

MUTILATION AND THEFT OF LIBRARY RESOURCES IN THE IMO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, OWERRI, IMO STATE NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study investigated mutilation and theft of library resources in Imo State University Library Owerri. A total of 221 users' population made up of 41 staff and 180 library users were obtained through random sampling technique. Data was collected using structured questionnaire and direct observation method. The result showed that the major cause of mutilation and theft of library information materials is lack of adequate security network as 61% opined that users hide library materials inside their bags and files. The result also showed that reference materials are the most frequently affected as 43% of the users attested even though all library materials are vulnerable to mutilation and theft. In order to prevent mutilation and theft of library resource, 40% are of the opinion that there should be guards and attendants at the main entrance of the University Library and 33% suggested that offenders should be handed over to the library committee for disciplinary action. The researcher therefore recommended as a way to alleviate this ugly situation that there is the need for a good and strong electronic security system, multiple copies of library materials, photocopying machines, user education programme and adequate financial support from government for effective management of information resource in the University Library.

Key words: Mutilation, Theft, Library Resources, Information, Imo State University.

Introduction

The library is the heart of academic in any institution of higher learning. Rubin (1998) stated that colleges are walking up to the fact that the work of many researchers and many departments depend on the library because it is an authentic place where students can learn beyond lectures and textbooks.

A study conducted by Okoye-Ikonta (1981) revealed that book mutilations and thefts constitute the major threat to the resources of Nigerian University Libraries. Mutilations and thefts of Library materials is a problem that is multifarious in form and wide in scope. Some unscrupulous library users are daily coming up with new, complex and sophisticated means and ways of ripping off pages from library books and journals and actually stealing library resources. It is not an overstatement that libraries have lost most of their valued information materials through this illegal channel. The disturbing aspect is that illegal removal of books from the library is an ill wind that blows no one good (Sokari, 2011), The library staff, users and the institution in which the library is established share from this problem. In ancient times, replacement of lost documents involved expensive and laborious tasks of locating a good copy of the lost document from another library and copying it by hand for days, while these days' mutilated texts are either repurchased or rebound (University of South Carolina Beaufort, 1976). In library policy, all library users are subjected to state law regarding theft, damage and failure to return borrowed library materials. Universities libraries all over the world formulate library rules and regulations aimed at regulating the conduct of library users and checking library book mutilations and thefts.

One major challenge libraries contend with, is the problem of mutilation and theft of library and information resources, It is a very serious problem as it places library resources in jeopardy; thereby hampering teaching and learning. This ugly phenomenon is not new; it has been with the library system from time immemorial (Sokari, 2011). Although, the level or frequency of mutilation and theft of library resources in Imo State University library is very high due to lack of adequate security, hence the need for this type of research investigation.

The study is aimed at investigating the causes of mutilation and theft of library resources in Imo State University Library; the method used in mutilating and stealing of library book; the type of materials that are

frequently mutilated, the method adopted in preventing mutilations and thefts of library materials; punishment mapped out for the offenders and suggesting ways of stopping mutilation and theft in the Imo State University Library.

Review of related literatures

Mutilation and Theft of Library resources in the University Library were identified as a major threat to academic library materials(Bello,1997) Mutilation is the method of ripping off or removing of any important part of library book or material while theft is the act of stealing library materials. Nwamefor (1974) described mutilation and theft of library books as anti-social act which is universal and persistent in spite of student's orientation on care and management of library books. Ibok (2000) reported how a student was caught by library security guard when the student turn-off a whole chapter of a book from the library and attempted to escape with it. It is instructive that library porters be security conscious and vigilant at all times in the library so as to forestall mutilation and theft of books by delinquent library clientele.

