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ASSESSMENT OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A STUDY OF MICHAEL OKPARA UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, UMUDIKE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study assessed deviant behaviour among undergraduate users of the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU) library, Abia State, Nigeria. Guided by three research questions, the study examined the most common forms of deviant behaviour, the factors that predispose students to such behaviour, and the effects of these behaviours on students and library operations. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and the entire population of 104 library staff was studied using a census approach. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire (Assessment of Deviant Behaviour in Academic Libraries Questionnaire, ADBALQ) and analysed using mean scores on a four-point scale, with a criterion mean of 2.50. Findings showed that misuse of computers, loitering, stealing of library materials, mutilation of materials, and noise-making were the most prevalent deviant behaviours. Key predisposing factors included the perception of a low likelihood of being caught or punished, peer influence, porous security, poor illumination, and inadequate staffing. The behaviours were found to negatively affect sustainable library growth, damage materials, frustrate staff efforts, limit users' learning and research potential, and reduce overall service quality. The study concludes that deviant behaviour remains a significant challenge to library service delivery at MOUAU and recommends strengthened security infrastructure, consistent enforcement of library policy, and sustained user education as priority interventions.

Keywords: deviant behaviour, academic libraries, library security, user education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Nigeria

Introduction

The primary mandate of university libraries is to provide access to print and non-print collections in support of teaching, learning, and research (Aina, 2004; Mabawonku,

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2004). The effective discharge of this mandate, however, depends on proper planning and a constructive relationship between library staff and patrons. While the central role libraries play in higher education is well established (Wu & Liu, 2001), academic libraries across Africa face persistent challenges, including the loss, mutilation, and theft of materials by patrons (Nwalo, 2000; Ogunsola, 2004).

Nigerian academic libraries serve diverse constituencies that vary widely in size, funding, and location, which makes generalisation about their operations difficult (Unagha, 2009). Trends in library usage differ not only in available resources and services but also in the behavioural and security dimensions of staff–user interaction, and these dynamics tend to be more pronounced in larger research libraries (Worpole, 2004). Inadequate funding alongside rising student enrolment has placed considerable pressure on Nigerian university libraries (Ogunsola, 2004), and the increasing population of students has correspondingly increased the incidence of deviant activities within library spaces.

Deviant behaviour is generally understood as conduct that departs from accepted social norms, with such behaviour considered antisocial when it prevents an individual from functioning effectively within a community, from meeting personal needs appropriately, or when it negatively affects the wellbeing of others (Roberts, 1981). Every library community holds a set of norms and values, and individuals who, through action or inaction, depart from these standards are regarded as deviants (Rock, 2000). Although scholars have not settled on a single definition, most agree that deviance centres on the violation of established standards and is likely to attract sanction or disapproval (Downes & Rock, 2003).

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Common manifestations of deviance identified in the literature include theft of physical materials, alteration or destruction of data, theft of money, non-return of borrowed items, theft of equipment, verbal and physical abuse directed at staff and users, vandalism of library property, and the destruction of stock (Lorenzen, 1996; Ewing, 1994). Many Nigerian libraries also continue to face structural challenges, including ageing infrastructure, limited information technology, and poor shelf organisation, all of which compound the problem of deviant use (Goldstein, 2006).

A substantial body of Nigerian research has examined how academic libraries plan and secure their facilities, storage, and special collections (Ajegbomogun, 2007; Maidabino & Zainab, 2011). Much of this literature, however, frames patrons predominantly as security threats, while paying comparatively little attention to how the library environment itself may contribute to, or be affected by, deviant conduct, and to how users themselves may be harmed by such behaviour (Maidabino & Zainab, 2011). This gap, combined with the relative absence of staff-perspective studies, motivated the present assessment of deviant behaviour at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU) library, conducted through the perspectives of library staff.

