Preservation Practices in University Libraries in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

In the dynamic landscape of academic libraries, preserving knowledge and cultural heritage for the future generations is paramount. This study examined preservation practices in South-West Nigeria's public university libraries. A survey was conducted among 536 library personnel drawn from 14 public University libraries in South-West Nigeria. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan formula/table. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 224 respondents. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire with a return rate of 185 (82.6%). Simple percentages mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that middling preservation practices such as proper shelving ($\overline{x}$= 3.47), regular cleaning ($\overline{x}$ = 3.43) etc. and minimal preservation practices which include implementation of disaster control management ($\overline{x}$= 3.52), regular building maintenance ($\overline{x}$= 3.40) etc. were adopted by the libraries more than optimal preservation practices. Furthermore, the result also revealed that mass de-acidification ($\overline{x}$=1.91) grouped under optimal preservation practices was not adopted in most public University libraries in South-West Nigeria. The result also revealed that inadequate skilled preservation administrators ($\overline{x}$=3.45), absence of effective preservation practices ($\overline{x}$= 3.39) etc. were the obstacles to effective preservation practices while lack of partnership with other institution ($\overline{x}$= 2.09) is not part of the obstacles. The study recommended that library management should provide the necessary support to improve preservation practices, aligning with their mission of advancing knowledge through teaching and research in these libraries.

Key Words: Preservation, Preservation practices, Academic libraries, Library personnel

Introduction

Preservation practices in academic libraries play a crucial role in safeguarding knowledge for future generations. As the landscape of learning and information continues to evolve, academic libraries face unique challenges in preserving and managing resources. (Premadasa, 2016) highlights the need for academic libraries and library staff to adapt swiftly to the new learning environment, particularly in addressing the changing formats of resources. Furthermore, Fan and Wang (2020) sheds light on the digital library and traditional library resources and emphasize the importance of their management and preservation. Despite the rapid development of infrastructure and increased access to computers and the Internet, academic libraries still encounter various problems. These include difficulties in competing with other organizations that offer more attractive work environments and salaries to ambitious professionals, inadequate funding for acquisitions and barriers to providing user-centered services (Corpuz, 2020).

Preservation crucial role in safeguarding knowledge by ensuring that valuable information, insights, and cultural heritage are protected and passed on to future generations. It acts as a bridge between the past and the future, allowing us to understand our history, learn from it, and build upon it. Cultural heritage, historical records, and scientific advancements are all preserved through various means, such as archival efforts, digital preservation, and conservation practices. By safeguarding this knowledge, we maintain our cultural identity, avoid the loss of crucial historical records, and foster the continuous progress of human civilization (Abdullahi, Nwachukwu, & Ahmad, 2023). Preservation, according to Umana (2020) also ensures the continuity of educational knowledge, allowing future generations to access and learn from the accumulated wisdom of previous scholars and educators. This enables a smooth transfer of knowledge, encouraging further exploration, and development in various fields of study. Additionally, preservation supports the protection of intellectual property rights, incentivizing creativity and innovation by providing recognition and protection for creators and inventors. This, in turn, promotes a culture of knowledge sharing and collaborative learning.

Preservation techniques used in academic libraries are diverse and aim to safeguard various types of materials, including books, manuscripts, photographs, audiovisual materials, and digital resources. According to Shameenda (2011), physical preservation techniques in academic libraries involve a range of practices aimed at maintaining and extending the lifespan of physical materials.

Skilled conservators repair and conserve damaged items, such as books and manuscripts, using techniques like bookbinding, reattachment of loose pages, and repairing covers. Additionally, libraries employ de-acidification processes to neutralize acidic paper, preventing further deterioration. Encapsulation and lamination are utilized for fragile documents, protecting them from handling damage. Temperature and humidity control ensure stable environmental conditions to prevent damage caused by fluctuations. Libraries also take measures to prevent pests that could harm collections. Disaster preparedness plans are developed to protect materials in emergencies or natural disasters. Through these physical preservation efforts, academic libraries strive to protect their valuable and irreplaceable physical collections for the benefit of scholars and researchers.

