

Management of Special Collections in Academic Libraries in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study investigated the management of special collections units of five academic libraries in Imo State, Nigeria. These are Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Owerri, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri, Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo and Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The population of the study were the five (5) special collections librarians of the aforementioned institutions while the descriptive survey design was adopted using structured questionnaire to elicit responses from them. Some of the bottlenecks in effective management of special collections include: lack of written collection development policy, poor funding, shortage of skilled staff, poor storage facilities amongst others. Recommendations were made for the improvement of special collections in these libraries.

Keywords: academic libraries, Federal University of Technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Management in business and organization is the function that coordinates the efforts of people to accomplish goals and objectives by using available resources efficiently and effectively. Management involves identifying the mission of the organization which comprises the interlocking functions of planning, organizing, leading or directing, controlling an organization to accomplish or achieve a policy's objectives or goals (Kaplan, 2014).

Business Dictionary (2012) defines management as the process of dealing with or controlling things or people. Based on this; in academic institution, the management of special collections is the sole function of the academic library. An academic library according to Oyegunle (2013) is a library that is attached to an academic institution serving the teaching and research needs of the students and staff. He goes on to state that academic libraries are information centers established in support of the mission of the parent institutions, to generate knowledge, equip people with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the well being of mankind.

Balloffet (2005) and Banks (2000), maintain that the term special collection have come to mean great many things as the definition has become less specific and increasingly misunderstood. Association of Research Libraries (2003), describe special collections as those materials that can be in any format while Dooley, Jackie & Luce (2010) state that individual libraries or archival institution determine for themselves what constitute their own special collections. In the same view Schmit (2010) concludes that special collections are institutions containing materials from individuals, families and organizations deemed to have significant historical value.

Special collections maintain extensive unique and distinctive materials of rare published and printed resources. They are items written in manuscript format; intrinsically archival in format and content. Examples of such items are photographs, audio-visual materials like sound recordings, films, maps, plans, drawings, printed materials such as an organization's minutes or accounts, groups of working research papers, personal papers or individual items and information held in digital form. Special collections of an academic institution includes patents, administrative records, proceedings of senate, council, minutes, inaugural lecture series, etc.

According to Dooley, Jackie & Luce (2010) rare collections fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Records created before 1850,
- Records of special bibliographic significance, special edition, privately published or small press items of significance provenance.
- Of cultural, historical significant e.g Association, Inscribed, records of known scarcity value etc.

Special collections may be housed in a separate building or within the central library building. In describing special collections, standardized language and authority control found in library of congress authority files and in the Getty vocabularies are used. Information is presented in formats such as MARC (Machine-readable cataloguing and EAD (Encoded Archival Description)(American Library Association 2005).

Schmit (2010) reveal that; the academic libraries hold a large number of special collections which by virtue of the uniqueness or rarity of the items contained within them, their physical form, content, depth of subject coverage or other special significance are arranged by order of provenance and are also shelved according to their creating agencies e.g. senate proceedings, council matters etc. The materials of special collection unit are distinguished from the general stock of the academic library. They receive special treatment in terms of cataloguing, arrangement, management, consultation, preservation and conservation. They form part of the local, national and international documentary heritage.

2. ACQUISITION

Special collections is the libraries major resource. They are considered to be permanent collections and as such provide continual strong support for present and future programmes of study and research activities. They are available to all researchers regardless of background or affiliation. In Nigerian academic libraries, special collections have been acquired and built up by gift, bequest, loan and purchase as well as through international transfer. It is important to have a policy guiding the selection of special collections, either incorporated in the library's general policy or independent of the general policy. The acquisition policy to be followed is one that:

- Requires common sense, wisdom, genuinity, capacity to harden one's heart against sentimentality of vendors.
- It also requires being vigilant, tactful in fending off unwanted gifts.
- The subject is still of interest to the University.
- Quality of material
- Authoritativeness
- Circumstances of creation
- Enduring value: evidential, informational, intrinsic
- Cost of retention: processing, storage, preservation, technical support
- Format appropriateness
- Copyright and fair use (JMU, 2017).

3. ACCESS AND UTILIZATION OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Special collections are indispensable to many students, researchers and librarians. Their composition and their fragile nature make them vulnerable to pilferage and mutilation. Should this vulnerability to be an excuse of making physical access to these collections nearly impossible. The basic fundamental difference between the general collection and special collection in academic library is the question of material accessibility. Most general collections are on open stacks while almost all special collections are on closed stacks (Dooley, Jackie and Luce, 2010).

Special collections should be housed under conditions of strict security, in stacks to which direct users' access, though seldom completely prohibited, is the exception rather than rule. Therefore, discouraging their utilization in any form is to turn the special collections into a museum, which is only one part of its functions. Panitch (2017) adds that the primary functions of a special collections unit of an academic library is to provide researchers access to items while ensuring their proper use, storage and protection from theft and environmental damage. Items in a special collections contain non-

circulating items, meaning that items cannot be loaned or otherwise removed from the premises. Access to materials is usually under supervision by the staff in charge who locates and retrieves the desired material. Users do not go to the shelves to access information.

