

Vandalism and security problems in academic library: A case study of lagos state polytechnic library, Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was designed to survey the vandalism and security problem in academic library of Lagos State Polytechnic Library, Nigeria, with the view to ascertaining the type of security problems, categories of materials that are prone to stealing, the likely reasons for committing such library crime and the security measures put in place to control it. A quantitative research was adopted in the study, and survey as the research method. The study involved a population of fifty (50) library personnel. Data for the study was obtained using questionnaire instrument. The findings of this study revealed that academic libraries experience security problems such as stealing and vandalism of library resources, as well as natural disasters such as flood and fire outbreak. The categories of materials that are prone to stealing include journals, reference materials and recent accessions. The reasons for the theft and vandalism of library resources according to the study include inadequate number of copies, inadequate photocopying services, scarcity of needed materials, shortage of staff and poverty, while the major factors that encourage these problems are poor security systems and the criminal nature of individuals. The study further revealed the fact that there is a poor security management in LASPOTTECH academic library, as the security system adopted was inadequate to control and protect the library resources from theft, vandalism and natural disaster such as flood and fire. Base on these findings the study recommends improve security system, preferable modern gadget, measures that will ensure that at least, the bulk of available resources would be preserved if new ones cannot be readily acquired.

Keywords: Vandalism, Security problems, Academic library.

Introduction

A library could be defined as an orderly collection of book and non-book information resources, managed by qualified personnel, so that they are meaningful to prospective users. They are institutions set up to cater for the educational, cultural, research, recreational and information needs of their users. Libraries have the major objectives of carrying out a proper selection, acquisition, organisation, storage and dissemination of information to their patrons in order to gratify their quest for knowledge.

Academic libraries are libraries established along with academic institutions like universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. They serve as a focal point where users of diversified age groups, socio-political, economic backgrounds and cultural interests converge to utilise all the available resources that are relevant to their individual needs. However, the diverse use of information resources in academic libraries makes it vulnerable to all forms of crime and security risks from not only the users, but the library staff as well.

In our contemporary time, vandalism, mutilation, defacement, theft and arson have deprived many library users from fully gratifying their information needs. Theft and malicious damage of books and other library collections are difficult to combat because the chances of getting caught is very low, while the likelihood of success is high due to the poor security network in libraries. The criminal activities in academic libraries are not limited to library resources alone, but also the theft of properties such as handbags, purses, keys and notebooks of other library users are equally

common; and the extent, nature and rate at which these crimes occur vary from one academic library to another.

Libraries in the developing countries are not spared from security problem. All libraries, small and big, public, private, academic and special, have security problems. Vandalism and security problems in academic library was before now limited to book mutilation and stealing, recently excessive noise, sexual harassment, theft of personal property, big criminal acts such as arson, unruly behaviour of users, breakage into library, theft of many volumes at a time etc. are now very common occurrences (Arterburn, 1996). Sadly, the stealing of library books and other materials cuts across social lines; as records over the years shows that, library book thieves throughout have included high ranking officials and church elders as well as librarians themselves. Thus library theft or vandalism of library materials is a global phenomenon.

One of the greatest problems that bothered librarians from the earliest times to the present is how to ensure the security of library materials. Librarians have tried to preserve their materials against such threats as theft, mutilation, insect, fire, flood, dampness and so on. Of all the problems mentioned above, that posed by theft of library materials is the most devastating. In trying to find reasons for the upsurge on this global problem of library materials vandalism and insecurity, Etim (2004) opined that there seem to be a number of reasons which influence the rate of crime in libraries, such as direct access to the stacks, placement of high risk materials such as rare and valuable materials in the shelves, having too many keys to the

building or to locked cases in the circulation among staff, and apathy or indifference towards library crime.

Several other reasons have been adduced for book theft and security risk in libraries the world over. Popoola (2003) listed seven points as the reasons for theft of library materials such as poverty, poor library budget, poor security system, culprit having the tendency to develop his/her own library collections; users steal because of their brutish nature of preventing other users from benefiting from such materials and some users being criminally minded.

However, to prevent theft and mutilation of library materials, Akinfolarin (1992) advocates the use of electronic security systems. Where exits are manned manually, the porters should be more vigilant. Acquisition of multiple copies of textbooks that are of high demand, periodic stock taking exercise to identify missing books by subject area which could be displayed on notice boards, provision of cheap photocopying services, instituting users' education programme, stern disciplinary measures taken against the culprit and periodic searching of students' hostels could also be effective.

