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## Security and Crime Challenges in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

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### Abstract

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Security and prevention of crimes in academic libraries is essential library duties for librarians to achieve. Due to security breaches in academic libraries, users sometimes are not able to get information materials needed and this makes the library ineffective in satisfying users' information needs. The paper, therefore, investigated the security breaches in academic libraries in Nigeria using Federal University of Technology, Minna and College of Education, Minna libraries. The survey research method was used for the study and the population was 130 undergraduate students and the staff working in the libraries of the two institutions selected for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage tabulation were used in analyzing the data. Results revealed that book theft, noise-making and mis-shelving in the library and book mutilation are the major security breaches in the libraries. It also revealed among other findings that print materials, serial/periodical collections, reference collections and reserve collections are vulnerable to security breaches. To eradicate crime and improve security measures in the libraries some prevention measures such as written security policy to be placed on the notice boards, manual security approach such as monitoring users in the library premises, introduction of electronic security system to mention but a few were recommended

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**Key words:** academic libraries, crime, library security, book theft, book mutilation

### Introduction

A library is a treasure-house of knowledge. A well-stocked library is an asset to the school, college, university and the environment where it is located. A library is a place where not only books but also magazines, journals, newspapers, atlases, encyclopaedias and more are kept for the benefit of the users. It has books on various topics, subjects and events, all books are kept systematically and classified according to their subjects, the labelling of books helps the users to get a particular book without any difficulty.

With the growing popularity of Internet which provides lots of information with just a click of a mouse, one may pause to think about the decreasing relevance and importance of a library in today's world. But one should keep in mind that a person goes to a library not only to search and get information from books but also to sit and study there. The ambience and the peaceful and scholarly atmosphere in the library help one to concentrate more on one's work and study. Thus, libraries will never become redundant. They will always be there to indicate the presence of a well-read and educated society.

Libraries are institutions set up to cater for 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. A library is a benefit to poor students who cannot afford some of the text books that is required in their areas of specialization. The best place for easy access to books is a library which is a popular place in the academic curriculum. The academic libraries are integral part of any institution, most especially at the tertiary level.

Library services can only be achieved through the availability of library collections. Nkiki and Yusuf (2008) observed that information is an essential part of a nation's wealth and access to it is a basic human right. A library houses a wide variety of information resources. Information is not only a national resource but also a medium for social communication. No wonder, it is generally argued that library is the only centralized location where new and emerging information technologies can be combined with knowledge resources in a user-focused, service-rich environment that supports today's social and educational pattern of learning, teaching and research.

Academic libraries are the "heart" of the learning community, providing a place for students and faculty to do their research and advance their knowledge. One major challenge academic libraries have been faced with is security problem. That is, how to secure their valuable resources collected over time. Academic libraries must be safe from security threats and vulnerability. Academic library collections are broad and varied and they support the educational community in satisfying their information needs. Borrowing privilege is an important means of giving access to library collections for personal, educational, and socio-economic advancement. Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2009) discussed the importance of access to collections in supporting the mission of the university. One of the reasons of encouraging accessibility of library resources to users is to make effort towards minimizing or avoiding library theft.

Ajebomogun (2004) opined that collection security refers to a process designed to protect library collections against un-authorized removal or loss. This involves protecting resources against disasters as well as thieves or intruders. Information security governance is the manner in which information security is deployed. Collection security management in libraries can be conceptualized to mean the overall manner in which collection security policies, programs, procedures, or measures are deployed to mitigate risk and ensure access.

Criminal activities in academic libraries are not limited to library information materials alone but theft of properties such as handbags, purses, keys, laptops, handsets and notebooks are equally common. The extent, nature and rate at which these crimes occur vary from one academic library to another. Anunobi and Okoye (2008) stated that, “academic libraries are faced with hybrid challenges of managing resources and are challenged to acquire the necessary skills.” One such challenge is the issue of collection security for print and non-print resources.

From the earliest time to the present, librarians are bothered on how to ensure the protection of Library collections from theft and damage. A depletion of available materials means a reduction in how the library can serve and satisfy the needs of the patrons. It is therefore crucial to preserve available materials and resources from theft and mutilation. Vandalism, mutilation, violence, arson and other criminal activities needed to be properly addressed, measured and the level of their existence in the libraries needed to be understood by the librarians and information scientists of today. The crimes which are committed by some users of the libraries have deprived many others from fully achieving their information needs. Vandalism, mutilation, defacement, theft, arson, etc are problems regularly encountered in most libraries since libraries are the best places where information resources are acquired, organized, preserved and disseminated to users. Some of these information resources are not only rare to come by but they are also expensive and fragile in nature. These days libraries be it academic, public, school, national and other types of libraries spend a lot of money to install considerable security devices in order to check these criminal activities. Ensuring effective use, longevity, and accessibility makes an effective program of collection security necessary. It is important to secure library resources. It is equally important to ensure that the security is performed as seamlessly as possible, without interfering with the library’s objective of providing a user-friendly environment (McComb, 2004).