Digital preservation in academic libraries focuses on ensuring the long-term accessibility and usability of digital resources, which are susceptible to technological obsolescence and data corruption (Paucar-León, Molina-Granja, Lozada-Yánez & Santillán-Lima, 2022). Libraries implement data backup and redundancy strategies, creating multiple copies of digital materials stored in diverse locations to prevent data loss. Also, format migration is carried out periodically, converting digital files to updated formats to avoid obsolescence and ensure compatibility with evolving technologies. However, library preservation practices presents a multifaceted set of challenges that require careful consideration and resource management. One of the primary obstacles is financial constraints, as preservation efforts demand significant financial investments in specialized equipment, materials, skilled staff and budgetary limitations. Balancing preservation needs with other essential library services and acquisitions becomes an ongoing challenge for institutions with limited resources.

Technological obsolescence poses another significant challenge, particularly in the realm of digital preservation. Libraries must grapple with rapidly evolving technologies and formats, ensuring the long-term accessibility and usability of digital resources. Ongoing efforts are required to address potential format obsolescence and data migration issues. To overcome this challenge, libraries need to invest in robust digital preservation systems and strategies that keep pace with technological advancements and ensure the continued accessibility of digital collections. Tang and Hu (2019) noted that many libraries lack expertise in preservation practices presenting a significant challenge. Preservation requires specialized knowledge and skills, such as conservation and digital curation expertise. Finding and retaining qualified staff, including conservators and digital preservation

specialists, can be difficult due to the limited pool of experts in these fields. Consequently, libraries must invest in training programs and professional development opportunities to build and maintain an expert preservation workforce.

Moreover, Megaw (2021) opined that the sheer size and diversity of library collections present a challenge in prioritizing preservation efforts effectively. Academic libraries often house vast and varied collections, ranging from rare books and manuscripts to digital research data. Creating comprehensive preservation policies and strategies becomes a complex task as each collection type requires specific preservation considerations. Libraries need to adopt a nuanced approach to prioritize preservation efforts and allocate resources effectively. Physical preservation also faces challenges related to space and storage constraints. Providing proper storage facilities and maintaining suitable environmental conditions for physical materials can be challenging, especially for libraries with limited space. Ensuring collections are stored safely and protected from deterioration requires careful planning and investment in adequate storage infrastructure.

In the context of this study, the three Levels of Preservation Practices Model by Forde Rheys-Lewis (2007) will be used to measure preservation practices focusing on the three Levels Programme of preservation practices which includes; minimal or small level of preservation, moderate or middle Level of preservation and optimal or full level of preservation. The minimal or small level preservation is the barest measure to improve the physical handling of library information materials when they are in circulation among the users. This is the everyday care for books, they include cleaning, shelving, photocopying, monitoring, etc. The moderate or middling level preservation is the library staff's knowledge on preservation of information materials that they should not be tightly shelved. This level of preservation covers all those activities that demand greater expertise beyond minimal level. Optimal or full level of preservation refers to the highest level of preservation practices. It is at this level that a full scale system for migration or emulation of digital materials is done, including mass de-acidification of library materials. Hence, this article delves into the intricate tapestry of preservation practices in academic libraries, unraveling the profound importance they hold as custodians of knowledge. It explores the diverse preservation practices and shedding light on the challenges militating the enduring legacy of human intellect for the generations to come.

Research Objectives

The specific objective of this study is to investigate the following;

1. To determine the prevalent preservation practices for safeguarding recorded knowledge in public university libraries in South-West Nigeria.

2. To ascertain the factors that militates against preservation practices to safeguard recorded knowledge in public university libraries in South-West Nigeria.

Literature Review

The strategies for preserving information materials aimed at stabilizing, strengthening and ensuring that information resources are protected and remain available for use by the present and future library clients. Masenya and Ngulube (2019) revealed that the best strategies for preserving information resources in libraries are through monitoring and controlling of environmental conditions where print information resources are housed. Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Osinulu (2015) observed that mass de-acidification, binding, lamination and restoration are the appropriate strategies that need to be adopted for preservation. According to Shigwan (2015) digitization is another strategy that could assist in preserving information resources in academic libraries, to address the information needs of their clients. Mubofu, Mambo, and Samzugi (2020) noted that to preserve information resources in good condition, it is important to maintain and control the environment to avoid fluctuations in temperature and humidity. Phillips (2015) revealed that emergency preparedness, climate control, integrated pest management, care and handling policies are ways to ensure preservation of library materials.

