

Theft and Mutilation of Library Materials in Academic Libraries: The Case Study of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research is on theft and mutilation of library materials in academic library: the Case of Kano University of Science and Technology Wudil, Kano, Nigeria. It is no doubt a known fact that what motivates the developments of a society is the ability to get the right information at the right time and one of the agencies in this drive is the library. However, the effective services of the library depend very strongly on the availability of needed materials. Theft and mutilation of library materials has been identified as one of the major blocks against this all- important body especially in academic libraries. This work, therefore, aims to ascertain the level of theft and mutilation in academic library. In accomplishing this task, interviews were conducted and copies of questionnaire were also administered to the various units of the library and the student. Also, discussions were systematically made with the staff of the library in addition to the researcher's personal observation. Random sampling was employed to select participants for the study. Data were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentage. The study recommends among others that there is need to educate library users, give proper library orientation periodically for the users to acquaint the importance of books in education and how mutilation could be an obstacle to the services rendered by libraries.

Keywords: *Theft, mutilation, library, materials, academic library*

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are institutions set up to cater for the educational, cultural, research, recreational and information needs of their users. Libraries have the main objectives of being entrusted with the selection, acquisition, organization, storage and dissemination of information to their patrons. Academic libraries are 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 of the institution. The services of these type of libraries are provided to the students on the basis of access for all irrespective of type, all kinds of libraries are entrusted with the selection, acquisition, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information in whatsoever format. The academic library in this regard is entrusted with those of the institution that is the parent organization. Jama'a (1984) observes that academic libraries in particular, assume a focal point where users of diversified age groups, socio-political, economic and cultural interests have to converge to utilize all the available resources that are relevant to their individual needs. As

a result of this diverse use of the materials, these libraries stand to be vulnerable to all forms of crime and security risks from not only the users, but the library staff as well. It is on record that not everybody that walks into the academic library does so for the single purpose of patronizing the immense educational and cultural resources. In other words, not every visitor to the library respects and adheres to the norms of the library, some go there as human risks to the library resources thereby inflicting serious damage on the library resources by way of theft and mutilation. This occurs through vandalism and improper handling of library materials. These users either out of ignorance or deliberate malhandling render library materials damaged. Theft of and malicious damage against books are difficult to combat because the risk of getting caught is very low, while the likelihood of success is high. Criminal activities in academic libraries are not limited to library and information materials alone but theft of property such as handbags, purses, keys and notebooks are equally common.

The extent, nature and rate at which these crimes occur vary from one academic library to another. The crimes, which are committed in some of the academic libraries, have deprived many others from fully achieving their information needs. Vandalism, mutilation, defacement, theft, arson, and a variety of others are problems regularly encountered by the materials of these libraries. The commodity the libraries promote: books and other information materials are valuable and expensive but is likely target for criminal activities. The expected roles of the academic library tend to lead it to criminal activities. The more the control, safeguard and security levels there are, the less it resembles a library that is traditionally expected to serve as user. Libraries and other information centre's spent so much money on acquiring materials in which information is embodied. It is imperative therefore that the materials are preserved adequately and protected. Preservation is far better than repairs and restoration of already deteriorated materials. The goal of every library should be a total preservation of damages, harm, decay and destruction to library materials in their varied formats. It is as a result of this therefore, that appropriate measures towards a lasting preservation must be adopted by every library administration. This senerio gives imperatives for this study.

The Kano University of Science and Technology Wudil Library

The University Library came into being with the start of academic activities in the university in April, 2001. The objective of the library among others is to supplement the teaching learning and research activities of the university through acquisition and systematic organization of all forms of recorded and unpublished information in all the field of study patent to the goals of the university. The library makes available materials to the university community especially those engaged in research and study. It is the academic nerve centre of the university. The library is situated in between the central administrative block. It has four units viz administrative, technical services, reader's services serial units and E- library. The university librarian is the head of the "department who coordinates, directs and controls the general administration and executes all policy matters as regards the operation of the library. The university library offers to user's services, in the following units.

