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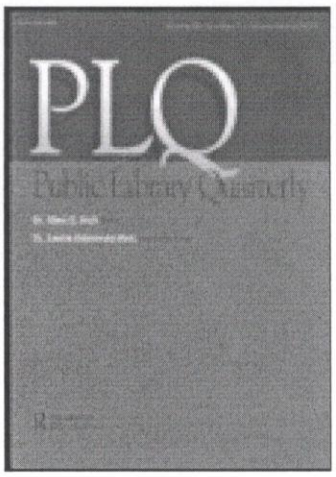

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A Study of Users' Delinquency at the Oyo State Library Board Headquarters, Dugbe, Ibadan

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A Study of Users' Delinquency at the Oyo State Library Board Headquarters, Dugbe, Ibadan

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This study examines delinquency at the Oyo State Library Board, Dugbe, Ibadan, Nigeria. The study's objectives were to find out the reasons for delinquency, identify the causes/methods employed, and suggest ways of minimizing its occurrence in the study library. It employs the case study design, sampling nearly 50% of the staff and employing questionnaire, interviews, and personal observations. The findings show that students are the major culprits, who fear others will borrow but fail to return materials. Ways of ameliorating this are suggested, encapsulated in a well-formulated collection development policy to serve as a working document for the library staff.

KEYWORDS rules of library use, material shortages, user delinquency, theft of materials, mutilation of materials

The library is a storehouse of knowledge and a depository of books and nonbook materials as well as other printed materials. Libraries cannot exist without such materials, namely books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and other recorded information in machine-readable formats such as tapes, films,

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slides, filmstrips, and computer software, which are, in their unique and special ways, capable of providing information to users. For these materials to be maintained, preserved, and utilized they have to be properly organized and well secured by library personnel. The issue of the safety and security of these materials due to users' delinquency, therefore, continues to be a source of concern to library authorities.

The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (1998) defines delinquency as a behavior, especially by young people, that is not in accordance with accepted social behavioral standards or with the law. Short (1972) states that delinquency consists of behavior on the part of individuals that, under the law, can bring those engaging in it before the court. Delinquency is a social problem, which Raab and Selznick (1961) define as "problems in relation[s] among people." Whenever people stay or live together, they establish laws, rules, or well-understood behaviors that enable them to know what they expect of each other. All aspects of a functioning society are bound by the expectations built into these formal and informal rules. A societal problem occurs when some breakdown occurs in following these rules. The social problem is a problem in human relationships that seriously threatens society itself or impedes important aspirations of many people in the society.

In a library environment, violating the rules and regulations of the library is usually said to be an act of delinquency liable to penalties set by the authorities. User delinquency is as old as the library itself. In the past, delinquency was handled by the keeper of the library; today it mostly is dealt with by readers' services librarians. These antisocial behaviors may include pilfering; defacing or mutilation of pages, pictures, tables, maps, or diagrams; writing on library walls; chewing gum; eating food items, especially biscuits, which encourage rodent invasions; noise making; mishandling of audiovisual materials; holding borrowed books beyond their due date; and displaying unruly behavior and impersonation. All these can have adverse effects on the use and growth of libraries.

According to Oche (2000), users have devised many methods to steal or mutilate materials, including:

1. Female users covering their shoulders with wrappers with books enclosed in them so as to thwart security oversight.
2. Library staff conniving with users to remove books and other information sources from the library.
3. Patrons using sharp objects to cut out pages of books.
4. Library staff removing books without bothering to indicate the bibliographic information in the "book request file."
5. Male users using flowing gowns (*agbada*) or inner pockets of suits to remove books from the library.