Statement of the Problem

Over recent decades, concern has grown over the conduct of students within academic libraries, with librarians frequently reporting that a disproportionate amount of their time is spent managing behavioural problems rather than supporting research and learning (Milman et al., 1980). Reported issues range from vandalism, book theft, non-return of borrowed materials, and mutilation, to aggressive and disruptive conduct toward

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staff and other users. Most existing studies, however, approach these problems from the librarian's perspective, leaving a gap in understanding how deviant activity is perceived and experienced from a more holistic, staff-based vantage point. This study addresses that gap by investigating deviant behaviour among undergraduate users of the MOUAU library as reported by library staff.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to:

- identify the most common forms of deviant behaviour among undergraduate students in the MOUAU library;
- determine the factors that predispose undergraduate students to deviant behaviour in the MOUAU library; and
- ascertain the effects of deviant behaviour on students and on library operations at MOUAU.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the most common forms of deviant behaviour among undergraduate students in the MOUAU library?
2. What factors lead to deviant behaviour among undergraduate students in the MOUAU library?
3. What are the effects of deviant behaviour on students and on library operations at MOUAU?

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1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings are expected to assist university administrators in supporting library-led user education and orientation programmes; help librarians identify behavioural patterns and design appropriate counselling and control measures; enable students to better appreciate the consequences of deviant conduct; and provide a contemporary empirical reference for future research in library and information science.

Literature Review

Concept of Deviant Behaviour in Libraries

A review of the literature shows that book theft and mutilation consistently rank as the most prevalent forms of deviance across Nigerian university libraries, alongside the hiding of materials between shelves, defacement with pen or pencil marks, and the retention of materials well beyond their due dates (Ogunmodede & Emeahara, 2010).

More recent Nigerian studies confirm that these patterns persist: a study of two academic libraries in Oyo State found that theft, mutilation, impersonation, and defacement remained the most commonly committed deviant behaviours among undergraduate users, with theft and mutilation affecting a substantial share of collections (Adeyemi & Olawale, 2024). Similarly, a recent study of book theft attitudes among Nigerian tertiary institution users found a predominantly negative perception of theft, yet noted that cultural and reading-habit factors continue to shape its persistence (Bilgi ve Belge Araştırmaları Dergisi, 2024).

Factors Associated with Deviant Behaviour

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Several studies attribute deviant behaviour in libraries to a combination of situational, institutional, and individual factors, including economic hardship, scarcity of materials, inadequate photocopying facilities, and an insufficient number of copies of high-demand titles (Akussah & Bentil, 2010). Some researchers have further observed that library staff themselves are occasionally implicated in anti-social conduct, including the misuse of administrative authority (Akussah & Bentil, 2010).

More recent empirical work corroborates these findings in the Nigerian context. A study of federal university libraries in southwest Nigeria found that deviant behaviours were largely opportunistic crimes driven by situational factors, including users' pervasive perception that there was little danger of being caught, porous security, poor illumination, lack of staff vigilance, and a sense that punishment was unlikely even if caught (Adeyemi & Olawale, 2024). These findings suggest that the underlying drivers of library deviance in Nigeria have remained largely stable over time, even as the specific technologies and materials at risk have evolved.

Effects of Deviant Behaviour on Library Operations

The consequences of deviant behaviour extend well beyond the immediate loss of materials, particularly where rare or out-of-print titles are stolen or mutilated and the loss becomes irreplaceable for current and future users alike.

Beyond material loss, deviant behaviour has been shown to demoralise staff and erode service quality. At a systemic level, a recent review of deviant behaviour in library use found that such conduct depletes collections, increases operating costs, discourages library

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usage, and — if left unchecked — risks reducing libraries to under-resourced reading rooms that fail to meet the information needs of their communities (Chukwu, 2025).

