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User Delinquency in Nigerian Academic Libraries: An Empirical Perspective

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Introduction

Libraries have been seen as one of the pillars of civilization. No nation can function effectively without the use of a library. The term "library" means is a collection of educational materials organized for use. The word is derived from the Latin word "Liber" which means a book. This is a good reason to believe that the root concept of Library is deeply embedded in our ways of thinking about the world and coping with its problems. In its primary role as guardian of the social memory, there are many parallels with the ways in which the human memory orders, stores and retrieves the information necessary for survival. The study of library history and its related disciplines bears witness that the instinct to preserve, the passion to collect and the desire to control have been dominant influences in the genesis and growth of the library idea in the history of civilization (Broadhead, 2002).

Mookerje (1997) defines Library as a collection of graphics, acoustic and holistic materials such as books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, maps , charts, filmstrips, microfilms, records etc all design for use. Ubogu (2006) says that academic libraries continually seek to identify their roles in contributing to institution outcomes and objects in the areas of research, teaching and learning. From the above definitions of library, it is worthwhile saying that books and other materials in a library are brought together mainly for the purpose of use. A famous Indian librarian and information scientist, Ranganathan (1970) through his guiding principles of library services contained in his five laws of library science, pointed out the usefulness and importance of the user to any library. Delinquency, according to Broadhead (2002), is defined as an action that is illegal or immoral which adversely affect the library services. User delinquencies therefore, are

actions that are illegal or immoral that users carry out during the process of consulting library books and other materials. Such actions include unruly behaviors, receiving phone calls in the library while others are reading, mutilation of library materials, impersonation, theft, misuse of OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) computer system etc. These illegal and immoral acts of users can be found in different types of library.

This research work is set to examine the user delinquency in three academic libraries patronized by teaching/research staff, undergraduate students and external users from other higher institutions and research centers. The study also examines the extent of damages that are being done as a result of user delinquency at these three university libraries and the actions that can be taken to eradicate such illegal and immoral acts.

Literature Review

Literature search revealed the most prominent abuse of library materials which has been the focus of many of the studies and reports in user delinquency through book theft, mutilation etc. Karin de Jager (2004) in her study stipulates that material use in an academic library takes place for a considerable number of reasons by students, researchers and teaching staff. Student may need library items in preparation of papers and class assignment for establishing or verifying facts or in the tracing of historical development over a period of time. Researchers, teaching staff may use library materials in order to keep pace with development in specific field of interest, to orientate themselves in new or previously unfamiliar fields, to establish, ratify or reconsider presently held positions or options.

Burrows(1997) in his article of theft and losses of library materials in the United Kingdom found out a comprehensive survey of the financial loss borne by U.K library services due to theft of books and other library materials. He further reported methods of preventing these losses and estimates that a loss of books alone exceeds 100 million pounds per annum. Delinquent library users and staff have devised many ways of removing illegally information materials or resources from the library. Afolabi (1993) and Tefera (1996) stated that the following factors constitute user delinquent in the library:

- Throwing out books and other information resources through windows at night during power outage.
- Carrying books and other information resources out of library without getting them properly charged out.
- Tearing off pages of books and other information resources.
- Using chemicals to clean off library ownership stamps in books and removing date due slips.
- Removing the jacket cover and preliminary pages of books so that those books cannot be identified.
- Stealing other registered library user borrower's tickets and using them to borrow books.
- Users conniving with some library staff such that a user can be issued with more tickets than allowed by the library.
- User borrows a book legally, goes out of the library, removes the date slip, comes back to the library, removes the date slip of the book intended to be stolen, uses a gum to affix the date due slip to create the impression that it is a legally borrowed book and takes the stolen book out of the library. Several library materials could be stolen this way until it is a time to return the book that was legally borrowed.
- Library staff at times assisting users to borrow books legally and destroy the records later.