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These and other delinquent behaviors of users lead to frustration among library clientele, because appropriate library materials—sometimes many at once—are not readily available when they are needed. This study, therefore, presents a survey of the Oyo State Public Library staff members about their services to and perceptions of users regarding library resources, with a view to understanding the prevalence of user delinquency among patrons of the Oyo State Library Board, Dugbe, Ibadan, Nigeria.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OYO STATE LIBRARY BOARD

Oyo State Library Board was formerly known as the Western Regional Library when established in 1955 by the then Western Region Government led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The library was intended to support the government's free primary education project. The Regional Library was situated in one of the buildings that now houses the Central Bank of Nigeria. Dugbe, Ibadan, became the Oyo State Library in 1976 when Oyo State was created. The present Oyo State Library Board was inaugurated in 1988 by an enabling edict. Colonel Sasaeniyan Oresanya, then military administrator, set up the Library Board, which is presently an independent parastatal (i.e., state-owned corporation) of the Oyo State Government.

The headquarters of the Library Board is located adjacent to the General Post Office, opposite First Bank, Dugbe, Ibadan. It has two functional zonal libraries, namely: Ogbomosho Zonal Library, opposite Ogbomosho South Local Government, Arowomole, Ogbomosho, and Oyo Zonal Library, Oke Oroki, Oyo. Similarly, two additional functional branch libraries are located at Bodija (Adeyi Road) and in the Elekuro areas within Ibadan metropolis. The first chairman of the board in 1988 was Professor Bimpe Aboyade, with Dr. D. F. Elaturoti and Deacon Adeyemi as the first members of the board. The present board consists of two members with Professor Nuremi Tanimowo as the chairman.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The public library, by its nature, scope, and orientation is meant to cater to the entire population by providing for the diverse informational, educational, cultural, and recreational reading and information needs of the citizens regardless of age, sex, religion, or social standing. Thus, it has a mandate of the widest scope of responsibilities when compared with other types of libraries, even though it has the smallest funding. Huge responsibilities and low funding put the public library in a precarious situation today. The library must do everything possible to preserve the hard-earned resources on hand for greater durability and utilization.

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Without great staff vigilance, the rate at which library users engage in delinquent acts with library resources has been on the increase. This is most undesirable, especially for the public library, in this period of global economic recession. Users often complain about the inability of their public libraries to meet their diverse needs, which could be owing to the consequences of users' delinquency. To obtain a more accurate picture of this situation, this study investigated user delinquency at the Oyo State Library Board, Dugbe, Ibadan, with a view to identifying the reasons responsible for users' delinquency and the materials prone to such acts in the library. The researchers believed that with a better knowledge of the tactics employed and by highlighting the problems encountered in curbing the acts, a better solution might be developed to reduce library delinquency.

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REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Delinquent Acts by Users in Libraries

Library patrons all over the world have a common purpose for using the library—as the source for information for academic and research purposes. The problem of misuse of library materials is a global one, and the issue of how to ensure the security of library materials, especially against theft, has been the concern of librarians throughout library history (Akinfolarin 1992). On January 26, 1972, the British Broadcasting Corporation devoted five minutes to problem of theft in British libraries. According to Arden (1978), this report was brought about by the Edinburgh University librarian's annual report. This report stated that nearly 800 volumes of books had gone missing in the previous academic year. The report suggested that an attempt be made to find out the reasons for the upsurge in book losses in libraries all over the world. Line (1969) said the problem had gotten so bad that no user minded watching another user in the act of illegally removing a book from the library. Such thefts suggested to Asheim (1966) that the libraries in developing nations should emphasize preservation of library materials rather than that of satisfying their readers.

Beach and Capen (1977) suggested that in some instances, book theft was being perpetuated by some library staff. In our public libraries today, many of the library security workers contribute to the insecurity of library materials because of their negative attitudes toward work. Some of them often sleep on duty, thereby giving users the opportunity to remove materials from the library. According to Afolabi (1990), potential book thieves are always monitoring the effectiveness of library security. Afolabi also suggests that an effective security arrangement will deter theft. Shefrin (1977) notes that stealing books often occurs because users cannot locate on the shelves the items they have located in the catalogs. The survey found that many cases of theft result from difficulty in initially obtaining books and

a competitive atmosphere concerning their use. These conditions usually result from drastic reductions in book budgets even as the user population is increasing annually.