were also accused. Some of them secretly take away materials out of the institutions library without the permission of the relevant authority, some of them therefore; disappear with library books loaned to them. On the foreign scene, Bahr (1981) has given extensive statistical data of library stock loses from some selected schools and public libraries in some of the developed countries of the world. She says “the Suffolk country senior high school reported that about 22% of its newly acquired books had disappeared from the shelves”. Library stock losses in individual public libraries are believed to be higher than the National average citing examples of individual public libraries. Obikoya (1994) in a study on theft and mutilation in academic libraries reports that 78.6% of library materials are taken away illegally under clothes. Hence mode of dressing is gradually becoming a source of concern in terms of library security. Antwi (1989) believes that, generally power black out affords the most likely opportunity for theft and mutilation. Student/other users take this advantage and hide under the cover of darkness to steal or mutilate library materials. Bello (1997) reveals that stealing of library materials via tearing and damage accounts for 66% of library crimes in Nigerian universities of technologies. Hence, he concludes that security problems of stealing and mutilation in academic libraries are mostly through tearing valuable parts of library materials. In this regard, tearing of pages may be seen as mutilation.

Similarly, Akinfolarin (1994) reports that users take advantage of tiny windows that have no barrier to hinder book passage and throw books outside, while Relay (1977) identifies staff involvement as an unfortunate means through which books are either stolen or mutilated. He notes further that employees of libraries and thieves are not themselves immune from temptation of removing items for sale to legitimate businessmen. In the same vein, Afolabi (1986) reports this method when he notes that an unscrupulous user can use the date-due-slip of legally borrowed books to steal other circulation books from the library. All that the person does is to remove and take the date-due-slip of a book that has been properly charged out to him by the library and then takes another circulation book of his choice and replaces the date-due-slip of the book with that of previous book borrowed. This method is regarded as very subtle method because with this method, there is no limit to the number of books that can be stolen.

Vandalism: Book mutilation stands out in this crime of vandalism by library patrons. They engage in this by cutting some pages, parts of a page, pictures, colour plates, with the intent to steal them. Library workers should be active in patrolling the library to detect those whose intents are to mutilate the books or magazines. Anyone caught should be punished to serve as a deterrent to others. The best deterrent is a purposeful surveillance. Thefts could also be prevented through this means. Large and rich libraries that can afford to have theft detection security system should put it in place. The best is the electronic alarm system. Thieves can be deterred also by the turn – key system this is effective where there is an active worker at the entrance.

Humidity: Where humidity is high, books become damp due to moisture which is not good for books and other library materials. In the case of audio video films, damp weather causes mold thus damaging such material.

Sun and Heat: Some library materials like books become brittle on excessive exposure to sunlight or heat. Mere flipping of a page renders it useless.

Factors that induce theft and mutilation of library materials

Alafiyato (1986) asserts that with poor security, patrons may be tempted to steal. This poor security, Afolabi (1993) argues originates from lack of modern security system in our libraries. Hence, one can conclude that manually controlled security in academic libraries allows perfunctory searching of library users at the library exit and insecurity of the entire library building. Obikoya (1994) reports that non-availability of photocopying services is accountable for nearly 70% of the reasons why library patrons steal or mutilate library materials. She broke this non-availability to means, frequent break down, heavy charge and lack of maintenance. Robert (1998) confirms further that some library patrons steal or mutilate library materials on the ground that photocopying machine was not in order. He therefore advised libraries to provide cheap and easy-to access photocopying services if they want to curb this menace. Ologbosanye (1994) notes that students in academic libraries can steal or mutilate library materials as a way of protesting against some library policies and procedures. Be that as it may, certain measures have to be adopted to check or prevent these menace in academic libraries. Hence, according to Timothy (1997), implementation of practical security at a little or no cost is important because it concerns library staff at all levels. It mostly involves intensifying surveillance in and around the library building for possible detection and prevention of library malpractices. Material security in libraries vested on the hand of library workers whose work qualities that include patience and imagination lead to successful security programmes (Reley, 1977). In other words, for libraries to reduce incidences of theft and mutilation of their materials, security is the first measure to be considered. Availability of photocopying services around the library premises is yet another measure.

