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Security and Crime Prevention in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of the Kano State College of Education, Kano, Nigeria

Andrew Leo Ogbonyomi
Bayero University

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Dr Andrew Leo Ogbonyomi
Department of Library and Information Sciences
Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

Introduction

Libraries are institutions set up to cater to the educational, cultural, research, recreational and information needs of their users. Libraries have the main objectives of being entrusted with the selection, acquisition, organisation, storage and dissemination of information to their patrons. Jama'a (1984:1) observed that academic libraries in particular, assume a focal point where users of diversified age groups, socio-political, economic backgrounds and cultural interests have to converge to utilise all the available resources that are relevant to their individual needs. As a result of this diverse use of the materials, these libraries stand to be vulnerable to all forms o crime and security risks from not only the users, but the library staff as well.

The crimes, which are committed by some users of the academic libraries, have deprived many others from fully achieving their information needs. Vandalism, mutilation, defacement, theft, arson, etc are problems regularly encountered by the materials of these libraries. The commodity the libraries promote: books and other information materials are valuable and expensive but are likely targets for criminal activities. The expected roles of the academic library tend to lead it to criminal activities. The more the control, safeguard and security levels there are, the less it resembles a library that is traditionally expected to serve as user.

Theft of and malicious damage against books are difficult to combat because the risk of getting caught is very low, while the likelihood of success is high. Criminal activities in academic libraries are not limited to library information materials alone but theft of properties such as handbags, purses, keys and notebooks are equally common. The extent, nature and rate at which these crimes occur vary from one academic library to another.

A Brief Historical Background of the College and its Library

The Kano State College of Education was established in 1978 as a result of the need to train more teachers for the primary and post-primary institutions in the State. Also as a result of the introduction of the Universal primary Education Programme in Nigeria in 1976. There was urgent need to train manpower (teachers) to man these schools that were either established or expanded. The library of course, came on board with the establishment of the college at its temporary site, which was located at the present pilgrims' camp.

As a new library, its collections were few and its first librarian was a Canadian lady who handled the affairs of the library on part-time basis. With the growth of the college's student and staff population coupled with the introduction of more academic programmes, there was need to move the institution to a more spacious site. And so, ion 1984, the college moved with its library to its present site along Kano-Zaria road.

The library collections recorded a steady growth both in terms of staff ad information resources up to the year 1990. The academic activities also witnessed great improvement and expansion with the introduction of new academic courses.

This researcher was privileged to work as the college librarian between 1985-1990. In 1987, the college had a modern and spacious library building but with little or no increase in its staff strength. This development created a larger area to be governed by the very few staff who were managing the library when it was located in a two-classroom structure. Also, the library had only one professionally trained librarian with supporting staff who had never been to any library school. The poor awareness of the library's importance and the functions of the staff of the library might have influenced the carefree attitudes of the staff to the library and its information materials.

This research therefore attempts to examine the followings:

a. The cause(s) of crimes in the library understudy.
b. How the crimes are committed.
c. How the crimes affect the administration of the library.
d. How crimes can be prevented in the library.

Review of Related Literature

Nature and Causes of Crimes in Academic Libraries:

The nature and causes of crimes in libraries can be seen in the following two perspectives:

a. Crimes caused by human agents and
b. Crimes caused by natural agents or phenomenon.

The causes by human agents relate to complete or partial loss of the library materials and this loss can be either permanent or temporary, making the materials unusable by other patrons of the library. This type of crime includes theft, mutilation and non-return of borrowed materials. The offenders of this type of crime are the patrons for whom the materials are collected to serve. These are the group of people, Richmond (1976:60) referred to categorically as causing the greatest loss and mutilation of library materials. He went further to observe that:

There are many natural disasters that cause loss of all or part of the library's collection: water, humidity, fire and many others. None of these however, has caused as much loss to many libraries as theft and mutilation by the very patrons these libraries see to serve.

Other damages done to library materials include those affected through shelving books or jamming them to either tightly on the stacks, bending books backward or pressing their backs for the purpose of photocopying. Natural agents or disaster in the library include fire, flood, rodents, insects, etc which destroy materials in one way or the other.

Measures to Control Crimes in the Library

Libraries adopt various types of charging system, such as Brown Charging System, etc. Some libraries have computerised their charging system to make their operations faster. Whichever system a library adopts, it is one of the means of detecting stolen books since due dates are always on the date due slip of each book borrowed. Commenting further ion the importance of library charging systems in the library, Olanlokun and Salisu (1985:45) noted that:

Some charging systems enable the libraries to know the statistics of use or circulation of some books. This could be used to weed. The system also identifies some books that are missing and makes provision for their replacement if they are needed.

In order to minimise the occurrence of crimes in the library, exit controls are necessary. Some libraries use turnstiles and guards to slow down movements of users and check patrons going out at the exit. Libraries in developed countries mostly use electric security system at their exits.