Akinsoji (2008) points out that methods to steal library materials include throwing books through the windows that have no barriers to hinder their passage, borrowing books legally and using their date-due slips to remove other desired books, and female users "getting pregnant" with stolen books while their male counterparts stock their trousers. Okoye (1981) studied security problems in thirteen Nigerian libraries and found that theft ranks highest among library delinquencies; mutilation ranks second. Omotayo (2005) identified mutilation and theft in libraries as menaces that have persisted, noting that the worsening state of libraries in Nigeria aggravated their frequency and heightened their negative impact. Omotayo reported that library insensitivity to users' needs, the high cost of books, the nondetection of previous acts of theft, and frequent power outages are some of the factors responsible for mutilation and theft in libraries.

Alao (2005) surveyed the extent to which students are involved in theft and mutilation of library materials at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. That survey indicated the following.

1. Of the 1,280 respondents, 416 (32%) admitted to the malpractices
2. All types of library materials (mostly reference books) and subject field sources (especially pure and applied sciences) were affected
3. The students' attitudes toward theft and mutilation were generally unfavorable
4. User selfishness was regarded as the most probable cause of abuse, and display of the abused materials was the remedy that users suggested to deter malpractices
5. Involvement in mutilation and theft of library materials was significantly related to the students' sex, major course and level of study, possession of library tickets (cards), status of library tickets (cards), and frequency of library use

Keeping books beyond the due date is another common act of delinquency. Many users selfishly hold books beyond their due dates, depriving others of the use of materials that are scarce or have only a limited number of copies in the library. Abegunde (1988) reported that withholding books beyond the due date frequently leads to their loss. Nnaji (1989) identified mutilation of library books as a type of malpractice that sometimes reduces a book's contents to incoherence. Akinwunmi (1986) observed that pencil or pen markings in books may render it useless by staining a book or making it very difficult to read. Spilling liquid or drinks on books and leaving greasy food marks attracts insects and pests of different types, possibly leading

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to the destruction of material. Obikoya (1994) opined that defacing library books is common among users. Instead of having jotters (doodles or notes) in their own notebooks, some students write directly on the textbooks, tables, and walls of the library.

Reasons for Users' Delinquency in Libraries

A lot of reasons have been explored for users' delinquency in libraries. Some of these, according to Akinfolarin (1992), include:

1. *Indigence of users:* The indigent frequently have to use a library because they have no money to purchase books. Furthermore, they sometimes lack identification or a residential address, making it difficult to check out materials. And, some indigent have no experience using a library. Within these limits, some indigent see stealing a book or razoring out an article and taking it as the only way to obtain the material they want.
2. *Drastic reduction in book votes (i.e., funding):* When the government does not provide sufficient revenue for a library to purchase new materials, the few items that are purchased are stolen or mutilated, especially when the number of users increases. The general rule that when libraries buy few new materials, theft and mutilation increases, especially when the demand for library materials is rising.
3. *Poor security system in the library:* Security agents in some cases connive with users to steal library materials. The desire of readers to build their own library with no expenditure, and the belief that public property belongs to nobody, leads some users to cultivate the act of stealing. Security agents should be conscientious and of high integrity when dealing with these criminals.
4. *Absence of photocopying services*: Oche (2000) notes that the availability of photocopying services can, to some extent, reduce book theft and mutilation because inexpensive, easily produced copies of pages of books and periodicals is often a good substitute for theft.
5. *Inadequate staff numbers*: If libraries lack sufficient staff to supervise the various sections effectively, some users will move quickly to stealing and vandalizing information materials.
6. *Attitude of library staff regarding their jobs*: The most frequent problem occurs when staff do not watch over the use of the collections. If a staff member remains inert at a desk with his or her head bent over reading or staring at a computer screen, theft is likely to occur. There also are instances when staff engage in aiding and abetting theft and mutilation of materials. Some allow removal without following appropriate borrowing policies; others assist in theft by taking materials outside of the library and handing them to thieves.

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Measures to Minimize Users' Delinquency in Libraries

To ensure that libraries provide an environment conducive to meeting the diverse needs of their users, libraries need to establish etiquette geared toward arresting all forms of distraction. Behavior ideals are the maintenance of silence and tranquility (noise-free environment), a ban on food items, and a ban on smoking (Igbafe and Sanni 2005). In order to minimize these acts of delinquency and provide quality time for patrons in the library, some specific policy measures need to be adopted.