According to Aguolu, C. and Aguolu, I. (2002), in order to help reduce the incidences of pilfering and mutilation of books and journals, however, as a measure to curb theft and mutilation, photocopying services must be available at an affordable price. Properly enlightening users on the dangers of theft and mutilation by library staff have been suggested as a good measure to curb theft and mutilation of library materials among library users. Edibo (1995) states that since theft and mutilation has not denied any solution, strategies such as user education/enlightment on the proper use of library materials should be embarked upon by library practitioners. To achieve this effectively, Akinfolarin (1994) suggests that librarians or representatives could use part of the time slated for use of library in general studies programmes and library orientation period to educate the students on the negative effects of theft and mutilation of library materials on both the library and users of the library.

METHOD

The researcher employed the Survey research method to gather both primary and secondary data for this study. For the purpose of this research, the researcher used a series of instrument for the collection of reliable information and data. These are oral interview, questionnaire

and personal observations. The study is about academic library of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano State and the population constitutes the professional (librarian) of the following unit, collection development, circulation, reference, serials, Para professional (other staff) and students. Random sampling was employed to select participants for the study. Data were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that books were the most used material in the library followed by Newspapers, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Journals and magazines. The subjects mainly consulted are mathematics, physics, chemistry, agriculture and engineering. The researcher during the interview segment with the circulation librarian gathered that 85.04% circulated books were mutilated between 2001 and 2012. Also, reference books 5.78%, and in the serials unit 9.18% items were mutilated. The subject mainly mutilated in the library under study are physics 60 copies, engineering 43 copies, mathematics 40 copies, agriculture 35 copies and others 72 copies and 17 reference books. Data on the table 2 also show that 55% circulation books were stolen, 30% serial items were also stolen. Also in the collection development unit of the library, the librarian (head of the unit) responded by saying that 15% physics text books were stolen before stamping through the window. Also 6 copies of food science text books were stolen and personally caught by the librarian. No case of mutilation was found in the unit.

The respondents mainly staff of the library indicated that theft and mutilation occur mostly during the period and time of examinations, the time observe by the staff are mainly 9:00 am to 1:00 pm having highest percentage of 46.67% by the respondents, other respondents said during examination period between 5:00 pm – 9:00pm users have the habit of theft and mutilation with 33.33% also between 1.00pm-3.00pm it was 13.33% by the respondents and low level of mutilation is between 3:00pm to 5:00 pm with 6.67%, due to low level of patronage at that very hours. The users mainly students have the habit of stealing library books during examination period, materials were stolen by hiding them in their pocket having the highest vote with 40% response, followed by putting it in their handbags with 20% response then by confusing, diverting the mine of people at the circulation desk with 13.33% response, the student used to steal and hide books in their personal belonging especially exercise book having 16.67% vote by the respondents lastly others with 10% response. Two students were caught with book respectively using this method of hiding books in their exercise books. The students usually hide books inside their shirt or pocket, two students were caught using this method.

Another student caught in Sabon Gari, Kano with 3 copies of library books in the process of selling the books in the market; two students were also caught using method of putting books in their handbags. Also in the process of confusing and diverting the attention of the security personnel at the check point, 2 students were caught with library books. The respondents clearly stated that the reasons for the stealing are due to the high cost of the books and was voted the highest by the respondents. Also, lack of photocopying and other machines cause stealing in the library also ranked 10% by the respondents. Insufficient

copies in the library lead to stealing with 26.67%, high demand of books also voted 16.67% by the respondents and others with 6.66%. Respondents (30%) suggested that, there should be enough security guard, also there should be qualified staff got 13.33% and 20% of the respondents opine that cameras should be mounted to monitor every activity going on in the library by both the staff and students, 10% of them suggested having good burglar in the windows enough copies of books should be brought into the library suggested by 16.67% of the respondents, and user's orientation was also raise by respondents having 10%.

