Examining the Causes and Prevention of Book Losses in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

Purpose: This article is an attempt to examine the current situation of book losses/theft, their causes, and remedies that have been taken by academic libraries in Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative approach was adopted for this study for which questionnaire as an instrument was carried out. It comprised of identifying the reasons, measures, and frequency of book theft was responded by 136 university librarians. The questionnaire was designed and administered via Google forms that took about two months for collection of the desired data. The data collected was tabulated and analysed using the Microsoft Excel.

Research limitation(s): The scope of the study area is limited to the central libraries of universities of Pakistan. The investigation was confined to library physical learning resources i.e. book, journal, magazine, theses, flash cards, CDs and DVDs. Departmental, seminars, sub-campus and approved centre libraries were not the part of this research study.

Key finding(s): The findings revealed that absence of national/local level policy, unawareness of users' education, high prices of the study materials, untrained supporting staff and lack of proper ownership marks are the causes of theft in the academic libraries in Pakistan. A few libraries have taken measures so as to control the theft of valuable library materials which include use of CCTV Cameras for monitoring and recording and the use of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). However, due to high cost, useful precautionary measures have not been adopted by the libraries especially in universities.

Practical implication(s): The findings of the study would highlight the importance of policy making regarding the library security measurement in the higher educational institutions of the country. It will alert the management of universities and higher education commission for provision of ample funds and applying the latest technology to resolve the issue.

Contribution to knowledge: The study would prove fruitful and help aware the professionals of the library field about different aspects of library theft, allied reasons and their control.

Paper type: Research.

Keyword(s): Book theft; Library security; Library safety; Control of book theft; Academic libraries.

Introduction

Academic libraries serve as a gateway of knowledge for any educational institution. Nobody can deny the exigency of these academic libraries. Though, these libraries faced numerous challenges such as to keep pace with the technological improvements, user education, collection development, etc. However, one of the common and core problems in academic libraries is the security management for preventing book theft that includes theft of print and non-printed resources (Akor, 2013).

Today's digital technology allows academic libraries to provide readily available information. In this scenario the library materials varies in different forms and theft of such materials is a challenging task because not only the students are involved in the guilty of theft in libraries, but also the faculty members and other library patrons (Cox, 2010). A case reported by The Guardian in 2019 reported that a man jailed for stealing 7,000 books from Scottish universities (Carrell, 2019). Regarding library loss rate American Library Association reported in 2016, that overall loss rate is between 4 to 8%.

Similarly, a recent study conducted by Elizabeth and Ogunjimi (2019) for investigation of the security challenges in university libraries in Southwest Nigeria showed that theft of library materials, mutilation, hiding of the important materials by preventing the access of other users was a major challenge.

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Ohayagha (2014) defined "when an individual dishonestly usurps property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the owner of it is a theft" (p. 2). Literature showed that major study on the problems and challenges of book and library materials theft and disfigurement was conducted in the developed countries. There is least information available on the book stealing, causes of its stealing, and associated issues in the developing countries of the world. There are 206 universities and degree awarding institutes in Pakistan with approximate 1.463 million students enrolled in different fields of study (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2017).

The university libraries are one of the most developed library sector in Pakistan (Khan & Idrees, 2015), and it is a general perception for a university librarian to be aware that materials have actually left its premises without any justification. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to examine the current state of affairs for the academic libraries in Pakistan as regards book theft problems in order to suggest precautionary measures. An important and valuable item might be found missing with no sense of interference or other irregularity. This may be the hardest type of theft to confront with by the library administration to overcome before one is emotionally able to take positive action. There is limited information available in the published literature on current situation of book theft and its control mechanism in academic libraries especially university libraries in Pakistan.

This study aims to investigate the root causes of book theft in the academic libraries of Pakistan. The investigation also aimed at to explore the adopted security measurement by the academic libraries or what they suggest to avoid stealing of the library materials. This research can bring possible solutions for library theft control and to fill the gap of literature.

Literature Review

A general search on library specific databases available on the internet revealed that the topic of book theft and its prevention has been given slight attention as compared to other issues in the literature of librarianship. Literature related to the topic was searched with different keywords on LISTA (Library Information Science & Technology Abstracts) a product of *EBSCOhost*. Using the advance searching panel with keyword "Book theft" only in title, we received 44 search results followed by "Library theft" 14 results. Further, searched with keyword using Boolean technique "Library" AND "RFID"—Radio Frequency Identification; received 54 results.

