

Theft and Mutilation Challenges and Management in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines the theft and mutilation challenges and management in academic libraries, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria serving as a case study. The aim of the study was to identify the causes of book thefts and mutilation in university libraries and how to curb this menace.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Survey research method was adopted. Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. A total number of 420 library staff and students were selected from the institutions to participate in this study. Twenty (20) library staff and four hundred (400) students who had spent at least an academic session in the institution were randomly selected by lottery which gave each person in the sampling frame an equal chance of being included in the sample. Frequency counts, tables and percentages are the main statistical tools used for data analysis.

Findings: Results of the analysis showed that the university library materials are stolen and mutilated due to inadequate copies of library materials, porous security systems, etc. It was also discovered that various methods were used for stealing and mutilating of library materials which includes: tearing of book page(s) off, divert the mind of people at circulation area, hiding of books under their clothes and their pockets, etc.

Practical Implication: From the findings, it was discovered that unless academic libraries install electric security system and Close circuit television (CCTV) so as to monitor the activities of both staff and students in and around the library, provide photocopying services at subsidized rate to enable the library users to photocopy materials that are in few copies in the library and sanctioning/punishment of the offenders to serve as deterrent to others, etc. the issue of theft and mutilation would still continue to be the order of the day.

Originality/Value: This paper emanated from the researcher's interest to ensure that every resource in the libraries is protected from being mutilated and stolen so as to ensure continuous use of these information resources in the library.

Keywords: Theft and mutilation, Academic library management, (FUOYE), Nigeria

Introduction

Academic library, which is the 'heart' of any learning institution, is the library attached to post-secondary institutions such as the universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, etc. University library therefore, is the academic heart of university systems and its basic purpose is to provide the university staff, students and researchers with materials assistance and an enabling environment that would facilitate teaching, learning, research and advance the frontiers of knowledge. The institutions advance the knowledge of the citizenry through their libraries with the help of the collections that are the bedrock for the services provided to the users. This explains why Idris, Hassan and

Abdul-Qadir (2013) referred to the academic libraries as multipurpose institutions set up by the academic institute where it is situated to cater for the educational and in some cases, cultural, recreational and informational needs of the students and staff of the institution. However, one of the major challenges that academic libraries have been faced with is security problems, that is, how to secure their collections against theft and mutilation.

Theft, according to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2010), is an act of stealing something from a person or a place. It is also the act of stealing. Specifically, it is the felonious taking and removing of personal property with

the intent to deprive the rightful owner of it. While mutilation in the library, is an act of tearing or removing part of a book. It should be noted that libraries are 'systems' and security is a vital part of maintaining balance in the system. Library security is typically best understood as a system that reflects the strategies of librarians and other library staff to prevent or ameliorate the negative consequences of a realized threat in the libraries. Therefore, library security management is a professional effort to deal practically with knotty problems of library safety and security.

Mullen and Gaumond (2009) pointed out that people prefer to stay where they are, if the place is safe and secure. Therefore, for academic libraries to achieve their aim of information dissemination there must be proper security management of library collections against theft and mutilation which are the common threats to academic libraries. However, one of the important duties of any library is the preservation and security of its collections. In spite of all efforts to preserve and secure library collection, users still employ different tricks to fault library management strategies. Hence, constant need for devising security measures to stop or reduce the rate of theft and mutilation of library collections. This can be achieved if a great interest is taken in effective theft and mutilation risks management at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) Library.

Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) Library came into existence during the 2011/2012 academic session. It has capacity to accommodate about 170 readers at a time with reading stocks of about 8,000 volumes of books and journals that cut across various disciplines being offered in the institution. The university has another library at Ikole Campus which caters for the faculties of Agriculture and Engineering. Both libraries have virtual library sections required to meet up with the current challenges of virtual information sourcing. The Library Management Software (LMS) adopted by the library is *Koha*, open source software. The library subscribes to different databases which include AGORA, HINARI, OARE, TEEAL, MIT Open Source ware, Egranary, Science direct, NUC Virtual library, etc.

