

Theft & Mutilation Concept: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The comprehensive review of the problem of theft and mutilation of library materials. Relevant sources from previous studies has been discussed considering global perspective, specifically studies in Europe, Asia and Africa. It has been systematized based on conceptual definitions, overview, theft and mutilation of library materials as a global concern, counter measures, Nigerian Academic libraries, Theft and mutilation of library materials as a Nigerian concern, counter measures and concludes by pointing the effect of mutilation not only for the library as system but also for the library users. The paper provides counter measures as a way forward for sustainable good governance in managing library resources.

Introduction

The below concepts are operationally defined in the context of the way they are applied in this research.

Theft: - In this context, theft implies the removal of any library materials without the knowledge and consent of the library management with intent of not returning them.

Mutilation: - Mutilation is an act of destroying or removal of an essential part of library material as to render it useless (Udoudoh 2012).

Security: - This entails the measures to be taken for the prevention of theft and mutilation of library collections.

Academic Library: -This is a library that is attached to a higher educational institution (universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and research institutions) which serves the curriculum and research purposes of the parent institution.

Overview

The position of Academic libraries in higher institutions in the transmission of information (Omotayo and Ajayi 2005) and knowledge cannot be over emphasised. They serve as workshops and strong room for the teaching, learning and research functions of the individual institutions. Moreover, with the increasing transformation of modern institutions nowadays, it is anticipated that access to e-books to meet the demands of the growing number of the students, and lecturers must be given higher priority, and also the system for issue and return of the hard copy materials needs to be improved, this could be achieved by the use of the modern automated systems. Thus, this will reduce these materials from being exposed to mutilation and theft as experienced in libraries of developed and developing countries of the world (Ewing 1994).

Statement of the problem

According to research information is scarce on why theft and mutilation occur and on how much they cost libraries as pointed by (Terry) 2014 from 1972 to 1987 less than fifteen articles and papers have been written on the subject. The problem of book theft and mutilation is laying waste to vital and expensive library collections based on the fact that frequently damage use to be done inaudibly and not exposed until long after the act has taken place (Terry 2014). Mutilation and theft in *libraries* is a menace that has persisted, and it is indeed a global problem. However, the worsening state of *libraries* in Africa especially Nigeria appears to have aggravated its intensity and the consequent detrimental impact (Ajayi 2003).

Considering Terry's 2014 and Ajayi's 2003 views this paper attempts to comprehensively examine the problems of theft and mutilation of library materials with sources from relevant previous studies in global perspective precisely studies in Europe, Asia and Africa.

Theft and mutilation of library materials as a global concern

Librarians across the globe share a common purpose, which is the use of library as a medium for academic and research purposes. The problem of abuse of library resources is a global one, as mentioned by (Akinfolarin, 1992) in (Issa.et al, 2011). As such, the issue of ensuring security of the library materials against theft and mutilation has been a major concern for library professionals throughout library history irrespective of geographical location. Theft and mutilation strike at the very core of the library: the material representation of culture and knowledge.

Theft

According to Curry, Flodin and Matheson (2000), skilled thieves ravaged the collections of seven major library systems in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. In an effort by libraries to find ways of stopping or preventing theft and mutilation of the materials, preventive measures are proposed, as discussed above. In this direction Stoker (1991) asserts that reporting theft and vandalism is essential in given enough time to police to pursue the thieves and for alerting other libraries about specific items likely stolen, as such, book dealers should be contacted by librarians regarding stolen items that have high resale value and very rare to be replaced.

According to Akinfolarin (1992) there was broadcast by the BBC in 1999 which came as a result of reports by the Librarian, University of Edinburgh, in the UK. The report stated that nearly 800 volumes of books had been discovered lost in the previous academic session and urged for ways to stop the ugly trends.

According to Parsons (2016) and Allan (1997) Librarians responsible for collections of library materials have to be concerned with theft and mutilation since libraries were immemorial. Unfortunately, the late twentieth century has been no exception, and theft from libraries is still with us. In fact, as prices for rare books and manuscripts has gone high on the auction gallery floor and in booksellers' catalogues, in the same way, incidents of theft have increased. Allan further said between 1979 and 1986 theft of materials valued at \$20,000 or more were reported at the Universities of Harvard, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Georgia, George Washington University, Boston College, the Thomas A. Edison National Historical Site, both the Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses of the University of California.

