



Assessment of theft and mutilation of information resources in selected academic libraries in Niger State

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Abstract This research was conducted to assess theft and mutilation of information resources in academic libraries in the Niger State of Nigeria, the reason why users resort to theft and mutilation, measures used to steal and mutilate information resources, possible measures to stem and curb these acts in the future. The survey research method was employed using the simple random sampling technique where three academic libraries were selected from all academic libraries in Niger State. Two types of validated questionnaires were designed and administered to both staff and student users. One hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered to library staff, out of which 72 copies were returned and found usable with valid responses. One hundred and eighty copies of the questionnaires out of 250 administered to student users were returned with valid data. The findings revealed that most of the offenders are students who use various methods to perfect these acts. It was also discovered that such stolen materials were concealed in clothes, files or bags. Mutilations of materials occurred in the form of tearing pages of text materials and writing on pages of books. It equally revealed that theft and mutilation were encouraged by the lack of adequate copies of titles to meet the needs of users among others. To address these problems, certain security systems, provisions of photocopiers and the extension of library hours are recommended.

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Introduction and background of the study

Theft and mutilation of library materials have generated much concern by information professionals since the invention of the printing press and the consequent emergence of libraries across the globe. Attesting to the long

existence of theft and mutilation of information resources are [Kayode \(1996\)](#) and [Aguolu and Aguolu \(2002\)](#), pp. 53–57 among others.

The term information resources (library materials) might be described as the summation of all carriers of information of diverse areas/needs, which the library provides for its users. These are the carriers of information that form the major basis upon which the academic library (or any type of library) provides services to its users: namely students, researchers, lecturers, etc. ([Olanlokun & Salisu, 1993](#)). Information

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resources (library materials) can be grouped into two distinct groups, print and non-print according to their formats.

Print materials

These include information in print format which can be used for study, research, reading, etc., such as textbooks, past examination questions papers, reference books, journals, newspapers and newspapers cuttings, magazines, treaties, monographs, etc. acquired by the library for study and other uses. Others are periodicals in different subject fields, documents, manuscripts, maps, pamphlets, government publications, photographs, conference papers and research publications, etc.

Non-print materials

The non-print information resources are carriers of information, which are not in print format and are products of different technologies, including databases, e-mail and other e-communications data files, etc. One smaller category is older format audio–visual (A–V) materials which many of these require special equipment for their usage. These A–V materials which require auditory and visual appreciation to use them and are divided into three types; audio, visual and audio–visual.

Audio

These are sound recordings produced on magnetic tapes or vinyl. Examples of such information resources are phonodiscs, audiotapes and audio cassettes. Other types of audio materials include the compact disc, Mp3 and Mp4.

Visual

Materials in this group include: microfilms, microfiche, ultra fiche, micro-card, filmstrips, transparencies, slides, film-loops, film (slient), VCD and DVD.

Audio–visual

These information resources require both visual and auditory senses for their use. These include sound films, tape/slides programs, videotapes, videocassettes, and videodiscs.

Longman Dictionary described theft as an “act of stealing something” (1995, p. 1495). Similarly, it describes mutilation as “to damage or change something so much or in such a way that it is completely spoiled or ruined.” Theft of library materials therefore involve illegal removal from the library of any material(s) with no intention to return it, while mutilation of library materials involves willful damage of library materials as a result of removal of page(s) of a book or any other material which eventually renders such materials useless to other users in the future. According to [Akinfolarin \(1992\)](#), specific threats to library materials are theft or mutilation, of library and individual properties, users’ disorderly conduct in the library, failure to return borrowed books, etc. Among these, theft and mutilation rank the highest of the above listed threats. [Aguolu \(1997\)](#), p. 233

reported that the high incidence of book theft and mutilation would gradually deplete the information resources and reduce the library’s effectiveness in supporting the academic pursuits of the higher institutions.

Theft and mutilation have been common problems plaguing academic libraries for too long. One of the basic functions of any library is the preservation and security of library materials so they are available for use. Despite all the efforts to preserve library materials, some users still resort to these actions, and the need to provide adequate security for library materials and resources is still significant for many libraries.

Academic libraries are in institutions of higher education, and there are wide variations in the size and scope of their collections. Some colleges focus almost entirely on curricula needs, while university libraries also emphasize research in many disciplines. [Chaturvedi \(1994, p. 135\)](#) contends that there is no better way to judge the quality of an institution than to look at its library.

One of the earlier reported cases of library users’ harmful practices in Nigeria ranks “theft and mutilation” as top on the list. These actions have a strong negative effect on academic library resource development and growth.

Statement of the problem

Recently, instances of book theft and mutilation have become so common that librarians are often accused of being negligent of their duties. Nevertheless, modern librarians recognize book theft and mutilation as a serious problem that must be curbed if learning resources are to continue to be available. These acts, according to [Omotayo and Ajayi \(2004\)](#), have deleterious effects on the academic performance of Nigerian higher institution students. These acts can also dampen the library staff’s morale in having to re-provide services that had been previously provided. High incidence of book theft and mutilation would gradually deplete the information resources and reduce the libraries’ effectiveness in supporting the academic pursuits of the institutions of higher learning.

Objective of the study

- i To establish whether theft and mutilation occurs in these academic libraries.
- ii. To determine why library users resort to theft and mutilation of library materials in an institution’s academic library.
- iii. Identify which groups of users commit theft and mutilation of library and information resources.
- iv. To identify methods used to steal and mutilate information resources in these academic libraries.
- v To identify measures adopted by academic libraries to stem/curb future theft and mutilation of library and information resources.

Research questions

- i Do incidents of theft and mutilation occur in academic libraries in this study?

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