

Abuse of library materials in the main library at University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka: An overview of the library staff

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ABSTRACT

The University of Peradeniya Library is the largest University Library Network in Sri Lanka. At present the cumulative book stock well exceeds one million mainly on Social Sciences and Humanities. The Main Library provides membership to a wide range of readers both in and outside the university. Abuse of the library materials is a serious issue for academic libraries. The abuse of library materials can be defined in terms of theft, mutilation, unauthorized borrowing and vandalism. Mutilating library materials by marking, underlining, removing pages or portions of pages, removing binding, removing barcodes, removing call number labels, damaging or defacing library materials, seriously affect the library. A survey was conducted to find possible solutions to protect the collection. The objectives of the survey were to identify various forms of abuse, to identify the reasons for the abuse and to identify the possible solutions to protect the library collection. The survey was conducted by using questionnaires with close and open ended questions. The staff of the Reader Services Division and all the senior staff of the main library were selected for this survey. A total of 32 questionnaires were distributed to the above staff and 25 (78%) of them responded. In respect of abusing of library materials, about 80% of the respondents were of the opinion that the main forms of abusing library materials were tearing pages away, writing notes inside textbooks, highlighting/underlining pages, mutilation and hiding of books. With regard to physically damaging the library books, 80% agreed that it was underlining, scribbling and creasing pages, while 60% agreed that it was the use of tippex (whitening). At least 60% also agreed that there are structural damages to books. Rare materials not being allowed to be photocopied as well as inadequate number of copies were also reasons for the abuse of library materials. The study recommends that a proper orientation be given to library users. The number of copies of rare books should be increased, library photocopying services should be improved, introduce an electronic checking system such as a CCTV camera, and recruit well trained security officers. Campaigns against abuse of library material should be launched. Posters containing warning against theft and mutilation should be conspicuously displayed on notice boards inside and outside the library.

Key words: Abuse of library material, Mutilation, Malpractices of readers

INTRODUCTION

Abusing of library materials by marking, underlining, removing pages or portions of pages, removing binding, removing barcodes, removing call number labels, damaging or defacing library materials seriously affect the library.

The library of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, originated in 1921 as the library of the Ceylon University College. The Library was shifted to Peradeniya in 1952 and was moved to the present premises in 1960. After moving to Peradeniya, the library developed into a library network comprising of the Main Library and seven other branch libraries namely; Agriculture, Science, Medical, Engineering, Veterinary Medicine, Allied Health Science and Dental libraries. The ninth library is attached to the sub-campus, Faculty of Agriculture in Mahailuppallama. The branch libraries are located in their respective faculties.

The mission of the library is to provide a comprehensive and user focused resources with high quality library services in support of teaching, learning and research needs of the university community; through developing collections, providing relevant infrastructure facilities and user guidance to encourage teaching learning and research in an intellectually stimulating university environment.

The threat to intellectual property through theft, mutilation and other forms of abuse has posed a tremendous challenge to the library profession worldwide. The abuse of library materials can be defined in terms of theft, mutilation, unauthorized borrowing and vandalism. This is not a new experience for any library in the world. According to Kesler (1977) - "As a result of mutilation of its books, the library spends its already limited funds for replacements rather than for the purchase of needed new items. The cost of library loses is not measured only by the price of the discrete replaced item, staff time and effort required for searching, recording, processing and rebinding plus the frustration caused the library users (who discover that the needed article is ripped out) must be included in the entire picture".

Abuse of library materials seriously affects the library. The University of Peradeniya Library is the largest University Library Network in Sri Lanka. The library provides open access to most of the resources except for few special collections. The Main Library provides membership to a wide range of readers both in and outside the university with varying degree of facilities. Abusing of library materials is a serious problem for academic libraries. According to stock count carried out in 2008, 35 books (out of 3360) which were highly abused were removed from the Arts and Archaeology collection in the Main Library. There is a tremendous challenge to protect the collection. Therefore this survey was conducted to find possible solutions to protect it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anoyaobi and Akpoma (2012) have done a study on abuse of library materials in Delta State Polytechnic Library, Oyawasi-Uku, Nigeria. They found that the abuse of library materials in libraries is a menace that persisted, and the worsening state of libraries in Nigeria appears to have aggravated its intensity and the consequent detrimental impact.

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Abuse of library materials has become a common occurrence in academic libraries in Nigeria as well as in other parts of the world and if this is not investigated and checked, it will create a serious threat to Nigerian libraries' collection and preservation. Disappointment is arising from inability of library users' to locate materials from shelves due to users' behavior of hiding materials and tearing out some pages in particular texts. Senyaha, and Lamptey (2011) describe that book theft and mutilation may concern the personal security and safety of library staff as matters of personal security and safety in a library have much to do with rules and regulations relating to the building, the library collection, the staff and users.

