An Introspection on the Relationship between Library Policies and Users' Crime Orientate Activities in University of Buea Library

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ABSTRACT

Crime committed within the library, the misuse of library resources, facilities and equipment is an age-old tradition in library and information science profession. This article presents a panoramic view of policies with which University of Buea Library is run or managed and the extent to which such library policies assist in the strategic control of crime wave in the said library. With the use of descriptive survey research design and purposive sampling technique; questionnaire which was the sole instrument for data collection for the research was administered to 15 librarians in University of Buea Library. When subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, the collected data revealed that mutilation, theft, hiding of books and answering of phone calls were among principal crimes disrupting proper librarianship in University of Buea Library. Consequently, it was recommended that rules and regulations prohibiting the acts of making/answering of mobile telephone calls, mutilation, theft and hiding of library books should be strictly implemented.

KEYWORDS: library policy, library management, library crime

INTRODUCTION

In most organizations such as schools, hospitals, churches, mosques and generally everywhere else in the Cameroonian society, it has gradually become almost impossible for people to live without committing crime. Despite some stringent measures taken by the government of this country, to curb the ever increasing crime rate in our neighbourhoods and society at large peace, tranquility, serenity and orderliness have been reduced to mere imaginations and therefore too difficult to come by. As a matter of fact, good brotherliness, fair treatment of people, goods and services are almost inexistent. In the library as is the case, the incidence of crime is not different from the aforementioned that happen elsewhere in the society. It is regrettable that crime wave in most Cameroonians libraries is seemingly growing out of proportion.

According to Akpan (2017) crimes committed in Nigerian libraries are steadily on the rise. The incessant increase in the rate at which crime is committed in libraries across the breadth of African libraries has provoked library scholars to embark on an unending chain of research with the singular objective of providing solution for a complete eradication of this mishap in our libraries. Unfortunately, this lone objective has never been achieved. This is because whenever recommendations are made towards the eradication of crime in the library, library users on their part take no time to develop new strategies to combat those recommendations. However, library management has also learnt never to relent but to constantly double effort in deriving its own new methodologies and strategies to counteract criminally established procedures and manipulations. It is for this reason that this study was commissioned to investigate the counteractive policies put in place by management in University of Buea Library to combat the seemingly increasing library crime wave recorded therein.

THE PROBLEM

Evidently, crime is actually increasing at a spectacular and frightening rate in all sectors of society. However, the unfortunate infiltration of this ugly scene in the library must not be allowed to continue because its presence seriously obstructs proper organization and routine management in librarianship. At this alarming rate which crime is committed in the library, it should be bored in mind that some library resources and facilities are expensive, fragile and delicate and must obviously be protected from vandalism by the library profession and professionals. To this position, effective library management policies among which include: membership and loan policies are previewed, formulated, revisited or reviewed all in an attempt to save acquired books and other resources for this current generation and the generation yet unborn. This of course is of absolute necessity given that a well-established library can be well described as an immortal store house of knowledge since it serves not just one generation but endless generations.

It is an undeniable assumption that the managerial policies adopted or adapted by library administration in every academic library, go a long way in determining the rate at which crime wave can be controlled in that particular library. This situation is seemingly general throughout academic libraries the world over. However, the position adopted by university libraries in Cameroon is actually not known. The management policies that these academic libraries adopt invariably determine the effectiveness and upholding of the principal objectives of university libraries which are teaching, learning and research. If there is crime committed in the library by users, it is clear that such library will not serve its targeted purpose. That is why every library does at least some remarkable effort in the control of crime within its setup. However, with University of Buea Library as the focal point, much is not documented in this direction. Therefore, it becomes an obligation for this research endeavour to investigate the extent to which various library management policies influence crime control in University of Buea Library.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Nature and types of library crimes
This whole issue of crime waving into the library is something not just of today's librarianship but of the past as well. As far back as late 19th century, Jama'a (1984) opined that in the midst of other exigencies, university libraries particularly undertake a focal point where patrons who emerge from all sorts of backgrounds converge for knowledge acquisition and information utilization. Owing to the nature of its collection, university libraries attract patrons of different ages, from an assortment of levels and statuses. Principally, university libraries pull its patrons from several social, political, educational, cultural as well as economic backgrounds. The argument of Jama'a (1984) is that when people from a wide spectrum having great differences than similarities converge in the university library for the consultation of available resources of information, there is bound to be crimes committed here and there in the course of this. Thus Jama'a (1984) declared that "as a result of this diverse use of the materials, these libraries stand to be vulnerable to all forms of crime and security risks from not only the users, but the library staff as well."

