

## Motivating academic library non-users to [re]discover the academic library's usefulness for their study practices – the perspective of the Gdańsk University of Technology Library

*(Motywowanie osób niekorzystających z bibliotek akademickich do [ponownego] odkrywania przydatności biblioteki akademickiej w praktyce studiowania – perspektywa Biblioteki Politechniki Gdańskiej)*

**Słowa kluczowe:** biblioteka akademicka, nieużytkownicy, motywacja, komunikacja, współpraca, networking, budowanie partnerstw

**Abstrakt:** Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie, w jaki sposób Biblioteka Politechniki Gdańskiej motywuje nieużytkowników biblioteki akademickiej do ponownego odkrycia jej wartości i przydatności dla studentów. Autorka skupiła się na omówieniu kwestii polskich studentów studiów dziennych jako jednej z grup nieużytkowników biblioteki akademickiej.

**Keywords:** academic library, non-users, motivation, communication, cooperation, networking, fostering partnerships

**Abstract:** The main purpose of this article is to present the methods used by academic libraries to motivate non-users to rediscover the library's value and usefulness for their study practices, with a focus on the perspective of the Gdańsk University of Technology Library. The author examines the issue of Polish full-time students as one of the groups of academic library non-users.

### Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to discuss how to motivate students who are non-users of the academic library to rediscover the academic library's values and usefulness for their studying practices. In recent years, the Gdańsk Tech Library has observed a noticeable decline in the number of students who do not use its services. This is a trend noticeable throughout Poland, as evidenced by statistics. As one study states: "Polish society is gradually losing its connection with literature, and therefore the competencies of interpretation, analysis and synthesis of the texts, including literary texts and others" [10, s. 39].

The group of academic library non-users can be defined as one including mainly students, faculty members and non-teaching staff. The author focuses specifically on students

as academic library non-users. A key question among librarians today is how to motivate non-users to [re]discover the academic library's value and usefulness for their studies. The author presents statistics illustrating changes in the number of active users over the past four years (2020/2021–2023/2024) and describes measures implemented by the Gdańsk Tech Library to reduce the number of non-users. Several authors have explored the issue of academic library non-users, and their works are cited in the references section of this paper [e.g. 2; 3; 6; 8; 9]. The primary beneficiaries of this research will be academic library professionals, especially those who specialize in upgrading the quality of academic library circulation services and developing a library liaison program.

Increasing the number of active academic library users requires reducing the still high number of non-users in academic libraries, both in Poland and beyond. Between 2008/2009 and 2017/2018 the number of full-time Polish students enrolled at Gdańsk University of Technology ranged around 20,000. In 2018/2019 enrollment at Gdańsk University of Technology dropped to approximately 14,000 and has remained steady through the present academic year (2023/2024). The decline in student enrollment may be attributed to demographic changes in Poland, including a negative natural increase, a negative balance of foreign migration, rising food and accommodation costs, and to some extent, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, among other factors [1; 4]. Naturally, these factors also impact the number of the Gdańsk Tech Library users as well. A decline in university enrollment leads to a lower number of library users. However, these factors alone do not fully explain why the number of library non-users remains high. The academic year 2023/2024 with its decline in the number of library non-users should be interpreted as a sign of improvement in the scope of students' engagement with the Gdańsk Tech students.

## **Library non-users – definition**

As Anna Mierzecka writes in book *Library marketing*, “a person who uses the goods and/or library services is called a library customer” [11, s. 269] therefore academic library non-users are potential users who do not – for various reasons – use their university's library. The group of academic library non-users can be described as one including students, faculty members and non-teaching staff. Not using the library can mean avoiding both print and electronic resources, as well as not utilizing library spaces. Some non-users do not engage with their library because they rely on alternative sources of information. One such alternative is the widespread use of PowerPoint presentations at Polish universities. These presentations, prepared by lecturers, concisely introduce course content. For many students, these presentations serve as their primary – and sometimes only – source of information. Since they do not feel the need, pressure, or obligation to seek additional resources, they often do not use their university library.