The bad news is that, the more these control and security devices are available in the libraries, the more the libraries lose their security values originally identified with. Loss of library materials is a recurring problem of libraries all over the world, but it seems to be more serious in academic institutions in Nigeria. No wonder Ogbonyomi (2011) stated that, offenders of this type of crimes are the patrons for whom the materials are collected to serve.

There is inadequate security to control behaviours and loss of books. Also, lack of funds has not helped matters as a lot of fund is needed for effective security of library materials to be achieved. This problem indicates the need to determine the current state of crime and

collection security in academic libraries. Library and information managers must have a clear vision and focus on the contemporary reality of security breach in academic libraries, especially those targeting the collections. This is one of the things librarians should concern themselves with if they are to successfully manage a flourishing and efficient library.

### **Literature Review**

The rate at which materials disappear in academic libraries cannot be overemphasized. According to Jato (2005) scandalous behaviours such as theft and mutilation, hiding library materials, refusal to return over- due borrowed materials, drinking and eating in the library, vandalism and defacement of library collections, arson, negligence to library policies as well as various disaster such as fire and flood caused by human factors, among others have become a common occurrence in academic libraries and if this is not checked, it would lead to serious drought of information materials in the library. Most academic libraries in developing countries including Nigeria lack security measures which encourage users to perform such immoral acts (Jato, 2005).

According to Momodu (2002), academic libraries have been faced with varying degrees of criminal behaviours in the use of their resources especially materials and to some extent manpower. The extent of this problem varies from one library to another. In some cases the dimension of the problem is so restricted that it seems non-existent, in some others the dimension is so immense that it calls for serious concern. The findings of a study conducted by Momodu (2002) on the delinquent readership in selected urban libraries in Nigeria, revealed that, every library has delinquent client problem and that there is no direct correlation between the type of library and the extent of the problem. The problem seems to be universal. A number of studies (Lorenzen, 1996; Momodu, 2002; Ajegbomogun, 2004) acknowledged that, some individual users of academic libraries display disruptive or criminal behaviours within the library surroundings and this can cause security problems in the library.

The issue of collection security is of growing concern to academic libraries and librarians. As a result there are vast literature on problems concerning library security in academic libraries. Ugah (2007) considers library security threat as formidable obstacles to information access and use. Such acts are serious problems that can result in user dissatisfaction. He identified major security issues in libraries to include: theft and mutilation; vandalism; damages and disaster; over borrowing or delinquent borrowers; and purposefully displacing arrangement of materials. Literature on collection security have shown that security breaches often happen

when the library premises are left unsecured. Oder (2004) maintained that security measures such as supervision, patrolling, and surveillance are lacking in libraries and keys are kept unsecured, if not in plain sight of the users. Momodu (2002) and Ajegbomogun (2004) maintained that library crimes also include varying degrees of delinquency, while Oder (2004) agreed that security personnel inefficiency is also a big avenue to library crime, especially in academic libraries. Non-return of library materials is a threat to the effective use of resources and to avoid this, libraries create policies to ensure library resources are used effectively.

Libraries in Nigeria are performing a great portion of their activities traditionally. A recent study has shown that crime against library collections, otherwise known as information resources, is on the increase in a number of Nigerian academic libraries. It was observed that there was no significant relationship found between the security measures adopted and the rate of crime. Literature has it that the rate of declining budgets and a higher subscription cost facing academic institutions is making it seemingly impossible for libraries to meet the rising information needs of university students, let alone allowing the available collections lost. As a matter of fact, criminal activities against information resources are formidable obstacle to information access and use, not only posing a serious problem that needs urgent attention, but also constituting a big cost to scholarship (Ugah, 2007).

Ifidon (2000) in his own opinion stated that 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. Theft is the act of stealing from the library's collection and it has been argued that the theft of archival materials has become a problem of great proportions to the library resources. Mutilation is the defacement or damage of library materials. Mutilation of academic library collections has been reported by many researchers (Ajegbomogun 2003; Bello 1998; Lorenzen 1996). Mutilation or vandalism occurs when users knowingly tear, mark, or otherwise damage or destroy materials.

