

# Book Theft as a Correlate of Information Resource Preservation in University Libraries in Edo State

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## Abstract

*The preservation of information resources is a major responsibility of university libraries because these resources support teaching, learning, and research activities. However, book theft has become a persistent challenge confronting many academic libraries, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. This study examined book theft as a correlate of information resource preservation in university libraries in Edo State, Nigeria. The study discussed the causes of book theft, methods used by offenders, effects of book theft on library services, and strategies for improving preservation of information resources. The study adopted a descriptive survey approach and relied on relevant literature and empirical studies on library security and preservation practices. Findings revealed that inadequate security systems, insufficient copies of information materials, poor funding, high cost of textbooks, and inadequate user orientation contribute significantly to book theft in university libraries. The study further revealed that book theft negatively affects information resource preservation through depletion of collections, increased replacement costs, reduced accessibility of materials, and poor library service delivery. The paper recommended adequate funding, installation of modern security technologies, employment of professional librarians, regular stock evaluation, and intensified user education programmes as strategies for reducing book theft and enhancing preservation of information resources in university libraries.*

**Keywords:** Book theft, information resource preservation, university libraries, library security, Edo State.

## Introduction

University libraries play a critical role in supporting teaching, learning, research, and innovation in higher education institutions. They serve as repositories of knowledge by acquiring, organizing, preserving, and disseminating information resources in both print and electronic formats to meet the academic and research needs of users. Information resources such as textbooks, journals, theses, dissertations, reference materials, newspapers, audiovisual resources, and electronic databases are essential assets that contribute significantly to intellectual development and academic excellence (Aina & Mabawonku, 2021). Consequently, the preservation and protection of these resources remain a major responsibility of university libraries.

Information resource preservation involves all policies, strategies, and activities designed to ensure the longevity, accessibility, and usability of library collections. Preservation practices include protection against deterioration, environmental hazards, mutilation, vandalism, technological obsolescence, and theft. In modern academic libraries, preservation has become increasingly important because information resources are expensive to acquire and, in many cases, difficult to replace. Effective preservation therefore guarantees continuous access to information resources for present and future users (Nwosu & Chukwu, 2022).

One of the major threats to information resource preservation in university libraries is book theft. Book theft refers to the unauthorized removal or illegal possession of books and other library materials without proper approval or circulation procedures. It is one of the most persistent security challenges confronting academic libraries globally and has continued to increase in many developing countries, including Nigeria (Olatokun & Salaam, 2020). In many cases, users engage in theft for personal study, academic advantage, commercial gain, or out of frustration arising from inadequate access to required materials. Other related acts include mutilation of books through tearing of pages, underlining, highlighting, and concealment of materials to deny access to other users.

The increasing incidence of book theft has become a major concern to librarians, university administrators, and other stakeholders because it undermines effective library service delivery. Theft and mutilation reduce the availability and accessibility of information resources, create gaps within library collections, and increase the financial burden associated with replacement and preservation of materials. In many Nigerian university libraries, the problem is compounded by inadequate funding, weak security infrastructure, overcrowded reading environments, poor user orientation, and insufficient copies of highly demanded textbooks (Adeyemi & Yusuf, 2022). These challenges negatively affect the ability of libraries to preserve and sustain their collections effectively.

In Edo State, university libraries continue to experience cases of theft, mutilation, and unauthorized removal of information resources despite efforts aimed at improving preservation and security practices. Reports of missing books, damaged materials, and poor accessibility of resources have continued to threaten the effectiveness of library services in several academic institutions within the state. Since university libraries are expected to provide unrestricted access to information resources for academic advancement, persistent book theft poses serious challenges

to the realization of these objectives. It is against this background that this study examines book theft as a correlate of information resource preservation in university libraries in Edo State.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Book Theft

Book theft refers to the unlawful removal, concealment, or illegal possession of books and other library materials without authorization. It involves deliberate acts aimed at depriving the library and other users access to information resources. According to Okoro and Dike (2021), book theft in academic libraries includes unauthorized borrowing, concealment of books in bags or clothing, smuggling of materials out of the library, and manipulation of circulation records. In some cases, offenders collaborate with dishonest library staff to remove library materials illegally.

Book theft manifests in different forms within university libraries. These include hiding books on shelves, throwing books through windows, removing ownership marks or security tags, and mutilating materials to conceal evidence of theft. Such acts constitute serious security breaches that threaten the preservation and accessibility of information resources in libraries (Ogunmodede & Ebijuwa, 2021).

### Information Resource Preservation

Information resource preservation refers to all measures and activities undertaken to protect library materials from deterioration, theft, mutilation, obsolescence, and environmental hazards in order to ensure their long-term accessibility and usability. Preservation practices encompass conservation, digitization, proper storage, environmental control, disaster preparedness, and implementation of effective security systems (Ezeani & Nwabueze, 2020).

Preservation is essential because library resources are vulnerable to damage resulting from physical handling, climatic conditions, biological agents, technological changes, theft, and vandalism. Effective preservation practices therefore help maintain the quality, usability, and sustainability of information resources for present and future generations of library users (Igbinovia & Edomwonyi, 2023).

### Causes of Book Theft in University Libraries

Several factors contribute to the increasing incidence of book theft in university libraries. One major cause is the inadequate availability of highly demanded information materials. When the number of users exceeds the available copies of books and other resources, some users resort to theft in order to secure materials for personal use (Adeyemi & Yusuf, 2022).

