

Assessments of Collection Security Management in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of Central University Library

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Abstract

Librarians and libraries across the world are faced with the issues of security of their collection. The issue of collection security in libraries in the developing countries is worsened by low funding for libraries. In Ghana, the issue of collection security management often poses a tremendous problem to many libraries particularly academic libraries due to the lack of properly documented collection security policy.

There is a compelling need for librarians to put in place measures that would effectively monitor crime, mutilation and abuses on library staff and collection, or else academic libraries will soon be empty. This study was conducted to determine the operationalization of collection security management procedures at the library of Central University

The university was conveniently selected for the study, with students' population totalling 8000 and library staff of 33 both professional and para-professional. A statistical table was used to determine the sample frame and size for the students' population resulting with a sample size of 370 for students with a confidence level of 95%. A structured questionnaire was administered to the participants. Twenty (20.8%) of the users surveyed admitted that stealing and mutilation were common phenomena among library users. Limited copies of library books, cumbersome borrowing procedure, and high cost of photocopying and frequent breakdown of copiers were some of the causes of library materials theft and mutilation.

The study revealed that Central University library suffered adversely from security issues and other anti-social menace and that the introduction of security policy, library surveillance and devices (CCTV) would drastically improve the situation. The study recommended further that theft mutilation of books and other security breaches can be checked by staff being vigilant and also carrying out "security patrols".

Keywords: Security management, academia, academic libraries

1.0 Background of the Study

Academic libraries have long been recognized as the ‘hearts’ of the institution to which they are attached. To fulfill their mission of supporting the educational objectives of their parent bodies, which include teaching, learning, research and cultural development, the libraries develop and maintain standard books, journals and audio-visual collections and services, (Ogunsola, 2006). The provision of up-to-date and effective library collections in academic libraries is considered as a significant function for supporting teaching, learning and research. They constitute the bedrock for services provided to the academic community. Hence, libraries are still valued by their collection size (Payne, 2005).

Libraries are institutions set up to cater for the educational, cultural, research, recreational and information needs of its users. Libraries have the main objectives of being entrusted with the selection, acquisition, organisation, storage and dissemination of information to their patrons (Matthew, 2004).

Jama’a, (1984) 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 utilize all the available resources that are relevant to their individual needs. Any academic library that aims to satisfy the information needs of academics and researchers must take great care with the development and management of its collection.

The collection is an important component of the library as it is the base upon which a library adds value and provides essential services to its users. Since time immemorial, libraries have been defined by their collections. For a long time, the usefulness of a library rested chiefly with the size and quality of its collection. Most of the works that libraries do are tied to their collections, (Choy, 2007). Protecting library collections will have a great impact on the library survival.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The preliminary investigations by the researcher, revealed that the Central University library like all academic libraries faces theft of collection, abuse such as mutilation, defacing of documents, verbal assault on staff, overdue and occasionally equipment failure.

The researcher also observed from interaction with a cross section of library staff that it appears there is a lack of proper collection policy and procedures formulated by academic libraries to support the security of the

library collection and the activities involved in the management of security issues in libraries of which Central University is not an exception.

Many academic libraries fail to recognize the vulnerability and security of their collections to loss. Collections can be threatened not just by theft and vandalism, but also by disasters (e.g., fire or flood) and damage from careless handling or poor environmental conditions. The issue of collection security is of growing concern to all types of libraries and librarians. Many researchers have indicated that, the threat to intellectual property through theft, mutilation and other related crimes has continued to pose a tremendous challenge to library collections worldwide. As a consequence, there is a vast literature on a range of problems concerning collection security in libraries, however, few literature exist on the aspect of collection security management in the academic and university libraries in particular.

The problems of high cost of collection, average rate of increase over the years and high cost of subscription to online data bases and electronic resources has continued to pose serious challenges to the libraries. Alemna (1998) indicated that, with escalating prices of information materials worldwide, it is not surprising that all kinds of libraries are facing serious problems in collection development and maintenance. In many libraries therefore, funding level cannot keep pace with the basic requirements for books, journals and equipment necessary for library operation due to declining budget and increase demands of users. Consequently, many libraries are finding it difficult to acquire both primary and secondary publications to meet the enormous demands of users, Ugah (2007). Many publications as further indicated by Ugah, (2007) have been priced out of reach of individual subscribers and many libraries, with only large libraries able to afford them. Because of this high cost, collections are the most important asset in the library and therefore securing them becomes important.

It is for these reasons, that the researcher conducted the study to look into the governance practice on collection security management in the Central University Library.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. Find out which materials are most vulnerable to security breaches.
2. Find out user's perceived security breaches and their effect on their academic work
3. Assess the effectiveness of security systems in academic library under study

4. Determine the extent of commitment of management to collection security issues
5. Determine the level of staff and user awareness and the extent of training received by staff and users with regard to security issues in the library.