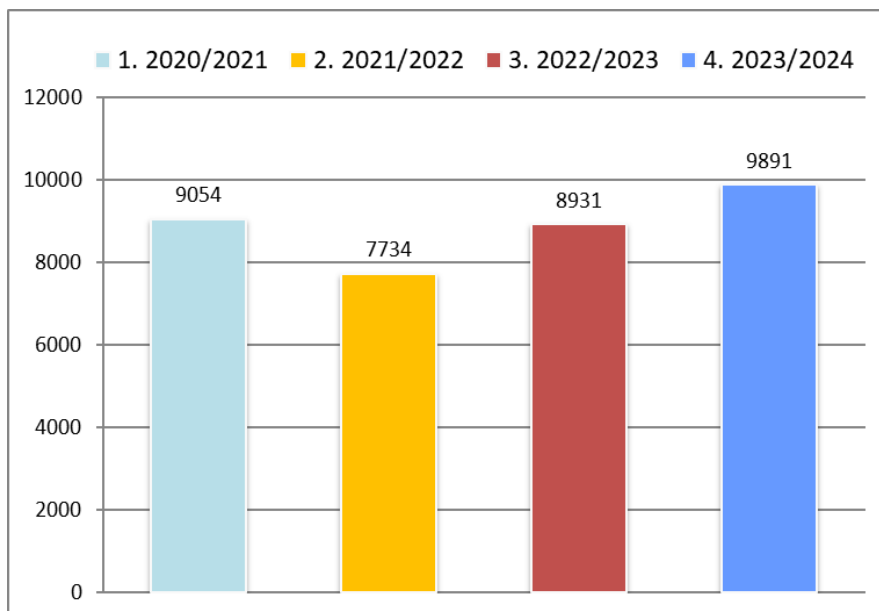
For some library non-users enrolling in a university means “marking time until a more interesting opportunity presents itself”, encourage them to engage with the library's services. Some students may lack the time to visit the library due to part-time jobs needed to support themselves financially. Others might prefer to buy their own books or face dif-

difficulties accessing materials due to personal constraints. Additionally, negative interactions with library staff may discourage students from using the library. Last but not least, other library non-users might suffer from library anxiety, a problem which seems to be neglected, ignored or totally unnoticed. Some students experience significant anxiety when entering an academic library to conduct research, making it difficult for them to navigate resources effectively.

### The Gdańsk Tech Library active academic library users vs non-users

In this paper, the term ‘active academic library users’ is limited to a specific group of Gdańsk Tech Library users, namely to Polish full-time first- and second-cycle students who borrow print books. Although reading print materials seems to have already been dominated by reading in electronic version (approximately 25 to 75% by some authors) at least among the faculty, borrowing print books still seems to be a value that is statistically relevant to some extent. It is also “statistically convenient” as it is easily measured [see more 5]. The author did not obtain the data concerning Gdańsk Tech Library frequency usage. Thus, the definition of “active user” has been used in this paper in the sense of user borrowing (a) print book(s). The group of academic library non-users may include university employees – such as academic staff, librarians, administrators, and support personnel – as well as students of various nationalities and academic levels.

**Figure 1.** Total number of Gdańsk Tech library active users in the years 2020/2021-2023/2024



**Source:** own work.

In this paper the author defines an “active academic library user” as a Polish student enrolled in a first- or second-cycle study program who borrows print books<sup>4</sup>. The statistics on which this study is based do not precisely define what ‘borrowing books’ entails. Consequently, the author assumed that “an active student is a student who borrows at least one book per academic year”. Accordingly, in this paper, an ‘academic library non-user’ refers to a Polish student enrolled in a first- or second-cycle study program who does not borrow any books from the Gdańsk Tech Library within an academic year. The data analyzed for the period 2020/2021 – 2023/2024 come from two sources: *Politechnika Gdańska – Sprawozdanie z działalności PG za rok 2023* (the total number of Gdańsk Tech 1<sup>st</sup> – and 2<sup>nd</sup>-cycle Polish students) and statistics reported to the Polish Central Statistical Office (documenting the number of active Gdańsk Tech Library users). The data are presented in figure 1.