Disciplinary measures

Obokoh (1996) identified various disciplinary strategies used to curb the incidents of material theft and mutilation that are employed by twenty libraries that are part of the World Bank Book Project. The result of Obokoh's research showed a lack of standardization/uniformity in the application of various disciplinary strategies aimed at safeguarding the new books, thus yielding no significant results. There need to be regulations to guard against user delinquency. One such regulation is having users sign a form when they arrive stating that they will not engage in delinquent acts and they will bear the consequences if caught committing such acts. The library also needs to prepare and post in prominent places within the library handbills on rules affecting users. Security needs to be made visible, with guards and staff moving about within the facility watching over the safety of both users and materials.

User education

User education involves instruction on how users can make use of library resources effectively and efficiently. According to Fjallbrant and Malley (1984), Faber (1995), and Tiefel (1995), efforts to educate library users in universities began in the 1880s. In many developed countries, users' education and information skills are taught starting at the primary school level. Lack of meaningful user education programs in libraries, especially public libraries in developing countries, gave rise to incompetence in the effective use of library resources (Mchombu 1991). And, the inability to use a library frequently leads to delinquent acts.

Over the years, there have been various terms referring to teaching the effective use of the library and its resources. These terms are *readers' instruction, readers' education, library use education, bibliographic instruction, library instruction, library use instruction, information literacy*, and *library users' education*. What is common among these terms is that they all refer to organized programs practiced across various types of libraries to enable library users to acquire the required skills to use the library resources effectively.

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Fjallbrant and Malley (1984) define *user education* as "a process concerned with the whole information and communication process involving the local interaction of the users with the library for a continuous process from the school level to libraries (public, academic, and special libraries) which will add an educational value to every visit made to the library." This user education, Fjallbrant says, allows for users' self-reliance in locating, sorting, and repackaging information, an inspirational and informational link between the book and user; essential for a new user and desirable for an experienced one. User education prepares the user for self-evaluation of information (Feather and Sturges 1997). It teaches how to make the most effective use of the library and other information systems, encompassing all activities undertaken to help students become efficient users of information (Tiefel 1995). It is a process of turning information into knowledge; a lifelong process whereby an individual acquires new knowledge and skills throughout his or her life. User education, therefore, aims at changing an individual's behavior and experience toward the use of library and other information sources.

Security measures

Some libraries have made various security arrangements to reduce the excesses of user delinquency, including the employment of security officials to stay by the library's entrance and ensure that library materials are not stolen or mutilated. Information and communication technology (ICT) has also become very useful in library security. Some libraries use electronic devices to detect removal of library information sources while video cameras are used in others to detect and apprehend potential thieves. The use of technological appliances in our libraries can assist in curbing and tracking the pilfering of library resources. Security arrangements should be used to make users conscious of themselves, because the library user who is a rogue is always watching the staff. Delinquent acts occur when users find that security arrangements are relaxed at one point in time.

Closed-access policy

Another useful measure is to put all materials that are limited in number and in high demand by users under closed access. This should be done in such a way that users who need them will be required to sign for them. The materials, when returned after use, should be properly checked to ensure that they have not been mutilated. Ajayi (2003) examined whether there are significant differences in the utilization of library books after the introduction of a closed-access policy in Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library and whether the users are satisfied with the policy. Questionnaires were administered to a random sample of 1,100 students. Results show that maximum use was

made of the library. Students were satisfied with the implementation of the closed-access policy. There is no significant difference between the science and nonscience students in preferring closed access. The study makes the following recommendations concerning closed access.

