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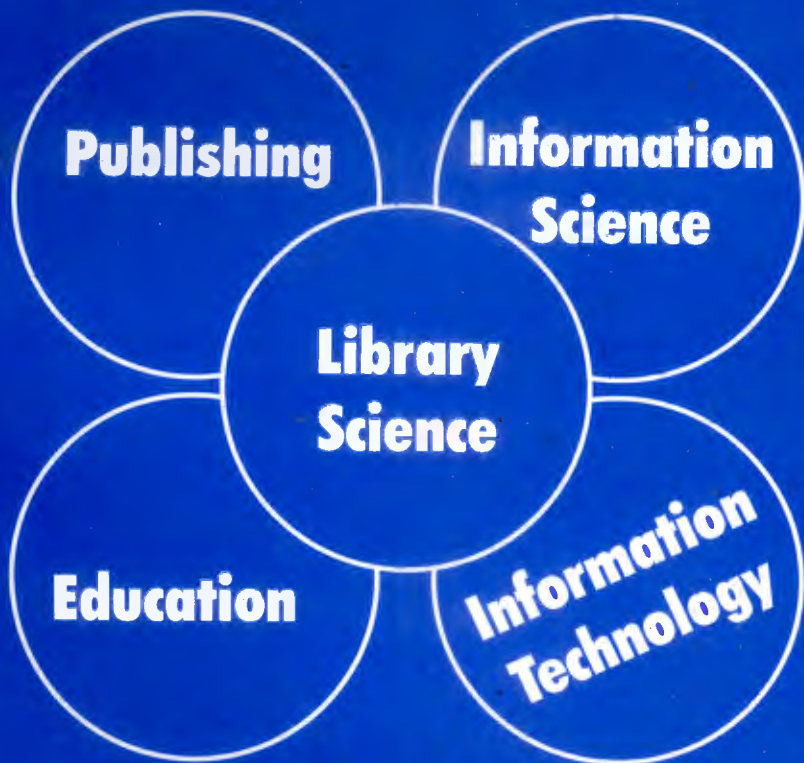


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SECURITY ISSUES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: THE WAY OUT

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ABSTRACT

Security of library materials has been a concern for librarians from the medieval period to the present. This study examines and evaluates security issues in academic libraries which include: theft of library materials, mutilation or vandalism of library materials by deviant patrons, etc. The focal point of this study is on the issues of theft and mutilation of library materials which has bedeviled academic libraries. Insensitivity to the needs of others, absence of efficient reprographic services, incessant power outage, porous security, etc, are some of the reasons why patrons steal and/or mutilate library materials. The study further examine techniques and dynamics of library crimes, the effect on users and the library itself. Finally, this study recommends modern and proactive approaches as the way out of the menace of theft and vandalism in academic libraries. These include but not limited to, facility consideration when designing a library building, security personnel, window protection and the installation of Electronic Security Systems (ESS) such as 3M security system, electronic surveillance cameras/CCTV, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) System, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Security is probably one of the most serious problems in academic libraries today. This has made the libraries to be subjected to a wide variety of security concerns. It must be noted that academic libraries are bedeviled with many security challenges. Akinfolarin (1992) observed that one of the greatest problems that have bothered librarians from the earliest time

to the present is how to ensure the security of library materials (especially against theft and mutilation). The act of theft and mutilation of library materials have not been seriously addressed by scholars. Jato (2005) revealed that there is dearth of literature on theft and mutilation of library materials in Nigeria.

Theft of library materials is not a recent phenomenon. It is a universal problem which affects both the developing and developed countries including U.S.A, U.K and European Union. Rajendran and Rathinasabapathy (2007) in a study on the "Role of Electronic Surveillance and Security Systems in Academic Libraries" revealed that, it was traditional, particularly before the genesis of the printing press when books were hand-written manuscripts, "to letter a curse into" the books to prevent them from being stolen. Two of such letters of curse are:

- * *For him that stealeth a book from this library,
Let it change into a serpent in his hand and rend him
Let him be struck with palsy and all his members blasted
Let him languish in pain crying aloud for mercy,
Let there be no surcease to his agony till he sinks to dissolution.
Let bookworms gnaw his entrails in token of the worm that dieth not,
When at last he goeth to his final punishment,
Let the flames of hell consume him forever and aye.*
- * *Steal not this book my honest friend
For fear the gallows should be your hend
And when you die the Lord will say
And wares the book you stole?*