## Methods for motivating academic library non-users: the perspective of Gdańsk University of Technology Library

Academic year 2023/2024 showed a substantial decline in the number of the Gdańsk Tech Library non-readers. The rise in the number of active library users appears to be primarily – but not exclusively – due to the Gdańsk Tech Library’s efforts to enhance its relationship with users. This improvement has been driven by strengthening communication and collaboration between the library, its users, and other institutions, including other libraries, through the implementation of the following initiatives:

- improved communication and collaboration, reflected in enhanced Gdańsk Tech Library social media services (e.g., a well-designed website and a Facebook fan page featuring transparent, regularly updated, relevant, and engaging content – fig. 2);
- networking and fostering partnerships with Gdańsk Tech faculty departments, deans’ offices and individual faculty members;
- contacting with students directly through mailing lists to communicate important updates in an effective way;
- increasing visibility by actively promoting library services and expanding campus-wide outreach efforts;
- organizing Gdańsk Tech Library orientation game once per academic year (the game’s learning objectives include helping students feel comfortable in the and familiarizing them with its services and resources).

Last but not least, it is essential to update the “reading lists” required by the faculty. The lists should be based on both print and e-resources available in the academic library. Avoiding outdated resources is particularly important in technical universities. Updating such “reading lists” seems to be another idea that might be considered to enhance the students’ engagement with the library in terms of using the materials. Cooperation between academics and library staff is also important [see more 7].

<sup>4</sup> To acquire a complete picture of the library users’ activity a broader analysis should be performed covering such elements as the print and electronic resources usage among all kinds of Gdańsk Tech Library users (Polish and international students of various types of studies, the teaching and administrative staff, unaffiliated users), and frequency of use of Gdańsk Tech Library spaces, which this paper does not provide.

**Figure 2.** Facebook profile Gdańsk Tech Library

**Biblioteka Politechniki Gdańskiej / Gdańsk Tech Library**  
2,4 tys. polubienia • 2,5 tys. obserwujący

**Wydarzenia**

**Nadchodzące wydarzenie**

**Krótkie repetytorium z historii Politechniki Gdańskiej**  
5 LUTEGO 2023, GODZ. 17:00  
SALA DOL. Ciepłoty Główny

**Zdjęcia**

Informacje o danych w statystykach strony • Prywatność • Regulamin • Reklama  
Opcje reklam > Pliki cookie • Więcej • Mita © 2025

**Source:** <https://www.facebook.com/BibliotekaPG>.

## Conclusion

The author examines the phenomenon of academic library non-users basically focusing on the experience of the Gdańsk Tech Library in the scope of reducing their numbers. In recent years, various initiatives have led to a significant increase in the number of active library users. These initiatives have been mentioned in the text. Applying the solutions described in the article had a positive impact on increasing the number of active library users of about one thousand Polish full-time students in the academic year 2023/2024 compared to the previous period. Becoming more visible in the campus thanks to the library's social media marketing and fostering relationships with the deans' offices and academic departments seem to have a powerful impact on motivating academic library non-users – especially the students – to [re]discover the academic library's usefulness for their studying practices. Today, it is crucial for all members of academia to address the challenges posed by evolving learning paradigms, changing modes of information delivery and the proliferation of data and resources. Librarians' key role is to provide services and support to academics and students. To fulfill this task, librarians must understand the faculty's visions, expectations, and objectives. By leveraging the diverse expertise of staff with varying backgrounds, it should be possible to enhance the use of library spaces, services, and electronic and print resources to better support student learning. Strengthening communication between librarians and faculty can play a crucial role in reducing the number of library non-users.

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