Other measures that can prevent theft of library materials are by ensuring that the building housing the library materials is fully air-conditioned. In this situation, windows through which some miscreants throw library materials outside would not be open. Also, library management should endeavour to buy multiple copies of popular books that are in high demand. Some libraries can also install cameras and close-circuit television sets in order to monitor the activities of users (Aina, 2004).

Statement of Problem

Libraries have over the years faced problems such as book theft, vandalism and insecurity. These problems still linger despite the fact that books may be borrowed free of charge from most libraries, some antisocial individuals will steal or mutilate the books rather than borrow them.

This problem is persistent in academic libraries in spite of orientation, talks at the beginning of every academic session, and despite carefully spelt out library rules and regulations. Academic libraries still silently suffer this type of unfortunate incident perhaps as a result of the poor security network that it operates. The problem of vandalism and insecurity especially in these days of economic crunch when books are not only scarce but their prices are also highly exorbitant coupled with the problem of foreign exchange calls for concern, as library collections are daily stolen or vandalised by users of academic libraries. If this trend is not checked, it may lead to a situation whereby the library just become an empty building, with no viable collections to meet the users' needs. It is against this backdrop that the study was conducted to examine the extent of vandalism and security problems in academic library.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine vandalism and security problem in academic library of the Lagos State Polytechnic. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the type of security problems experience in academic libraries
2. Investigate the reasons for these security problems
3. Determine the type of security measures adopted in the academic libraries
4. Assess the effectiveness of the security measures/system adopted in academic libraries.

Research Questions

1. What are the type of security problems experienced in academic library?
2. What are the likely factors responsible for these security problems?
3. What types of security measures/system are adopted in academic library?
4. How effective is the security measures/system adopted in academic libraries?

Literature Review

Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprises of students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Many a times academic libraries are referred to as the heart or nerve centres of institutions of higher learning where all academic activities revolved. Bassey and Enidiok (2019), posited that supporting research and learning activities are the major objectives of academic libraries.

Libraries have over the years been developed as places where the emphasis is on access to collections, the encouragement of use, customer care and meeting the needs of users with the minimum number of rules and regulations. There fore, to lock library collections away from users, asan attempt to safeguard against theft and mutilation, is to deprive users of access to these collections. On the contrary, the popular open door policy to a wide range of users from different cultures and social backgrounds makes libraries vulnerable in the face of increasing antisocial behaviour such as book theft, mutilation and vandalism; which according to Akinfolarin (1992) has a strong devastating effect on libraries.

It is not only always possible to achieve air tight security, as it appears to be extraordinarily difficult to determine what is actually vulnerable to theft in libraries, assume materials are more vulnerable than others. Also, although increased accessibility increases the rate of book theft, the greater the value of materials the greater the prospect of it being mutilated or stolen. However, all types of library materials are vulnerable to book theft, be it rare books, manuscripts, popular fiction and records. Libraries also suffer from the menace of mutilation, which like theft, is an ancient library problem (Alemna, 1992).

Mutilation involves removal of pages or whole chapters and articles from books and journals. Some of the materials at the most risk of being mutilated are encyclopaedia, rare books containing plates, unique architectural drawing and sensational items, especially those on sex. Apart from theft and mutilation, other problems which academic libraries are interlineations and marginal notations in books and journals by users. These pencil, pen and crayon markings or writings can lead to the defacement of books and journal pages, thereby rendering them useless (Afolabi,1993).

There is also the problem of intentional miss-shelving of books by users who cannot readily borrow them, even when they urgently need to use these for research and study. Under the circumstance, such materials are withdrawn from their rightful places on the shelves and are sent to other shelves. Only the culprit and to some extents, his cronies, can access the miss-shelved book without difficulty to the detriment of other library users. The non-return of borrowed books by users an indirect form of theft, is another source of worry to librarians. Library users have come to realize that even where they have the means to purchase copies of books they have borrowed and which they urgently need for long periods, it has not always been possible to do so. Such users find it cheaper and easier to fail to return the borrowed books and pay the fine imposed.