Afolabi (1993) also concluded that damages are caused by library users, insects

and other animals and also by climatic conditions including hazards, she emphasized that recent studies have indicated that the greatest agent that deface books and cause wear and tear on library materials are human beings which are library users/ patrons. Toka (2005) said that the theft of archival materials has become a problem of great proportions to the library resources and identified insiders and patrons as the types of theft that archives face. Selth (2001) described the case of a man who stole 15,000 books from local library.

Moreover, a constraint which must be recognized is that the theft of library books is not only seen as somehow different from the theft of other commodities, but also that it has often proved very difficult and costly to establish in the courts, that the culprit intended to permanently deprive the library of the books which is the requirement for a conviction for theft under the theft Act of Britain 1968. Delinquency is seen as a deviation from the norms of the society; but in libraries of today we have some delinquent library users. Ifidon (2000) in his own opinion stated, *"Mutilation and theft in libraries is a menace that has persisted, and it is indeed a global problem, the worsening state of libraries in Nigeria appears to have aggravated its intensity and the consequent detrimental impact. The study attempts to investigate perception of students to the dynamic of book theft and mutilation, including its effect and impact on the library, its services and clientele".* The result revealed that: insensitivity to the need of other users, high cost of books, non detection of previous acts of theft and incessant power failure.

Due to some factors mentioned above, users also engage in various delinquent acts through different methods. Among these methods is the deliberate keeping of borrowed books beyond the due date. Other methods include eating in the library, defacing furniture and books, sleeping, talking and disturbing other library users. Hiding of books for the purpose of monopolizing it is also a delinquent act. Librarians have recognized user delinquency as an inherent problem in libraries globally and so the punishment melted out to those criminals have very much been softened, they deal with them in a civilized manner.

Objectives of the Study

This research work is designed to find out the following:

1. The categories of users of the libraries within and outside the universities.

2. Cases of various types of users delinquency in the libraries.

3. The category of users most involved in this illegal and immoral act.

4. The extent of damages caused due to the act of delinquency.

5. The actions that can be taken to limit the illegal act.

Research Questions

The following research questions bother this study:

1. What are the categories of materials that are in stock in the three university libraries?

2. Does poor library building encourage the delinquent act on these materials?

3. What are different security policies and security measures available in the library?

4. Does lack of access to information materials contribute to the abuse of library materials?

5. What are the roles of library staff in curbing the abuse of library materials?

Statement of the Problem

There are many academic institutions with poor or no definite library building and facilities. This encourages the malhandling of the library materials by the clientele. Insufficient quantity of materials in the library also creates a problem of delinquent act.

Recently, shortages of books and journals including other research materials have hit libraries, especially the academic libraries. Most of the existing books and journals in these libraries are old and could not meet the information needs of the users. This is due to bad economic conditions prevailing in the country, which resulted to low subventions to libraries and the high cost of these materials. Mutilation, defacing and mishandling of books and journals, improper use of library equipment and other delinquent acts constitute big threats to the materials in the libraries being studied.

Methodology

In this research study, three methods of data collection were used to collect data from respondents and these include: questionnaire, interview and direct observation methods.

The study is conducted on the basis of two sets of questionnaire. Questionnaire 'A' is for the use of students. 300 copies of the Questionnaire were administered to students in the three selected university libraries. 250 copies of these questionnaires were duly completed and returned by the respondents; Questionnaire 'B' is for the library staff. 50 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the staff of the three university libraries and 48 copies were fully completed by the respondents and retrieved.

Wood (1996) is of the opinion that questionnaire backed up with interviews should be the best method for collecting data. The interview instrument used is scheduled among the staff of the three libraries to enable researchers elicit information about delinquent acts among their library users.

Population of the Study

Population is viewed as the total collections of objects to be observed. The target population of the study was based on 300 students and 100 staff from the university under study.

Table 1: Population and sample of students in the Universities under study

S/N	University	Population of student in each university	Sample of students under study
1.	Ambrose Alli	18,000	100
2	Benson Idahosa	2,500	100
3	University of Benin	22,000	100

Table 2: Population of staff in the Universities under study

S/N	University	Population of staff in each University library	Sample of staff understudy
1.	Ambrose Alli	35	23
2.	Benson Idahosa	9	8
3.	University of Benin	40	17

300 copies of these questionnaires were administered to the students while 250 copies were retrieved successfully.