1.4.1 Research Questions

The research questions that will guide the research are as follows:

1. Which materials are most vulnerable to security breaches?
2. What are the measures used to reduce and address security breaches in the library?
3. How effective is the security system in the academic library under study?
4. To what extent is management committed to security issues in the library?
5. What is the level of staff and user awareness and the extent of training received by staff and users with regard to security issues in the library?

1.5 Scope and limitation

The study is limited to only Central University library and as such findings are true to academic libraries in Ghana and other parts of the world. The study is limited to collection security issues in academic libraries, University libraries in particular. Other types of libraries therefore, do not form part of the scope of the study. The study also covered only Level 300 and 400 students since the researcher believed that they are familiar with the library security and procedures.

1.6 Significance of the Study

- This study would bring to the limelight the strength and deficiencies in the collection security management policy in academic libraries to serve as a guide for managers of libraries in maintaining their collection.
- The study is expected to close the widening gap in literature related to collection security management in the world in general and Ghana in particular.
- It is also envisaged that the study would help enhance teaching and research activities in the information field while recommendations are offered towards improving collection security management of Central University and academic libraries in general.

- It is to provide a useful framework of reference and serve as conceptual bridge or springboard for new strategies for collection security management in academic libraries.
- It will also provide a policy framework for policy makers.

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Research Design

The cross-sectional survey approach was employed in this study to assess collection security management at Central University library. The cross-sectional survey approach proves useful in its ability to provide a snapshot of collection security management in the academia library under study. The university was conveniently selected for the study, with students' population totalling 8000 and library staff of 33 both professional and para-professional. A statistical table was used to determine the sample frame and size for the students' population resulting with a sample size of 370 for students with a confidence level of 95%.

Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of respondents until the last respondent was reached based on Brink (1996) assertion that purposive sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher regarding subjects who are representative of the phenomenon or topic being studied, or who are especially knowledgeable about the question at issue. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of open and closed-ended questions outlined under four sections. Data collected through the use of the questionnaire was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 from which descriptive and inferential statistics were computed.

2.0 Discussion of the findings

This section presents a discussion of the findings of the study as identified in the objectives. The analysis of the questionnaires revealed major findings. The discussion was grouped under the following:

- i. Vulnerable materials to security breaches and effect.
- ii. Effectiveness of security systems in academic library
- iii. Management to collection security issues
- iv. Level of staff and user awareness and the training

Vulnerable materials to security breaches

The study revealed a number of issues relating to materials that were vulnerable to security breaches. Higher proportions (53.3%) of the students were of the view that reference books are more vulnerable than textbooks. 93.3% of the respondents affirmed also that there is no documented security policy in the library, and even if there is, it was ineffective.

The findings of Holt (2007) identified several of such security incidents, theft of physical materials; theft or alteration of data; and theft of money as major security crime in libraries.

According to Ajegbomogun (2004) library security is a strategically designed system to protect library collections such as books and non-books against unauthorized removals and involves safety of users and books against fire outbreak, insects, flood and protection of the premises against intruders.

In addition, Lorenzen (1996) asserted that many libraries acknowledging the threats of security are noted to have policies concerning collection security management which stress the importance of vigilance against theft or attack or inform staff of the steps to take to ensure their own safety and the safety of the resources.

Other studies focus on security breaches like purposive misshelving of items, especially reference books (Alao et al. 2007), disruptive behaviour as a result of drunkenness and drug addiction (Lorenzen, 1996; Arndt, 1997; Momodu, 2002; Ajegbomogun, 2004), natural and man-made disaster (Evans et al. 1999; Shuman, 1999; Aziagba and Edet, 2008) and demand outstripping supply, which may give rise to delinquent behaviour such as stealing, mutilating or using another user's borrowing tickets (Bello, 1998). All of which may subsequently remain a serious threat to the security of the library and its collection. The effect of this was highlighted by Alemna (1998) as, "with escalating prices of information materials worldwide, it is not surprising that all kinds of libraries are facing serious problems in collection development and maintenance". This shows that financial constraint has been a hindrance to library collection in Ghana and specifically Central University.

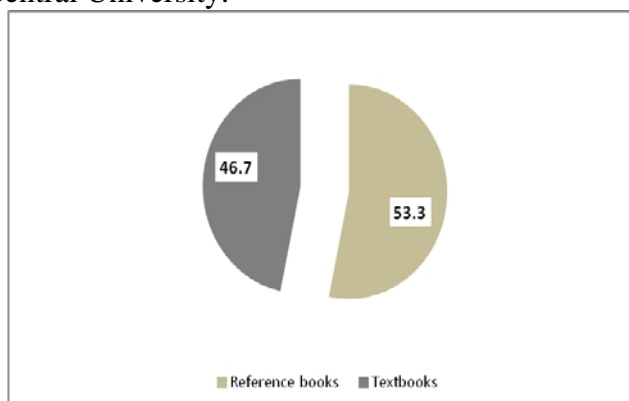


Figure 1: VULNERABLE MATERIALS TO SECURITY BREACHES AND EFFECT.