Matthews (2018) describes preservation as an umbrella term for an array of activities, principles, practices, and organizations that ensure the usability, longevity, and accessibility of recorded knowledge. These activities include; general collections repair, reformatting (microfilming, photocopying, and digitization), environmental monitoring and control, care and handling of materials, disaster preparedness and recovery, binding and preservation education and training. In preservation, consideration is given to every element that promotes the protection of the materials including the housing, stable environment, storage system and security against such threats as theft, mutilation, disaster preparedness such as floods, fires, tornadoes, and earthquakes and poor

handling. Orim (2017) revealed that where the library is well funded, it will facilitate the acquisition of facilities, equipment and infrastructures that are needed to keep the library resources safe. Alex-Nmecha and Okoro (2020) reported that when library resources are properly preserved, service delivery will be hinge-free and better conservation practices will lead to an increase in library service delivery effectiveness in the libraries studied. However, lack of needed policies and library staff training on proper preservation and conservation practices are some of the problems.

Dare and Ikegune (2018) reported that Microfilming, Fumigation exercises and Disaster preparedness were the major methods adopted to preserve materials. The study also revealed that lack of preservation and conservation librarians in the library, insufficient fund, lack of interest on the part of staff and inadequate equipment were the problems associated with the preservation and conservation of serials. Shameenda and Kanyengo (2012) revealed that 20 (57%) of the library staff had not received formal training in preservation and conservation of library materials. Shameenda and Kanyengo further established that some of the major obstacles to the development and administration of preservation and conservation programs in the university libraries were lack of funds and necessary skills and qualifications in preservation and conservation techniques and practices. Moreover, staff skills and qualifications regarding preservation and conservation of library materials are inadequate among the staff and in the University of Zambia Library. Mubofu, Mambo and Samzugi (2022) revealed that effective preservation approaches for information resources can be done when binding, digitization, migration, and emergency preparedness plans were adopted. The findings further revealed that libraries still has a low-level competence and skills to implement some preservation strategies such as migration. From the findings, it was concluded that public university libraries have a variety of preservation approaches for both print and digital information resources.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The population of this study was made up of five hundred and thirty six (536) library personnel in university libraries in South-West Nigeria. This was gotten via contacts from colleagues in the profession across the concerned institutions. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was used to arrive at the sample size of 224. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents and a structured questionnaire tilted questionnaire on Preservation practices and militating factors in safeguarding

knowledge for future generations (PPMFSKFG) was used to elicit responses from library personnel. The questionnaire was divided into three sections which include demographic information (Section A), Methods of preservation practices (section B) and the Constraints to preservation practices in the libraries (section C). 224 copies of the questionnaire were administered and 185 (82.6%) were retrieved and deemed fit for analysis. Frequency counts, mean, simple percentages and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions, using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 26 software.

DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS

Demographic Information of Respondents

Findings from this study revealed that 126(68.1%) of the library personnel under this study were female while 59(31.9%) were male. 85(46%) of the respondents are 51years and above, while 27(14.5%) are below 20-30 years. This implies that the majority of the respondents are 51 years and above. Library officers 57(30.8%) dominated the respondents while 11(5.9%) were deputy university librarians. The results also show that 63(34.1%) hold bachelor's degree, while 19(10.3%) hold diploma. The results shows that 83(44.9%) of the respondents have spent 31 years and above on the job, while 19(10.2%) have spent between 1 and 10years on the job. The implication of this, the respondents who have been employed for 31 years or more with the largest proportion have supplied reliable information regarding current preservation issues. Also, in the next five years, there will be a high retirement rate, which could result in a staffing deficit at Nigeria's public university libraries if hiring is not done.

