A SURVEY OF SECURITY PROBLEMS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

Library security is *an issue that attracts the immediate attention of all serums minded librarians and library administrators The authors set out to study to what extent security* is *a problem in academic libraries in Benue State, the forms of insecurity that were more prevalent and the methods adopted to contain them After the survey of the nine academic libraries* in *Benue State,* it *was found that theft of hooks and journal mutilation were more prevalent in most of the libraries. It was also found that connivance and absenteeism by library staff contributed to insecurity in some libraries.*

Recommendations such as increase in *security personnel in and around library buildings and installation of electronic security systems* to *detect fraud have been made.*

INTRODUCTION

It is not an overstatement to rate educational institutions according to the quality of their library collections. This is more so as the purpose of academic libraries is to support the programmes of the institutions that establish them.

Selection of materials in academic libraries is usually based on the vision of the institutions. Librarians being members of the senate have no problem knowing in details the current programmes, those to be scrapped and the new ones to be introduced in the institution.

The teaching staff relies heavily on library collections to prepare their new lecture notes as well as update the previous ones. Students on the other hand use the library to complement or supplement what was taught in class since a one hour lecture can not discuss everything there is to discuss about a topic.

Libraries can not perform their roles of supporting the curriculum and teaching if they are not secure and are continuously vandalized. The security of academic libraries therefore becomes very crucial to librarians and administrators just as it is a national problem. Violence is being perpetrated in almost all parts of the country though in varying degrees of intensity and dexterity.

Educational institutions and libraries being part of the larger society are not left out. They experience security problems in various ways. Considering the ever increasing importance of the library in our contemporary life, librarians and library administrators have no option than find ways of making these collections secure for present and future use.

It is probably for this reason that so much has been written on the topic both by Nigerian and foreign authors. They however differ on aspects and levels of the subject matter.

Brown and Patkus (2002) pointed out that collections can be threatened not just by theft and vandalism but also by disasters (fire and floods) and damage from careless handling or poor environmental conditions. If these

are to be protected against loss, they argue, librarians and archivists must consider security as a management issue desiring a serious investment of resources and must be supported by the highest level of the institution. They called on every cultural institution to develop a written security policy that underlines a commitment to security management. This position tallies with Jam (2000) on disasters that affected libraries in Benue State with such disruptive consequences just as absence of security policy posed grave risks to libraries because everybody tries to do everything at the same time when disasters strike.

Agbo (2000) wrote on book theft and mutilation and their effects on services of Benue State Polytechnic Library, Ugbokolo. He established the causes as inadequate collections, few reading tables and chairs, absence of loan policy, absence of photocopying services, inadequate staff and staff attitude to duty. Similarly, Bello (2001); Molabi (1993); Tunlong (1990); Ishaya (1995); Maigari (1995); Akinfolarin (1992); Tefera (1996) have all agreed on similar causes of insecurity of library materials and have just fallen short of Okoye-Ikonta (1980) on book theft and mutilation of periodicals, damage to books caused by dust, insects, fungi, hot and humid conditions and inadequate insurance arrangement and other minor thefts by library staff. Retcliffe (1999) adumbrated similar security problems in Great Britain and the United States of America. The crime seems to have no limits as professors, librarians and other people of questionable character all engage in it for various reasons including personal gain (money), reacting for wounded pride, privacy, and a host of inexplicable reasons. Bean (1999) agreed with the above authors but strongly gave crimes that included sex in libraries which he described as "erotic oasis" i.e. males who engage in sex in public places such as toilets, streets, theatres, libraries etc. Physical attacks on library staff perhaps by mentally disordered people have added another dimension to library insecurity. Odd and strange people, occasionally entering the library, are perfect in the theft of patrons' materials. Bean (1999) recommended blacklisting and

banning all established cases of trouble makers, reinforcement of technology with greater levels of manpower, constant patrol of reading areas, as well as checking of patrons bags. Adefarati mentioned photocopying services which should be central to avoid mutilation of journals and books among others.

