libraries.

**Table 4: Perception of ethical issues in libraries**

Ethical issues in libraries	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	S.D.
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
<b>Equality of treatment of library users</b>										
I feel library users either male or female should get the same treatment in the library	118	79.7	21	14.2	9	6.1	-	-	3.74	.564
I feel economic status should not dictate how users are treated in the library	117	79.1	22	14.9	9	6.1	-	-	3.73	.567
Social status should not be the yardstick to attend to users fairly	111	75.0	28	18.9	9	6.1	-	-	3.69	.581
Education status should not influence how the library users are treated	103	69.6	30	20.3	12	8.1	3	2.0	3.57	.729
I feel religion should influence the way and manner I attend to library users	100	67.6	15	10.1	17	11.5	16	10.8	3.54	1.054
<b>Avoidance of bias in acquiring information resources</b>										
I feel discipline should determine the acquisition of information resources	49	33.1	25	16.9	28	18.9	46	31.1	2.52	1.242
I feel the number of students should determine the acquisition of information resources	101	68.2	43	29.1	4	2.7	-	-	3.66	.531
I feel economically viability of each discipline should influence the acquisition of information resources	94	63.1	41	27.7	11	7.4	2	1.4	3.53	.694
I feel the interest of the librarian should determine the acquisition of information resources	59	39.9	43	29.1	29	19.6	17	11.5	2.97	1.030
<b>Avoidance of bias in evaluating information resources</b>										
I think it is important to reduce the level of acquisition of information resources for less important disciplines	46	31.1	69	46.6	19	12.8	14	9.5	2.99	.907
I feel when it comes to the evaluation of information resources, the choice of the librarian should be factored-in	69	46.6	41	27.7	20	13.5	18	12.2	3.09	1.043
I hold the view that the number of the students should determine the information resources of the discipline to be evaluated	73	49.3	48	32.4	16	10.8	11	7.4	3.24	.921
I feel the information resources of the disciplines that contribute more to the finances of the polytechnic should be evaluated the more	91	61.5	27	18.2	20	13.5	10	6.8	3.34	.953
<b>Respect for confidentiality/privacy of information</b>										
I feel it does not matter if I reveal the identity of library users to whosoever demands	52	35.1	41	27.7	34	23.0	21	14.2	2.84	1.063
I think my interaction with library users should be documented for future reference	58	39.2	44	29.7	38	25.7	8	5.4	3.03	.977
It is not an unethical to discuss the private discussions concerning the information needs of a user with my colleague	36	24.3	65	43.9	27	18.2	20	13.5	2.79	.964
I feel it is not necessary to keep secret all information concerning users, their interest and their personal data	46	31.1	44	29.7	35	23.6	23	15.5	2.76	1.059

Criterion mean = 2.5; Grand mean = 3.24

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant relationship between demographic factors

and perception of the ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria.



Table 5 captures the results of the correlation matrix analysis done between demographic factors and perception of the

ethical issues in libraries by library personnel in selected polytechnics in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Table 5 Relationship between demographic factors and perception of the ethical issues in libraries**

		Age	Gender	Marital status	Religion	Designation	Years of experience	Perception of ethical issues in libraries
Age	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
	N	148						
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.879**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
	N	148	148					
Marital Status	Pearson Correlation	.784**	.746**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
	N	148	148	148				
Religion	Pearson Correlation	.865**	.838**	.763**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
	N	148	148	148	148			
Designation	Pearson Correlation	.900**	.958**	.715**	.865**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	N	148	148	148	148	148		
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation	.939**	.835**	.822**	.893**	.843**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	148	148	148	148	148	148	
Perception Of ethical issues in libraries	Pearson Correlation	.228**	.140	.222**	.294**	.155	.257**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.089	.007	.000	.060	.002	
	N	148	148	148	148	148	148	148

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results showed that:

- There is a positive and significant relationship between age and perception of ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel ( $r=.228^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).
- There is a positive but no significant relationship between gender and perception of ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel ( $r=.140$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p>0.05$ ).
- There is a significant positive relationship between marital status and perception of ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel ( $r=.222^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).
- There is a positive and significant relationship between religion and perception of ethical issues in

libraries by library personnel ( $r=.294^{**}$   $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

- There is a positive but no significant relationship between designation and perception of ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel ( $r=.155$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p>0.05$ ).
- There is a positive and significant relationship between years of experience and perception of ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel ( $r=.257^{**}$ ;  $N=148$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

Thus, from the results of the correlation matrix, out of the demographic factors, age, marital status, religion and years of experience had a significant positive relationship with perception of

ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel.

### **Discussion**

Results showed that out of the four dimensions of ethical issues in libraries examined, most of the library personnel had the positive perception of one, while that of the other three can be adjudged to be negative when considered in the light of what is ethically acceptable. The nature of their perception could stem out of their lack of understanding of the ethical issues surrounding avoidance of bias in acquiring information resources, avoidance of bias in evaluating information resources and respect for confidentiality/privacy of information. This result differs from that reported by Phillips, Oyewole and Akinbo (2018) where most of the respondents had a positive perception of ethical issues in libraries. Though, the study was phenomenological in nature and only few librarians participated.

From the findings, out of the six demographic factors studied, only age, marital status, religion and years of experience had a significant positive relationship with perception of ethical issues in libraries by the library personnel. This implies that the age of the library personnel could determine the mental image that could be formed about ethical issues in libraries, ditto for marital status. Also, the religion that is practiced could determine how the library personnel perceive ethical issues. In addition, it is expected that the years of experience of library personnel has a role to play in ascertaining the perception of ethical issues in libraries. This result in a way supports the findings of Lindblom and Lindblom (2016) and Ogoun and Okubokeme (2024) that age is an important determinant of perception of ethical issues. On the contrary, this result disagrees with that of Safavi et. al. (2018) who discovered in their study that demographic factors are

not important determinants of perception of ethical issues.

### **Conclusion**

The type of perception that the library personnel have of the ethical issues in libraries will determine what their attitude would be and eventually how they behave when confronted with these ethical issues. Therefore, it is essential for the library personnel in polytechnic libraries to have a positive perception of these ethical issues so that eventually, they will not violate ethical norms and standards in library service delivery. In order to improve the perception of the library personnel, the management of the polytechnic libraries should organise workshops and seminars on the ethics guiding library service delivery and reasons why ethical standards should be kept. This would enhance the understanding of the library personnel and also help them to have a positive perception of these ethical issues. In planning these workshops and seminars, the management should consider the age of the personnel, their marital status, their membership of religious organisations and the years they have spent in the library.

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