Theft and Mutilation on the Use of Library Resources in Nigerian Academic Libraries

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Abstract - *The ability of the library to meet the needs of its teeming users is greatly dependent on the availability of information resources. Theft and mutilation are serious factors that hamper not just availability but usability of information resources. This paper discussed some of the causes of theft and mutilation to include high cost of books, lack of photocopying machine, lack of electronic security measures, and lack of proper monitoring of students, porous library security system, and unavailability of online databases among others. This study also revealed that theft and mutilation of information resources has lots of negative impact on the entire collection and services of academic libraries in Nigeria. The following were suggested to improve on ways to curb the menace of theft and mutilation of resources in Nigerian libraries: Strategic positioning of the security officer in the library so that strict compliance to the library rules and regulations would be ensured among the library users; Male and female security staff should be employed to ensure that a thorough search takes place for both male and female students at the exit of the library; Closed circuit television (CCTV) system should be deployed to the library as the major system of securing the library collection and should be closely monitored by a security minded staff so as to minimize the menace of information resources theft and mutilation among others.*

Keyword: Theft, Mutilation, Library Resources, academic libraries, Nigeria.

Introduction

A library can be defined as an institution that acquires, organizes preserves and make available the recorded knowledge of man to the users. It can also be defined as a collection of book and non-book materials organized and kept for reading, studying and consultation. Library resources vary but they can be broadly categorized into graphic and non-graphic materials. The graphic are books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals and reference resources. While the non-graphic materials are grouped into three categories namely audio, visual and audiovisual.

Popoola and Haliso (2009) define library information materials as those information bearing materials that are in both printed and electronic formats, such as textbooks journals, indexes abstracts, newspapers and magazine, reports, computers ,CD-ROM databases, internet/e-mail,videotapes/cassettes, diskettes, magnectic disc e.t.c. out of which printed materials are more vulnerable to theft and mutilations.

Libraries in respective of it type whether national, academic, school, public or special are all service oriented institutions. Their activities are geared towards serving the needs of library

patrons. Libraries play an important role in the organization they serve. Libraries hold printed materials including books, periodicals, newspapers, reports, special collection of government documents and a wide range of electronic resources among others with which their users' information needs are met. (Vijeyaluxmy, 2015).

Background Study

Materials theft in academic libraries is a common problem that deserves serious attention from librarians and other stakeholders in general. It is wrong to mutilate library materials thereby denying others the opportunity of using such materials. Mutilation is carried out by lazy, uncultured users for their selfish interest. Mutilation in academic libraries becomes rampant towards the end of the semester when students are preparing for examinations. In most cases, mutilated materials become more or less useless as some chapters or parts of some materials or texts are removed.

As the custodian of library materials and resources, librarians own an obligation to their patrons and users to preserve the library stocks for present and future use. A depletion of available materials means a reduction in how they can serve and satisfy the needs of patrons (Peter, 2000). Besides, non-availability of library materials might mean inefficiency on the part of the librarians and other information experts who keep such materials. It is therefore in the interest of the professionals and their patrons to preserve available materials and resources from theft and mutilation. According to Bello (2001) book theft is the intentional removal of books from the library in an unauthorized manner.

Causes of Theft and Mutilation of Library Resources

There are many reasons why library users engage in theft and mutilation of library materials. Some of the reasons are as follows:

Selfishness

When demand exceeds supply, selfishness becomes a motivating force. Some people cut off pages of books because they can't be bothered to use a photocopier; some do it because they want to be the only one in their class to read that chapter before the final exam at the expense of other patrons. As noted by Nawe (1988) at University of Dar es Salaam library mutilation is well pronounced in the arts and social sciences due to selfish behavior. People commit a crime when they knowingly tear, mark, maliciously render imperfect or otherwise damages or destroy library materials. This is indeed an irresponsible behavior. Scholars who have studied security problems in Nigerian University libraries described mutilation as antisocial acts, which are universal and persistent inspite of the orientation talks given during fresher's week on the care and treatment of books (Alatiatayo, 1983; Bello, 1998; Onohwakpor, 2006).

Expanded Student Enrolment and shortage of library materials.

Expanded student intakes, in some cases this doubles the previous enrolment, but without expansion and improvements in teaching resources and student facilities (Mittelman, 1971 as cited in Kelefa, 2007). In the same vein, Okotore (1991) noted that users resort to delinquent behavior because demand over-strips supply of library materials. Students also steal and mutilate library materials because of shortages of books, and short-term loans. Similarly, competition for scarce library items tempts users to mutilate or engage in illegal borrowing

using other borrowers ticket (Keele, 1987). As Onohwakpor (2006) observes: Students population increases annually with the development of new faculties. The ability of the library to adequately cope with the increase in students population has been a concern, introduction of new courses and the expansion of existing ones had been hampered by insufficient funding, increased students enrolment means heavy usage of the meagre library resources while inadequate library budgets means that libraries cannot invest adequately and appropriately in preservation and conservation measures.

Internal and external factors

Kademani (2003) found that the causes of mutilation are both external and internal. External causes are attributed to physical, chemical, biological, improper storage, unauthorised exposure, mishandling and natural calamities such as flood, earth quakes, fire outbreak etc. Internal causes are attributed to poor quality of paper or materials used and the chemicals used for printing and binding.