Tefera (1996) stated that the following factors constitute user delinquency in the library:

- Throwing out books and other information resources through windows at night during power outage.
- Carrying books and other information resources out of library without getting them properly charged out.
- Tearing off pages of books and other information resources.
- Using chemicals to clean off library ownership stamps in books and removing date due slips.
- Removing the jacket cover and preliminary pages of books so that those books cannot be identified.
- Stealing other registered library user borrowers' tickets and using them to borrow books.
- User borrows a book legally, goes out of the library, removes the date slip comes back to the library with it. Then, removes the date slip of the book intended to be stolen. Uses gum to affix the date due slip from the book borrowed onto the book intended to be stolen, to create the impression that it is a legally borrowed book and takes the stolen book out of the library. Several library materials could be stolen this way.
- Library staff at times assisted users to borrow books legally and destroy the records later.

Akussah, and Bentill (2010) in their study of abuse of library materials in academic libraries conducted at the University of Cape Coast main library, showed that there is no doubt that for as long as library materials are physically and intellectually explored, there is bound to be some form of abuse or the other. The results of the study have clearly indicated that the documents of the University of Cape Coast main library are under the threat of abuse. They suggested that many thefts occur in libraries because of difficulties faced by the users in getting access to materials. The library should provide multiple copies, adequate facilities for photocopying and liberal lending policy to allow number of copies to be borrowed.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Objectives

The objectives of the survey were to identify various forms of abuse of library materials, to identify the reasons for the abuse of library materials, to identify the possible

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solutions to protect the library collection, and to identify library staff's suggestions to protect the library collection.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by using questionnaires with close and open ended questions. Physical observation of any abused library materials was also used for this survey.

Population of the study

All the senior staff at the main library and the library staff of the Reader Service Division (Library Assistance and the Library Attendants) were selected for this survey. A total of 32 questionnaires were distributed to them and 25 (78%) of them responded.

RESULTS

As shown in table 1, the answers rating *strongly agree* and *agree* were over 60%. The forms of abusing of library materials mainly include tearing away pages, writing notes inside text books, and highlighting and underlining pages. At least 50% of staff members agreed that hiding of books is also a grave issue. It is indicated that tearing away pages, writing notes inside textbooks, highlighting/underlining the pages are the main forms of abusing library materials.

Table 1: Forms of abusing library materials

Forms of abusing the library materials	SA	A	D	SD
Tearing away pages	13	04	04	04
Writing notes inside textbooks	05	10	07	03
Highlighting/underlining the pages	03	11	07	04
Hiding of books	03	13	03	06

*SA= Strongly Agree A=Agree D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

For the question on the physical damage of library materials, 65% agreed that it was tearing and removing of covers and figures. 60% agreed that it was the use of tippex (whitening) and creasing of books. More than 50% opined that underlining words or scribbling and creasing as the reasons. At least 40% cited marks and stains in documents and tearing and removing of covers. According to these figures, most of the physical damage was in the form of tearing and removing of covers and underlining of words or scribbling.

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Table 2: Physical damage on library materials

Physical damages on library materials	SA	A	D	SD
Underlining words or scribbling	03	09	04	09
Marks in documents, Stains in document	09	02	11	03
Books with torn or removed covers / figures	12	05	06	02
Creased books, Use of Tipex (Whitening)	03	13	05	04
Structural damage	02	11	04	08

According to table 3, the staff are very satisfied with the existing photocopy service in the main library. It also indicated that less than 20% agreed with the statements of “strict library rules” and “lack of support from the library staff”. It is a positive response which shows that the library staff is much helpful to the readers. The staff gave a neutral response to the statements of, strict library rules, lack of support from the library staff and, lack of proper shelving. It shows that the library staff is very supportive of the students.

Table 3: Inadequacies of library services that might contribute to the abuse of library materials

Statements	SA	A	D	SD
Lack of photocopy services in the library	02	01	02	20
Strict library rules with regard to rare collection	02	01	07	15
Lack of support from the library staff	01	01	03	10
Shelving of books	02	03	04	16
Lack of adequate library orientation programmes for new library users.	10	10	03	02
Inadequate copies of popular library materials.	07	04	10	04
Inadequate copies of recommended texts in the library	06	09	09	01

It should be mentioned that the inadequate number of copies of recommended texts in the library is a serious issue for the readers. Lack of adequate library orientation programs for new library users is also a factor which should be seriously considered.

According to table 4 there are various reasons for the abuse of the library materials. The main reasons given for the abuse of the library materials are certain materials being rare and not being allowed to be photocopied. Unavailability of copies and high cost of photocopying are also another reason for the abuse of the library materials.