The university library offers to users services in the following units:

- Serial collection

- Africana special collection
- Document collection
- Reference collection
- Reserve collection
- Recent accessioned
- Virtual library

Opening hours during the academic session:

The library opening hours are:

Monday to Friday: 8:00am to 6:00pm

Saturday: 9:00am to 2:00pm

Sunday: 1:00pm to 6:00pm

Public holidays: Closed

Vacation:

Monday to Friday: 8:00am to 4:00pm

Saturday: 8:00am to 2:00pm

Sunday and public holidays: Closed

(*Guide to the University Library, 2015*)

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, many factors have been militating against theft and mutilation risks management in academic libraries, these ranges from unqualified security personnel to user delinquency such as bad attitudes towards library collections. Theft and mutilation could be perpetrated at any hour of the day (Idris, Hassan & Abdul-Qadir, 2013). Thus, theft and mutilation risks management should be a major concern for any academic library that wants to stand the test of time. It is in the light of this that this research investigated theft and mutilation challenges and management in University Library, particularly, Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), Nigeria.

Literature Review

Academic libraries are prone to various security threats such as theft and mutilation. Holt (2007) observed that libraries are faced with the problem of physical materials theft, data theft and money theft. Other problems include theft of library equipment as well as theft and abuse of personal belongings of staff and users. Therefore, there is the need to examine the theft and mutilation risks management in academic libraries in order to provide quality services for users making use of the collections. Although the dilemma of social inclusion and stock

security in today's libraries is not an easily achievable task since the causes of crime are diverse (Mansfield 2009).

Theft and mutilation in academic libraries is a global problem. Security of library books has been the subject of much investigation. However, the situation seems not to be getting better (Ajayi 2003). No wonder why Nielson (2002) described library security management to be 'simply too bad a state of affairs'. Destructive habits of some users such as theft, mutilation and hiding of information materials pose a great problem to other users who are most often prevented from having access to library collections. Arising from these unwholesome practices, the library staff also experience difficulties providing quality services while the library management runs into financial mess of replacing lost or damaged collections (Popoola 2003).

The threat to intellectual property through theft, mutilation and other forms of abuse has posed tremendous challenges to the library profession worldwide (Akussah and Bentil 2010). Ajegbomogun (2004) stated that theft and mutilation of books and non-books is a common phenomenon in Nigerian University libraries and if not checked will create a serious threat to library' collections and their preservation.

In the aspect of security issues, Ugah (2007) identified theft and mutilation, vandalism, damages and disasters, over borrowing or delinquent borrowers and purposeful displacing arrangement of materials as some of the main security issues. The mismanagement and abuse of documentary materials contribute greatly to physical degradation. These include mutilation, careless handling, excessive photocopying, mis-shelving and flicking document over (Akussah, 2010). Nowadays, any computer or library network connected to the internet is at risk of probes and scans, account compromise, packet sniffing and malicious codes (Sarmah, 2003). As libraries move from paper to electronic medium, safely providing access to resources has become complicated.

In as much as there are various problems facing academic libraries, there should be different ways of reducing the problems. Wallace (2008) argued that there should be the use of security theatre in the library to improve the library security. In using library security theatre the library will put in place various security measures to ensure that the library is properly

secured and monitored. Security awareness should be formalized in organization policy and procedures and communicated to every employee who works with information resources (Saffady, 2005). Akussah and Bentil (2010) recommended that library should invest more in electronic resources, which will reduce to a large extent the incidence of users physically handling documentary materials. This will enhance multiple access to library materials with little damage.

Atkins and Weible (2003) observed that, for libraries' missing items to be identified there must be successful inventory process. Freddie (2003) advocated the use of electromagnetic security system in securing library collections because it is very cost effective. Apart from inventory taking, there are some other steps that can be taken for libraries collection to be monitored. Human beings as agents of destruction in libraries have been the most difficult to control. Library staff is part of the challenges facing library security management because they also engage in collection theft and since they are part of the system, it is easier for them to carry out the operation without being caught.

In view of this, Holt (2007), therefore, concluded that "theft of library collections by staff is a real problem that libraries should address and not ignore". Every profession has its "closed areas" which are little studied and seldom discussed publicly. It is in the light of this that Janus (2001) advocated stiff legal penalties for collection theft in order to serve as deterrent to prospective offenders. She also advised on keeping update of inventories and suggested the inclusion of theft possibilities into disaster plan and publication of stolen materials by the concerned institution.