According to Ogbonyomi (2011) it is disheartening to know that due to outrageous crimes constantly committed in academic libraries, patrons unfortunately do not succeed to achieve their intended goals and objectives which they have in mind before visiting the library. In fact, because of this, it is evident that while some library users have lost hope in visiting the library in order to consult information resources, others are rather scared that they will be implicated if they visit the library since the library now has a record of several crimes among which are vandalism, mutilation, defacement, theft and arson just to name but these. Ogbonyomi (2011) recorded that the commodities found at the central stage of the libraries (in other words information resources) have a high degree of vulnerability to theft in as much as they are of great value. In this light, these commodities are highly chased by crime-committing users. These users do not go after them for consultation and use, but for dubious purposes. Unfortunately, therefore, academic libraries are rather turning their users to criminal who indulge in criminal activities instead of leading them towards the satisfaction of their information needs. In his own words, Ogbonyomi (2011) explained that:

Theft of and malicious damage against books are difficult to combat because the risk of getting caught is very low, while the likelihood of success is high. Criminal activities in academic libraries are not limited to library information materials alone but theft of properties such as handbags, purses, keys and notebooks are equally common. These are problems or crimes regularly encountered by the materials in libraries. The context, scope, type as well as degree of crime and its perpetration differ tremendously as someone moves from one library to another.

Akinfolarin (1992) observed that one of the serious issues that have bothered librarians from the earliest times to the present is how to ensure the security of library materials, especially against theft and mutilation. However, Bello (1998) asserted that not all thefts are committed by patrons. Some library staff actually thieve materials from the library under the pretention of they are just 'taking' such materials and not thieving them. But it is common sense that any library materials 'taken' without a due process of checking them out on loan basis tantamount to thievery. This kind of theft, according to Lorenzen (1996), is one of the hardest to prevent, since library employees know how to defeat the security system. In as much as it is vital to ensure the security of library resources, it is equally vital to ensure that this security is performed as seamlessly as possible, without interfering with the library's objective of providing a user-friendly environment (McComb, 2004). Consequently, the more the control, safeguard and security levels are, the less it resembles a library that is traditionally expected to serve its users in a rather friendly and tension–free environment (Ogbonyomi, 2011). Ogbonyomi (2011) rightly recorded that there exist alterations among crimes committed by library users especially in a university setting or in libraries attached to higher education. Alterations are observed in context, scope, nature as well as degree of their perpetration. It is incumbent on libraries to ascertain effective management policies that can help in savaging the situation caused by library crime. To this effect, a couple of authors have brainstormed in such direction and have documented quite some laudable efforts.

Library management policies geared towards the control of library crimes
A keen look at what a couple of libraries do, reveal that different libraries have put in place different policies that enable them to control crime within their establishments. Yarning efforts are oriented towards the control of crime in Cameroonian academic libraries at all cost. However, out of Cameroon and elsewhere in the world, a series of stringent library management policies are adopted to combat library crime. According to Olanlokun and Salisu (1985) policies on charging and discharging which are aspects that culminate into lending and borrowing of library materials are among the best tools that libraries can use to combat library crime wave. Commenting further on this, Olanlokun and Salisu (1985) explained how important information on the state at which library materials are found can be quickly obtained from the loan service. Such information is beneficial to the proper functioning and adequate management of library resources. Such information aids in tracking down lost materials and weeding of unwanted ones from the library shelves. In their opinion, they stated that a good charging system should be able to identify missing books and offer suggestions on how they could be possibly replaced if a need arises.