Library materials are facing security threats. Therefore, it is essential to apply feasible strategies to control theft ratio if not possible to eliminate it. Literature pointed out that besides library books, users' bags and electronic devices are also stolen in libraries. Hence, one of the library personals should be positioned at the entrance point and for that a few surveillance cameras should be installed at the key points (Agboola & Aduku, 2019). It is also observed that libraries in addition to books, research manuscript, library equipment and users' personal belongings need to be given protection from being stolen (Ali & Sherwani, 2010).

In view of this situation it is need of the time to tackle the risks of theft and mutilation in academic libraries. However, to overcome the issue is not an easy task for the libraries of the day (Mansfield, 2009). Chinwendu (2019) examined the effect of theft and mutilation on the use of library materials in the academic libraries of Lagos state. The data was collected through questionnaire form for the registered users of library. The findings presented that theft and damage on library collection was very high in Lagos, Nigeria. The main reason behind this is lack of proper security, photocopying, monitoring and high cost of the reading materials. The study suggested a proper strategic security plan and appointment of male and female security personals at exit points to ensure safety of the resources of academic libraries.

Librarians had to face the issue of audit regarding the missing books. Sometimes librarians cope with paid penalty for missing books. The cases of theft of books can be minimized to a greater extent through technological tools and security system. The use of smart security technology and write off policy can also be helpful to librarians in audit process (Ali, 2017). Library theft has detrimental effects on the frequent library users, library staff, academic community, and society. The competent authorities of these educative libraries should provide funds for sufficient volumes of expensive reading materials. Libraries are required to issue books for reasonable period of time in the greater interest of the users (Okogwu & Uchenna, 2013).

Usually library books are stolen or mutilated due to insufficient number of volumes, financial constraints and selfishness on the part of students. Regarding methods of books stealing and mutilation, it has been noted that the users are removing their desired pages of study books, removing book title cover to change the identity of books (Akor, 2013). Book theft in academic and public libraries is not an old issue. However, in recent years it has become a matter of increasing concern to these libraries. The online catalogues having the content details of library collection generally attract the researchers and students. One of the reasons of book theft is the limited volumes of important books. Similarly, open shelves trend in multi-story libraries is one of the easiest way to steal a book (Higgins, 2015).

Libraries are using security gate of different types as study revealed that use of electromagnetic (EM) security systems (66%) and open gate sensors (58%). It is noted that EM gates failed to sound alarm properly. But, sometimes patrons felt irritation with false alarms (Harwell, 2014). RFID system is a package of different functions. It helps the librarians to expedite the circulation of books, inventory control, tracking of library materials, and monitoring. But it is most helpful in theft detection, and reducing books robbery (Nisha, 2018).

Trapskin (2008) explored the importance of RFID, metal detectors, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras, invasion alarm in library monitoring, detection of different security aspects that can ensure security measurements for protection of the library materials. The literature indicates that the threat to library collection through theft or mutilation is an alarming issue throughout the world. Akussah (2006) stated that theft, mutilation, or other forms of abuse of intellectual materials was a great challenge to the library profession worldwide. Nambobi, Ssemwogerere, & Ramadhan (2020) examined the implementation of RFID technology for the autonomous assistants. They discussed the role of EM (Electro-Mechanical) performance as commonly use for the library security but it now can also use for the library autonomous assistants.

In the start of this segment already mentioned that there were a very few numbers of related papers have been published especially in the context of Pakistan. Despite the author used different keywords on LISTA (Library Information Science & Technology Abstracts) a product of *EBSCOhost*. Using the advance searching panel with keyword "Book theft" "Library theft" and with keyword using Boolean technique "Library" AND "RFID"—Radio Frequency Identification OR "Security" but found less papers on the topic.

In-view of the scarcity of related published literature this research can bring out the status and picture of the topic in context of Pakistan. This study can also be helping in policy developing to the reference of library security.