Collectively, this literature underscores that deviant behaviour in academic libraries is not merely a matter of individual misconduct but a phenomenon with cascading operational, financial, and service-quality consequences for the institution as a whole.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting and systematically describing data on the characteristics, features, and perceptions of a defined population (Nworgu, 2006). The study was conducted at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU) library, Abia State, Nigeria. The population comprised the entire 104 professional and para-professional staff of the MOUAU library. Given the relatively small population size, a census approach was adopted in which the entire population was studied, consistent with the position of Bernard (2012) and Nworgu (2006) that populations under 200 may be studied in full rather than sampled. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Assessment of Deviant Behaviour in Academic Libraries Questionnaire (ADBALQ), developed in line with the study's research questions. The instrument comprised a bio-data section and clustered item sections corresponding to each research question, with responses recorded on a four-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The instrument was validated by the researcher's project supervisor and two additional experts from the Department of Library and Information Science, MOUAU, and was revised in line with their recommendations prior to administration. Copies of the

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questionnaire were administered to, and retrieved from, respondents by the researcher and trained research assistants.

Data were analysed using mean scores derived from the four-point scale (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as the decision threshold: items with a mean score of 2.50 or above were accepted as representing prevalent behaviours, significant factors, or notable effects, while items scoring below 2.50 were rejected on that basis.

Results

A total of 104 copies of the questionnaire were administered, and all 104 were returned correctly completed, representing a 100% response rate.

Table 1: Common Forms of Deviant Behaviour

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	x̄	Decision
1	Stealing of library materials	30	40	22	12	2.85	**Accept**
2	Loitering around the library	38	34	24	8	2.98	**Accept**
3	Noise making in the library	14	56	18	16	2.65	**Accept**
4	Mutilating library materials	14	52	30	8	2.69	**Accept**
5	Defacement of library materials	12	28	34	28	2.24	**Reject**
6	Rudeness to library staff	4	54	22	24	2.37	**Reject**
7	Misusing of computers	58	18	20	8	3.21	**Accept**

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8	Verbally insulting library staff	10	26	38	30	2.15	**Reject**
9	Harassing/intimidating one another	10	14	37	43	1.91	**Reject**
10	Physically attacking one another	4	12	38	50	1.71	**Reject**
11	Smoking/vaping in the library	6	10	24	64	1.60	**Reject**
Grand Mean						**2.40**	**Reject**

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; $\bar{x}$ = mean; Criterion Mean = 2.50.

Table 1 shows that five of the eleven surveyed behaviours were accepted as prevalent, with mean scores above the criterion of 2.50. Misuse of computers recorded the highest mean (3.21), followed by loitering around the library (2.98), stealing of library materials (2.85), mutilation of library materials (2.69), and noise-making (2.65). Behaviours such as defacement, rudeness to staff, verbal insults, harassment, physical attacks, and smoking or vaping all fell below the criterion and were rejected, with the grand mean across all items standing at 2.40.

Table 2: Research Question 2: Factors Leading to Deviant Behaviour

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Users' pervasive view that there is little or no danger of being caught	38	44	14	8	3.08	**Accept**
2	Porous library security	40	18	18	28	2.67	**Accept**

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3	Poor illumination	24	45	27	8	2.82	**Accept**
4	Lack of vigilance on the part of employees	24	39	33	8	2.76	**Accept**
5	Feeling that there is little or no punishment when caught	53	32	10	9	3.24	**Accept**
6	Inadequate staff/security personnel	23	49	28	4	2.88	**Accept**
7	Ignorance of the gravity of offence	30	40	28	6	2.90	**Accept**
8	Library architectural design	26	30	34	14	2.65	**Accept**
9	Peer influence	37	51	10	6	3.14	**Accept**
10	Unfavourable library policy	19	24	31	30	2.31	**Reject**
11	Ignorance about library rules	17	50	29	8	2.73	**Accept**
Grand Mean						**2.83**	**Accept**

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; $\bar{x}$ = mean; Criterion Mean = 2.50.