Academic libraries in Benue State have a fair share of all the above enumerated security problems. All authors mentioned above have not written on security of academic libraries in Benue State. This study hopes to fill that yawning gap.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

An academic library is only as good as the quality of its collection. Often times these collections are not safe. They are either gutted by fire stolen or defaced by known or unknown persons. In order to guarantee the safety of our collections, security problems surrounding our academic libraries need to be studied. Quite often library staff that are entrusted with the security and up-keep of library materials tend to pilfer or aid in the theft or vandalization of such materials. Library patrons often contest regulations, subjecting them to searches just as absence of photocopying services in academic libraries tempts library clientele to mutilate highly desired source of information in the library. Absence of policies dealing with security problems in academic libraries does not help matters. Inadequate staff to man the stack areas and or electronic systems to help in detecting pilferers is lacking in some academic libraries in Benue State.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of this study are:-

I) To ascertain which academic libraries investigated had security problems,

ii) To ascertain the type and nature of such security problems in such academic libraries,

iii) To establish reasons and uses of such security problems in the academic libraries,

iv) To recommend ways of bridging such security lapses in these academic libraries.

v) To add to the existing literature in this field of study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions arise:-

i) Do academic libraries in Benue State realize that they have security problem?

ii) What is the nature or type of security problems in academic libraries in Benue state?

c) How do security problems affect academic libraries in Benue State and to what extent?

iv) Do academic libraries in Benue State make plans to control or prevent security problems?

v) Are library staff oriented in the art of combating security problems?

vi) Do academic libraries in Benue State have security policies?

vii) Do academic libraries in Benue State have electronic security systems?

SCOPE

This study is centered on academic libraries in Benue State. The survey covers almost all staff who work in the libraries under study except attendants who are excluded from the study due to their low level of training/understanding of the nature of questions asked. As new entrants without formal library training; it is envisaged that they may not fully comprehend the professional depth of response required. The study does not cover natural security problems but man-made security problems. It covers security problems in academic libraries only and not other libraries like school libraries and public libraries. This survey was carried out between June, 2005 and February, 2006.

METHODOLOGY

A one page questionnaire was designed with a cover letter and discussed among experienced professional colleagues in the field. Those items found unnecessary were dropped leaving us with those that had a purpose to serve. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information on security problems in academic libraries in Benue State. It particularly covered theft and mutilation of library materials, harassment by readers, acts of indiscipline that pose a threat to library security, notably, absenteeism, loitering and security preparedness of academic libraries in Benue State. The questionnaire also sought to know if an electronic security system was in place in any of the libraries under study. Lastly, free comments and suggestions were sought on how to prevent or minimize security problem in these academic libraries.

(Two hundred sets of questionnaire were distributed to all the academic libraries in Benue State out of which 189 (one hundred and eighty-nine) were retuned in good state for analysis. That figure gives a 94.5% response rate. Exhaustive literature review on the topic was undertaken just as data was collected. Informal visits and discussions with some staff of libraries covered in the study were undertaken *to* crosscheck the validity of responses given in the questionnaire forms returned for analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The study received a 94.5% response rate from 189 out of 200 questionnaire forms distributed and returned in usable state. The results of the analysis are expected to provide answers to the research questions raised earlier in the study. The responding libraries, the dates of establishment and geographical locations are given in table 1 below:

Table I: Responding Libraries

No	Library	Location	Date
01	Akperan Orshi College *of* Agric.	Yandev *Giboko*	1976
02	Benue State Polytechnic, Library	Ugbokolo	1977
03	College *of* Education Library	Katsinal Ala	1977
04	College *of* Advanced and professional Studies Library	Makurdi	1977
05	University *of* Agriculture Library	Makurdi	1981
06	Benue State Un	Makurdi	1992
07	College *of* Education Library	Oju	4992
08	University *of* Mkar Library	Mkarf Gboko	2005
09	Fidel Polytechnic Library	Giboko	2005