During these same years, Brown-Syed (1999) also discussed the case of a culprit who was actively stealing books from public and academic libraries all across the country until the college's chief librarian heroically put a stop to his activity in the book stacks of the Oberlin College Library. In the early 1990s, perhaps the most active single book thief in the twentieth century was Stephen Blumberg who was arrested, tried, and convicted for federal crimes relating to the theft of nearly 25,000 titles over a twenty-year period from more than three hundred U.S libraries spread from one coast to the other. For example, in the state of Michigan, Blumberg stole books from at least ten academic and public libraries. On the West Coast in the Los Angeles area alone, Blumberg hit at least seven academic and public libraries. This is only a small proportion to those libraries that audit their collections periodically and that make them conscious of the happenings in their libraries. In the developing nations worst things happens, not only books but even equipments disappear in the libraries and very little is done to salvage the situation.

Dane (1991) confirms that terrible nature of the situation is clearly evident in a few quotes from The New York Times. One headlined article reads "HOT STUFF. What's stolen and stashed away in an estimated 25 million American homes? In commenting

on the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts, the Times reported that "communities collectively were losing an estimated \$1,100,000 per year in library materials including books, videotapes and paintings with some towns like Shrewsbury, with a population of 23,000 losing \$12,000 per year in missing books.

As mentioned by Chaturvedi (1994), an example of the miss-use of authorities is when a professor in Manchester University, who was the chairman of library committee illegally had over 250 books in his possession that belongs to the university library.

According to Ewing (1994) the British library hosted a seminar in 1987 on theft and mutilation, and it was discovered that an author of preventing library book theft in person of Herbert Keele expressed concern that UK losses a yearly amount of £100 million. Keele was shocked that the theft was not only by hardened criminals, it included clergymen, lawyers, psychologists and the most reputable professional researchers, in fact the library staff also contributed to the losses either by intentional theft or refusal to return the materials. (Ewing 1988) An example of such case is a librarian from Liverpool, Norma Haig that left a £46,000 worth of plates of 18th and 19th century costume from rare books at the British library, Victoria and Albert museum, National art library and Birmingham city library.

Mutilation (partial theft)

Research conducted on four academic libraries of the Klang valley, Malaysia, on security issues, Maidabino (2010) opined that most of the security issues bordered mainly on eating, drinking in the library and improper use of the collections and equipments, this includes staining of book pages etc. Also in another direction he noted the mutilation and torn of book spine, borrowing books for friends and family members was common. Kumbhar and Veer (2016) observed that in India libraries have been affected by mutilation and also theft of collections such as books, journals and magazines or misplacement of text books. While they affirmed that in some libraries there were verbal abuse and physical combat between librarians and the clients. There were also reported cases of some staff who had uncontrolled emotional behaviours and psychiatric problems. These and many more were also identified instead of helping and assisting the users, they in the reverse needed to be assisted.

Another point of consideration regarding theft is how in March 1991 two thousand two hundred and ninety cassettes and books were found in a car park in Kingsbury. It was discovered that these belongs to libraries in Barnet, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Islington, Kensington, Chelsea, Southwark, Brent, City of Westminster and as far as Birmingham and Manchester. The items were mutilated and defaced in order to remove the ownership stamp of the libraries they were stolen from.

Another reported problem by (Ewing 1994) is a case of mutilation of a book by tearing out its electronic trigger by removal with a razor of plates and illustrations, and adding comments in the text books. Another culprit with was sentenced to jail for a period of six months for adding "rude bits" to library books.

As mentioned by (Ajala and Oyeboade 2008), mutilation of collections not only drains badly needed financial resources but also frustrates and frequently infuriates the patrons. Now, the concept of security is seen as a guide to curtail the disappearance of valuable materials in the libraries.

Countermeasures

As regards to the countermeasures for such illegal activities, some opinions suggested that punishment such as charging fines, publishing names of culprits on notice boards will help in reducing the menace.

According to Ayoung, Boatbil, and Banbil (2014) in their evaluation of six polytechnic libraries in Ghana, confirmed that the main culprits of security breaches were students who were often fined or were put under severe conditions of punishment, some were banned from using the library. Some of the culprits are frequent offenders, they are rusticated. However, the most difficult offenders to deal with are academic staffs who are often cited for non-return of borrowed books. All efforts ranging from imposing fines or other punitive measures do not often yield any result. This is usually because the issue of enforcement of the rules and regulations governing the use of library and its facilities is difficult to carry out especially when management does not give adequate backing as some members are offenders themselves. Librarians, therefore, have no option than to just appeal to staff to return books in their custody. Also, most of these appeals do not lead to the retrieval and return of these materials. Even though the library management and the school have the option of initiating a prosecution process, but it has never been done, these attitudes becomes frustrating and killing the morals of the librarians and the team of serious minded co-workers.