Effectiveness of security systems in academic library

The study revealed that close circuit television (CCTV) should be included in the security system, use of electronic sensors and electronic surveillance systems to monitor movement of users and books and finally, the need to adopt well trained and permanent security personnel in the library.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (2006) proposed a guideline for the security of rare books, manuscripts and special collections. The guidelines proposed the establishment of proper governance by hiring library security officers who plan and administer security programmes, prepare and spearhead written policies. The library is also advised to closely monitor the entrances and exits of special collection reading areas, making staff aware of collection security problems, providing training in security measures, monitoring users in the stacks, reading and reference areas, keeping adequate accession records, and aiding access through proper cataloguing records and finding aids. The importance of good and supportive governance with clear policies and procedures in order to maintain an acceptable level of collection security in libraries is therefore necessary.

In terms of the implementation of the security systems in academic library, the libraries identified close to completion status while only one library is at the partial implementation stage. The result of the findings show that, all the libraries of the four universities demonstrated close to completion level of implementation security for the acquisition and circulation processes. Therefore, Jordan (1999) proposed that to ensure continued access and longevity of collections a proper framework involving the establishment of a repair and binding unit, preservation and duplication unit (for microforms, digital materials and photo duplicating) should be considered.

To Boss (1984), librarians commonly respond to losses in a reactive, rather than a proactive manner. A common reaction to headlines about thefts else-where or evidence of local losses is to purchase an electronic theft detection system; the reaction to vandalism is to secure vulnerable doors and windows, and install burglar alarms and smoke detectors. Electronic theft detection in libraries has become a growth industry. Are the collections protected by such systems truly secure from theft, or do the librarians have a false sense of security? Libraries have recently begun to install burglar alarms and smoke/fire detectors, but is there any evidence that this has deterred theft and vandalism. While of value in controlling losses, theft detection systems can instill a false sense of security because they protect only the entrances at which they are placed.

Management to collection security issues

The study through the respondents found out that the library management was aware of the factors hindering security system, yet placed less effort in curbing the situation. That management is putting in only a little effort; more importantly, the respondents confirmed that that the library security was not a priority of management and that management do not bother about the security problems of the library. That is why training among staff has not been implemented in the library.

Traditionally, security has been a matter of devising safeguards in reaction to specific losses. That is to say, when a loss occurs a new safeguard is introduced to protect against recurrence of that type of loss in the future. Libraries cannot afford the luxury of continuing such an approach; security must be viewed in the broadest possible sense and librarians should engage in anticipatory planning (Boss, 1984).

To curb the situation, Boss, (1984) suggested that the library administrators (management) should define the collection security needs broadly, encompassing in the review the security of materials from theft, fire, flood, and vandalism. Included in the definition should be protection of materials against removal from the inventory by modifying machine-readable bibliographic records. This is the area which has been most widely ignored. Librarians have apparently assumed that their computers function in benign environments. The major concerns appear to have been accidental losses of records from errors, omissions and natural disasters. The experience of the business community suggests that security planning should also encompass the protection of computer records against deliberate alteration.

Level of staff and user awareness and the training

Most of the respondents (80%) stated that there has not been any form of training arrangements for staff regarding security issues of the Methodist University library. The staff however indicated that the frequency of the training per academic year should be encouraged and continuous. More so, users of the study (students) stressed that they were aware of the security procedures and became aware through orientation and the notice boards. Library bulletin and the lecture halls were also identified as means of knowing about security issues.

Lowry and Goetsch (2001) agreed with the findings in the study that there is a need of creating shared culture of mutual responsibility for security and safety of library collections. This involves making clear to users and staff about the safety and security policies and guidelines in libraries, especially those regarding food consumption in the library, theft, mutilation, and disruptive behaviour. They also emphasized on policies regarding training of staff to create an

awareness culture. The people aspect of library security issues, include staff's nonchalant attitudes to users' needs and ignorance about security issues (Ives, 1996).

There are instances which indicate that library staff entrusted to protect the integrity, accessibility and confidentiality of library materials were often the source of collection security problems (Ajegbomogun, 2004). These studies indicate that the people aspect and security culture are important factors when assessing collection security in libraries is most critical.

Contrarily to the findings of the study, it has been found that some people who deface books may not be aware of the adverse effect of their actions, and raising readers' awareness of the consequences, in terms of the cost and difficulty in replacing items, can also sometimes be effective in reducing the incidence of damage (Ewing, 1994). He therefore noted that equipment should be positioned in such a way that it is in view of staff to deter thieves and vandals. Here again the value of good library layout can be understood. Where possible, items should be secured, and in the case of expensive machines such as computers, electronic alarms can be fitted.

Equipment should be kept in good working order to deter "tactical vandalism" . Staff rooms and storage rooms containing valuable household items should be kept locked when not in use and, as a final precaution against theft, parts of equipment, especially IT, should be indelibly marked for identification purposes.

On joining the library, borrowers should provide proper means of identification and preferably more than one source. This is to ensure that they are who they claim to be, and that they are not giving a false address in order to steal books. In addition, if a librarian feels suspicious of a person on library premises, the patron should be able to produce a library card proving that they are legitimate users.

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