Table 2 indicates that ten of the eleven listed factors were accepted as contributing to deviant behaviour. The feeling that there is little or no punishment when caught recorded the highest mean (3.24), followed by peer influence (3.14), users' pervasive view that there is little danger of being caught (3.08), ignorance of the gravity of offences (2.90), inadequate staff and security personnel (2.88), poor illumination (2.82), lack of vigilance among employees (2.76), ignorance about library rules (2.73), porous library security

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(2.67), and library architectural design (2.65). Only unfavourable library policy fell below the criterion mean (2.31) and was rejected. The grand mean of 2.83 confirms that, taken together, these factors were perceived by respondents as significant and consistent contributors to deviant behaviour among undergraduate users of the MOUAU library.

Table 3: Effects of Deviant Behaviour

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	x̄	Decision
1	Has negative impact on sustainable library growth	43	53	4	4	3.30	**Accept**
2	Destroys library materials	40	32	2	30	2.79	**Accept**
3	Frustrates the efforts of library staff	35	37	26	6	2.97	**Accept**
4	Affects the image of the library	41	26	32	5	2.99	**Accept**
5	Limits users' learning/research potential	35	36	10	23	2.80	**Accept**
6	Indirectly costs taxpayers' money	26	28	34	15	2.63	**Accept**
7	Reduces library's service capacity	26	32	25	21	2.61	**Accept**
8	Reduces the quality of library resources/services	26	52	8	18	2.83	**Accept**
9	Increases educational inequality	25	43	16	20	2.70	**Accept**
10	Discourages library usage	23	28	33	20	2.52	**Accept**

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11	Reduces the perceived value of library services	16	36	20	32	2.35	**Reject**
Grand Mean						**2.77**	**Accept**

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; $\bar{x}$ = mean; Criterion Mean = 2.50.

Table 3 shows that ten of the eleven listed effects were accepted. The most strongly endorsed effect was a negative impact on sustainable library growth (3.30), followed by effects on the library's image (2.99), frustration of staff efforts (2.97), reduced quality of library resources and services (2.83), limitation of users' learning and research potential (2.80), destruction of library materials (2.79), increased educational inequality (2.70), indirect costs to taxpayers (2.63), reduced service capacity (2.61), and discouragement of library usage (2.52). Only reduction in the perceived value of library services fell below the criterion mean (2.35) and was rejected. The grand mean for this set of items stood at 2.77, confirming that, overall, respondents perceived deviant behaviour as having a clearly negative effect on library operations and service delivery.

Strategies for Curbing Deviant Behaviour

Although a detailed treatment of curbing strategies falls outside the primary scope of this paper, respondents strongly endorsed a range of interventions. The highest-rated strategies were the establishment of counselling units for deviant users (mean = 3.62), the installation of biometric technology and CCTV cameras (3.50), acquisition of multiple copies of high-demand titles (3.44), the formation of student disciplinary committees

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(3.40), and the provision of periodic user education and training (3.35). Other endorsed measures included closer supervision of library users, deployment of additional staff to unmonitored areas, increased security personnel, the introduction of stiffer penalties for offenders, and the use of RFID tagging on library materials. These findings reinforce the view that a combination of technological, educational, and disciplinary measures is perceived by staff as the most effective approach to curbing deviant behaviour.

Discussion of Findings

Common Forms of Deviant Behaviour

The prevalence of computer misuse, loitering, stealing, mutilation, and noise-making at MOUAU is consistent with findings from comparable Nigerian and West African studies. Akussah and Bentil (2010), in their study of the University of Cape Coast main library, similarly found theft and mutilation to be common forms of deviance, often linked to high demand for limited resources. More recently, Adeyemi and Olawale (2024) found that theft, mutilation, impersonation, and defacement remained the most commonly committed deviant behaviours among undergraduate library users in Nigeria, affecting a substantial proportion of collections. The prominence of computer misuse in the present study, however, reflects a behaviour less emphasised in older literature, suggesting that the nature of library deviance is evolving alongside the growing role of ICT facilities in academic libraries. This shift carries a practical implication for MOUAU specifically: security measures historically designed around physical materials (shelving audits, exit checks) may be poorly matched to a threat that is now substantially digital, and provision