Finally, Finance is another factor threatening library security management. Ajegbomogun (2004) and Akussah (2010) agreed that financial constraints had deprived librarians of the opportunity to acquire adequate number of essential books in high demand thereby exposing the available ones to the risk of theft and mutilation. There should, therefore, be adequate budgetary provision for libraries to enable them meet their basic requirements in order to meet the expectations of their clientele.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to

determine the:

- i. kind of materials used in the library
- ii. reasons for stealing library materials
- iii. methods used in stealing and mutilating library materials.
- iv. methods of preventing stealing/mutilating of library materials

Research Questions

From the objectives enumerated above, the following research questions were derived to guide this study:

- i. What are the kinds of materials use in the library?
- ii. What are the reasons for stealing/mutilating library materials?
- iii. What are the method(s) used in stealing the library materials?
- iv. What are the methods that can prevent stealing/mutilating of library materials?

Methodology

A set of self-developed questionnaire for students and library staff in the university library was used to elicit information from respondents. Some of the library staff were personally interviewed to complement the questionnaire

used for data collection for the study. Majority of the respondents in this research were students and library staff members, who are the major stakeholders of the library.

Twenty (20) library staff and four hundred (400) students, making a total of 420 respondents were selected from the institution and used for this study. These are people who have spent at least an academic session in the university and conversant with the library. For the purpose of this study, random sampling was used in order to give each person in the sampling frame an equal chance of being included in the sample study. The university has four (4) faculties: namely, Agriculture, Engineering, Science and Humanities & Social Sciences, and twenty (25) departments. The instruments for data collection for this study were questionnaire and interview.

In all four hundred and twenty (420) copies of questionnaire were administered on the library staff and students respectively in each of four (4) faculties in the university. Three hundred and eighty four (384) copies of questionnaire were duly filled, returned and found useable, representing a response rate of 96%. The descriptive statistics involving frequency counts, tables and percentages were used for the data analysis.

Result Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Types of materials (resources) used in the library

S/No	Materials	Number of students	Percentage%
1	Books	364	91
2	Encyclopedia	344	86
3	Dictionary	348	87
4	Journals	332	83
5	Newspapers	304	76
6	Magazines	144	36
7	CD ROMs	308	77
8	Virtual library	336	84
9	Online databases	312	78

Table 1 shows that books were the most used material in the library followed by dictionary, encyclopedia, virtual library, journal, online

databases, CD-ROMs, newspapers and magazines

Table 2: Methods used in stealing library materials

S/No	Methods	Number of student (%)	Number of staff (%)	Overall (%)
1	Hiding them inside exercise books	260(65)	11(55)	271(64.5)
2	Hiding them in their pocket	288(72)	20(100)	308(73.3)
3	Putting it their handbags	272(68)	11(55)	283(67.4)
4	Confusing/diverting the mind of people at the circulation desk	192(48)	11(55)	203(48.3)

Table 2 revealed that 73.3% respondents identified that hiding of books in the pocket was the common method used in stealing library materials, while 67.4% said that library materials were stolen by putting them in the handbag.

Also, 64.5% and 48.3% identified that materials in the library were stolen by hiding them inside exercise books and confusing the mind of people at the circulation desk respectively.

Table 3: Reasons adduced for stealing library materials

S/No	Reasons	Number of student (%)	Number of staff (%)	Overall (%)
1	High cost of books	288(72)	17(85)	305(72.6)
2	Lack of photocopying Machine	336(84)	15(75)	351(83.6)
3	Insufficient copies in the library	328(82)	11(55)	339(80.7)
4	Library security systems is porous	276(69)	15(75)	291(69.3)
5	Lack of proper documentation of students	200(50)	11(55)	211(50.2)
6	Unavailability of online databases	232(58)	10(50)	242(57.6)

Table 3 shows that 83.6% respondents think that lack of photocopying machine was the major cause of stealing the library materials followed by insufficient copies of books (80.7%), high

cost of books (72.6%), porous security systems(69.3%), unavailability of online databases (57.6%) and lack of proper documentation (50.2%).