Delinquent library users and staff have devised many ways of illegally removing information materials or resources from the library. Users engage in various delinquent acts through different methods. Among these methods are the deliberate keeping of borrowed books beyond the due date, 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.

Adewuyi and Adekanye (2011) listed the following methods adopted in stealing information resources:

- i. Hiding items in their clothes
- ii. Throwing stolen item(s) through the window and door when people are not observing
- iii. Putting library item(s) in handbag or briefcase
- iv. Collaborating with library staff to steal library collection
- v. Selling of library books by library staff to supplement poor monthly salary and making friends with porters before carrying out their illegitimate plans.

Furthermore, studies have shown that several factors influence crimes perpetrated in libraries. Lorenzen (1996) identified the following as the causes for theft and mutilation in the libraries:

- i. Students' dissatisfaction or unfamiliarity with library services
- ii. Lack of knowledge of replacement costs and time
- iii. Lack of concern for the needs of others
- iv. Few students think of library mutilation and theft as a crime.

It is a common practice among students to steal or remove pages of library materials because of high cost of books in Nigeria. Some students find it difficult to make ends meet and as such cannot afford recommended textbooks. The only way out for some students is to resort to tearing off pages of the textbooks or stealing a complete textbook from the library's collections. They do not officially borrow the book.

More so, competition for resources tends to increase the library's collections which invariably tempt users to steal, mutilate or engage in illegal borrowing. Most libraries do not have photocopy facilities for users in case of any need, when available in some cases incessant change in power does not give room for users to make copies of urgent material needed. This among other factors tempts users to engage in disruptive act.

From the foregoing, one can conclude that security and crime challenges in academic libraries are recurring problem of libraries all over the world and therefore needs to be given

prime attention. The need to check library theft in the tertiary institutions is to enable the academic libraries achieve the educational objectives expected of them as well as to avoid the few individuals committing this crime from preventing a whole lot of library users from having access to the information resources needed. This study, therefore, assessed the security problems observed in academic libraries with particular reference to Federal University of Technology (F.U.T), and College of Education (C.O.E.) Minna, libraries, Niger State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) To find out the security problems F.U.T. Minna Library and C. O. E. Minna library are facing.
- (b) To investigate the causes of these security problems in F.U.T. and C.O.E. libraries.
- (c) To identify the type of collections that are more vulnerable to security breaches.
- (d) To suggest measures that could enhance library security in F.U.T and C.O.E libraries.

### **Research Method**

The descriptive survey research was used to collect data in the study. Two tertiary institutions were purposively selected from Niger State One federal and state owned institutions and the population of the study consists of all undergraduate students of F.U.T., C.O.E. and the staff working in the academic libraries of the institutions. The population was restricted to thirty (30) library staff and hundred (100) undergraduate students, giving a total of one hundred and thirty (130) population used for the study. The random sampling technique was used for data collection. The instrument employed for data collection is the questionnaire. The questionnaire was randomly distributed to students during their lecture hours while the library staff were distributed theirs during working hours in their offices. Interview and observation were also used to collect data for the study. Some staff in the two institutions were interviewed to obtain information for the study and direct observation was undertaken to physically assess some information resources in the libraries.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In order to determine the security issues of the libraries studied, respondents were asked to identify with some statements that could reveal the type or nature of crime observed in their libraries. To adequately present the findings of the study the percentages of option such as agreed and disagreed were used in presenting the results in the study. The finding is presented in Tables 1-4.

**Table 1: Types of collection security breaches**

S/N	Security breaches	Agree (percentages)	Disagree (percentages)	I don't know (percentages)	Total (percentages)
1	Book theft	100 (76.9%)	30 (23.1%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
2	Book mutilation	120 (92.3%)	10 (7.7%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
3	Non- return of borrowed books	90 (69.2%)	40 (30.8%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
4	Using fake ID cards to borrow books	60 (46.2%)	40 (30.8%)	30 (23.0%)	130 (100%)
5	Mis-shelving of books	125 (96.1%)	5 (3.8%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
6	Noise making in the library	128 (98.5%)	2 (1.5%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
7	Eating in the library	85 (65.4%)	40 (30.8%)	5 (3.8%)	130 (100%)