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for filtering, monitoring, and accountable log-in on library computers may need to be prioritised alongside conventional security. It is also worth noting that behaviours rejected in this study, such as verbal insults and harassment of staff, may be underreported rather than genuinely rare, since staff completing a self-administered questionnaire about their own work environment may be reluctant to disclose experiences that reflect on institutional discipline or their own vulnerability; this is a plausible alternative reading of the low means recorded for these items.

Factors Leading to Deviant Behaviour

The dominance of perceived impunity — the sense that detection and punishment are unlikely — as the strongest predisposing factor at MOUAU mirrors the findings of Adeyemi and Olawale (2024), who similarly identified this perception, alongside porous security and poor illumination, as central drivers of opportunistic deviance in Nigerian university libraries. The prominence of peer influence in the present findings also aligns with broader literature on deviant behaviour, which consistently identifies social and peer dynamics as significant amplifiers of rule-breaking conduct (Akussah & Bentil, 2010). Taken together, these findings point to the urgent need for enhanced monitoring systems, improved physical infrastructure such as lighting, and consistent enforcement of library policy to close the perceived gap between misconduct and consequence. It is notable that unfavourable library policy was the only factor rejected by respondents, which suggests that staff at MOUAU do not regard the content of existing policy as the problem; rather, the weight of evidence points to a gap in enforcement and monitoring capacity rather than in policy design. This distinction matters for practice, since it implies that MOUAU is better

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served by investing in surveillance infrastructure and consistent sanctioning than by revising its rules on paper.

Effects of Deviant Behaviour

The finding that deviant behaviour negatively affects sustainable library growth, damages materials, frustrates staff, and limits users' learning and research potential is consistent with Lorenzen's (2003) earlier observation that vandalism and theft not only damage materials but also demoralise staff and degrade service quality and user satisfaction. The recent review by Chukwu (2025) similarly emphasises that unchecked deviant behaviour risks reducing academic libraries to under-resourced reading rooms, with long-term consequences for both current and future users. These convergent findings across studies separated by more than two decades suggest that, despite ongoing institutional efforts, the operational effects of library deviance in Nigeria remain stubbornly persistent and continue to warrant sustained management attention. A more critical reading of the MOUAU data, however, reveals an apparent tension: while staff rated the operational effects of deviant behaviour as considerable, the single item measuring whether such behaviour reduces the perceived value of library services was the one effect rejected by respondents. This divergence suggests that, at MOUAU, deviant behaviour is understood by staff as an operational and material burden rather than as a threat to the library's institutional legitimacy or standing, a distinction that has not been sufficiently drawn out in prior studies and one which may explain why sustained advocacy for security investment has not always translated into proportionate institutional support.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that deviant behaviour, particularly computer misuse, loitering, theft, mutilation, and noise-making, remains prevalent among undergraduate users of the MOUAU library. These behaviours are driven primarily by users' perception of a low risk of detection or punishment, peer influence, porous security, poor illumination, and inadequate staffing. The consequences extend beyond material loss to include reduced service quality, demoralised staff, and constrained learning and research opportunities for students. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action across security, policy, and educational domains.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that:

- Library management strengthen security infrastructure, including improved lighting, CCTV coverage, and adequate staffing of reading areas, to reduce the perceived likelihood of undetected misconduct.
- Clear, consistently enforced policies on library use be developed and communicated to all users, with violations addressed through an active disciplinary process.
- Periodic user education and orientation programmes be institutionalised to reduce ignorance of library rules and the consequences of deviant conduct.
- The university administration support the library with adequate funding for security technology and staff training, recognising library security as integral to the institution's academic mission.
- Future research examine the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as RFID tagging and counselling units, in reducing deviant behaviour over time.

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