Table 4: Solutions to stop or minimize theft and mutilation of library materials

S/No	Solutions	Number of student (%)	Number of staff (%)	Overall (%)
1	Use of security personnel at the main entrance	280(70)	11(55)	291(69.3)
2	Continuous security officers' patrol	296(74)	11(55)	307(73.1)
3	Installation of Close circuit television (CCTV)	340(85)	20(100)	360(85.7)
4	Installation of electric security system	316(79)	14(70)	330(78.6)
5	Secret security pages in the books	248(62)	15(75)	263(62.6)
6	Opening of register for students entering any section of the library	200(50)	11(55)	211(50.2)
8	Checking in and out of the library users and personnel	296(74)	10(50)	306(72.9)
9	Occasional check on library users in the reading/shelf areas	324(81)	14(70)	338(80.5)
10	Making enough copies of books	300(75)	11(55)	311(74.1)
11	Keeping the theft and mutilated collection inventory	248(62)	11(55)	259(61.7)
12	More emphasis on acquisition of e-resources to give room for multiple access	328(82)	11(55)	339(80.7)
13	Window burglary with net	336(84)	12(60)	348(82.6)
14	Availability of functional photocopy machine	320(80)	11(55)	331(78.8)
15	Sanctioning/punishment of the offenders	324(81)	13(65)	337(80.2)

As revealed in Table 7, most of the respondents 85.7% indicated that installation of Close circuit television (CCTV) was the appropriate measure to prevent or minimize theft and mutilation of library materials. Likewise, 82.6% of the

respondents identified window burglary with net as one of the security measures while 80.7% of the total respondents laid emphasis on acquisition of e-resources so as to give room for multiple users' access to a particular title of library material in electronic format without any

hindrance. Also, 80.5% indicated occasional check on library users in the reading/shelf areas, 80.2% indicated sanctioning/punishment of the offenders, 78.8% indicated availability of functional photocopy machine, 78.6% indicated installation of electric security system, 74.1% indicated making enough copies of books in the library, 73.1% indicated continuous security officers' patrol, 72.9% indicated checking in and out of the library users and personnel, 69.3% indicated use of security personnel at the main entrance, while 63.9% indicated secret security pages in the books.

Conclusion

Theft and mutilation in academic libraries has remained worrisome and requires a holistic approach to addressing this menace. In order to protect the library resources, all staff must share responsibility for safety and security. If the libraries are to truly justify the basis of their existence, that is, support the teaching, learning and research activities of their parent institutions, they should, as a matter of urgency and necessity, provide a lasting solution to all the barriers that impede library effective service delivery. The safety and security of library resources should be at the heart of library management at all times. The major findings of the study are as listed below:

- Books were the most used material in the library followed by dictionary, encyclopedia, virtual library, journal, online databases, CD-ROMs, newspapers and magazines.
- Most of the respondents identified that hiding of books in the pocket as the common method used in stealing library materials followed by putting them in the handbag, hiding them inside exercise books and confusing the mind of people at the circulation desk respectively.
- Majority of the respondents revealed that lack of photocopying machine was the major cause of stealing the library materials followed by insufficient copies of books, high cost of books, porous security systems, and unavailability of online databases and lack of proper documentation.
- Installation of Close circuit television (CCTV) was identified by the majority of the respondents as appropriate measure to prevent or minimize theft

and mutilation of library materials followed by window burglary with net, acquisition of more e-resources so as to give room for multiple access, occasional check on library users in the reading/shelf areas, sanctioning/punishment of the offenders, availability of functional photocopy machine, installation of electric security system, making enough copies of books in the library, continuous security officers' patrol, checking in and out of the library users and personnel, use of security personnel at the main entrance and secret security pages in the books.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- i. In addition to installation of electric security system, strategic places in the library should be installed with Close Circuit Television (CCTV) so as to monitor the activities of both staff and students in and around the library.
- ii. Security in and around the library should always be beefed-up, through the installation of window burglary with net, creation of secret security pages in the library books and use of competent security personnel at the main entrance. This is to help protect the valuable library heritage from being mutilated and stolen.
- iii. Staff should always move around to monitor the activities of users, especially around the reading and the shelving areas of the library.
- iv. More emphasis should be laid on acquisition of e-resources and online databases so as to give room for wider and multiple accesses to information resources so as to meet the information needs of diverse users.
- v. Photocopying services at subsidized rate should be provided to enable the library users make certain pages of books that are relevant to their research needs, which the library may have few copies in their collection.
- vi. Sanction/punishment of offenders should be strictly enforced. Whoever is found guilty must be made to suffer the

consequences, to serve as a deterrent to others.

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