Perceptions and attitude of students in relation to vandalism in a University Library

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Reports a study carried out at the University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria in November, 2009 to find out students’ perceptions and attitudes to vandalism in the library. To elicit the necessary information, a questionnaire was distributed to 500 randomly selected students of the University spread across the nine colleges out of which 386 responded. Analysis of their responses showed that vandalism of library materials in the form of theft, mutilation and hiding of books and journals, is largely regarded as a form of academic self-survival strategy that is hardly frowned at by majority of the respondents. Factors that predispose to vandalism include limited library collections; restrictions in the use of some materials; number and duration of loans; insufficient number of copies of recommended textbooks; unaffordable cost of personal textbooks; high cost of photocopying as well as peer-influence. Recommendations are made for liberalization of loans, intensification of user education, provision of multiple copies of standard textbooks, occasional mounting of conscience exhibitions’ as well as tighter security measures.

Introduction

Vandalism of library materials has been an age-long problem of libraries. This takes the form of ripping off pages of books and documents, deliberate defacement of materials and sabotage of library equipments and outright theft of books and other library materials and equipment. Unlike professional thieves who steal for economic reasons, some library patrons vandalize library materials for selfish motives. Others rip off pages of books because they cannot afford the cost of the book or they cannot find a particular book anywhere else. In the Nigerian context, this problem has been further worsened by the high cost of books and economic meltdown in the country, which has made personal acquisition of essential books unaffordable to most students, and even staff of tertiary institutions. Coupled with this fact is low funding of libraries in Nigeria.

A common reaction to theft or evidence of local losses or vandalism is to purchase electronic theft detection systems and to secure vulnerable doors and windows and install burglar alarms. Despite this, it is generally known that any security system can be compromised and this is why libraries continue to record theft, mutilation and other acts of vandalism. This study, therefore sought to find out students’ perception, and attitude to vandalism in the library of the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria.

Review of the literature

Vandalism of library materials is the act of deliberate destruction of books, journals, monographs, equipment, etc. The issue has been well flagged in the professional literature as it is a problem that affects all types of libraries. However, very little has been done on the perception of students to vandalism in libraries and their attitudes. Hart¹ observed that the explanations for vandalism in libraries and, in particular the mutilation of materials are diverse in nature. A review of the literature on theft and mutilation of library materials in Nigeria yielded many studies which include studies by Huntsbery², Alokun³, Maigari⁴ and Oche⁵. All these studies reflected the problems from the perspectives of various library systems. Akinfolarin⁶ identified seven reasons for book theft in developing countries, these are indigence of students, drastic reduction in book votes, poor security systems in libraries, the desire by the culprit to want to build his own library, the belief that public property belongs to nobody, wanting to prevent others from using particular books, and absent mindedness, or forgetfulness on the part of the reader.
Onatola expressed that human beings as agents of destruction in libraries have been the most difficult to control. He recommended that library security personnel as well as reader’s services staff and indeed all library staff should be exposed to short training courses in library security at least once in every four years. Abareh reported the results of a study designed to gather information on how best to reduce the threat of theft, loss and mutilation in a university library in Nigeria. He concluded with a number of useful suggestions on more effective library security measures. Bezuidenhout outlined suggestions on how to combat vandalism. These include teaching young people on how to use books; notes and requests for ‘careful handling’ placed inside books, keeping popular illustrated books behind the counter but visible, banning scissors, installing a mirror and exhibiting damaged materials.

Objectives of the study
- To find out the students’ perception of vandalism of library materials,
- To know about the students’ attitude to vandalism of library materials, and
- To examine factors responsible for vandalism of library materials.

Methodology
As a part of survey method used for this study, a questionnaire was designed to obtain the students perceptions and attitudes to vandalism in the library. The students’ population for the university is 8,228. The university library porters were instructed to distribute the questionnaires to every twentieth student entering the library during November 2009. In all 500 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 386 were returned, representing 77.2% responses.

The questionnaire listed 25 statements that approximate different perceptions of, and attitudes to library vandalism. Using Likert Scale of rating, students were asked to respond to each of the 25 questions showing their level of agreement/disagreement, i.e., Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Findings and discussion
The data collected showed that, out of the 386 respondents, 247 (63.73%) were male while 139 (36.27%) were female. The gender difference tends to suggest that male students are more in number. The distribution according to colleges are as shown in Table 1.

The colleges of engineering and veterinary medicine have low respondents (5.44% and 3.62% respectively) because they are newly created colleges and the population of the two colleges are very low compared to other colleges on campus.

Analysis of the data shows that the majority of the respondents are 300 level students in the university as shown in Table 2. This implies that the respondents have been in the system for at least three years and would have been familiar with the use of the library facilities.

Data analysis in Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents, representing 188 (48.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that vandalism is inevitable in libraries, while only 52 respondents representing 13.4% strongly disagreed with this. This indicated that the perception of students’ on vandalism of library materials is negative and this calls for urgent need to orient the students in this matter. Among reasons on inevitability of vandalism in the library include limited library collections, insufficient number of copies of recommended textbooks, exorbitant cost of textbooks, high cost of photocopying and less number of books allowed to be borrowed and duration of loans respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of college</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of Natural Science</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Plant Science</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>15.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Animal Science</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Environmental Science</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Agric. Managt, Rural and Consumer Studies</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>25.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Engineering</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Veterinary Medicine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4, shows that the majority of the respondents perceived library materials as being public property which also belongs to them and therefore can be removed and used for their private use. Hence vandalism of library materials was not seen as real crime. Rather, the respondents saw it as taking what belongs to them.

The attitude of the students to vandalism also reveals selfishness as part of the students. They felt that since they are paying for library facilities they have the right to use the resources maximally and in an attempt to exercise their right they usually resort to mutilation, defacing and the sort, while some hide the materials so that others would not have access to them. This corroborated Mansfield’s view that students paying increased fees may feel they have the right to access information by any means because they were paying for it. However, 116 respondents (30%) felt it is foolish not to participate since others are doing it, while the majority, 270 representing 70% of the respondents agreed that vandalism could be avoided if users can be considerate and patient. This also emphasized the fact that frequent user education programmes needed to be organized to change negative perception of the students. In addition to this, efforts should be made to increase funding for the library so that the library will be able to satisfy a considerable number of users which might eventually reduce or minimize vandalism.

**Recommendations**

In view of the effect of vandalism in the library it is recommended that:

(i) the library should mount an intensive user education programme with emphasis on punitive measures against vandalism;

(ii) the library should be more liberal in its resent loan policy which restricts students loan of books to two weeks;

(iii) the library should make provisions for multiple copies of standard textbooks;

(iv) tighter stock security measures should be put in place, and

(v) occasional mounting of conscience exhibition should be done in the library.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of this study revealed that many students of the University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria did not see anything wrong in vandalizing library materials. It is largely regarded as an academic self-survival strategy that is hardly frowned at. Factors that make students to want to vandalize library materials include limited library collection, restrictions in the use of some materials, inadequate numbers of books to be borrowed, short duration of loans, high costs of books, and unaffordable cost of photocopying of materials.
References