Table 4 : Reasons for abusing library materials

Reasons for abusing library materials	SA	A	D	SD
Rare materials not being allowed to be photocopied	21	02	01	02
Inadequate number of library materials	09	03	06	07
High cost of photocopying	07	07	09	02
Rare materials – Unavailability of copies	06	05	10	04

Disciplinary measures are essential for any institute for effective management. It is essential for the library as an institute for dissemination of information, to have disciplinary measures. According to table 5, 20 staff members agreed to the charging of full cost of the abused material. 10 agreed to exhibit the offenders’ photos with names. The other measures were the cancellation of membership and suspending the membership for a few weeks.

Table 5: Maintaining of disciplinary measures

Maintaining disciplinary measures	SA	A	D	SD
Charging of the full cost of the abused material	20	02	02	01
Cancellation of membership	11	06	05	03
Exhibiting the offenders’ photos with names	10	04	06	05
Suspending the membership for a few weeks	09	08	04	04

According to the staff views of the protection strategies, the following suggestions were made. The respondents agreed to the all the suggestions such as user education, awareness seminars, library constantly displaying mutilated books with names of the reader, encouraging users to protect the collection and developing the collection ownership attitudes.

Table 6: Strategies for the protection of the collection

Protection strategies	SA	A	D	SD
User education or awareness seminars	22	03	00	00
Library must constantly display mutilated books with names of the reader	09	11	02	03
Encourage users to protect the collection	19	01	02	03
Develop the collection ownership attitudes	20	03	02	00
Installation of security cameras	21	02	01	01
Provide electronic resources	19	04	02	00
Fining system according to the damage	12	06	06	01

From the statements given in the Table 7, most of the staff members (80 -100%) agreed with the all statements given. They also highlighted that it is very essential to improve

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supervision, provide enough library materials, introduce electronic checking system and conduct regular library orientation programs, regular supervision of users; books should be examined after returning by the reader. It is believed that these suggestions are very important for policy makers to implement them in future.

Table 7: Suggestions to protect the library materials

Suggestions to protect the library materials	SA	A	D	SD
Improve supervision	18	4	3	0
Conduct regular library orientation programs	16	7	1	1
Provide enough library materials	13	8	2	2
Digitization on rare materials	12	8	3	2
Regular supervision of users	13	9	1	2
Improve competence in security officers	15	7	4	0
Books should be examined after returning or using by the reader	13	9	2	1
Introduce a huge fine system for abusers	12	7	6	0
Make electronic accessible copies as far as possible	15	4	3	3
Ban bringing blades, tipex, bottle of water, file covers, highlighting pens. etc. to the library	14	8	1	3
Introduce electronic checking system	22	2	1	0

The following open ended questions were answered by the staff:

What are the roles of library staff in reducing abuse of library materials?

- The library staff who works in the shelf area and the reading rooms should frequently visit and observe this area
- Show readers that the staff members are vigilant and that they pay attention to the book shelves areas and observe user behaviors
- Books should be examined by the counter staff when they are returned by the user
- Punish library staff if they are careless in protecting the books

What are the measures the library should take to reduce the abusing of library materials?

- Install security cameras in the library
- User registration number should be mentioned on the date label below the return date, when issuing a book
- Books should be examined at the return counter at the time of returning. If it is not feasible, returned books should be kept for certain period at the counter for checking
- Security camera system (CCTV) for regular checking of rare, important places in the library

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study was mainly concerned with the examination of the abuse of library materials in the main library, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. There is no doubt that for as long

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as library materials are physically handled and intellectually explored, there is bound to be some forms of abuse or the other. The results of the study have clearly indicated that the documents of the University of Peradeniya Library network are considerably abused by the users in the form of; tearing away pages, writing notes inside textbooks, highlighting/underlining the pages, and hiding of books. Abuses of library materials are higher among print materials than the non print materials. This indicates that print materials are used more often than the non print materials. The library awareness program is a very important factor to the users. Students who underwent frequent library instruction and orientation, understand better the value of borrowing and returning library materials and that will help to avoid abusing the library materials.

The following recommendations are hereby given based on the identified problems. Library staff working in shelf areas and the reading rooms should frequently visit and observe those areas. Show readers that the staff members are vigilant and show reader that they pay their attention to the areas of book shelves and observe user behaviors. Punish library staff for their carelessness in protecting the books and provide adequate staff in the library. Should introduce motivational and punishable guidelines for library staff who are responsible for the collection.

Furthermore, multiple copies of textbooks in demand should be made available in the circulation section. Constantly educating users to protect the collection and identifying the high demand books and acquire enough copies and digitizing of more rare materials are other solutions. Not issuing already damaged books is another way. Conducting user awareness programs to make students understand the importance of protecting library material. Discussion with student union leaders, library staff, and top managerial staff on how to reduce the abuse of library materials. Technical and physical improvement of the library also will be an asset to protect the collection such as installing a security camera system (CCTV) for regular supervision of the library.

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