Ogbonyomi (2011) is of the opinion that primarily all charging systems are policies put in place by library management to detect library materials that may undergo mismanagement in the hands of users, and also for the type and content of such mismanagement to be dictated as well. While some information services have deeply involved the use of the new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the management of their libraries including the charging and discharging of their resources, other libraries haves adopted various types of charging system of high efficiency, one of which is Brown Charging System (Venkataramana, 2010). One way of fighting illicit practices in academic libraries is the installation of ICT equipment for surveillance. One of which is a video camera. This could be done at both entry and exit points. There are information services in which management implements the adoption of turnstiles and guards all geared toward a retardation in the way patrons take their leave from the services. When they quit these services at a slow pace, they are given the opportunity to be thoroughly checked. All these explain why most if not all information services in the Western World are well equipped with ICT security checks at departure points (Nancy, 1976). Similarly, Revill (1979) observed that: avoiding duplication of keys, use of keys by few staff members, restriction of entry with briefcases or bags, label on drawers, use of uniformed porters, efficient and cheap photocopying services, liberal loan services and the use of electronic devices will help reduce criminal activities in the library.

Ogbonyomi (2011) stated that the "purpose of conducting annual stocktaking in libraries is to enable the library management know the number and rate of their loss of books in the libraries, stocktaking therefore, enables library management to remove the catalogue cards for those books that are missing and also arrange for their replacements". Commenting on stocktaking in libraries as a management policy to combat library crime, Neal (1995) observed that:

> "Many libraries hold an annual check of their book stock and this enables catalogue cards for any books that are missing to be withdrawn, and so ensuring the accuracy of the catalogue as a guide to the stock. Also, any missing book replaced, or alternative titles purchased, any marked increase in the annual rate of loss is noted and thought given to possible remedies.

Unfortunately, it was discovered that the academic library which Neal (1995) studied did not carry out this important exercise."

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
This study was designed:
1. To establish an inventory of common crimes committed in University of Buea Library.
2. To find out how library membership policy influences strategic crime control in University of Buea Library.

3. To determine the level at which user borrowing policy influences strategic crime control in University of Buea Library.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Three research questions were put forward to address the objectives of this study. They were formulated as follows:
1. What are the common crimes committed in University of Buea Library by users?
2. To what extent does library membership policy influence strategic crime control in University of Buea Library?
3. What is the extent to which user borrowing policy influence strategic crime control in University of Buea Library?

AIM OF THE STUDY
This research work is of significance to library users, school administrators, librarians, information practitioners and general library management. The research is aimed at creating awareness on the need for library users to be aware of habits they should shun when making use of materials in any library where they find themselves. The findings of this research are, therefore, considered as a springboard, which has the tendency to spur the management of University of Buea Library to take active interest in formulating and maintaining adequate library management policies that can strategically control crime wave in the said library.

METHODOLOGY
Survey research design which deals with the collection of data to accurately and objectively describe existing phenomena was adopted. The population of this research comprised all staff members of University of Buea Library. However, the sole instrument for data collection which was a structured questionnaire entitled "Library Management Policies and Strategic Control of Crime Wave Questionnaire (LMPSCCW)" was distributed to 15 librarians who formed the sample size of the research. The administration of LMPSCCW was done by means of purposive sampling technique.

Likert scheme of reacting to questionnaire items was used ranging from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) to strongly disagree (SD); and was given numerical values namely 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The respondents filled the correct boxes that solicited suitable responses to various questionnaire items. A total of 15 valid questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents giving a retrieval percentage of 100.