Questionnaires 'B' are for the library staff. 50 copies of the questionnaires were administered to the staff of the three university librarians and 48 copies were fully completed by the respondents and retrieved.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research question 1:

What are the categories of material that are in stock in the university libraries?

Table 3: Showing the categories of materials that respondents use in the university libraries.

Library materials	Not used		Used	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Text books	24	13	161	87
Reference books	99	53.5	86	46.5
Journals	115	62.2	70	37.8
Newspapers	124	67	61	33.0
CD.ROM	163	88.2	22	11.9
Audio-visual	154	83	31	16.8
Total	679	100	431	100

Table 3 shows the categories of materials in stock and that were in use in the university libraries sampled. It was discovered that from the sample size, 161 (87%) make use of textbooks while only 24 (13%) use more of other materials, reference books took 86 (46 5%) of usage as against 99 (53.5%) of non-serious

use; journals 70 (37.8%) of the population making use of them as compared to 115 (62.2%) that are not making use of them frequently. Newspaper had only 61 (33%) of the population making use of them every time while as many as 124 (67%) of the population were not making serious use of them, CD-ROM had only 22(11.9%) using it while majority of the respondents 163 (88.1%) were not using it. Audio-visual materials were used by only 31 (16.8%) of the respondents while 154 (83.2%) were not using it. In summary, it was found out that while majority of the library users make more use of textbooks, reference books, journals and newspaper. CD-ROM and Audio-visual were not in frequent use.

Research Question 2

Does poor library building encourage the delinquent act on the library materials?

Table 4: Poor library building as a form of encouragement that causes the delinquent act on the library materials.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	31	64.6
Agree	9	18.8
Strongly Disagree	5	10.4
Undecided	3	6.3
Total	48	100

The result in the above revealed that 40 (83.4%) of the respondents (staff) agree that poor building had encouraged the delinquent act on the university library materials in the university libraries. Only 8(16.7%) either disagreed or undecided.

Research Question 3:

What types of security policies and security measures available in your library?

Table 5: Security policy available in the sampled university libraries

Type of security policies and measures available in the library	No		Yes	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Installation of security systems	30	62.5	18	37.5
Making expensive / popular titles on reserve for short term loans	9	18.8	39	81.3
Engaging staff to glance over the reading rooms.	18	37.5	30	62.5
Daily shelving & shelf reading	14	29.2	34	70.8

As can be seen in Table 5, various types of security strategies/policies were available in the sampled university libraries. These are: making expensive or popular titles on reserve for short term loans had 39 (8.3%), followed by daily shelving and shelf reading, 34 (70.8%) while engaging staff to glance over reading rooms, 30 (62.5) and the least was installation of security systems, 18 (37.%).

Research Question 4:

Does lack of access to information materials contributing to the abuse of library materials?

Table 6: Lack of access to information materials contribute to the abuse of library materials

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of photocopy services in the library	6	12.5
Inadequate security in the library	6	12.5
Lack of vigilance in the part of library staff	10	20.8
Lack of proper shelving and shelf reading of library materials.	20	41.7
Lack of adequate library orientation to new library users.	11	22.9
Inadequate copies of popular library materials.	14	29.2

To the question on lack of access to information materials that contributes to the abuse of library materials, the respondents agreed that lack of proper shelving and shelf reading of library materials had 20 (41.7%), followed by inadequate copies of popular library materials had 14 (29.2%), while lack of adequate library orientation to new library users had 11 (22.9%), lack of photocopy services and inadequate security measures in the library had 6 (12.5%) each. These were different reasons given for lack of access to information materials that contribute to the abuse of library resources in the three university libraries sampled for the study.

Research Question 5:

What are the roles of staff in curbing the abuses of library materials?