Nancy (1976:576-690) wrote extensively on the use of electronics to combat book theft and discussed at length the experiences involved in their installation in the United States. While Revill (1979:38-44) observed that avoiding application of keys, use of keys by few staff members, restriction of entry with briefcases or bags label on drawers, use of uniformed porters, efficient and cheap photocopying services, liberal loan services and the use of electronic devices will help reduce criminal activities in the library.

Although most academic libraries have library committees which assist in regulating the activities of the library, only very little is done on security and crime prevention in libraries. For example, the librarian of the library under study claimed that activities such as annual stock taking, revisiting the borrowing system, reinforcing the security gadgets and even increasing the number of security personnel have never been considered in the library. The purpose of conducting annual stocktaking in libraries is to enable the library managers (the librarians) know the number ad rate of their loss of books in the libraries. Stocktaking also enables them to remove the catalogue cards for those books that are missing and also arrange for their replacements. Commenting on stocktaking in libraries, Neal (1995:84) observed that:

Many libraries hold an annual check of their book stock and this enables catalogue cards for any books that are missing to be withdrawn, and so ensuring the accuracy of the catalogue as a guide to the stock. Also, any missing book replaced, or alternative titles purchased, any marked increase in the annual rate of loss is noted and thought given to possible remedies. It was discovered that the library under study does not carry out this important exercise.

Methodology

The researcher employed the survey research method to carryout this research since all the students have the same aims and objectives of coming to the school and also the same rules and regulations bind their use of the library: the researcher interviewed the college librarian and twenty student users. The

student users were purposefully selected to ensure that only students in their second and third year of study were interviewed. This selection of twenty students in their second and third year was done because the researcher believed that these categories of students are already familiar with the use of the library as a supporting agent to their academic pursuits. The first year students may not be very familiar with the use of the library and so tend to depend more on the lecture notes they receive from their teachers. Also, care was taken to ensure that ten of those interviewed were male students while the remaining ten were female students. The data collected were carefully analysed and correlated with those collected from the college librarian.

The limitation of this research is that the selection of only twenty student users may look inadequate. It is the belief of the researcher that since the students are subject to the same purpose for using the library and its resources, even if a large sample size is taken, there may not be much difference in the data that would be collected. The researcher also assumes that the criminal acts carried out in the library are common to all the users.

Analysis of Data

Causes of Crimes in the Library

The causes of crimes in whatever form in the library are numerous and they vary from one user to the other. During the interview with the student users, the following facts were gathered as the major causes of crimes in the library.

1. Nearly all the respondents started that poverty is a major cause. This is a double-edged problem as both the users and librarian claimed that lack of fund has militated against mass purchase of reading materials while the users claim that they have no fund to purchase personal copies of the books they used.

The Librarian complained of the very poor funding of the library while the users claimed that the economic trend is hitting them seriously. The users observed that they can hardly feed well, so, there is nothing left over for them to purchase needed textbooks.

1. User Population: the user ratio to the needed books is too high. The users claimed that more than forty users may be waiting to use a recommended text at a time. Sometimes, before the end of the day, the needed chapter may be missing ..together from the book. A user who does not believe in sharing the material with others might have removed the chapter. The librarian on his part lamented that with the large number of users of the library, coupled with the few library staff; it is very difficult to check some of the crimes that users commit.
2. Poor Security: The librarian conformed that the library is grossly understaffed. He claimed that the library has only two security personnel who run the morning and evening shifts. This implies that at any time the library is opened; only one security man is on duty. This is seriously inadequate in a library which serves about three thousand student users.

Types of Materials most Affected by Criminal Activities

The librarian regrettably agreed that nearly all types of materials are affected by the criminal practices. He however, specifically remarked that books on Home Economics, Economics and Education are grossly affected. The criminal practice may not result in the entire loss of the book but users usually

tear off the cages, which they consider very useful to them.

Recommendations

Electronic theft detection systems or electronic security systems as used in advanced countries are expensive for many average academic libraries in Nigeria. Maintenance costs may be difficult to sustain in a dwindling economy like Nigeria. It would appear therefore that libraries in Nigeria will continue to rely on manual operations of our security systems through employment of security men at the exits of our libraries. In the library under study, one guard or security man to the numerous library users at any shift is inadequate. Efforts should be made to introduce new methods of checking the users at the exit of the library.

There is the need to educate the users on the devastating effect of theft and mutilation of library materials on the stocking and services of the library. Circulation policies should be adequate, while realistic policies for borrowing of books should be formulated and seriously guarded. For example, the posting of just one staff to man all the procedures of the charging and discharging books is inadequate in a college of Education Library where all the students are expected to offer education courses throughout their study period. It will be advisable that multiple copies of education books and any other heavily used materials should be purchased. The penalties for theft and mutilation in the library should be well publicised and consistently applied.

To guard against natural disasters, which may be caused by fire outbreaks, flood, etc, there is the need for the librarian and his staff to set up disaster prevention measures. These include proper inspection of all electrical installations from time to time to detect possible electrical faults. Fire extinguishers must be provided and properly maintained. Water taps should be checked and properly closed before the end of work each day.

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