1. A successful closed-access policy should be enforced where effective control of the books can be made.
2. Library ethics should be incorporated into the library's instructional program course where the students will be taught how to use and handle library books.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The case study design was adopted for this study. A structured sample of 50 was drawn from a total of 106 library staff, including those in the branch libraries, which constitute the study's population. The sample constitutes a broad spectrum of library staff professionals, library officers, and security personnel who have direct contact with users and who are the most directly concerned with security and the preservation of library materials. The instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire (for the specified library staff), interviews (for the readers' services librarian), and personal observation that complemented responses to the questionnaires. Data collected were analyzed using the descriptive method.

PREAMBLE TO DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part revealed some sociocultural data about the respondents. The second part focused on the causes of user delinquency, methods used by perpetrators, and how the problem can be minimized in the library studied. There were twenty-five male and twenty-five female respondents to the survey.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1 shows that 28 percent of those surveyed were between age 25 and 30, 38 percent were between age 30 and 35, while the remaining 34 percent were age 35 and older. Sixty-two percent were married, 36 percent were single, and 2 percent were widowed, indicating that most of the library personnel are adults (age 30 and older). This implies that the library's workforce is matured and responsible. Also, the surveyed group was distributed along different work groups, namely, security personnel (20%), library officers who have been involved in apprehending library delinquents (12%),

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TABLE 1 Demographic Variables of Respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percent
Age bracket		
25–30	14	28
30–35	19	38
25 and older	17	34
Total	50	100
Marital status		
Married	31	62
Single	18	36
Widow	1	2
Total	50	100
Ranks/positions		
Senior librarian	9	8
Librarian I	5	10
Librarian II	15	30
Senior library officer	11	32
Security	10	20
Total	50	100
Work experience (Yrs.)		
1–5	20	40
6–10	12	24
11–15	11	22
16–20	3	6
20 and more	4	8
Total	50	100

and professional librarians (68%) of varying ranks and positions who work now and have worked previously in different departments of the library. This figure suggests that they have, at one point or the other, dealt with users directly and as such can identify delinquent acts and their perpetrators. Regarding work experience, 40 percent have spent between 1 and 5 years in service, 24 percent have spent between 6 and 10 years, 22 percent have spent between 11 and 15 years, 6 percent have spent between 16 and 20 years, and 8 percent have spent 20 years and more. This shows that most of those surveyed have spent a considerable number of years in the library, which is sufficient to understand the acts of delinquency perpetrated by library users.

Table 2 reveals that staff's most frequent user delinquency experience was dealing with past overdues: 80 percent had dealt with this issue. Seventy-four percent had dealt with patrons who had hidden books, thus preventing others from making use of them, while 56 percent had dealt with users who had taken books without proper authorization. Stealing/mutilation (46%) were significant and mishandling of materials (50%) further compounded the delinquency situation.

Staff had little sympathy for these delinquent acts against the library: 90 percent of respondents believed that the library had provided sufficient loan periods. That finding came despite the fact that 90 percent of

TABLE 2 Delinquent Acts Perpetrated in the Library

Users' delinquent acts	Yes (%)	No (%)
Users caught:		
Overdue (withholding books beyond due date)	40 (80)	10 (20)
Hiding books to prevent others from using them	37 (74)	13 (26)
Taking books without proper authorization	28 (56)	22 (44)
Mishandling of library materials	25 (50)	25 (50)
Stealing/mutilation	23 (46)	27 (54)
The library provides:		
Required cooperation on reported cases	46 (92)	4 (8)
Sufficient period of loan	45 (90)	5 (10)
Sufficient number of books for borrowing at a time	37 (74)	13 (26)

all respondents reported dealing with prior overdues. Meanwhile, personal observation revealed that more than 200 books on loan were overdue for return at the time the survey was conducted. A vast majority (92%) were pleased that the library management took action against the various delinquent offenders.

Table 3 suggests that students (64%) are the group most involved in delinquent acts because only 4 percent involved unemployed adults. Although none of the respondents confirmed that members of the library staff are involved in delinquent acts, the interview with the readers' services librarian revealed that some library assistants and security officers were once found to be accomplices to these acts, assisting users in taking out library books. It is obvious, however, that the students are the main culprits, accounting for most of the cases discovered.

