Security of Library Materials under Nigeria's Depressed Economy

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ABSTRACT

The challenge for librarians today is not just the acquisition of book and non-book materials into the library, but the problem of safeguarding them to avoid losses or damage. Like many developing countries of the world, Nigeria has also been experiencing difficult economic conditions and this has affected a lot of organizations including library institutions. Library services can only be successful through the availability of library materials that satisfies the needs of both present and future users. It is against this background that this work examines how library materials can be secured under Nigeria's depressed economy. The study reveals that the dwindling economic fortunes of Nigeria coupled with hyper-inflation has made it increasingly difficult for government to fund the libraries adequately. Hence, this will afford libraries the opportunity to provide adequate and multiple copies of highly demanded materials for their users.
Keywords: Security, library materials, depressed economy, Nigeria, availability.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries can be describe as social institutions responsible for systematic selection, acquisition, organization and dissemination of recorded and on-line information resources kept for reading, research, reference and consultations. Maigari (1995) viewed libraries not only depository, but also have active role in the economic, social, educational, political and technological development activities of all nations. In performing their functions libraries are expected to ensure that adequate resources are available by acquiring materials that are relevant to the needs of their communities in various formats to cover all the categories of users. These materials are then organized professionally by putting related materials together so that the units of information can be identified and retrieved easily by readers or users. According to Singh (1999), libraries preserve knowledge so that nothing is lost, organize knowledge so that nothing is wasted, make the knowledge available so that none may be deprived of it. Libraries are therefore seen as essential ingredient of civilized society.

Similarly, Aji (1990) stresses that the improved living condition of the society is vested on the library's role of informing, educating and guiding of the average members of the society who are basically literate and non-literate in matters that would lead to better their living conditions. That is to say, libraries are institutions where users of diversified age groups, socio-political, economic backgrounds and cultural interest have to converge to utilize the material resources that are made available and relevant to their individual needs.

The use of library material resources by users is meant to improve the quality of their lives by giving them education, information, recreation, intellectual stimulation and enriching their life in all aspects. The crux of the matter is, are the material resources available in our libraries? And if there are available are they secured? Any library user will feel bad when what he/she requires is not available in the library or damaged. Aguolu (1993) states that developing countries like Nigeria develop their collection amidst numerous constraints, including book famine and depressed economy, which means inadequate funding and stocking of libraries. Hence the security of library materials in Nigeria assumes a greater importance because it is difficult to replace lost or damage materials.

The problem of insecurity to library material resources which emanate mainly from man made malpractice such as theft and mutilation of books by users cause a lot of concern in library services today. The problem of theft are not only confined to books but even records, tapes, soft-wares and hard-wares are targets of mutilation in some libraries and this has rendered the library services ineffective, inefficient and in-secured. The immoral behaviour of the library users that cause a lot of insecurity to the library materials could not be far fetched from the problem of the prevailing depressed economy being felt in the country Nigeria today.

Problems of Depressed Economy in Nigeria

Economy depression is when production and consumption decreases drastically and unemployment increases rapidly. While Hornby (2005) defines it as where there is not enough economic activities or jobs for people. Nwachuku (1998) looks at it as one under economic adversity; this means that there are scarce resources with low business activities. The scenario of economic adversities in developing countries today is so tormenting to the society. Aguolu (1993) states that the condition of Nigeria with its prevailing depressed economy, which is characterized by galloping inflation, high cost of goods and services, mass unemployment with resultant mass poverty and high cost of living standards are the major contributing factors to insecurity in libraries and in the country at large.

Nigeria even after many years of political independence has not been able to match its political independence with economic independence and self-reliance as reiterated by Aguolo C. and Aguolu I. (2002). It is a well known fact that Nigerian government started a programme of free education at all levels that was in the late seventies but today the situation has changed, the education of children are now the responsibility of parents. The school grants and scholarships that were granted before to students have either been stopped or limited to only well connected people. Furthermore, various school fees from primary to tertiary institutions have been increased. The burden of such fees is too much for most parents to bear. Hence most of the children of the poor are not well cared or catered for and some of these children have to take care of themselves. The economic situation is so intense that some children dropout of schools taking into all kinds of social ills like robbery, advanced free fraud (419) and even looting which have affected the security of the society. The society itself plays a significant role by not living by examples. Greed has taken over in the lives of people especially those in authority, which has led to

economic hazard which has given birth to assassination, kidnaps, cultism among a host of other social ills. Afolabi (1995) observes that just as the common man battles with soaring prices of basic commodities, crimes of varying proportions are on the increase daily. Thus the social ills of armed robbery, burglary and stealing are afflicting greatly in the society. This is generally manifested among library users and even library staff. Libraries are social organizations that operate within the society. Theft and mutilation of library materials is a universal phenomenon which poses a serious threat to libraries especially in the developing countries. The current economic problems facing Nigeria call for appropriate action to be taken with a view to achieving the objectives of libraries.