Table 1: Preservation Practices in Academic Libraries

S/N	Prevalent Preservation Practices in academic libraries	SA	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	Mean	Std. Dev
		SA		A		D		SD		Mean	Std. Dev
	Minimal or Small level preservation practices Mean = 3.29										
1.	Proper Shelving is done in my library	102	55.1	72	38.9	7	3.8	4	2.2	3.47	0.676
2.	Regular Cleaning is done in my library	106	57.3	61	33	10	5.4	8	4.3	3.43	0.785
3.	Binding of deteriorated materials is done in my library	92	49.7	83	44.9	7	3.8	3	1.6	3.43	0.648

									Mean	SD
4.	Training staff to ensure library users handled library materials correctly is done in my library	82	44.3	85	45.9	15	8.1	3	1.6	3.33	0.695
5.	Photocopying deteriorated library resources	50	27	72	38.9	40	21.6	23	12.4	2.81	0.975
Moderate or Middle-Level Preservation Practices Mean = 3.35										
6.	Implementation of Disaster control management	110	59.5	65	35.1	7	3.8	3	1.6	3.52	0.652
7.	Regular building maintenance	80	43.2	100	54.1	4	2.2	1	0.5	3.40	0.563
8.	Installation of good metal shelves and cabinets	80	43.2	90	48.6	13	7	2	1.1	3.34	0.658
9.	Implementation of a digital preservation strategy	71	38.4	103	55.7	9	4.9	2	1.1	3.31	0.616
10.	Installation of air conditioners	72	38.9	72	38.9	39	21.1	2	1.1	3.16	0.789
Optimal or Full-scale Preservation Practices Mean = 2.49										
11.	Preservation by substitution is done in my library	85	45.9	85	45.9	9	4.9	6	3.2	3.35	0.722
12.	Full scale system for migration or emulation of digital materials is provided in my library	40	21.6	47	25.4	90	48.6	8	4.3	2.64	0.867
13.	Installation of an air filtration system is available in my library	26	14.1	32	17.3	89	48.1	38	20.5	2.25	0.940
14.	In my library, preservation and conservation room is installed	13	7	45	24.3	111	60	16	8.6	2.30	0.725
15.	Mass de-acidification is done in my library	4	2.2	21	11.4	114	61.6	46	24.9	1.91	0.665
Overall mean = 3.04										

Table 2 shows the prevalent preservation practices in public university libraries adopted in South-west Nigeria by library personnel are shown in Table 2. The result indicate that preservation practices were adopted in the public university libraries in South-West Nigeria with an overall mean of ($\bar{x}$= 3.04). Moderate preservation had the highest mean of ($\bar{x}$= 3.35) followed by minimal

or small level preservation practices (x̄= 3.29) while optimal or full-scale preservation practices had the lowest mean (x̄= 2.49). This implies that the prevalent preservation practices deployed in the university libraries were moderate. These preservation practices include proper shelving (x̄= 3.47) which is the highest preservation practices while photocopying deteriorated library resources (x̄ = 2.81) is the least preservation practices adopted. In the moderate level preservation, implementation of disaster control management (x̄ =3.52) is highly practice while installation of air conditioners (x̄ =3.16) is the lowest preservation practices. Optimal preservation practices revealed that preservation by substitution (x̄ =3.35) is the highest preservation practices while Mass de-acidification (x̄ =1.91) is the lowest preservation practices adopted.

Table 2: Factors that Militate against Preservation Practices in Academic Libraries

S/N	Factors Militating against Preservation practices	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Mean	Std Dev.
1.	Insufficient fund	104	56.2	81	43.8	0	0	0	0	3.56	0.497
2.	Inadequate number of skilled preservation administrators	100	54.1	70	37.8	14	7.6	1	0.5	3.45	0.659
3.	Absence of effective preservation policies	100	54.1	62	33.5	18	9.7	5	2.7	3.39	0.773
4.	Inadequate skills for properly handling information resources	89	48.1	66	35.7	23	12.4	7	3.8	3.28	0.825
5.	Poor housekeeping practices	56	30.3	125	67.6	2	1.1	2	1.1	3.27	0.534
6.	Harsh environmental condition	54	29.2	127	68.6	3	1.6	1	0.5	3.26	0.511
7.	Insufficient organizational commitment	43	23.2	114	61.6	20	10.8	8	4.3	3.04	0.718
8.	Complexity of the preservation process	28	15.1	97	52.4	60	32.4	0	0	2.83	0.669
9.	Shortage of preservation equipment	0	0	113	61.1	69	37.3	3	1.6	2.59	0.524
10.	Lack of collaboration and partnerships with other institutions	0	0	26	14.1	149	80.5	10	5.4	2.09	0.434
	Average mean = 3.08										