Table 1 reveals that among the items categorized under the types of collection security breaches in the library, 98.5% of the respondents agreed that noise making in the library is usually high and 96.1 % of them indicated that mis-shelving of library resources is always observed. Over ninety percent (92.3%) of the respondents disclosed that book mutilation usually occur in the libraries studied. Over seventy percent (76.9%) of them stated that the rate of book theft is high in the libraries studied, while 69.2% of them reported that non-returning of borrowed books is commonly observed. Also, 65.4% of the respondents revealed that eating in the library by the users is one of the security breaches observed in the libraries, while 46.2% stated that using fake identity cards to borrow books is also a security breach observed in the libraries. The picture drawn from Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that noise making in the library, mis-shelving of library books, mutilation of library resources and book theft are high in both F.U.T. and C.O.E libraries studied. This finding is similar to Broadhead's (2002) who observed that delinquencies 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 behaviours, 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 libraries.

**Table 2: Causes of crime in the library**

S/N	Causes of crime	Agree (percentages)	Disagree (percentages)	I don't know (percentages)	Total (percentages)
1	Limited/insufficient library resources for users	120 (92.3%)	10 (7.7%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
2	Selfish interest of the culprits	75 (57.7%)	35 (26.9%)	20 (15.4%)	130 (100%)
3	Lack of proper orientation to users on the use of library resources	65 (50.0%)	55 (42.3%)	10 (7.7%)	130 (100%)
4	Lack of photocopying machines	101 (77.7%)	28 (21.5%)	1 (0.8%)	130 (100%)
5	Financial constraint of libraries	90 (69.2%)	30 (23.1%)	10 (7.7%)	130 (100%)

From Table 2, the items listed under causes of crime in the library revealed that majority of the respondents (92.3%) indicated that insufficient library resources for users make users to commit crime such as stealing and mutilation in the library. This is followed by lack of photocopying machine (77.7%) while 69.2% indicated that financial constraint causes users to commit crime in the libraries, 57.7% stated that they commit crime in the libraries due to selfish interests and 50% commit crime in the library because of lack of proper orientation given to users on how to use library resources.

The response in Table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents disclosed that insufficient library resources in the library, lack of photocopying machine and financial constraint mostly make users to commit crime of different types in the library. This finding is similar to Ugah's (2007) who observed that the rate of declining budgets and a higher subscription cost facing academic institutions is making it seemingly impossible for libraries to meet the rising information needs of university students, let alone allowing the available collections lost. As a matter of fact, criminal activities against information resources are formidable obstacle to information access and use, not only posing a serious problem that needs urgent attention, but also constituting a big cost to scholarship.

**Table 3: Types of collections vulnerable to security breaches**

S/N	Types of collections	Agree (percentages)	Disagree (percentages)	I don't know (percentages)	Total (percentages)
1	Print materials in general	115 (88.5%)	10 (7.7%)	5 (3.8%)	130 (100%)
2	Serial/periodical collections	95 (73.1%)	25 (19.2%)	10 (7.7%)	130 (100%)
3	Reference collections	75 (57.7%)	35 (26.9%)	20 (15.4%)	130 (100%)
4	Reserve collections	55 (42.3%)	65 (50.0%)	10 (7.7%)	130 (100%)
5	Non-print collections	5 (3.8%)	125 (96.2%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)

Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents (88.5%) indicated that print materials are most vulnerable to security breaches while 73.1% reported that serial collections are equally vulnerable to security breaches. Over fifty seven percent (57.7%) of the respondents stated that reference collections are also vulnerable to security breaches, 42.3% indicated reserve collections and 3.8% revealed non-print collections as the type of collection that are vulnerable to security breaches in the libraries studied. The picture drawn from Table 3 shows that of all the items listed to determine the collections that are vulnerable to security breaches in the library, only non-print resources has low percentage.

**Table 4: Possible preventive measures that could be used to check crimes in the libraries**

S/N	Preventive measures	Agree (percentages)	Disagree (percentages)	I don't know (percentages)	Total (percentages)
1	Written security policy to be placed on notice boards	130 (100%)	Nil (0%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
2	Manual security approach such as monitoring users in the library premises	130 (100%)	Nil (0%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
3	Use of security guards	130 (100%)	Nil (0%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
4	Checking users ID card before they are allowed access to the library	130 (100%)	Nil (0%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)

5	Staff security training within and outside the library	128 (98.5%)	2 (1.5%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
6	Users should be searched before leaving the library	130 (100%)	Nil (0%)	Nil (0%)	130 (100%)
7	Electronic security system should be introduced	130 (100%)	Nil (0%)	Nil (0%)	19 (100%)