-Culled from old letters of curse on Book Thieves

<http://www.bluewymtea.blogspot.com/2007/02/curse-your-library.html>

The unfortunate thing is that the curses of old on book thieves never had permanent solution to book theft. In those ancient times books had chains on them to guide against theft. Akinfolarin (1992) confirmed that in ancient Egypt, writings on papyrus and leather were restricted to tombs and temple archive rooms under lock and key to prevent them from theft. Teferra (1996) asserted that protection of documents is a practice with a long history. He said further that clay tablets and parchments in pots in ancient Middle East and chain-locking volumes in Europe of the middle ages were ways employed to safeguard library materials from theft and vandalism.

Lorenzen (1996) advocated that theft of library materials started in the ancient times. He revealed that the Royal Library of Alexandria Egypt, was invaded by soldiers in the seventh century BC and looted many materials. Staurt (1988) also revealed that one Pilcher, a prominent scholar, stole so many books from the Imperial Russian Library in the nineteenth century (19th c.). Strassberg (2000) recorded that in March 1990, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested Stephen Carrie Blumer in his home in Ottumwa, Iowa in USA. He was charged of illegally transporting nineteen (19) tons rare materials which included books, manuscripts, and other library materials. It was discovered, according to Strassberg, that among those items stolen were property of more than 327 of the most prestigious libraries and archival repositories in 45 American states and Canada.

Scholars have also recorded that many academic libraries in developing countries like Nigeria, had often times suffered from security problem of theft and mutilation. It was observed by Omotayo and Ajayi (2006) that Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife is not let out of increase in the number books stolen and mutilated. Obikoya (1993) quoting Nwamefor wrote that the collections of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka suffered from security menace. Undergraduate students devised clever techniques of enlarging their private collections through theft of the university's large collections, inspite of the fact that the library suffered from the effect of the Nigerian civil war where some materials were destroyed. Obikoya went further to state that many senior faculty members of Nigerian universities have acquired some

immunity and are illegally taking away library materials without being searched or questioned and, are even hardly reported by library attendants/ security personnel.

Library personnel are also perpetrators of theft/mutilation of library materials. Strassberg (2000) observed that library staff indulges in theft acts in libraries. According to him, library staff sometimes come across interesting books with attractive titles, take them out to read; they may also hand over same books to friends outside the libraries, who in turn transfer the books to others. The chain of transfer may continue until no trace may be made to such materials. Boyes (2006), asserted that a corrupt library staff in Germany stole more than 800,000 Euros (i.e. about 541,000 Pounds or N140, 800,000) worth of antique tomes (large, hefty leather-bound valuable ancient books). He stated further that the library security personnel who had worked for the University of Erlangen in Southern Germany for 40years had been stealing without being caught. It was until a beautifully illustrated *Herbal Book*, regarded as a 'European Treasure', written by Leohart Fuchs in 1543 got missing, that he was apprehended. More so, when search was conducted, several ancient books were discovered stacked in his garage. Some commentators have suggested that as many as 75% of thefts in libraries and archives are "inside jobs" (Omotayo, 2004). Although one would contend that the percentage estimated is on the high side.

CAUSES OF THEFT AND MUTILATION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Several reasons have been put forward for mutilation and theft of library materials. Prominent among them include the following:

- **INSENSITIVITY TO THE NEEDS OF OTHER USERS**

Some library patrons steal and mutilate materials in the library without empathy for others. There have been instances where some users will deliberately deface and/or steal materials in order to deprive others from using same (Obikoya, 1993).

- **COPYING MACHINES**

Several studies have shown that one of the reasons responsible for theft of library books and periodicals is frustration, caused in particular by non-availability of copying machines (Strassberg, 2000). Most of the time library patrons are disappointed when they get to the photocopying section and they can not obtain the service. It is either the machine(s) is/are not functional, or the operating officer is no where to be found and the place under lock and key. Their frustration is multiplied when they are denied the opportunity of taking such materials out of the library to make copies of the needed information. After repeated calls to the copying section to no avail, the next thing they would think about is to rip off the pages.