Table 2: Perception or security problems

	Respondents	Percentage
Those that see security as a problem	144	76.19
Those without security problem	28	14.08
Indifferent/ undecided	17	09.00

The first and all-important item on the questionnaire was whether the respondents believe security is a problem in their libraries. This is considered very important because respondents must first of all appreciate that security is a problem in their libraries even though the researchers acknowledge the possible variance in individuals' concept or perception of security. 144 or 76.19% of the respondents interestingly agreed that security is a problem in their libraries while 28 or 14.81% disagreed with 17 or 9.0% remaining indifferent.

Those who remained indifferent were library assistants whose training is unprofessional in depth. Besides, they may not have considered the nature of seriousness security has posed to academic libraries in Benue State.

Table 3: Theft of Books/Journals

	Respondents	Percentage
Those with cases of theft	149	78.84
Those without known cases of theft	23	12.17
Indifferent/ undecided	17	09.00

The table above shows instances of book theft in the libraries studied. 149 or 78.84% of the respondents acknowledged the prevalence of the illegal and antisocial behaviour in their libraries, 23 (12.17%) disagreed and 17 (9.0%) were undecided or indifferent. In a study of library use malpractices at Ibadan Polytechnic, Bello (2001) found book stealing to rank 5th among the malpractices studied.

Lamenting the prevalence of book theft in academic libraries, Bean (1999) posited that one reason why thefts in academic libraries have apparently increased very suddenly in a few years is that a point may have passed where no student minds being seen by another student in the act of illegally removing a book. He goes on to argue that once social sanctions which are so much more powerful a restraint on our behaviour than legal rules are removed, new patterns of behaviour can easily become the norm.

Table 4: Mutilations

	Respondents	Percentage
Those with cases of mutilation	138	73.02
No mutilations	31	16.40
Those indifferent/ undecided	20	10.58

Book or journal mutilation is another anti-social problem libraries have had to contend with. It is capable of eliciting instant anger and dejection on the user who discovers that a55seriously needed material has been

mutilated either by cancellation but more especially tearing off pages. Of the respondents sampled 138 or 73.02% affirmed that mutilation takes place in their libraries, 31 (16.40%) disagreed while 20 (10.58%) remained indifferent.

Table 5: Frequency of theft

	Respondents	Percentage
Frequent	83	43.92
Infrequent	67	16.40
Undecided	20	10.58

When asked to indicate how frequently thefts occurred in their libraries, 83 or 43.92% of the respondents said it occurred frequently, 67 or 35.45% said thefts rarely occurred while 39 (20.63%) remained indifferent. This high figure of indifference is again attributable to assistants who do not take their jobs seriously. Academic libraries experience a lot of thefts but quick time actions can reduce the tally as books could be recovered from hostels during emergency checks. Permission for such actions could be obtained from the relevant authority.

Table 6: Connivance by library staff

	Respondents	Percentage
Incidence of connivance	62	32.80
Non -connivance	108	57.14
Undecided	19	10.05

One widely but rightly or wrongly held view by the public is that theft of books can not take place in a library without the active or at least passive connivance of the library staff with the book thieves.

When asked whether they believe library staff connive with users to steal library materials, 62 or 32.80% affirmed, 108 or 57.14 disagreed while 19 or 10.05% remained indifferent.

Records of theft are usually kept by professional librarians but assistants know very little of such classified information. The 19 indifferent staff could be from the group of assistants who have no access to such records.

Table 7: Absenteeism by staff

	Respondents	Percentage
Incidence of absenteeism	106	56.08
No cases of absenteeism	64	33.86
Undecided	19	10.05

For a library to function properly, all other things being equal all the staff must report punctually and remain seated to serve the clientele. Absenteeism on the other hand reduces staff strength when it occurs. This results to insufficient hands especially to man the most strategic areas such as circulations department, serials, public services unit and exits thereby creating security problems for the library. When asked about the level of discipline in their libraries, 106 representing 56.08% of the respondents agreed that they had cases of indiscipline, particularly absenteeism in their libraries, 64 or 33.86% had no problems while 19 or 10.05% remained indifferent. Almost all libraries had cases of absenteeism and loitering. Heads of such libraries have to conduct checks on the access points since most theft and mutilation, which are aspects of security breach, are most prevalent there.