The library management should liaise with local booksellers/vendors, in order to apprehend the suspected sellers of the stolen books brought to them to buy. Another example by Traister (1994) provided the efficacy of this method of recovery on account of an incident in which a rare book dealer was contacted about stolen items through dealer networks in the United States, the Antiquarian Bookseller's Association of America and had organised "Book watch U. S. A. "a nationwide network of rare book dealers who share information on rare books stolen from libraries.

There are very few survey-based studies, conducted by Parsons (2016) in regard to safety and security, using the academic library as the primary focus. In 1993, a survey of Texas academic libraries was conducted to identify levels of security and technology systems used, compare library guidelines and policies, costs and loses associated with crime prevention. Southern health sciences libraries were studied in 1999 for similar information. Parsons (2016) assessed master's thesis written in 1993 and reviewed the extent and breath of security issues, what policies and guidelines are available, and how libraries define security issues in Ohio academic libraries.

Security issues in Louisiana academic libraries were studied in 1996, and most recently, 25 academic libraries in North and South Carolina were surveyed in Belvin (1994), Chavez (1993), Duggar (1999), Forrest (2005) and Sanders (2012).

Allan (1997) affirms that the large public Midwestern university library is one of the largest buildings on campus. It has opening hours which varies when classes are in session and in spring semesters. During the same time period the University's enrolment grew more than other times. Supervisors needed to know exactly what issues the porters were dealing with while on duty and conducting security rounds. From the foregone analysis, more security attention is required in this session to commensurate with the security requirements of the library environment.

Ajegbomogun (2004) viewed the concept of security as machinery set in motion to guide or curtail the sudden disappearance of valuable materials from its original position to an unknown destination. Therefore, library security is strategically designed system to protect collections of any kind against unauthorised removal by intruders. Stoker in (Susanna and Matheson 2000) asserts that while failing to report theft is understandable, since it may result into negative publicity, it allows police to pursue the thieves, and for alerting other libraries. And equally the book vendors and dealers should be contacted regarding stolen books. This action therefore calls for an urgent consideration to curtail all the unforeseen circumstances; which leads to the continued missing and destruction of these collections and also the frustration and anger by selfish and unpatriotic library users. (Usman 2013).

Nigerian Academic Libraries

Ifijeh (2016) portrayed the history of academic library development in Nigeria dates back to pre-independence time when the University of Ibadan and its library were established in 1948. As pointed out by Aguolu (1996), in Ifijeh (2016) since independence in 1960, there have been continues expansion in the establishment of educational institutions at all levels, especially tertiary education. Their libraries, being centre of academic activities, generally emerged simultaneously with their parent institutions.

At independence in 1960, the Federal Government of Nigeria decided to establish a university in each of the geo – political regions as in those years. This gave birth to the establishment of the university of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile – Ife, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

These universities have mandatory responsibilities to build reputable libraries to meet the needs of their students and staff, over the years, by extension, University libraries have increased. Consequently, Federal and State Governments opened more universities, while private individuals and organizations are now free to operate universities. Presently, there are one hundred and forty-two universities in Nigeria (NUC, 2016). University Libraries in government-owned universities, however, are

suffering from low budgetary allocation. Sadly, many years after, the challenge of funding remained unsolved (Deji-Folutile and Oketola, 2014). MacArthur Foundation (2005) reported that with low funding, universities are not able to provide adequate funds to run libraries with first class services. As a result, there are no sufficient facilities and information assets, so students use the libraries mainly for study space. Not many members of staff use the library resources regularly and most of them unaware of new developments and resources within the library. The library staffs are struggling to make available access to electronic resources while coping with undependable power, fluctuating access to the internet and low bandwidth. A lot view the library as weak and unable to sustain teaching and research (MacArthur Foundation, 2005). Despite these yet, the academic libraries are trying to fit into the present information society. Therefore, this is the trends of academic library development in Nigeria with its numerous challenges. Regardless of these negative impact of underfunding of libraries in Nigeria Okiy (2012) said the libraries remained the core and most vital equipment of any recognised educational institution in Nigeria. This is because, as a resource centre for the institutional progress, the library occupies a central and a primary place in serving the functions of teaching, and research in the creation of new knowledge. It's also known for the promotion of current information in professional practice and transmission to posterity of learning and culture of the past age. Libraries are seen and regarded as having very close relationship with learning and research which scholars believed is parallel revolution and change; that is why according to Yakubu (2015) library is the "heart" of the academic community.

Theft and mutilation of library materials as a Nigerian concern

Rampant cases of mutilation, defacing and theft of library materials are reported in Nigerian academic libraries. For example, ABU library Zaria, Nigeria was heavily affected, which resulted into organizing an exhibition of mutilated and stolen books, as stated by Bello (2001).