- **SELFISHNESS**

Library users, especially students, indulge in selfish acts. They are so selfish that they would not want to share vital information with their fellow students. In a bid to hide such information; they rip off pages containing such from books. Ajayi and Omotayo (2004) submitted that substantial amount of theft/mutilation in libraries is not caused by frustration, but by simple selfishness. They observed that, because of non-detection of previous acts, the students have the erroneous belief such act of theft and mutilation is very easy.

- **IMPATIENCE**

Library users, especially students, indulge in mutilation and theft of library materials because they desire to make good grades; whereas they lack time commitment for such. Sewdass and Kaniki (1995) opined that students are always in a hurry to make use of materials in the library. But instead of settling down to use the materials inside the library, they vandalize the materials (especially periodicals and reference materials).

- **INCESSANT POWER OUTAGE**

In this part of the world where incessant power failure is a bane, theft and vandalism of materials in the libraries thrive, especially when such (power outage) occur at night when libraries are yet to close for the

day. Unfaithful patrons take advantage of the situation, to take away materials or rip off pages of books they are reading before the outage since no one would detect them in the dark.

● **POROUS SECURITY**

If the security system in the library is poor, thefts are more likely to occur. Investigations have revealed that most security personnel posted to academic libraries are from the institutions' pool. They insist on posting personnel to the libraries and change them to other departments. They are never permanent in the libraries. Also, the security personnel are only responsible and loyal to the unit that sent them and thus, not loyal to the library authority. This situation makes it difficult for the librarians to control security matters as his orders may be flouted. Again, Akinfolarin (1992) opined that, one area of security not yet properly investigated by librarians, is the probability that security personnel manning exit gates connive with students to steal books. Some of such accomplices could be friends or relations to the security personnel.

Other causes of theft in academic libraries are non-availability of sufficient copies of books, stringent library policy and procedures on loans and overcrowding at library exits

METHODS EMPLOYED IN STEALING LIBRARY RESOURCES

Several related literature have revealed that library patrons use different techniques to steal and mutilate materials in the library. Nwamefor, as cited by Akinfolarin (1992), claimed that students use various techniques to steal library materials. Akinfolarin reported further that at the Nnamdi Azikiwe library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, students devised a method of throwing out books through windows without burglary proofs. The other method involves borrowing a book legally and using its date-due-slip to remove other desired books from the library.

Akinfolarin stated further that other methods students adopted include, female students getting "pregnant" with books, while their male counterparts stock their trousers, shirts and flowing garments with books undetected.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Studies on library security have revealed that theft/mutilation has been an issue of great concern to librarians of academic libraries. This issue has impeded optimum productivity and dissemination of information to patrons. However, various preventive measures have been put forward to stop/reduce the menace to its barest minimum. Brown and Patkus (2003), White (2004), and Rathinasabapathy (2007) articulated the following as valid measures to curbing the menace.

- Libraries should procure more copies of rare materials since they are in constant demand and use.
- Copying machines must constantly be in good shape. Also, the operating officer in charge should always be on ground to attend to library users.
- Serious-minded and educated security personnel should be posted to the library on a permanent basis. They should be made to discharge their duties conscientiously, devoid of any form of favouritism.
- Inscriptions on walls and other conspicuous areas of the library should be made, appealing to the conscience of users not to steal/mutilate library materials,
- User education programme should be on a regular basis (especially for new patrons).
- The University Librarian or his representative could use part of the time slated for the use of libraries in the General Studies Programme to educate students on the negative effect of book theft/mutilation. Some of these may include, diluting library budget allocation, replacing stolen books when you could be investing in new ones
- Air-conditioners should be purchased and installed in the library so that windows could be permanently shut to avoid the case where users throw books out through the windows
- Library assistants/officers should be well remunerated. This is to dissuade them from the temptation of stealing and/or mutilating library materials.

- Good and functional stand-by generating sets should be purchased to augment government electricity supply in case of power outage.