Bello (1998) in his survey found out that the high cost of photocopying and frequent breakdown of copiers were the major cause of library material theft and mutilation in Nigeria while the lesser cause was attributed to greediness. Ubogu (2000) observed that book theft occurs as a result of difficulty in having access to the books, while Afolabi (1993), noted that book theft occurs as a result of insecure library buildings, perfunctory searching of library users at exit, lack of security consciousness among library staff and lack of modern security services.

Stringent sanctions on overdue books can also be the reason for book theft. This was the view of Popoola (2003), that if sanctions, most especially fines on overdue books in the libraries are not carefully applied, it could encourage non return of borrowed books. The amount of money that the readers holding on to overdue books need to pay may scare them from ever returning the books. Books which would have been returned if the fine were moderate may therefore not be returned and may never be recovered. On the other hand, where the clients are not given the privilege of borrowing books even for overnight use, desperate clients may be forced as a result of circumstance to employ any dubious means of using the books. This they may do by either stealing, mutilating or miss-shelving the books against circulation rules.

In a bid to abetting book theft and insecurity in libraries, Okon (2005)stressed the fact that more books should be made available in the library. This is because, the more the books available, the lesser the temptation to steal. This was supported by Okiy (2000) when he earlier reported that, increased availability of books can curb not only theft, mutilation and illegal borrowing, but also that the reader

will be willing to return a book when he knows that he will definitely gain access to it again, or another copy whenever he needs it.

Many approaches both manual and technical outfits are recorded in the literature for the prevention of vandalism and insecurity in libraries. Houlgate and Cheney (1992) identified two, namely the physical and the environmental methods. The physical involves efforts to protect the library building and its contents with the available fences, gates lighting, patrols, walls, doors, windows, window netting and roofs. Others are intruder alarm systems, organizing space, security stores, equipment and records, surveillance, keys and fire exists. Conversely, environmental prevention deals with the environment in which the criminal is operating, thereby focusing on the psychology of criminal activities, the mental impulse like excitement, anxiety, imperative, tension and fear.

Staff training is very important where the staff will have the opportunity to discuss both the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours as well as the tolerance level of every staff in any aggrieved situation. The training equally exposes staff to the nature of the problems and how to handle them. Furthermore, the use of Electronic Theft Detection System (ETDS) cannot be guaranteed without adequate training on why the system was introduced, how it works and instruction on the steps to be taken when the alarm blows. (Ubogu, 2000).

Aina (2004) opined that many libraries should have security device installed in each library material acquired. This is an electronic system where all the documents in the library could be sensitized with magnetic strips. When books are loaned out, the clerical staff responsible for charging out books are expected to desensitize the magnetic strips before the documents are handed over to the patron. When a library material is taken out illegally the magnetic strip will be activated and the alarm will be activated and the alarm will be on. This would alert the security staff who would cross check the books and if the patron has taken out the document illegally he/she would be apprehended/interrogated.

Etim (2004) advised that libraries should avail themselves of ever improving technology in order to solve the security challenges in libraries. Such technology could be all embracing, directed towards internal and external security. The former should be used for the protection of staff, books and patrons' protection while the later should be used for problems outside the library environment.

A number of studies have come up with precautionary protection policies and procedures recommended for adoption where specific contexts warrant them. Developing an effective written library protection policy and procedure is essential. According to Cronin (1980) the time to discuss guidelines about security should be before the problem arises. There will be no time to discuss such matters in the face of a crises. Conducting user studies to enable the library to improve its services is a crucial strategy, since attending to user needs has the added benefit of helping

create an atmosphere in which theft or mutilation will be less likely to result from frustration.

Exit attendance and checking using guards or library assistants has proven to be ineffective, and moreover, it is expensive. Assigning library assistants to cater for users at service points and also to check exits further diminishes their performance. Research has established that in such a context one person cannot be responsible for two sets of activities without compromising the efficiency of both, at least at certain times. A consistently effective means of security check is machine-based; specifically, it is the electronic security system. Installing electronic theft detection systems and surveillance systems which use cameras, radios, electronic monitoring equipment etc., significantly reduce losses, albeit they have flaws (Oisen & Osiler, 1985).

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was a survey method. This was chosen because it is the most appropriate method that will provide the accurate data considering the population size for this study. Also, because of the advantages of this research method for the generalization of findings. In this regard, questionnaires were designed and used as survey instruments.