Financial Constraints and high cost of learning materials

The economic crisis experienced by developing countries has affected student's purchasing power. For example, in Nigeria since the mid 1980s: financial constraints encourage users to engage in antisocial activities and the perpetrators feel it is justified because it is directed to the library and not to an individual (Nwamefor, 1974; Okotore, 1991). In the same context Onohwakpor, (2006) noted that: The poor economic situation that has affected every sector of fund generating sources which has also indirectly affected students' means of subsistence is one of the contributing factors to high rate of mutilation of library materials. Parents, who squeezed their resources to pay the exorbitant school fees, do not have enough money to purchase personal books for their wards. The high cost of information resources is also a contributing factor since libraries cannot buy sufficient books given their meagre budgets. Therefore, the high number of stolen and mutilated books in libraries these days can be partly attributed to the economic depression and high price of books.

Security Measurements

According to Onohwakpor (2006) weak security is a major loophole for book theft in libraries. The library needs a good security system to prevent mutilations and this would require investing in either electronic security systems or security guards and training staff to be vigilant by checking book stocks regularly.

Effect of Theft and Mutilation of Library Materials in Nigerian Libraries.

It is noted that libraries have impacts on quality teaching, learning and research. The effect of theft and mutilation include the following:

Cost in terms of time and money

Theft and mutilation of library materials is costly to the University Community and to taxpayers. Replacement costs of lost or damaged material is far more expensive than the original cost of the item since incidents of mutilations are on the increase and library budgets cannot afford the consequences of widespread abuse. For example in the UK in 1987, losses amounted to100 million per year for replacement of mutilated materials imposing a

substantial financial drain on limited library budgets. Library materials are costly not only in a monetary sense but as well as in an intellectual sense (Jackson, 1991; Keele, 1987). A study conducted at the University of Oregon library found that the library replaces over a thousand pages each month, many of them are deliberately damaged. That's why a lot of photocopying, a lot of glue and staff time is spent to identify and locate the damaged library materials and borrow replacements from other institutions to photocopy and insert into original volumes.

Low quality services and frustration

Adomi (1981) and Oni (1984) have observed that abuse of library material reduces the quality of library services. Abegunde (1988) states that library materials mutilations result into frustration of staff and students because they can't find what they need. According to Onohwakpor (2006) mutilation frustrates readers and is an embarrassment to a librarian and the non-recovery of missing or torn material is an indication of inefficiency and inadequate provision of library services on the part of library staff. Consequently, accountability, quality education services and effective communication is reduced by the abuse of library materials through mutilation (Kabudi, 2003; Wamunza, 2003). This view is shared by Matefu (2002) who argues that academic libraries are meant to support teaching, learning, research and consultancy but mutilation of library materials reduce efficient, quality and effective provision of library services managed by librarians. Sloane (2005) argues that inevitably a financial constraint imposed upon most academic libraries do not allow the library to meet a full range of user requirements.

User and library staff dissatisfaction.

Misuse practices do not only affect users but also library staff satisfaction. Library staff get demoralized because innocent clients feel that if the library staff were doing their work properly, mutilations would not occur.

Shortages of library materials

Teferra as cited in Kelefa (2007) found that losses and mutilation are experienced in all libraries regardless of the size of their user population. For example collections in most academic libraries in Ethiopia are dismally small and yet 93% of these libraries lose too many volumes every year, thus creating shortage of library materials in all type of libraries.

The Way Forward

Academic, staff and students are aware of the critical role played by libraries in the teaching and learning process. However, as noted from the literature review effective use of the library is greatly hampered by mutilations which results in poor quality and quantity of library services. The literature suggests the following ways of preventing mutilations:

Photocopy Services

To overcome mutilations, university libraries often subsidize photocopy services for students which is a necessity and a means for making mutilation unattractive to students (Nwamefor; 1974 as cited in Kelefa, 2007). To minimize library mutilation, Alafiatayo (1983) suggests a reduction in the cost of photocopying and granting of amnesty on regular basis to encourage the return of overdue library resources.

Security

Ewing (1994) argues that internal mutilations and theft can be reduced by positioning shelves in such a manner that they can be seen and consequently supervised from the counter, identification of legitimate readers, conservation of rare or expensive items, protection of premises against intruders after business hours, long loan periods and by ensuring that loan and services, policies are sufficiently liberal so as not to aggravate the thefts. Akin (1992) and Adomi, (2002) suggest that, the electronic security systems are the most effective of ail the security system. The security of library materials should not be left to library staff alone but all users should cooperate to ensure that materials are optimally secure.

Rules

General rules of conduct (warning rules) should be posted in conspicuous places in the library. Each library should post a copy of these rules at a location adjacent to each entrance to the library facility and at each point in the premises (section) of the library facility at which the borrowing materials occurs. Also, Nwamefor (1974) says they should also be available in booklet form or flyers that can be handed to the customer when a library staff needs to discuss problem behavior. Libraries should formulate standard guidelines for antisocial library acts including mutilation.

Digitization

One of the activities performed by libraries includes preserving both materials created and acquired in digital form and digital files. Today most academic institutions are creating digital institutional repositories into which the intellectual capital of a college or university can be preserved for reuse, including articles, books of the completed scholarly works and data sets, presentations, and course-related materials that faculty generates. Effective digital preservation requires life-cycle management of digital information from the point of creation through storage, migration, and providing access on a continuing basis. In order to preserve materials libraries need better technology and methods to manage these objects over long periods of time, (Hedstrom and Montgmery, 1998)

Conclusion

Library and Information centers exist to provide users with accurate and timely information resources to meet their varying information needs. Theft and mutilation of library materials make it almost impossible for libraries to fulfill their mandate. Theft and mutilation directly affect material availability and this hampers effective service delivery. To ensure that this menace is put under check, serious efforts must be put into ensuring the security of library materials especially academic libraries. Also, appropriate measures must be implemented to forestall the mutilation of library materials to ensure their continual usability and enhanced service delivery.

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