EFFECTS OF THEFT AND MUTILATION

Theft and Mutilation are two sides of a coin that affect both the library and the users. The following are some of the effects of this menace:

● **LIBRARY**

The effective use of the library is hampered due to theft and mutilation of materials which results in poor quality and quantity of library services. One of Ranganathan's laws of librarianship postulates that books are for use, therefore, outright theft or mutilation of these materials serve as a neutralizer of this all important law. This goes a long way to frustrating library users and reducing the efficiency of library services rendered by an academic library. Oni (1984) averred that the efficiency of a library service is reduced by frustration experienced by readers and faculty. When users can't access materials needed due to theft and mutilation, they may definitely resolve not to visit the library again. Librarians expend much money in procuring materials. Theft and mutilation of these materials therefore, leads to acute reduction of library stock and the life span of materials vandalized. Jato (2005) corroborated this assertion when he observed that delinquent behaviours of users reduce library stock and shorten the life span of the mutilated materials. He posited further that this delinquent behaviour can be quantified in terms of extra money, time and personnel needed to replace the stolen and mutilated library materials.

● **USERS**

Library users are psychologically frustrated and disappointed when they are denied access to very important information on their visit to the library due to theft and mutilation. Oni (1984) advocated that users find it demoralizing, discouraging, frustrating, disappointing and may become angry for being denied access to critical information. Also, non-availability of materials due to theft causes the library patrons to waste precious time which defeats one of the principles of librarianship, 'save the time of users'.

Also, effective use of the library is hindered by mutilation and theft of materials. This in turn, affect quality of research work being carried out by faculty as they are denied access to relevant materials they may need. Mwantimwa (2007) affirmed that theft and vandalism of library materials affect the quality of teaching, learning and research negatively.

THE WAY OUT OF SECURITY ISSUES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The present economic crunch, high exchange rate, leading to the rising cost of library materials, without a reasonable commensurate increase in the yearly funds allocated to libraries in their institutions' annual budgets; protecting existing collections has become more important than ever. A more proactive approach can be employed to safe-guard library materials from theft and vandalism.

Materials could be secured both by physical (non-electronic) and electronic security systems. Corroborating this, Rajendran and Rathinasabapathy (2007), disclosed that the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries came up with useful guidelines, aimed at reducing to the barest minimum, material theft/mutilation in libraries. The crux of the guidelines proposed by ALA and ACRL include:

- Appointment of a library security officer
- Forming a security planning group
- Communication with the Public Relations department
- Communication with law enforcement agencies
- Work for institutional and legalistic support
- Report library groups

The guidelines also suggest that security cameras should be installed in libraries to cover areas where library staff may not see at a glance.

PHYSICAL SECURITY SYSTEMS (NON-ELECTRONIC)

Facility Considerations

Architects who design libraries and archives construct them without taking into cognizance, the potential for theft and vandalism. The issue of burglary has been a concern in designing, planning and renovation of library buildings. Security consultants should be involved in the design team for major library structures (Strassberg, 2000). Architects love buildings with large windows and a plethora of entrances and exit door. Library security calls for few windows and carefully controlled entrance and exits.

SECURITY PERSONNEL

Security personnel posted to library should be on permanent basis. They should not be redeployed to other departments within the institution. Also, they should undertake routine patrol within the library, inspect bags and other belongings of all users while entering and leaving the library. When users find out that they are strictly being monitored even while reading or by the stacks, there will be avoidance of unethical activities in the library. Rajendran and Rathinasabapathy (2007) supported this view when they advocated that security personnel should conduct visual inspection through floor walks. This is a non-electronic method librarians adopt to overcome unethical practices such as malicious writings/defacing pages of books, ripping off pages and outright stealing of an entire book, etc.

Patrons should be discouraged from coming into the library with their bags. Security personnel must insist that such are deposited in the property counters or book cloaks provided for this purpose. Readers should only be allowed to come into the reading areas with loose sheets of papers only.

WINDOW PROTECTION

This is another non-electronic method for securing library materials. Window protection with strong locks, grills, door protection, and dummy security devises that scare off criminals and other miscreants from accessing library collection should be in place, especially during non-library hours.

ELECTRONIC SECURITY SYSTEMS (ESS)

Electronic means of security can be used to augment the non-electronic security systems. During the ancient days, books were protected from theft, with curses placed on them, yet there was no head way out of it. Other physical methods have been employed to reduce mutilation/theft of library materials, yet the rate of occurrence has been alarming.