Study Population

The population of this study comprised of the senior library staff of LASPOTTECH Library Lagos Nigeria. Due to the small size of the population, the total enumeration was adopted. In this case, all the fifty (50) senior library staff of LASPOTTECH was used for the study.

Instrument of Data Collection

A questionnaire was designed to collect the research data for this study. It was titled "Questionnaire on a survey of vandalism and security problem in academic library of Lagos state polytechnic, Lagos state, Nigeria." The questionnaire was divided into five sections A-E. Section A elicited response on demographic variables; Section B elicited response on the types of crime committed in the library, Section C elicited response on reasons of stealing of library materials, Section D elicited response on the available security system in the library and Section E elicited response on the preventive measures adopted by the library. The questionnaire contained both open and closed end items.

Validation of the Instruments

Validation of the instrument was ensured through the scrutiny and judgement of experts from the Department of Library and information Science and Educational Test and Measurement of the University of Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was ensured using test-retest reliability method of two weeks interval. This involved administering the same questionnaire instrument to the same set of respondents on two different occasions at two weeks interval. The data collected was correlated and the overall reliability

returned of $r = 0.89$. this was considered high enough and reliable for the study

Method of Data Analysis

The research data collected were analysed using simple descriptive statistical techniques like tables and percentages.

Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion of Result

Table 1: Rate of return

Frequency	Return	Percentage
50	50	100%

The table 1 above shows that all the questionnaires administered were duly filled and returned.

Table 2: Gender distribution of library staff

Sex	Response	Percentage
Male	29	58%
Female	21	42%
Total	50	100%

The table 2 demonstrated that 58% of the respondents (staff) were male while 42% (staff) were female. This result proved that the male respondents constitute the highest in the study population (staff).

Table 3: Educational Distribution of respondents

Education	Response	Percentage
Diploma	12	24%
1 st degree	27	54%
Master	11	22%
Ph.D	-	-
Total	50	100%

The above table 3 result shows that the educational qualification of respondents who obtained diploma in the libraries is 12(24%). Those respondents with 1st degree are 27(54%), similarly, the respondents that obtained second degree (Masters) is 11(22%) as shown above. However, none of the respondents in the library obtain Ph.D degree. This result revealed that those with 1st degree constitute the highest number of respondents among the staff.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by working experience

Experience	Response	Percentage
5-9 years	14	28%
10-14 years	12	24%
15-24 years	13	26%
25 and above	11	22%
Total	50	100%

The above table 4 shows the respondents whose working experience fall between 5-9 years are 14(28%). Those respondents that fall between 10-14 years is 12(24%) and those that fall between 25years and above is 11(22%).

This result shows that those respondents whose working experience fall between 5-9 years constitute the highest in the population of staff of the study.

Table 5: Security problems experienced

Crimes Committed	Response	Percentage
Stealing	38	76%
vandalism	12	24%
Exchange of library cards	-	-
Total	50	100%

Generally according to table 5, it is noticeable that most libraries experience security risk. The table clearly shows that stealing and vandalism are the most security problems often experienced in Libraries. The respondents in the libraries indicated stealing 76% and mutilation 24%.

Table 6: Factors responsible for these security problems

Reasons for committing crime	Response	Percentage
Poverty	10	20%
Poor security system	13	26%
Wrong belief and attitudes to public property	11	22%
The criminal nature of individual	16	32%
Total	50	100%

Table 6 clearly reveals the various factors responsible for security problems in libraries. The result above indicated poverty, poor security system, wrong belief and poor attitude towards public property and criminal nature of individuals as factors that are responsible for stealing and other security risk in the libraries.

Table 7: Security systems available in the library

Security system available in the library	Response	Percentage
Camera	48	96%
Wireless security system	-	-
Home security system reviews and articles	-	-
Do it yourself home security system	-	-
Security world news- online home security magazine	-	-
Library security supplies & accessories	-	-
Library security guidelines from ALA	-	-
Library Security systems	-	-
Checkpoint Security System	2	4%
Aura Guard Tamper Evident Property ID Tags	-	-
Tagging Books to prevent theft	-	-
Total	50	100

Table 7 reveals that developing countries have not yet subscribed to modern security system available the world over. It is clear from the table that the respondents indicated camera 48(96%) as the major security system adopted in the library.