From Table 4 it is disclosed that 100% of the respondents suggested that a written security policy be placed on the notice boards, monitoring of users should be enforced, security guards should be used in the libraries, checking of users ID cards, thorough searching of users before they leave the libraries and installation of electronic security system while 98.5% of them indicated the need for staff security training as variables that should all be in place to serve as preventive measures that could check crimes in the library. From the findings, it is clear that the respondents indicated a high level of interest in all the recommendations indicated in Table 4. This to a large extent shows the urgent attention needed to effect these changes in the academic libraries studied in order to improve the undergraduate students' use of the libraries.

From the findings the picture that has emerged is that the level of crime challenges in F.U.T. and C.O.E. libraries in Niger State is high. From Table 1 it is revealed that noise making, book mutilation and book theft as well as mis-shelving are common crimes observed in the libraries. Probably this unfortunate situation could be caused by the dwindling economy affecting every sector of the society including the academic libraries. The rate of declining budgets and a higher subscription cost facing academic institutions is making it seemingly impossible for libraries to meet the rising information needs of university students. In the same vein, Dalhatu and Adamu (1999) revealed that in most Nigerian university libraries inadequate funding is the major problem facing libraries and the bedrock of any other development. There is inadequate budgetary allocation to libraries by the institutional authorities for running the libraries. No wonder, the information obtained from the interview with the institution librarians studied indicated that most tertiary institution libraries are under-funded and this affects the acquisition of library resources especially these days that these libraries are expected to provide print and electronic resources to satisfy the information needs of the users.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that this poor financial condition in tertiary institutions actually made the respondents to disclose in Table 2 that insufficient library resources and lack of photocopying machines are the major factors that cause crime in the libraries. This finding is similarly to ALA's (2010) view which revealed that the university libraries should provide varied, authoritative and up-to-date resources that support its mission and the needs of undergraduate users. Undergraduate collections should provide ready access to information resources that meet the needs of their primary clientele with focus on the institution's curriculum. The value of undergraduate collections is measured by their usability as well as quality and size. Unfortunately, it was observed that the sizes of collections most of these tertiary institutions' libraries studied are inadequate and this affects the educational standard of the undergraduate students. This is contrary to Kuh and Gonyea's (2003) view that, the size of a collection is used as an indicator of academic quality.

The study further revealed that print materials, serial collections, reference collections and reserve resources are all types of collections vulnerable to security breaches in the library. Non-print resources are the only ones with low percentage indicating they are not vulnerable to security breaches as shown in Table 3. Probably this could be as a result of lack of technical –know-how on the part of the users and also these tertiary institutions have few numbers of electronic resources closely watched by the library staff and thus, stealing them from the libraries would be a difficult task.

However, with the increase of information resources and the increasing demand for information in the society, F.U.T. Minna library and C.O.E. Minna library should endeavour to automate their library services and also install effective electronic libraries as this would not only provide current and varieties of information resources in the libraries but would also check-mate library theft. Provision of current information resources in the academic libraries would invariably assist in achieving the objectives of the institutions as well as improve the level of use of academic libraries in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

One can therefore conclude that since the level of security and crime challenges in F.U.T.Minna and C.O.E Minna libraries is not encouraging there is need for all hands to be on deck in order to eradicate these vices. This effort would help to strengthen the life span of the information resources in these libraries. The information resources would no longer be de-faced, mutilated, mis-shelved or completely stolen from the library. The eradication of

these vices would in turn encourage students to effectively use their academic library in order to achieve their educational objectives.

On the basis of the specific findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Written security policy should be placed on notice boards of F.U.T. Minna and C.O.E. Minna libraries for users' benefits.
- (2) Proper shelving and shelve- reading should be encouraged in F.U.T. Minna and C.O.E. Minna libraries to ease users' information search and discourage stealing habit.
- (3) Photocopying machines should be provided at affordable prices in and around F.U.T. Minna and C.O.E. Minna libraries.
- (4) Users should be thoroughly searched before entering and leaving the premises of F.U.T. Minna and C.O.E. Minna libraries.
- (5) Orientation of users and staff should be done regularly in the two academic libraries in order to impart user education into library users.
- (6) Staff training on how to prevent the culprits from perpetuating the act within and outside the academic libraries.
- (7) Electronic security system should be introduced in these libraries especially in C.O.E. library.

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