The Effect of Depressed Economy on Acquisition and Security of Library Materials
As a result of the current economic situation in Nigeria, inflation has become the order of the day, prices of library materials continue to escalate and library budget do not keep pace with the inflation. Oche (2000) observes that the problem of inadequate availability of books and other information resources in all disciplines is a great concern to the library management. The few titles that are available cannot meet the demands of the users adequately. The dwindling economic fortunes of Nigeria coupled with hyper-inflation has made it increasingly difficult for government to fund the libraries adequately. The inadequate nature of library materials encourages theft and mutilation, Afolabi (1993) attributes the inability of Nigerian libraries to buy several copies of most books to economic constraints. The library is being faced with the dilemma of using the meager funds seldom approved, either for the purchase of new books or to use for replacement of lost or mutilated materials.

Due to the economic situation, many students in higher institutions could not afford to buy textbooks recommended to them because they find it hard to even feed themselves, as many came from poor backgrounds, their parents are either retired or do not have jobs. The students therefore rely heavily on their lecture notes and the library materials and some of these students are so greedy such that they steal or tear out the portion of material they need in the library. Theft and mutilation of library materials have adversely affected the services of the libraries in Nigeria. This has led to the situation where considerable number of materials are withdrawn from the shelves. When a user comes to the library and discovers that the materials he/she is looking for is not or are not there on the shelf or that some relevant pages are removed. This makes the student to become frustrated, this therefore means that the library has failed to meet the needs of its users. Ugah (2007) considers collection security violation as formidable obstacle to information access and use. Such act according to him is a serious problem that can result in user dissatisfaction.

Another problem is library building, which is supposed to be solidly designed to secure the collection as well as to provide users easy access to the library materials, but today most of the library buildings are either not solidly designed or debilitated. Security according to Aguolu C. and Aguolu I. (2002) could sometimes take precedence over accessibility because security provides some guarantee to the continued availability of library materials and without any security measures nothing will be left in the libraries. Actually, depressed economy has affected many libraries so badly that the annual budget

dwindles, making it so difficult to replace material resources lost through theft and mutilation or other means. There is also high cost of library materials particularly journals and reference books. However, what should be done to make library materials available for use? And how can this immoral behaviour of users and even library staff be curtailed in libraries in Nigeria to preserve the material resources for present and future users?

CONCLUSION

Library managers know that theft and mutilations of library materials have deprived many library users from fully achieving their information needs. This problem should be addressed in the interest of the majority of users without disturbing the general freedom to the use of library material resources. It is established by many researchers that depressed economy that is characterized with inflation, poor condition of living, unemployment among others are some of the contributing factors to insecurity of library materials. Libraries cannot function effectively and efficiently without considering the security and protection of its materials. Anunobi and Okoye (2008) observe that information is an essential part of a nation's resources and access to it, is a basic human right with declining budgets and higher subscription cost, it is becoming difficult to meet the demands of library users. In Nigeria, libraries can only afford limited and inadequate number of material resources due to their budget constraints.

Since libraries are able to provide scarce and heavily used resources, the materials therefore 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 therefore apparent that libraries should ensure the security of the available materials in their custody if they are to successfully manage flourishing and efficient libraries. Even though libraries cannot totally eliminate losses of their materials but it can be reduced to the minimum if certain measures are undertaken. The library managers should always think of ways of exercising effective methods of control and security of the material resources to curtail and possibly eliminate the illegal removal of the materials from the library.

Based on the above, this study recommends the following as library security measures. There is this electronic security system which can ensure that borrowers cannot get out of the library without proper documentations as used in advanced countries, it is very good but they are quite expensive and are not common in Nigeria. With the economic problems, may be, some organizations can afford it and for many that cannot afford, should increase the number of security guards to man the entrance and exit of the libraries. Since poverty, inflation and high cost of living in the society have been viewed as some of the reasons encouraging theft and mutilation of library materials, there is need to educate the users on the devastating effect of theft and mutilation of library materials on the collections and services of the library. There is also need to encourage the society through different channels of media to be self-reliant, whereby individuals struggle hard to earn a living to avoid idleness which leads to poverty and causes a lot of havoc in the society. The government of Nigeria should look seriously into the situation of unemployment in the country which has caused a lot of harm to the society today. Also, viable industries should

be establish which many families will be gainfully employed, this can reduce to a large extent the adverse effect of redundancy in society. The funding capacity of libraries should be improved upon by the relevant authorities. This will afford libraries the opportunity to provide adequate and multiple copies of highly demanded materials for their users. The non-return of library materials by borrowers is a threat to the effective use of resources. Udoma and Okoro (2007) suggest that libraries should create policies to ensure library resources are used effectively. The policies should be realistic for borrowing of library books. Also libraries should have clear written procedures of penalties for theft and mutilation of library materials. With harsh penalties, it might reduce significantly the problems of theft and mutilation in the libraries and should be spelt out to the users. Another thing that can remedy the problem of theft and mutilation is to paste simple notices on strategic areas reminding users that illegal borrowing or stealing of library materials is a serious offence and attracts serious punishment too. There should be adequate availability of photocopying facilities and services in every library to assist readers make copies of their needed items at affordable cost, this will help users not to mutilate books needed outside the library.

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