Electronic security systems can help control these unethical practices in libraries. Mckean (1985) articulated that the installation of ESS at the University of Kentucky reduced book theft and mutilation. Lorenzen (1996) corroborated Mckean's report, that the widespread response to theft/mutilation of periodicals has been the installation of ESS

ESS is not only meant for advanced countries like USA and UK, developing nations can procure these gadgets and get them installed. Universities such as Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State and University of Lagos have electronic library security systems installed to forestall the issue of theft/mutilation of their library collections. Some major electronic security systems that can be useful to libraries are:

- 3M Library Security System
- Electronic Surveillance Cameras/Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV)
- Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) System
- Perimeter Alarm System

3M LIBRARY SECURITY SYSTEM

The system helps librarians to offer security and information management solutions to clientele. 3M detection system ensures that no materials are taken out of the library without being properly checked out. This system has a combination of audio and visible alarms. It also have video security system. 3M electronic device has an electromagnetic gate that can be installed at the entrance of the library. The gate has sensors for magnetic strip inserted in each material of the library. Any unauthorized exit of library material will produce alarm to alert the library staff/security personnel. Tattle-tapes are used to offer protection for all library materials, including books and non-books. The strips are designed for both hard covers

and soft cover books and are easily inserted into book spines, between pages of books and periodicals. The tattle-tape is electro-magnetic (iron containing strip) with an adhesive layer. This strip is not removed at check out, it is simply deactivated.

ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS

Video surveillance and closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems serve as a measure to secure library collections. It helps in monitoring and recording what is happening in the library, deter crime, and ensure safety. Libraries can use CCTV systems to identify patrons and employees, monitor work areas, deter theft/mutilation and ensure adequate security of the premises and other facilities. The system can also be used in recording evidence on patrons and library staff, should they exhibit unethical behavior.

CCTV systems are fast becoming the most significant and cost-effective security device available to libraries. Librarians should consider this system as the best option in fighting crimes in their libraries, depending on the size of their collections. Another good feature of the CCTV system is the inclusion of a video printer that can produce a hard copy of a video scene, a time and date generator that can annotate the video scene with chronological information and a camera identifier to identify the selected camera.

RADIO-FREQUENCY IDENTIFICATION (RFID) SYSTEM

This is the latest technology widely used by academic libraries in developing countries in combating theft/mutilation activities. RFID is an automatic identification method, relying on storing, and remotely retrieving data with the use of devices known as RFID Tags or transponders. RFID is a combination of radio-frequency-based technology and microchip technology. Lori (2004), disclosed that the use of RFID systems in libraries began in the late 1990s. He went further to state that approximately 130 libraries in North America are using RFID systems and the number is on the increase.

One good thing about RFID systems is that the tags/transponders help in tracking library materials. It has the ability to track the movement of a book or the person carrying it (Molnar and Wagner, 2004). An RFID system

consists of three components- the tag, the reader, and the application that makes use of the data the reader reads on the tag. The tag, also known as the transponder, consists of an antenna and silicon chip encapsulated in glass or plastic (Want, 2004). The tags contain a very small amount of information. For example, many tags contain only a bar code number. Want reported further that tags range in size, can be passive, active or semi-active. An active tag contains some type of power source on it whereas the passive tags rely on the radio signal sent by the reader for power. Lori (2004) asserted that most RFID applications today, utilize passive tags because they are cheaper to manufacture. RFID readers or receivers, as stated by Sarma et al. (2002), are made of radio frequency module, a control unit, and an antenna to interrogate electronic tags via radio frequency (RF) communication. Many also include an interface that communicates with an application (such as the library's circulation system). Readers can be mounted in strategic areas in the library to ensure they are able to read tags as they pass through "interrogation zone". This is the area within which a reader can read the tags.

PERIMETER ALARM SYSTEM

This is a device used in securing the border of an enclosed area. Alarm systems are put on especially after/when libraries have been shut down for the day. The security device is such that, when an intruder is detected, there is a loud sound that scares him away. Alarms are triggered inadvertently by the intruder. Perimeter Alarm Systems are intended to restrict and control the physical access of persons to a building.

CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying the fact that academic libraries are confronted with security problems. The findings from various studies on library crimes show that librarians are dealing with several problems which include mutilation and theft of periodicals, books and other library materials. Since the prices of books and journals are rising exponentially, and the libraries are to invest their lean fund into other costly materials, taking cognizance

of the latest technology, it is most expedient that librarians of academic libraries consider the installation of electronic security systems to minimize or forestall unethical behaviours in the library materials. Furthermore, there is no point in expending millions of naira or hard currencies on new acquisitions of information resources without the procurement and installation of such security systems to secure them.

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