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Preserving Information-Bearing Material in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

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Introduction

Libraries acquire material to meet the informational or recreational needs of its clientele. It is the responsibility of the library staff to keep these materials in good physical condition so they are available for users at all times. Materials in many libraries and archives throughout the country are still housed in conditions that leave much to be desired. A large portion of information recorded on audio or videotape about important events, people, etc., has been routinely wiped out in our electronic media houses. This is a sad situation and one that is found in many institutions throughout Nigeria. The deterioration of information-bearing material has a long history. Unless something is done to stop the process, library collections deteriorate and will continue to deteriorate. This is a battle that has to be waged against the deterioration of our intellectual heritage. Preservation and conservation of these materials is imperative.

Preservation is the action taken to anticipate, prevent, stop, or slow deterioration. It can also be described as the art of anticipating and preventing decay (Baker, 1981). Conservation is an act of preservation, protecting and shielding material from destructive influences that shorten their life span (Obike, 1990). The library plays a crucial role of protecting and preserving information-bearing materials from distortion, deterioration, and eventual loss.

Academic libraries acquire information resources to meet the needs of their community. More and more people use the collections as a result of increasing enrolments in higher education. There are shortages and decline in book budgets arising from the poor funding of the institutions as well as the high cost of books and other information resources. As a result, the libraries are left with damaged books, distorted tapes, scratched CDs, etc.

Literature Review

Preservation is a pressing concern for librarians in all parts of the world. They realize the need to preserve the world's memories. In Nigeria, however, preservation has yet to take its actual place in most academic libraries. The reason for this is a lack of funding. Madubuike (1998) emphasizes the significant role that libraries play in the social, economic, and political development of a nation. They are the "intellectual brickyards" of our civilizations, fundamental to survival and growth. It is important to take

adequate care of library resources. Limited funds, low-quality book production, and a high exchange rate are some reasons why preservation of library collections is essential.

Alhassan, in Edhebe (2004), gives reasons why materials should be preserved and conserved in the academic libraries:

- There has been a drastic reduction in the allocation of funds for books, limiting the library's ability to acquire new material. Journals, which carry the latest findings by researchers, are the worst hit. This makes preservation of existing collections essential.
- More than 90 percent of library material is foreign publications. The high foreign exchange rate is a problem, and therefore librarians must preserve material they have already acquired

Library materials must last as long as possible, and be preserved for active use for the next generation.

An old book, whatever its subject or quality, is truly a portion of history. We may imitate it or print it in facsimile, but we can never exactly reproduce it. Alegbeleye (1993) quoting Benedon, argue that in today's environment of advanced technology and dependence upon communications, information has joined capital, labour, and materials as the ingredients of a successful enterprise. Unfortunately, as important as information is, its effective management and preservation have often been accorded a low priority in libraries.

Mazikana (1993) states unequivocally that the "preservation and conservation scene in Africa [is] in a dismal state" for the following reasons:

- Many buildings housing library and archival materials are grossly inappropriate, as they were built at a time when preservation and conservation was not an important issue.
- Most libraries and archival buildings are not equipped with air conditioners to stabilize the temperature and humidity of the storage areas. Many air conditioners that are present are inadequate and non-functional.

The few libraries and archives with bindery and repair facilities lack qualified staff and working equipment. Mazikana stresses the need for a combination of facilities and maintenance procedures that are conducive to longevity of information resources. The process must begin when materials are produced. The quality of paper, film base for microforms, and the disks for computers must be made with substances that assure a long life.

Sound preservation and conservation programmes are multifaceted. As Chapman (1990) has outlined, the starting point of conservation programmes is the creation of a policy document specifying, among other things:

- Preventive measure to minimize deterioration in storage and handling
- Staff and user training programmes.
- Housekeeping routines to clean, protect, and extend the life of materials.
- Security measure and contingency plan for disaster control and recovery.
- Substitution programmes.
- Conservation treatment for repair of damaged originals.
- Procedures for exhibitions and loans.

It is doubtful that many Nigerian libraries and archives have such policy documents. Alegbeleye (1993) states that "better storage conditions for books and other library materials, establishment of

conservation policies in university libraries, as well as the recruitment of preservation librarians would bring about a better conservation effect in the African scene.”

Matwale (1993) describes the situation of libraries and archival institutions in Kenya, describing inadequate funds and lack of qualified personnel as major causes of archival underdevelopment, including the absence of proper conservation work in the national archival and library institutions.

Senapti and Nagta (1996) identify the need for preventive measures in conservation and preservation of library materials and records. These includes proper housing of documents, protection against heat, humidity, light, air pollution, dust, insects, fungi, fire, water, and mishandling. They suggest inclusion of conservation and preservation in library education and training. Alegbeleye (1996) advocates a preventive conservation and preservation approach in African countries, which should focus on improving the environment, controlling light, temperature, humidity, and pollution. Kroon (1997) is of the view that “all libraries need to preserve and conserve their collections against deterioration from a variety of sources including chemical and biological threat, as well as physical damage through handling. And libraries should prepare a disaster plan for dealing with emergencies and ensure that all materials treated are fully documented.” Polishko and Klimenko (1980) identify the basic factors affecting magnetic tapes, which are temperature and humidity, unfavorable storage conditions, dust, and moisture.