Ifidon (2000) stated theft and mutilation in libraries is an international menace that has persisted and indeed a great problem, the terrible state of libraries in Nigeria tends to have reached its peak and therefore has a massive negative impact on both patrons and the library managements.

In a study by (Abifarin, 1997) it was found that among different library users, students topped the list of culprits for theft and mutilation, ranging up to 96.6%. Aina (2004) in a similar study reviewed the factors that lead to theft and mutilation of books in Sokoto state of Nigeria. 500 university students were surveyed, and it was found that mostly expensive books were stolen and mutilated, particularly during examination times. This is because during this period, there is extremely high demand for the library materials, students that were busy with non-academic activities and missed classes

with un-copied class notes, tend to steal or mutilate the library materials to catch up, in order to pass the exams, to them is justified.

Similarly, Isaac (2008) evaluated the rate at which materials are stolen and mutilated in 4 various academic institutions in western part of Nigeria, it was discovered that reference materials, periodicals such as magazines, newspapers and journals, were mostly affected.

Theft

A study by Bello (1998) on theft and mutilation in technological institution libraries in Nigeria highlighted the lack of security and criminal behaviour due to higher demand of the library materials, which is more than the library can supply. This brings about high competition among clients for materials that invariably make it vulnerable and tempting for users to steal or engage in illegal acts.

Several cases at hand were the culprits hide stolen library materials in their clothing, such as the case of an un-employed graduate that was caught stealing seventeen books from Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) library, Ogbomoso in 2002. He was found guilty and prosecuted by a magistrate court and therefore sentenced to 12 months imprisonment or an option fine of 1000 Nigerian Naira. The culprit confessed that he has a ready market where he sells his stolen goods at very cheap prices. There was also another incidence of an elderly man who disclosed that he couldn't have a peace of mind after buying a stolen book from a vendor in a popular market and had to return it to the library.

Udoudoh (2012) mentioned that the University of Port Harcourt library had 21 volumes of Lexicon Universal encyclopaedia and 10 volumes of world book dictionary stolen. This is a big lost that requires millions of Naira to replace. The University of Abuja law library also lost 70 issues of Nigerian weekly Law reports, 49 volumes of 3, and seven volumes of encyclopaedia of Islam, were reportedly stolen.

Reporting similar cases, Oyesiku (2004) mentioned the case of set of Nigerian law digest that was stolen, and also a set of Gani Fawehinmi's Digest of Supreme Court cases with volumes of Encyclopaedia of forms and precedents. These stolen materials are worth a huge amount of money, this is a great lost to the library, considering the small budget of the library. As reported by Bello (1998) the main library of Olabisi Onabanjo University suffers similar cases of mutilation, theft and defacement of their collections.

Mutilation (partial theft)

An incident of mutilation at the National library of Nigeria, Ogun state branch, was reported in 1989 (Bello 1998) that a set of encyclopaedia of science and technology was massively mutilated and defaced.

Another female undergraduate student in LAUTECH Mutilated the Encyclopaedia Americana in 1996; she was caught and punished by the university disciplinary committee with a suspension of one academic semester (Ajala and Oyeboade 2008). Many of these sad cases are common in Nigerian libraries, which are unfortunate to discover.

Countermeasures

Abiafarin (1997), Allen (1997) and Bello (1998) reported high rate of book theft, mutilation and misplacement in Nigerian academic libraries.

They proposed measures to reduce the problems, which includes the following;

- Tight security at entrances and exits of the library.
- Suspension or expulsion of students convicted theft and mutilation for a particular period which deter culprits.
- Adequate provision of multiple copies of high demand materials,
- Provision and reduction of cost of photocopying, and easy access to scanners.
- Frequent search of staff offices and student's hostels.
- Rajendra (2005) suggested the need for planning the library security in the building should be at the beginning of the inception of library to be constructed were possible by architectural design considerations.
- Constant library staffs supervision.
- Updating the security personnel of the nature of the library routine.
- Use of media and social networks to condemn the act of theft and mutilation.
- Engage informed and educated security personnel in the library.
- Use of nets to all library windows and strategic places, to prevent throwing out books from the library.
- The use of the modern monitoring systems such as CCTV and other electronic devices.

Conclusions

Various scholarly works have been done by different individuals related to theft and mutilation of library materials. The examinations were carefully conducted to present proper and sound perspective to the study. The outcome of their views shows that not only does theft and mutilation affect the effectiveness of the library but frustrate the library users. This is as a result of denying them using a material at a time they need it most.

Theft and mutilation also threatens the professional competency of the librarians as a protectors and a guardians of the library collection.

The reviewed articles highlighted different ways and methods the culprits follow in order to achieve their nefarious activities in all the different types of libraries across the globe.

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