Table 8: Harassment by readers

	Respondents	Percentage
Incidence of harassment	104	55.03
No harassment	70	37.04
Undecided	15	07.94

The security of the library could be threatened if readers fail to cooperate with the staff either by refusing to identify themselves as bona fide members of the academic community entitled to the libraries facilities or by refusing to submit their files for search on leaving the library. In this study, 104 or 55.03% reported being harassed through refusal to show their identity cards, resisting searches and refusal to surrender books considered to have been improperly taken out of other libraries, 70 or 37.04% did not have same experience while 15 or 7.94% were undecided.

Table 9: Availability of electronic security system

	Respondents	Percentage
Available	26	13.76
Unavailable	144	76.19
Undecided	19	10.00

The question of whether the library had electronic security system was put to respondents. Interestingly 26 or 13.76% of them agreed they had the facility, 144 or 76.19% did not have while 19 or 10.05% were indifferent.

The 26 or 13.76% that agreed to electronic facility all came from the University of Agriculture Library which only has installed the detective machine. The rest of academic libraries have none. Electronic detectors cost a lot of money and only federal agencies have the financial muscle to acquire

them. All other academic libraries are either state or privately owned and for now don't have the sufficient financial backing for it. Table (2000) has reported the effective deployment of electronic machine use in Thomas Mofolo Library in Lesotho. Electronic security system has proved to be very effective in reducing book losses.

Table 10: Availability of Security policy

	Respondents	Percentage
Available	107	56.61
Not available	54	28.57
Undecided	28	14.81

The most heart warming finding from this study was that 107 representing 56.61% of the respondents indicated they had security policy for their libraries, 54 or 28.57% said they had none while 28 or 14.81% were indifferent.

In summary, McDonald (1999) put it that security policy poses a substantial challenge for management of all kinds of libraries and security concern will continue to influence the shape of library buildings, the organization of collections and arrangements for staffing and using library services. Although most respondents (107) or 56.61% said they had a security policy in place but none made it available to the researcher.

Respondents were lastly requested in the questionnaire to suggest remedies to minimize or eradicate security problems in academic libraries in Benue State.

Below are the respondents' suggestions for improvement.

1) Increase security personnel in and around library buildings.
2) Employ additional staff to man the exits.
3) Install electronic security systems.
4) Increase public enlightenment/policy making campaigns.

5) Improve training for library staff

It is hoped that all the suggestions above including those contained in the reviewed literature if implemented would help to contain the security problems in Benue academic libraries

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study; most responding libraries in Benue state believe that security is a problem. Thefts of books and journal mutilation have taken place in most libraries frequently. Connivance and absenteeism by library staff have contributed to insecurity in the library. Harassment of library staff by readers resulting in fear to attend to work at night was widely reported. Almost all the libraries except one had no electronic security monitoring system installed. Most academic libraries agreed having security policy in place but no proof of such was advanced. The researchers make the following recommendations for improvement in the covered libraries:-

a) As a matter of urgency, all academic libraries in Benue State should install electronic security systems to aid combat ills in the libraries.

ii) Additional staff are required to manage materials and money for effective administration of all library organization.

iii) A library security policy is very important because it is basic to all security problems. All academic libraries should therefore develop them.

iv) Library education programmes be mounted to enlighten the readers on the dangers of book mutilations, theft and other similar vices.

v) Additional training for staff on how to handle readers' harassment, connivance and absenteeism by staff.

vi) All Heads of Department, Deans, Directors, the Registrar and Head of Tertiary Institutions in Benue State most show a high level of commitment to security issues in their libraries.

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