This problem of mutilation and theft has been linked to various causes. Aina (2003) stated that theft and mutilation of library resources usually occurs when a delinquent user is interested in a particular document, rather than borrowing the whole book he/she resorts to the removal of pages that he/she is interested in. Asiru (2003) observed that reference books are kept for consultation only and are not allowed to be used outside the library; this means that reference materials are usually not given out on loan but to be consulted in the library. One possible reason for mutilation of reference books or theft of them could be due to the strict control on them. Omoniwa (1986)-also revealed that book Mutilation and theft in University Libraries is as a result of poor attitude to public property, lack of commitment on the part of the staff, non-functional facilities and infrastructures.

Another cause is an economic factor. Dare (1986) observes harsh economic situation on students is essentially responsible for such-anti-social behaviors in our tertiary institutions. Some students may be poor, books and other reading materials are beyond the reach of the teeming population, to alleviate the harsh economic situation which they found themselves, they indulge in mutilating and theft of library materials without considering the effects on themselves, other users and the library.

Library users in academic library employ various methods of mutilation and theft of library materials. Afolabi (1993) stated that various methods such as ripping-off of books and other information sources using chemicals to clean off library ownership stamp, removing date- due- slip and removing of book jackets and preliminary pages of book to avoid identification. Library users write and make notes inside a borrowed library book, most at-times; users deface the book by attempting to erase all identification marks on the books (Ibok, 2000).

On the implication of mutilation of theft of library books, Gojeh (1995) pointed that mutilation of book costs library a considerable sum of money, in the bindery for repair. Libraries are suffering serious losses of information resources. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) stated that high incidence of book theft and mutilation of resources can reduce the library's effectiveness in supporting the academic pursuits of the universities.

To prevent this, librarians should provide multiple copies of books. Nwosu (2000) observed that availability of photocopying services within the library also enable users to make personal copies of needed texts especially those they cannot borrow out of the library.

Methods

Descriptive research design was used for this research. Questionnaire and direct observation constituted the instrument for data collection. The sample size of the study is made up of the entire 9 Faculties and 41 library staff. For adequate representation of the students, the researcher used random sampling technique to select 20 students from each Faculty making a total of 180 students and 41 library staff. Thus the population frame is 221. The total population of the study was 221, out of which 41 are library staff and 180 library users. The selection of the library users was based on the 9 faculties of the university understudy. 20 copies of the questionnaire were given to the library users in each faculty; whereas the 41 questionnaires were given to the library staff. The selection of 20 respondents each from the 9 faculties was designed to represent even distribution of respondents/users to maintain a universal opinion of users. Secondly, the administration of same questionnaire to both staff and users was intentional since this problem is a broad based one requiring solution from both users and library staff and sometimes library staff are involved. Data collected was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages as shown in the results.

Results

As much as possible, the data were analyzed based on the objectives. Both the staff and library users answered the same questionnaire. Out of 221 copies of questionnaire distributed all were returned representing 100%. The outcome of the result is as shown in Tables 1-5.

Table 1: Causes of Mutilations and Thefts

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Photocopying facilities in the Library	50	23
Insufficient number of needed textbooks in the Library	45	20
Negative feelings among some library users that Library materials belong to nobody	30	14
Poor Security Network in the Library	56	25
Inability of students to purchase their reading Materials as a result of high costs	40	18
Total	221	100%

Table 1 above shows that 25% respondents agreed that poor security network in the library cause mutilation and theft, followed by lack of photocopying services 23%, insufficient number of needed materials 20%, inability of students to purchase their textbooks as a result of high cost 18% and negative feelings among some library users that library materials belong to no. one 14%

Table 2: Methods of Mutilation and Theft

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Borrowing without return	24	11
Ripping- off- of important pages and smuggling it out of the Library	63	29
Hiding library books inside users bags and files	134	61
Total	221	100%

Table 2 shows that 61% opined that hiding library books inside their bags and files, 29% are of the view that ripping-off of important page(s) and smuggling it out of the library, while only 11% are of the view that borrowing without return constitutes a method of mutilation and theft of library resources.