The predominant cause of delinquent acts in the library, as shown in Table 3, was the fear of others who may borrow but fail to return (80%),

TABLE 3 Categories and Causes of Delinquency ($N = 50$)

Categories and causes	Yes (%)	No (%)
Categories of delinquent users		
Students	32	64
Staff	–	–
Adult users	2	4
Causes of delinquency		
Fear of others borrowing without return	40	80
Users' laziness	38	76
Users' frustration	30	60
Shortage of time at user's disposal	27	54
Others	2	4
Suggested sanctions for offenders		
Replacement of materials in kind or in cash	41	82
Suspension from the library	27	54
Entering the user's name in the Board's black book	21	42
Total dismissal	12	24

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followed by users' laziness (76%), users' frustration (60%), and shortage of time at users' disposal (54%); "others" (4%) claimed that some did it in order to punish library staff. The sanctions suggested to curb delinquency included replacement of library materials in kind or in cash (82%), offenders to be suspended from the library (54%), the writing of delinquents' names in the Board's black book (42%), and total dismissal (24%). We interpret these findings as showing the importance of discipline because it will serve as a negative example for others.

INTERVIEW REPORT

One of the researchers interviewed the readers' services librarian in respect to the antisocial behavior of library users. The readers' services librarian reported that in the past, some individuals—mostly students—had been apprehended for library delinquency. It was also revealed that whenever a culprit was caught, the case was usually referred to the security section for investigation and then to the school's disciplinary committee for further necessary actions. On investigation, if the culprit was found guilty, he or she may be asked to pay for the material. If the offence is considered to be grave, the guilty delinquent could be suspended from using the library for a period of time.

Observation also revealed that regardless of the library's numerous rules and regulations, users still engage in antisocial behaviors, because some textbooks in the library have been mutilated. For instance, volume 9 of *Encyclopedia Britannica* was found to be in a bad state of mutilation with about eighteen different pages missing. Some science textbooks, atlases, and company gazetteers were also in the same condition. Newspapers are prone to theft or mutilation on a weekly basis, as contained in a report submitted to the reference librarian's office. The interview responses also revealed that library materials most prone to delinquent acts included science textbooks, encyclopedias, and newspapers, and that these acts may be unconnected with the item's value.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of the research confirm that it is not only in academic libraries that acts of delinquency are rampant; it is also a major challenge faced in public libraries. Findings show that despite the effort of the library in acquiring resources that best meet the needs of its users, the users on their part still sabotage these efforts by engaging in various acts of delinquency. Furthermore, in this resource-short public library in Nigeria, delinquent

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acts reduce the effectiveness of library staff services. Moreover, user delinquency in libraries cannot be fully eradicated, but it can be minimized if the library management intensifies its efforts in providing more security at the library and if all reported cases are treated without fear or favor of any kind.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report demonstrates that delinquency presents a huge challenge for the Oyo State Public Library, Dugbe, Ibadan, because the materials so abused in delinquent acts remain the library's backbone on which service provision squarely depends. This truth is even more so now than ever before as the world in general is in economic recession; a scenario that can only compound further the already worsened situation of the underfunded public library subsector.

Given the evidence generated by our study and its conclusion, the researchers recommend the following:

1. The Oyo State Library authorities should create ample staff time for library use orientation to educate users, young and old, on the proper use of materials and the negative effects of delinquent acts on the library and its users.
2. The library should make the acquired materials available to users, because it is one thing to have materials in the library and another to put them within the reach of the users. This will help to reduce the temptation to steal or mutilate. In addition, photocopying services should be provided within the library and at less expensive rates to help users make copies of materials as needed.
3. Better security services and technology should be provided to enable the security personnel to be more vigilant at checkpoints. The regular transfer and posting of staff will help deal with the stagnant behavior of old staff and break the circle of connivance where it may exist.
4. Users should be allowed to borrow as many books as they can use at their own leisure. To serve as deterrent to theft, strict disciplinary measures should be taken against culprits.
5. A viable and dynamic collection development policy is desirable. This policy will serve as a working document to guide all categories of staff in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities. It should be a document in which issues relating to user delinquency, alongside others, would be captured.

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