Table 1: Kind of materials used in the library

Materials	No. of respondents	Percentage
Books	13	43.33
Encyclopedia	3	10
Dictionary	4	13.33
Journals	3	10
Newspapers	6	20
Magazines	1	3.33
Total	30	100

Source: Survey, 2012

Table 2: Stolen and mutilated volumes of library items between 2001 and 2012

Unit	Total books	Items stolen	Items mutilated	% stolen	% mutilated
Circulation	13198	11	250	55	85.04
Reference	270	-	17	-	5.78
Serials	15059	6	27	30	9.18
Collection development	-	3	-	15	-
Total	28,527	20	294	100	100

Source: Survey, 2012

Table 3: Period of theft and mutilation

Time of mutilation	No. of respondents	Percentage
9:00 am – 1:00pm	14	46.67
1:00pm – 3:00pm	4	13.33
3:00pm – 5:00pm	2	6.67
5:00pm – 9:00pm	10	33.33
Total	30	100

Source: Survey, 2012

Table 4: Methods used in stealing library materials

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Hiding them inside exercise books	5	16.67
Hiding them in their pocket	12	40
Putting it in their handbags	6	20
Confusing/diverting the mine of people at the circulation desk	4	13.33
Others	3	10
Total	30	100

Source: Survey, 2012

Table 5: Reasons for stealing library materials

Reasons	No. of respondents	Percentage
High cost of book	12	40
Lack of photocopying Machine	3	10
Insufficient copies in the library	8	26.67
High demand of books	5	16.67
Others	2	6.66
Total	30	100

Source: Survey, 2012

Table 6: Suggestion to minimize theft and mutilation of library materials

Suggestion	No of respondents	Percentage
Enough security guards	9	30
Qualified staff	4	13.33
Mount cameras in the library	6	20
Having good window burglar	3	10
Enough copies of books	5	16.67
Good orientation exercise	3	10
Total	30	100

Source: Survey, 2012

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher was able to identify the menace of theft and mutilation as one of the problems facing the development of libraries in Nigeria especially in academic library. The findings showed that a lot of factors such as lack of adequate funding and high cost of book were found to be related to theft and mutilation in the library. This in turn helps in bringing about the problems of training staffs and having experienced librarians. Others resulted from the lack of photocopying facilities, inadequacy of books and other information materials and their corresponding high cost prompt/stealing and mutilating library materials.

Electronic theft detection system should be use to minimize the extent of theft and mutilation of the library materials, electronic security system as used in advanced countries of the world should be installed in academic libraries for improved monitoring of operations in the libraries. There is need to educate library users, give proper library orientation periodically for the users to acquaint the importance of books in education and how mutilation could be an obstacle to the services rendered by libraries. Circulation and borrowing policies should be adequate and implementable. A policy on dress code is urgently needed for all categories of library patrons.

The exhibition of recovered stolen or mutilated books could be held periodically, this will bring home the social loss to the community. Regular stock taking should be done. This will help in indicating what items are missing from the collections of library and consequently will help the librarian to become more security conscious. To salvage the situation of power failure, the library should have standby generating plants in case of erratic power supply. This will go a long way in preventing theft and mutilation of library materials. There is need for the librarian and other staff to set up disaster prevention measures to prevent natural disaster which may be caused by fire outbreak and flood. These include proper inspection of all electrical installation from time to time to detect possible electrical

faults. Fire extinguishers must be provided and properly maintained. Water taps should be checked and property closed before the end of work each day. The library should devise a means of attracting benefits to any information that could lead to discovery of stolen materials or apprehending culprits of mutilated materials. With this, people will give information about stolen library materials they can prove. Public relation programme should be rigorously embarked on. This can be in the form of a classroom information programme that will acquaint clientele with book replacement costs, difficulty of getting out of print books, the rights of readers and the implication of mutilation and theft on library services. Government, through National Universities Commission should provide enough funds for the provision of more copies of reading materials to ensure their adequacy and availability. This will encourage more borrowing and discourage theft and mutilation of limited materials in the library.

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