Swan (1981) discusses preservation of photographs, and advises librarians, archivists, and curators on the care of photographic collections, including environmental control and proper preparation of materials for handling. Elaturoti (1990) identifies dust, water, and insects as the factors that affect non-book materials. He recommends that they be cleaned regularly to remove dust, kept away from water, which can cause the materials to corrode, and kept away from insects. Osifoh (1997) identifies dampness, poor ventilation, which can cause mould and fungi attacks on documents, high temperature and humidity, aerosols and noxious gases from polluted air, insect and rodent infestations, as enemies of non-print materials. Electronic or electric machinery can be an enemy to magnetic tape, because they may generate magnetic currents. He recommends that magnetic tapes be stored in cardboard or inert plastic and be rewound at least once a year.

Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken to assess the preservation and conservation programmes and activities in libraries in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

A survey was used to gather data on preservation and conservation of information bearing materials in Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU) and Petroleum Training Institute Library, Effurun (PTI). A questionnaire, observation, and interview were the instruments used to collect data.

The population of this study covers staff of DELSU and PTI. A total of 50 staff were chosen from the two libraries with a ratio 3:2 as respondents for this study. The simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the libraries to represent the sample of the study.

Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings

Fifty questionnaires were administered to the staff of the two libraries. All the collected questionnaires were analyzed together (as a single entity), with the results of the interviews and observation, using simple percentage. There were 29 male and 21 female respondents from the two libraries, with 16 professionals, 23 paraprofessionals, and 11 nonprofessionals.

Table I: Written Policy on Preservation and Conservation

Options	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	14	28
Agree	31	62
Undecided	3	6
Disagree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Total	50	100

While 90 percent of respondents claimed that a policy on preservation and conservation is available, this result could be misleading, because interviews and observation revealed that there is no written policy in these institutions, and decisions on preservation are arbitrarily and inconsistent, particularly when the university librarian (as is the case for DELSU) or the director of library services (as is the case for PTI) changes. All respondents confirm the need for such policy and that this policy should spell out the percentage of the budget to be used for preservation and conservation programme. This view was favoured by 81 percent of respondents.

Also, the result showed that there are no trained personnel in conservation, but all, accept the non-professionals, have some training in general librarianship. The job of preservation of library resources cannot be left in the hands of only the professionals, because awareness and concern for preservation is the responsibility of all.

Table II: Only the Professional Staff Should Embark on Preservation and Conservation in the Library

Options	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	3	6
Agree	4	8
Undecided	7	14
Disagree	25	50
Strongly Disagree	11	23
Total	50	100

Only a small number of respondents agree with this statement. A large number of respondents see preservation and conservation as the responsibility of all levels of staff.

Table III: Cleaning and Dusting of Library Materials

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	14
Agree	8	16
Undecided	-	-
Disagree	24	48
Strongly Disagree	11	22
Total	50	100

The table above revealed that 35 (70 percent) respondents dispute the assertion that cleaning and dusting was the only method for preserving library materials. Mackenzie (1993) mentions three factors that contribute to prevention: the building, particularly the environment that it provides and its ability to resist threats from insects, fire, flooding and intruders; storage equipment and practices; and the way materials are handled when they are been used. Awale-Ale (2002) asserts that the government should institute a national preservation and conservation programme for libraries. The programme should take care of:

- Monitoring and controlling environmental conditions in libraries.
- Education of library staff and patrons.
- Consciousness-raising about library preservation in Nigeria.
- Physical treatment or replacement of deteriorating materials

As a result, the bindery section of libraries becomes vital. Although this is not a conservation workshop, it would go a long way in treating worn materials. More than 80 percent of respondents stated that the bindery section is very important in the conservation of library materials.

Table IV: Good Ventilation Can Help Preserve Library Materials

Options	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	17	34
Agree	26	52
Undecided	2	4
Disagree	3	6
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Total	50	100

Table IV shows that there is a general awareness that an atmosphere with balanced temperature and humidity will make for longevity of the information materials, and that good ventilation is paramount in preserving library materials.

Generally, lack of policy, inadequately- trained staff in preservation and conservation, poor staff attitude towards preservation and conservation, and lack of funds are the problems of preservation of information-bearing materials in Nigerian libraries. When respondents were asked if preservation and conservation should be done away with, nearly all rejected the proposal. Preservation and conservation should be routine activities.

Mazikana (1993), quoting Chapman, says that the starting point of a conservation programme is the creation of a policy document. Rosenberg (1993) suggests strategies to improve the physical condition of books that circulate amongst the library users. They involve both actors and activities.

The actors are those people who handle the books:

- Library staff, from cleaners to professionals, working in circulation or acquisitions
- Library users

The activities that merit attention are:

- Cleaning the library and the stacks
- Shelving (both removing books from the shelves and replacing them after use).
- Use of books: reading, consulting, carrying, storing.
- Photocopying
- Minor repairs that do not require special tools or expensive materials and which can be carried out in the library and within normal routines.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study was designed to investigate the preservation and conservation of library materials in higher institution libraries in Nigeria. The study reveals that there is no written policy on preservation and conservation in the libraries studied. It is impossible to cultivate the culture of preservation and conservation in such libraries, which places information-bearing materials at a high risk for extinction.

The main constraints to proper preservation and conservation in academic libraries are lack of funds, lack of qualified conservation librarians, non-committal attitude of staff, and lack of adequate and dependable storage facilities. Very few librarians are conversant with preservation management, thus militating against any comprehensive preservation programme. There is need to improve of library materials in libraries; orientation for staff, everyday care, and staff trained in preservation and conservation.

The following recommendations are made:

- A good policy on short-term to long-term preservation and conservation should be formulated.
- Professionally-trained conservators should be recruited, and training and retraining of staff should be encouraged.
- There should be an annual budget allocation for preservation and conservation.
- All Libraries should adopt everyday care methods.
- A well-equipped bindery section with trained staff should be established.
- There should be regular orientation on the preservation and conservation of library materials.

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