Research Questions

The basic aim of this quantitative study was to examine the current state of book theft and measures taken by Pakistani university libraries for theft control. Based on extensive literature review on the topic, the following research questions were formulated to achieve objective of this study:
1. What are the reasons behind theft of library materials in Pakistani' libraries?
2. Which materials are commonly stolen and what is the frequency of stealing?
3. What measures need to be taken by the academic libraries for book theft control?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study area is limited to the only central libraries of universities of Pakistan. The investigation was confined to library physical learning resources i.e. book, journal, magazine, theses, flash cards, CDs and DVDs.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted under quantitative cover for which questionnaire as an instrument was carried out that was based on the variables extracted from review of the relevant literature on theft of books in libraries. The research instrument (a semi-structured questionnaire) comprised of ten items identifying the reasons, measures, and ratio of book theft was designed and administered using Google Forms. As a pilot study the instrument was filled randomly by 5 professional librarians selected from the main libraries of the different universities. They suggested a few minor changes

which were incorporated and the final questionnaire was administered to all universities around the country through personal emails (obtained from the respective websites of the university) with request for a timely response.

The targeted participants of the survey were the heads of the central-libraries working under Pakistani universities. There are 206 universities throughout the country that are recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The population of the study was not too large so a census based approach was adopted. Social media website (www.facebook.com), phone calls and the Short Messages Service (SMS) were used as a follow-up tool. It took about two months to collect the data with 66% (136 out 206) response rate. The data collected was imported to Microsoft Excel Sheets for filtering and checking the errors. The filter, error free date was analyzed and presented in tables. The basic statistics was used including frequency, percentage, and cumulative percentage.

Results
Demographics
According to Higher Education Commission of Pakistan total 206 universities and degree awarding institutes are recognized. Out of these recognized universities, 124 are of public sector and the rest are private. All these universities were consulted for collecting data but responses were received from 136 universities. The participants of this study were the head librarians only, working in the main campus central library of the university the country. Gender wise, 130 respondents were male and 6 were female. Majority of the respondents (i.e. 120 out of 136) were having master degree in library and information science whereas, nine respondents had the qualification of MPhil (Master of Philosophy) and one was a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) degree holder in the field. The age of the respondents varied from 35 to 55 years whereas, work experience of the respondents varied between 10 to 30 years.

Identification of the Reasons Behind Book Theft in Pakistani Academic Libraries
Literature shows that there are multiple reasons behind the theft of library materials especially book theft. On the basis of difference in culture and socio-economic conditions different reasons have been identified in the literature (Akor, 2013). Keeping in view the work experience of the respondents, a question was asked to rate the most commonly agreed reasons of book theft in their respective libraries. As shown in Table 1, maximum 76(56%) of the respondents identified that "lack of user education" is one of the major reasons behind book theft in Pakistani academic libraries followed by 72 (53%), "Lack of ethical values".

Literature shows that there were several reasons for library material/book theft around the world. For example, lack of ethical values, lack of user education (Jagadish & Saravathy, 2018). As discussed earlier, user education can minimize the element of book theft in academic libraries. Therefore, user education should be given due importance during the orientation sessions concerning academic library.

Table 1. Common Reasons of Book Theft (n=136)

#	Statement	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	Lack of ethical values	56	8	72
2	Habitual	74	7	55
3	Lack of user education	54	6	76
4	Lake of photocopying facility	88	9	39
5	Users unable to purchase books	95	11	30
6	Lack of awareness	102	11	23

Identification of Common Precautionary Measures for Book Theft in Libraries
Literature shows that different measures have been taken to control book theft in libraries around the world. The respondents of this study were enquired about different alternatives for book theft

control, as quantified by Olajide (2017), and were asked to rate them according to their preferred usage in their respective libraries.

Table 2. Precautionary Measures for Stopping Book Theft in Libraries (n=136)

#	Statement	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	Library has separate entry and exit points	106	12	18
2	Security persons at the entrance/exit	92	11	33
3	Integrated detector system (i.e. RFID)	95	11	30
4	All library windows covered by gauze	88	10	38
5	Visible tags/stamp on books for easy identification	68	8	60
6	Library secret page/mark for library materials	109	12	15
7	CCTV for monitoring and record	31	4	101
8	Dropping bags at personal property counter/entrance	82	10	45
9	Library orientation program for new users	94	14	29
10	Security strips on library materials	95	11	30

Table 2 revealed that different precautionary measures were undertaken by the libraries to cope with the challenge of book theft in Pakistani academic libraries. The results disclose that technology plays a vital role in dealing with book theft issue. A regular monitoring system by using CCTV (Closed Circuit Televisions) cameras is considered as one of the frequently used method to control book stealing issues in academic libraries. The respondents indicated that visible tags/stamp on library books is also used to control book theft in libraries.