Percentage and frequency were deeply used in the procedure for data analysis. The data collected for this research was analyzed using these two descriptive statistical techniques and based on aggregate scores which were between 0-49 and 50-100, research questions were answered either in affirmation or negation respectively.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Research question 1
What are the common crimes committed in University of Buea Library by users?

Table 1: Responses for common crimes committed in University of Buea Library by users

	Items	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Ranking
1	Theft	4 (16)	6 (18)	3 (6)	2 (2)	2.8	2nd
2	Mutilation	8 (32)	4 (12)	3 (6)	0 (0)	3.3	1st
3	Defecation	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	15 (15)	1.0	5th
4	Hiding of books	5 (20)	3 (9)	5 (10)	2 (2)	2.7	3rd
5	Answering of phone calls	7 (28)	2 (6)	0 (0)	6 (6)	2.6	4th

Source: field survey 2020

Based on the analysis in Table 1, mutilation, theft, hiding of books and answering of phone calls which recorded mean values of 3.3, 2.8, 2.7 and 2.6 respectively were found to be within the list of crimes common among users of University of Buea Library. On the other hand, defecation was rejected by respondents to be a crime committed by students and lecturers of University of Buea who are the principal users of the said library. In an order of magnitude, mutilation and theft were the first and second crimes common with users of University of Buea Library. Meanwhile hiding of books and answering of phone calls occupied the third and fourth positions respectively.

This is a clear indication that a series of crimes are prominent and recurrent when users deploy resources and services of University of Buea Library. Mutilation and theft are old crimes associated with library use. Lazy students who cannot sit down in the library within a short period of time and maximize the use of an assortment of resources always have the tendency to mutilate, steal and hide materials. Due to the advent of modern technology, making and answering of mobile telephone calls is a new deviant behaviour recently identified in academic libraries. This finding is in line with Ogbonyomi (2011) who acknowledged that theft and malicious damage of booksare among an array of crimes commonly committed by library patrons.

In the midst of all these crimes committed in the library, it was therefore incumbent on these researchers to further investigate whether some acclaimed policies of the library could go any length in resolving the issues at stake. For the most part, library membership policy and user borrowing policy were chosen and investigated.

Research question 2
To what extent does library membership policy influence strategic crime control in University of Buea Library?

Table 2: Responses for library membership policy and strategy crime control in University of Buea Library

	Library membership policy	Strategic crime control							
		SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
6	Registered library users hardly commit crimes in UB Library	6	40.0	4	26.7	4	26.7	1	6.6
7	Library membership slows down crime wave in UB Library	7	46.7	3	20.0	3	20.0	2	13.3
8	UB Library users who are not registered members are more pruned to crimes than registered users	6	40.0	6	40.0	3	20.0	0	0.0
9	Users of UB Library avoid crimes especially when they are registered users	9	60.0	2	13.3	4	26.7	0	0.0
10	Crimes committed in UB Library are associated with laissez-faire attitude of non-registered users	2	13.3	10	66.7	3	20.0	0	0.0
	Total	**30**	**40.0**	**25**	**33.3**	**17**	**22.7**	**3**	**4.0**

Source: field survey, 2020

Based on the analysis in Table 2, total agreements (40% + 33.3%) and total disagreements (22.7% + 4%) to questionnaire items on library membership policy and strategic crime control were 73.3% and 26.7% respectively. Consequently, this revealed that library membership policy significantly influenced strategic crime control in University of Buea Library. University of Buea Library Staff ascertained that students who were duly registered and could therefore be described as registered users or registered members of University of Buea Library did not associate with crime at library. On the other hand, it was grossly revealed that various crimes committed in University of Buea Library were the handworks of unregistered library users.