Table 3 shows the factors militating against the preservation practices of public university libraries in South-West Nigeria. The result from table 4 revealed factors militating against the implementation of preservation practices with an overall mean of ($\overline{x}$= 3.08). These factors include insufficient fund ($\overline{x}$= 3.56) inadequate number of skilled preservation administrators ($\overline{x}$=3.45), absence of effective preservation practices ($\overline{x}$= 3.39), poor housekeeping practices ($\overline{x}$= 3.27), and harsh environmental condition ($\overline{x}$= 3.26), insufficient organizational commitment ($\overline{x}$= 3.04), complexity of the preservation process ($\overline{x}$= 2.83) shortage of preservation equipment ($\overline{x}$= 2.59) while lack of collaboration and partnerships with other institutions do not militate against the implementation of preservation practices in public university libraries, South-West Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

This study investigated the prevalence preservation practices and the factors militating it in public university libraries in South-West Nigeria**.** This study revealed that moderate or middle-level preservation which includes implementation of disaster control management, regular building maintenance, installation of good metal shelves and cabinets, implementation of a digital preservation strategy and installation of air conditioners and minimal or small level preservation practices such as proper shelving, regular cleaning, binding of deteriorate materials, training staff ensuring library users handled library materials correctly and photocopying deteriorated library resources were prevalent while optimal or full level preservation practices such as preservation by substitution, full scale system for migration or emulation of digital materials, installation of an air filtration system, installed preservation and conservation room and mass de-acidification was less prevalent public university libraries in South-West Nigeria. Hence this finding aligns with the study of Akintonde and Awujoola (2022) who discovered that the library engages in general cleaning and dusting at regular intervals, and that the libraries have an integrated disaster management system. These can be categorised under the minimum or small level of preservation practices and moderate or middle-level preservation practices. Similarly, a study by Lazarus, Jinadu, Eddy-Ugorji and Imam (2020) also found that cleaning the library and regular fumigation of the library surroundings are the most preservation strategies adopted which are grouped under the minimal or small level preservation practices in this study.

The study further revealed that the a number of factors militating against preservation practices in academic libraries among which are, insufficient fund and inadequate number of skilled

preservation administrators. This finding aligns with those of Shameenda and Kanyengo (2012) who found that the major obstacles to the development and administration of preservation and conservation programs in university libraries were lack of funds and inadequate skills in preservation and conservation techniques. Furthermore, Adekoya (2023) established that preservation of the library information materials in almost all academic libraries' annual budgets is not adequately funded by their institutions. According to Rasaki, Adewuyi and Makinde (2023), preservation in the libraries is highly overwhelmed by lack of knowledgeable staff and the unavailability of preservation policies or guidelines.

Conclusion

Preservation practices in academic libraries are a crucial role to ensuring longevity and transmission of intellectual properties to upcoming generations. Preservation practices in academic libraries will be highly effective by employing methods such as proper shelving of library materials, regular cleaning of the library, binding of deteriorate materials in the library, implementation of disaster control management, regular building maintenance, installation of good metal shelves and cabinets. In addition to the aforementioned methods, the implementation of optimal or full-scale preservation practices such as installing an air filtration system, mass de-acidification, and preservation by substitution or reformatting, and full scale system for migration or emulation of digital materials will also be of a great benefit. The study also revealed major obstacles to the administration of preservation practices in public university libraries in South-West Nigeria that call for attention. These obstacles prevent academic libraries from maintaining their information heritage to preserve it for future use.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Library personnel should improve in the adoption of optimal or full level preservation practices, for example scale system for migration or emulation of digital materials, installation of an air filtration system, installed preservation and conservation room and mass de-acidification.

2. The library management should provide workable platform for library personnel to acquire the knowledge and skills regarding the technical and complex aspects of preservation. This

can be done by organising conferences, workshops and webinars that focus on practical training on preservation and conservation.

3. The university management should give premium to preservation of library materials just as it is known that the university cannot operate without a functional library with durable collections.

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