Table 3: Materials frequently mutilated and stolen

Materials	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently consulted materials	23	10
Journals	34	14
Reference Materials	94	43
Books with limited copies	70	32
Total	221	100%

Out of the 221 respondents, 43% opined that reference materials are the material frequently mutilated and stolen while 32% said books with limited copies, and 15% said journals and finally 10% said frequently consulted materials.

Table 4: Measures to Prevent Mutilation and Theft

Measures	Frequency	Percentage
There should be one exit point	53	24
Provision of wire protector in all the windows	79	36
Force and threat should be employed on the users	-	-
There should be guards and attendants at the main entrance	89	40
Total	221	100%

Table 4 shows that 40% said there should be guards and attendants at the main entrance, 36% said provision of wire protector in all the windows, 24% said there should be one exit point and non-admitted that force and threat should be employed on the users.

Table 5: Types of Sanctions for Offender

Type of Sanction	Frequency	Percentage
Expulsion from University	52	24
Denial of or suspension of the use of the library for a period of time	41 73	19 33
Handed over to the library committee for disciplinary action		
Hand over to police or dismissed if staff is involved	55	25
Force out of the library	-	
Total	221	100%

Concerning the type of punishment mapped out to offenders, 25% suggested that if a staff is involved, he/she should be handover to the police or dismissed from his/her job, 24% agreed on expulsion from the university. 33% said handing over the offenders to the library disciplinary committee, 18% said denial of or suspension of the use of library for a

period of time while non-agreed that forcing out of the library is the appropriate punishment.

Discussion

From the analysis, the findings revealed that poor security network in the library is the major cause of mutilation and theft of information resources. This finding supported the view of Bello (2001) that some of the causes of library malpractices were lack of enough security and inadequate number of books in the library. The findings also agreed with Abullaihi and Dawia (2006) that high cost of books and poverty are some reasons while users steal and mutilate materials in the library.

The result also revealed that methods employed in executing this act include hiding library books inside bags and files, smuggling out books from the library, tearing out important, page(s), and borrowing without returning. These findings confirmed the view of Afolabi (1993) that delinquent library users and staff have devised many ways of removing out illegally, information sources from the library through - throwing out materials through the windows, and tearing page(s) from information resources. The findings also revealed that the type of materials that are frequently mutilated and stolen are reference materials with limited copies, journals and highly demanded materials. These findings agree with the findings of Nwogu and Anunobi (2002) that all materials are vulnerable to mutilation and theft, but well illustrated materials especially those with photographs, journals, frequently consulted materials with limited copies are the most vulnerable to theft and mutilation. The outcome of Table 4 revealed that the Imo State University Library does not use force and threat to check mutilation and theft, the methods adopted are provision of security guards and attendants at the main entrance, wire protectors at the windows to avoid illegal passage of library books and provision of one exit point in the library. These findings are in conformity with Aguolu and Aguohu (2002) that to safeguard library collections, many devices should be employed such as the use of guards and surveillance.

Lastly, the study revealed that the punishment that should be given to the offenders especially staff is to dismiss him/her from the job and hand him/her over to the police or disciplinary committee. This was in agreement with Edem (1998) who reported a case of book theft in the University of Calabar where the culprits mentioned two library staff as their accomplices during interrogation and they were handed over to the university disciplinary committee for action.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the outcome of this investigation, mutilation and theft of library materials affect the optimal performance and usage of libraries hence the researcher recommends as follows:

- i. It is apparent that the major cause of mutilation and theft is poor security network.
- ii. Strong and new security system preferably electronic type should be installed in the University Library.
- iii. Reprographic unit should be established in the library to generate little revenue for the library and to help discourage mutilation and theft of library materials.
- iv. User education programme should be effectively carried out in all the university libraries to ensure that user's minds are disabused from theft and mutilation.
- v. All these cannot be carried-out without fund hence National University Commission/Government should make finance available for the University Library.

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