This revelation is an eye-opener to University of Buea Library management which sometimes endorses students' use of library materials without any proper prior registration formality. Library membership policy is among salient measures that can put an end to students' destruction of academic library property. As a measure to curb the rate at which academic library users commit crime in academic libraries, library membership stands a chance to reduce library crime wave and clampdown library criminals. When library users are duly registered and officially given membership cards/statues they will be conscious that for every crime they commit, they will be easily identified and definite measures can be taken to track them down. As such they will not associate themselves with crime at library. This position is however, contrary to Olanlokun and Salisu (1985) who did not situate library membership as a relevant measure towards strategic control of library crime.

Research question 3
What is the extent to which user borrowing policy influence strategic crime control in University of Buea Library?

Table 3: Responses for user borrowing policy and strategic crime control in University of Buea Library

	User borrowing policy	Control of crime							
		SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
11	Borrowing of library resources is a means of controlling library crime	4	26.7	6	40.0	3	20	2	13.3
12	UB Library users who borrows resources seldom commit crimes in the library	11	73.3	2	13.3	0	0.0	2	13.3
13	UB Library users prefer to borrow materials rather than vandalizing them	6	40.0	7	46.7	2	13.3	0	0.0
14	Conditions for which books are borrowed in UB Library are users-friendly	6	40.0	6	40.0	3	20	0	0.0
15	Functional borrowing of items in UB Library renders library crime dysfunctional	8	53.3	4	26.7	0	0.0	3	20
	Total	**35**	**46.7**	**25**	**33.3**	**8**	**10.7**	**7**	**9.3**

Source: field survey 2020

Based on the analysis in Table 3, total agreements (46.7% + 33.3%) and total disagreements (10.7% + 9.3%) to questionnaire items on user borrowing policy and strategic crime control were 80% and 20% respectively. Consequently, this revealed that user borrowing policy significantly influenced strategic crime control in University of Buea Library. Staff of University of Buea Library revealed that borrowing of items by students was quite simple, easy and functional thus this made students to temporally own library materials. In this light, user borrowing policy was considered as a strong prevention to crime committed in the library.

Among several operations that libraries are charged with their implementations and exigencies is the act of letting users momentarily own and use certain library materials of their choice. This in other words is referred to as loan which comes about through a borrowing policy developed and sustained by the library in question. University of Buea Library has put forward a swift and dynamic borrowing policy in place which caters for the information need of users and this has gone a long way to put a restriction on users' ever–growing tendency to commit crime. This finding is in line with Olanlokun and Salisu (1985) who demonstrated that policies on charging and discharging which are aspects that culminate into lending and borrowing of library materials are among the best tools that libraries can use to combat library crime wave. Even though a systematic and dynamic user borrowing policy is highly solicited for library users, it is worth noting that borrowing of resources without a strict measure or mechanism put in place for their recovery can put libraries in a terrible mess of losing almost every vital resource they have struggled to acquire.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Crime committed within the library, the misuse of library resources, facilities and equipment is an age-old tradition in library and information science profession. This ugly scene which has led to a rather wrecking of the awesome book lending and readership practices which are among the core values that a library fosters, is unfortunately on the rise. Concomitantly, library management has the sole responsibility of coming up with stringent measures that can put this awkward practice on a permanent hold. To this end, this paper recommends that salient management policies should be reinforced so that library crime wave can be strategically controlled in University of Buea Library. Specifically, therefore, this research recommends the following:

1. Students' library membership policy should be revised by the management of University of Buea Library in order to facilitate the procedure and make things easy for many more users to be given membership cards/statues. This will culminate in a strategic control of crime and allow students to have a peaceful time at library.

2. University of Buea Library should modify its lending or borrowing formula so that loan can be given to users on a more flexible and dynamic conditions for this will ensure an efficient control of crime within the library premises.

3. Rules and regulations prohibiting the acts of making/answering of mobile telephone calls, mutilation, theft and hiding of library books should be strictly implemented. Such policy statements should be written as notices/bills and posted on library notice boards and other notice boards on campus. Such rules and regulations should have accompanying penalties clearly spelt out to defaulters.

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