Depending on the policies of an institution holding special collections, researchers may be asked to present identification cards, letters of reference, or other credentials to gain access. Most special collections are stored in areas in which the temperature, humidity, illumination and other environmental conditions are carefully monitored to ensure integrity of materials and adequate security is provided to protect theft and vandalism.

Rules often apply to use and handling of materials in order to protect against inadvertent damage; all items are subject to examination upon entering or leaving the reading room, advance notice is required for use of some material so that it can be retrieved from Storage, the reading room is reserved for use of special collections material only, writing implements which use ink are very commonly prohibited as well as flash photograph, use of cell phones, and the presence of food and beverages. Protective gloves are sometimes required when consulting delicate materials and some collections may require that damaged spines be read only while in special cradles. Finally patrons' personal property are placed in the storage cabinet drawers.

4. MANAGEMENT AND PRESERVATION

Every academic institution has a responsibility to safeguard the collections that are entrusted to it because the unique nature of special collections make their organization and management more difficult. The acquisition of rare materials is a painstaking exercise especially in a developing country like Nigeria. Some of the materials need special treatment because of their heavy use. If proper organizational and administrative care is not taken, the special collections will end up in a chaotic state and that will militate against effective utilization.

Conservation and preservation of library materials constitute a very vital aspect in library resources management. Jordan (2003) describes preservation as an array of activities, that ensures the usability, longevity and accessibility of recorded knowledge. Preservation of library materials including the special collections include conservation, reformatting, photocopying and digitization, etc. Materials in the special collections unit of James Madison University Library (JMU) receives conservation/preservation treatment at the point of acquisition and are reviewed after each use for preservation concerns that may arise over time as resources allow (JMU, 2017). In addition, the library services of the University College London (UCL) adheres to the policy of preservation of special collections as recommended in British Standards Institution, National Preservation Office, the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions, etc. The purpose of this policy is to provide direction to staff who have responsibilities as relate to the preservation and conservation needs of special collections in an informed way (UCL, 2017).

Deterioration of library materials is a challenge in most academic libraries. In most Nigerian libraries today, preservation is not taken seriously until most library materials starts showing traces of deterioration (Njeze, 2012). According to Reed-Scott (2000), libraries currently face the intellectual problems of determining what should be preserved and what should deteriorate. Maravilla (2008), revealed that every library is prone to two kinds of deterioration: Biological deterioration caused by extreme dampness, relative humidity, variations in temperatures and atmospheric pollutants.

Olubanke (2010), submitted that paper identifies moulds is the most important biodeteriorating agents of library material. Apart from destroying, disfiguring and staining books, the moulds have been linked to numerous adverse human health effects. In the same view, Muhammed (2006), states that light from incandescent source generate heat and must be kept a distance from library collections. Therefore, efforts must be made by librarians to ensure that these valuable resources are well preserved.

Many challenges are faced by academic institutions in their efforts to permanently preserve their special collections. These include; poor infrastructure, lack of funding, staffing shortages, lack of skill, poor storage facilities, severely limited or non-existent environmental control, disaster contingency measures and lack of proper preservation policies within academic institutions. All these have negative impact on long term survival of these collections. The frequent use of these special materials by students and staff is one of the dilemmas that the academic libraries face. Continuous use of these materials increases the rate of deterioration. Through proper management, information could still be accessed while ensuring that it is also preserved for use by future generations (Olubanke, 2010).

Objectives of the Study:

The broad objectives of this study is to examine the management of special collections in academic libraries in Imo state.

Specifically the study seeks to:

- i. Find out if the academic libraries under study have special collections units.
- ii. Identify the type of acquisition policy adopted by the libraries for the acquisition of special collections.
- iii. Ascertain the methods used by the libraries in processing special collections.
- iv. Find out how these special collections are arranged and described.
- v. Assess the methods for retrieval and use of special collections.
- vi. Ascertain how special collections are secured and preserved by these libraries.
- vii. Identify the challenges encountered by the special collections units of the libraries understudy and proffer solutions to them.

Research Questions:

- i. Does your library have a special collections unit?
- ii. What type of acquisition policy does your library use for the acquisition of special collections?
- iii. How does your library process special collections?
- iv. Which methods do you adopt for arranging and describing special collections?
- v. How do your users retrieve and use your special collections?
- vi. How are your special collections preserved and secured?
- vii. What challenges does your special collections unit face and how can they be ameliorated?

5. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design using structured questionnaire to elicit responses from the special collections librarians of the academic libraries under study.

The population of the study are the five special collections librarians of:

- Federal University of Technology, Owerri
- Imo State University, Owerri
- Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, Imo State
- Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri
- Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.

Data Analysis:

Table 1: Availability of Special Collections Units in Libraries

Library	Yes	No
AIFCE	√	
POLYNEK	√	
FUTO	√	
IMOPOLY	√	
IMSU	√	

Table 1 reveals that all the academic libraries being investigated boasts of special collections units.