Identification of Clients Involved in Book Theft

Literature shows that it is not necessary that the users are always involved in book theft, but sometimes the library staff is also engaged in such activities. Maidabino (2013) pointed out that not only the library users are involved in theft but in some cases library staffs have also been found involved in theft of library books and other materials.

When asked from the respondents of this study, the results made it clear that mostly students are involved in book theft. This question was investigated in the view of second objective of this study; what measures need to be taken by the academic libraries for book theft control? The measures may vary according to clientele level.

Table 3. Clienteles Involved in Book Theft (n=136)

#	Client	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	Students	11	1	124
2	Faculty members	132	4	0
3	Other staff	22	2	112

As shown in Table 3, no respondents mentioned that faculty is involved in such activity. Therefore, user education for students may be considered more important to reduce book or material theft in academic libraries.

Identifying Gender Difference in Book Theft

It is noteworthy that librarians should know if there's any issue associated with the male or female library users in order to effectively deal with book theft in libraries. The respondents were asked to identify the gender of library uses who involves in theft of the library resources.

Table4. Gender Difference in Book Theft (n=136)

#	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	5	3.68%
2	Female	2	1.47%
3	Both	129	94.85%
Total		**136**	**100%**

As shown in Table 4, majority of the respondents 129 (94.85%) reported that both male and female library users are equally involved in book theft activity. However, these results portray that the Pakistani academic libraries are not collecting gender-based information. Or maybe there is limited information available on book theft regarding gender difference in book theft in Pakistan academic libraries.

Type of Library Material

Library theft is not limited to any specific learning resource but it includes serials (magazines, journals, and newspapers) and other non-book materials such as CD, DVD, and Maps. Higgins (2015) and Akor (2013) discussed the matter in their studies. Table 5 (below) reveals that books are commonly stolen from the libraries.

Table 5. Type of Material Commonly Stolen (n=136)

#	Type of material	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	Books	9	1	126
2	Audio/video	132	4	0
3	Newspapers	129	3	4
4	Periodicals	130	3	3
5	Other	130	3	3

Options for Stopping Book Theft in Libraries

In order to improve the current situation of book theft in participating libraries, it is of utmost importance to identify what contributes toward stopping of book theft in Pakistani academic libraries. A number of alternatives were given to the respondents to opt what could be done to improve the current situation and to deal effectively with the challenge of book theft in their respective libraries.

Table 6. Options for Stopping Book Theft in Libraries (n=136)

#	Options	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	More fund for library stock security management	23	3	110
2	More security staff	109	12	15
3	More professional staff	58	5	72
4	Motivate library users	57	7	72
5	Membership suspension	120	12	4
6	Heavy fine	88	10	38
7	Refer to disciplinary committee	52	5	79

As shown in above Table, 110 respondents (53%) stated that more funds for library stock security management be dedicated to improve the current situation. Similarly, respondents indicated that motivation of the library users and deputing more professional staff in libraries are the effective measures to improve control the book theft in Pakistani academic libraries.

Conclusion

The study concluded that commonly stolen items from Pakistani academic libraries are books. In Pakistan, the costly learning resources, scarcity of library materials, and financial constraints are the major causes of book theft in the academic institutions. Many libraries keep the data of book theft for record purposes, however, in the book theft cases reported by libraries, there was no significant difference based on gender. Only a few libraries have taken worthy steps so far to keep safe the library materials which include the use of CCTV Cameras for monitoring and recording and use of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). However, due to high cost, such system is not usually affordable for all the academic libraries in Pakistan.

Some common remedies highlighted by the respondents for reducing theft rate in the academic libraries of Pakistan includes; availability of the sufficient number of copies of books, an increase in the budget for security and resources of libraries, focus on user education, appointment of more professional staff and adaptation of technological deductive systems like RFID or magnetic tags on library materials.

Recommendations

Indeed, the library materials theft is a serious issue and adequate measures on the part of the librarians and the authorities concerned must be taken to eliminate or reduce the ratio of book stealing in academic libraries and university libraries in Pakistan. On the basis of these findings the following measures are recommended:

1. There is a need of a country level policy for theft control in academic libraries.
2. Standardization of local law for book theft is required to protect the library materials from being stolen.
3. More professional and motivated library staff and user education is needed to lessen the theft in academic libraries of the country.
4. Adequate financial support is required to establish infrastructure for surveillance system using information and communication technologies.
5. Scanning facility for the library users and purpose-based library building might minimize the theft percentage in academic libraries.

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