Poor security infrastructure is another major factor responsible for book theft in academic libraries. Many university libraries lack modern security technologies such as Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) systems, electronic surveillance devices, and automated circulation systems. Weak monitoring systems and inadequate security personnel often create opportunities for offenders to steal materials without detection (Olatokun & Salaam, 2020).

Economic hardship and the high cost of textbooks have also been identified as major contributors to book theft. Due to rising inflation and economic challenges, many students are unable to afford personal copies of academic materials and therefore resort to stealing books from the library (Okoro & Dike, 2021). Poor user orientation and lack of awareness regarding library rules and ethical use of information resources further encourage delinquent behaviour among users.

Overcrowding in libraries, especially during examination periods, increases the likelihood of theft because effective supervision becomes difficult. In addition, poor reading culture, lack of moral discipline, peer influence, and inadequate punishment for offenders contribute significantly to persistent book theft in university libraries (Afolayan & Olatunji, 2023).

### **Relationship Between Book Theft and Information Resource Preservation**

Book theft has a significant negative relationship with information resource preservation in university libraries. When books and other information materials are stolen, library collections become depleted, thereby reducing the availability and accessibility of resources to users. Missing materials create information gaps that negatively affect teaching, learning, and research activities within the university environment (Ezeani & Nwabueze, 2020).

Frequent cases of theft also increase the financial burden of preservation because libraries are forced to spend additional funds replacing lost or damaged materials. In situations where stolen resources are scarce, out of print, or expensive, replacement becomes difficult, thereby undermining preservation objectives (Nwosu & Chukwu, 2022).

Book theft equally contributes to mutilation and improper handling of resources. Offenders often damage books while attempting to remove security labels, conceal materials, or tear relevant pages from books. Such acts reduce the physical lifespan of materials and increase conservation and repair costs (Ogunmodede & Ebijuwa, 2021).

Furthermore, theft discourages effective utilization of library resources because users become frustrated when required materials are unavailable. Persistent theft and mutilation also tarnish the image of the library and reduce users' confidence in the ability of the library to provide adequate information services. Therefore, effective preservation of information resources cannot be achieved in an environment characterized by persistent theft and vandalism.

### **Strategies for Reducing Book Theft and Enhancing Preservation**

To enhance information resource preservation, university libraries should adopt comprehensive preservation and security measures. One major strategy is the installation of modern security technologies such as CCTV cameras, RFID systems, electronic security gates, and alarm systems to monitor users and detect unauthorized removal of library materials (Olatokun & Salaam, 2020). Libraries should also intensify user education and orientation programmes. Users need to be adequately informed about library regulations, ethical handling of information resources, and the consequences of theft and vandalism. Awareness campaigns, seminars, and orientation programmes can help promote responsible use of library collections (Igbinovia & Edomwonyi, 2023).

Adequate funding is equally necessary for effective preservation and security of library resources. University management should provide sufficient financial support for acquisition of multiple copies of highly demanded materials, subscription to electronic resources, employment of qualified personnel, and maintenance of security infrastructure (Adeyemi & Yusuf, 2022).

Regular stock verification, shelf reading, and collection evaluation should also be conducted to identify missing, misplaced, or damaged materials early. Libraries should further strengthen entry and exit control systems and ensure proper supervision of users by security personnel.

Digitization of library resources and increased access to electronic databases can reduce excessive dependence on print materials and minimize theft-related challenges. In addition, clear library policies and disciplinary measures should be enforced against offenders to serve as deterrents to others (Afolayan & Olatunji, 2023).

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to reduce book theft and enhance preservation of information resources in university libraries in Edo State:

1. University management should provide adequate funding for acquisition of current information resources, maintenance of library facilities, and installation of modern security technologies.
2. University libraries should adopt modern security systems such as CCTV cameras, RFID technologies, electronic gates, and alarm systems to monitor users and prevent unauthorized removal of materials.
3. Professional librarians and trained security personnel should be employed to strengthen supervision, organization, and management of library resources.
4. Libraries should organize regular orientation programmes and awareness campaigns to educate users on proper handling of library materials and consequences of theft and vandalism.
5. Multiple copies of highly demanded textbooks and increased access to electronic databases should be provided to reduce pressure on available print resources.
6. Regular stock verification and shelf reading exercises should be conducted to detect missing or damaged materials early.
7. Clear library security policies and disciplinary measures should be implemented and enforced strictly against offenders.
8. Libraries should improve the reading environment through provision of adequate seating arrangements, stable electricity supply, and efficient photocopying services to discourage delinquent behaviour among users.

### Conclusion

Book theft remains a serious challenge affecting the preservation of information resources in university libraries in Edo State. The study established that inadequate funding, poor security infrastructure, insufficient copies of information materials, high cost of textbooks, poor user orientation, and weak disciplinary measures contribute significantly to the increasing incidence of book theft in academic libraries.

The study further revealed that book theft negatively affects information resource preservation through depletion of collections, increased replacement costs, reduced accessibility of materials, user dissatisfaction, and poor library service delivery. Persistent theft and mutilation undermine the primary objectives of university libraries, which are to support teaching, learning, and research effectively.

To address these challenges, university libraries must adopt comprehensive preservation and security strategies such as adequate funding, installation of modern security technologies, employment of professional librarians, regular user education, stock evaluation, and digitization of resources. Effective implementation of these measures will enhance preservation of information resources and improve library service delivery for present and future users.

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