Table 2: Type of Acquisition Policy for Special Library Units

Acquisition policy	AIFCE	FUTO	IMPOLY	IMSU	POLYNEK
Written	√		√	√	
Unwritten					√
On Demand		√			
Value Demand		√			

Table 2: Shows that Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education (AIFCE), Imo State Polytechnic (IMOPOLY) and Federal Polytechnic, Nekede have written acquisition policies which guide their Special Collections Units on what to acquire and what not to acquire, Federal polytechnic Nekede has an unwritten policy which invariably shows that their Special Collections Unit has no limit to what it can acquire. However, the Federal University of Technology, Owerri Special Collections Unit uses On Demand and Value demand polices to acquire their special collections.

Table 3: Method of Processing Special Collections

Method of Processing	AIFCE	FUTO	IMPOLY	IMSU	POLYNEK
By cataloguing		√		√	
By accessioning		√		√	√
Use of database	√				
Use of Inventories			√		

Table 3 indicates that FUTO and IMSU process their special collections by assigning them accession numbers and consequently cataloguing them just like books.

AIFCE uses a database in processing their special collections, IMPOLY documents their special collections by listing them in a ledger while POLYNEK accessions their special collections and place them in a closed access.

Table 4: Methods of Arranging and Describing Special Collections

Arrangement and description of special collections	AIFCE	FUTO	IMPOLY	IMSU	POLYNEK
Standard language and authority control		√			
The getty vocabularies					
Order of provenance	√				
Shelving according to creating agency		√	√	√	√

Table 4 shows how the methods the special collections units of the libraries arrange and describe their collections. These are by order of provenance as indicated by AIFCE; their resources are arranged and described according to their place or source of origin. FUTO shelves their collections according to their creating agencies and describes them with generally accepted language and authority control. The remaining libraries, IMPOLY, IMSU and POLYNEK arrange and describe their collections by shelving them according to their creating agencies.

Table 5: Retrieval and Utilization of Special Collections

Retrieval and use of special collections	AIFCE	FUTO	IMOPOLY	IMSU	POLYNEK
Open access			√	√	
Close access via the help of Reference Librarian	√	√			√
Use of Protective Gloves					

From table 5, access and utilization of special collections at AIFCE, FUTO and POLYNEK by users are through the assistance of the reference Librarians as the collections are strictly under closed access. Contrariwise, users freely access the resources at IMOPOLY and IMSU.

TABLE 6: Security and Preservation of Special Collections

Security & Preservation	AIFCE	FUTO	IMPOLY	IMSU	POLYNEK
Close monitoring in special reading room	√	√	√	√	√
Secured climate controlled reading room	√	√			
Secured in closed stacks especial cradles					

Table 6 reveals methods used by the special collections units of libraries under study to secure and preserve their special resources. All the libraries use close monitoring of users in their special rooms. In addition, however, AIFCE and FUTO have added advantage of housing their special collections in a climate controlled reading room.

Table 7: Challenges Facing Special Collections Units

Challenges	AIFCE	FUTO	IMPOLY	IMSU	POLYNEK
Poor infrastructure	√				
Lack of funding	√		√	√	√
Shortage of skilled staff	√			√	
Poor storage facilities	√	√			√
Lack of environmental control	√				
Lack of proper preservation policies	√	√		√	√

The challenges faced by the special collections units of the libraries investigated as shown in table 7 are: AIFCE indicated poor infrastructure, lack of funding, shortage of skilled staff, poor storage facilities, and lack of environmental control. At FUTO, their challenges were poor storage facilities and lack of proper preservation policy while IMPOLY indicated lack of funding as their major challenge. Furthermore, IMSU noted lack of funding, shortage of skilled staff and lack of proper preservation policy as their headache. However, POLYNEK indicated lack of funding, poor storage facilities as well as lack of proper preservation policy as the major challenges which inhibit their services.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is professionally gladdening that all the five (5) academic libraries investigated have special collections units. This shows the importance these libraries place on having special collections units.

However, establishing a special collections units where resources of special nature can be housed for use is very paramount for every library but the crux of the matter is equipping it with the relevant resources; furniture and equipment, conducive climate controlled environment for the resources and users, accessibility and security of the materials, and most importantly a retinue of professionally trained staff to man and render services at these units.

In view of the foregoing this paper recommends that:

- The necessary infrastructural facilities be put in place in aforementioned special collections units to enhance service delivery.
- The parent libraries housing special collections units should properly fund them
- Trained staff be positioned to administer services at these units. Just as constant retraining via workshops, seminars and conferences should not be glossed over.
- Adequate storage facilities for the resources in environmentally controlled rooms be put in place to keep the resources in top form and enhance user friendly environment.
- Adequate preservation policies be adopted by the libraries to encourage longevity of the resources
- Written acquisition policy be adopted by the special collections units as it will guide them on what and what not to acquire.

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