Table 8: Categories of material that are prone to stealing

Types of materials that are prone to stealing	Response	Percentage
Textbooks	3	6%
Journals	24	48%
Reference materials	13	26%
Recent accessions	10	20%
Total	50	100%

Table 8 above revealed that the materials that are mostly prone to stealing are journals 24 (48%) followed by reference materials 13(26%), then recent accessions 10 (20%) and lastly textbooks 3 (6%).

Table 9: Are you satisfied with the security arrangement in the library?

Option	Response	Percentage
No	33	66%
Yes	17	34%
Total	50	100%

Table 9 shows the respondents indication on the security effectiveness of the libraries 33 (66%) of the respondents indicated they were not satisfied with the security arrangement, while 17(34%) said they were satisfied.

Table 10: Reasons for committing library crimes

Reason for committing library crimes	Response	Percentage
Lack of proper supervision	-	-
Inadequate staff	7	14%
Inadequate number of books	8	16%
Curiosity to build personal collection	-	-
Inadequate photocopying services	12	24%
Fear of not having the book on the shelves again	-	-
Scarcity of needed material	13	26%
Poverty	10	20%
Selfishness	-	-
Total	50	100

There are various reason adduces for committing stealing and other security problems in libraries the world over as revealed in the above table. Various reasons were indicated by the respondents as reasons for meddling with libraries materials as follows: inadequate staff 14%, inadequate number of books 16%, poverty 20%, inadequate photocopying services 24%, and scarcity of needed materials 26%.

Table 11: Scarcity of risks experienced in the library

Other risk	Response	Percentage
Floods	10	20%
Fire	22	44%
Mishandling	18	36%
Total	50	100

The reaction of the respondent revealed that some of the libraries actually experienced other security risk apart from

stealing and mutilation. Table 11 revealed the type of other risk experienced by the libraries are as follows: Fire 22(44%), mishandling of library materials 18(36%) and floods 10(20%). However, from the result of the above table it is known that the major disaster these libraries are prone to is fire disaster.

Table 12: Are security measures are put in place?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	40%
No	30	60%
Total	50	100%

Table 12 shows that 20(40%) of the respondents indicated 'Yes' that there are measured put in place to arrest security problem in the library, while 30(60%) of the respondents indicated 'No'

Discussion of Result

The findings from the research question revealed that the major security problems prevalent in academic libraries are stealing, and vandalism of library materials, other security risks revealed by the study include fire, mishandling of books and floods. This finding is consistent with that of Akinfolarin (1992), who noted that one of the greatest problems that bothered librarians from the earliest times to the present is how to ensure the security of library materials, and that of all the problems mentioned that librarians face, theft of library materials is the most devastating.

The study also revealed that poverty, poor security system, wrong belief and poor attitude towards public property, and criminal nature of individuals were the various factors responsible for stealing and other security risk in the libraries. This finding agrees with the assertions of Popoola (2003) that the reasons for theft of library materials include poverty, culprit having the tendency to develop his/her own library collections, the brutish nature of preventing other users from benefiting from such materials and that some users criminally minded.

The study further revealed that the materials that are mostly prone to stealing are journals, followed by reference materials, recent accessions, and then lastly textbooks. This corroborates the report of Alemna (1992), that all types of library materials are vulnerable to book theft, be it rare books, manuscripts, popular fiction and records.

The study also revealed that the security system of the library was not absolutely satisfactory, a situation which can be said to be accountable for the incessant stealing and mutilation of library materials. This finding is in tandem with the view of Akinfolarin (1992), who stated that libraries must hire full time in house security expertise, or take advantage of outside security expertise, if not they may have to face the challenges of an encroaching world full of potential risks of vandalism. Library administrators who fail to put needed protection in place may be left bare after priceless collections are damaged or stolen.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is obvious that the reasons for the theft and vandalism of library resources as revealed by the study include inadequate number of copies, inadequate photocopying services, scarcity of needed materials, shortage of staff and poverty, while the major factors that encourage these problems are poor security systems and the criminal nature of individuals. Based on these research findings, the study recommends that:

1. There should be provision of adequate copies of needed journals and reference materials among others to avoid struggling by users for the few copies.
2. Modern security system should be acquired to control or protect the existing resources since they may be no fund to purchase or subscribe to new ones.
3. There must be provision of adequate photocopying services and existence makes functioning.
4. More staff should be employed to man the libraries.
5. Libraries should mount electronic security gadgets, in order to beef up security around the library.

Conflict of Interest: None.

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