Table 7: Roles of staff in curbing the abuses of library materials.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Non-challant attitude	7	14.6
Sanctioning of the offenders	17	35.4
Aiding and abetting the offenders	6	12.5

Reporting the offenders to the university authority for disciplinary action	18	37.5
Total	48	100

The various roles of staff in curbing the abuses of library materials were indicated in the result shown in the table above. Reporting the offenders to the university authority for further disciplinary action had the highest score of 18 (37.5%) followed by sanctioning the offenders which had 17 (35.4%) while non-challant attitude, aiding and abetting the offenders by the library staff had 7 (14.6%) and 6 (12.5%) respectively.

Thus, it is shown that reporting the offenders to the University authority for disciplinary action and sanctioning by the library management were the major roles that needed more attention in curbing the abuses of library materials in University libraries.

Limitations of the Study

In reality, this study is not without its limitations that may affect its successful completion. In the process of carrying out this research the researchers encountered some difficulties such as time, stress, distance, financial constraints, uncooperative attitude and insincerity of respondents in filling the questionnaires correctly and timely this led to outright rejection of some questionnaire copies which should have been used for the study. For these reasons, this study is limited to only three selected university libraries in Edo State and left out academic libraries in other states of the federation in its coverage.

Summary of Findings

This study was undertaken in order to explore user delinquency in academic libraries in three selected university libraries. Opinions of students, para and professional librarians were sampled in University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University and Benson Idahosa University, all located in Edo State of Nigeria. A combination of Questionnaire, oral interview, and observation was used for data collection. A total of 298 respondents, comprising students and staff of the aforementioned universities constituted the sample. The assumption that the problem of user delinquency exists was confirmed by the research.

According to the data collected, the causes of user delinquency identified were stealing of books, poor attitude of users towards public property especially library materials which are seen as 'no man's property' and the fear that one might not find the same book on the shelf when next one comes to borrow which may be linked with insufficient copies of books that are in high demand. Mutilation of pages of library books due to high cost of photocopying service in the library premises was also gathered as one of the causes of user delinquency. All the menace highlighted in this study are in agreement with the submission of Terfera (1996) regarding the various ways in which library users misuse materials.

Thus, this study has successfully investigated the assumption that user delinquency exists in all the three University libraries sampled, the various means that the defiants employ in mutilating and stealing of library materials and the factors responsible for the act and the type of punishment meted out to the erring users.

Recommendations

In the light of finding from the study conducted, it was glaring that all the three

sampled university libraries will have to solve some problems in order to reduce and hopefully eliminate the problem of user delinquency. The following recommendations are hereby given based on these identified problems.

- Proper orientation should be given to users of both libraries.
- Multiple copies of books in the circulation section and those displayed in the open stack should be provided since it is discovered that textbooks are the most affected by theft and mutilation.
- Affected libraries should launch campaign against user delinquency; there should be posters containing warring against theft and mutilation being conspicuously pasted on the on the notice boards within and outside the library.
- Libraries should be in possession of a standby and efficient power generating set to provide electricity to the library services during power shortage. The period of temporary electricity blackout usually encourages library delinquency among users.
- Libraries should engage more trained security personnel.
- In service training should be encouraged by libraries to enlighten, particularly, the junior staff on what library profession is all about. This will enhance the efficiency of the workers.
- The photocopying services of the library should be subsidized. This will reduce the tendency of stealing or mutilating library materials.

Conclusion

From the study, it can be concluded that the problems associated with user delinquency affect the three sampled university libraries; and their collections have been greatly tampered with. It is worthy to note that there is hardly any library in the world that can deny the fact that there is some abuse or user delinquencies such as - stealing, mutilating, hiding of books etc. With respect too the libraries under study, they experience these phenomenon through users delinquency. That not withstanding, the library should continually grow as the search for information rises daily. The security of the library, the roles the library perform, the kind of collection it possess and ways it discharges its functions should in no wise, be static if the needs of its users are to be satisfactorily met.

Lastly, libraries should be aware that there are obstacles to the achievement of the goal of meeting the information needs of the users and part of the problems are posed by user and the library itself. Hence, libraries should bestir themselves and device viable means of solving those aforementioned problems that serve as obstacles to their development.

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