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USE OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS BY POST GRADUATE STUDENTS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Special collections are usually library materials selected for specific purposes to meet specific needs. They are rare books and manuscripts which provide resources for the increasing needs of the research community in an academic or research institution. The study covers three universities in South-west Nigeria. These universities are Lagos State University (LASU), Bowen University, Iwo, and Covenant University, Ota. One hundred and ninety-three respondents were sampled for this study. The descriptive survey and stratified random sampling method was adopted for this study. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. Data were analysed in tables using simple percentages and mean. The study showed that there is a high level of utilization of special collections in the selected universities. The respondents, however, pointed out poor bibliographic details of these special collections as a major hindrance to their easy accessibility and retrieval.

Keywords

Special Collections, Post Graduate Students, Universities, South-west, Nigeria

Introduction

Special collections are usually library materials selected for specific purposes to meet specific needs. These collections are special categories grouped together and are different from conventional materials usually found in the library. Igbeka and Ola (2010) are of the view that, depending on their mandate and policies, different libraries has different types of special collections. According to Agyven-Gyasi (2008), special collections are rare books and manuscripts which provide resources for the increasing needs of the research community in an academic or research institution. Special collections seek to raise the profile of the University and its Library by achieving recognition of the regional and national significance of its collections. In addition, special collections synthesize, correlate and document the history and thought of distinguished people, they are referred to as mines of information illustrating the richness of the history, culture and civilization of people all over the world. Special collections are indispensable to students, researchers and librarians; their composition makes them vulnerable to pilferage and mutilation.

Ogbuyi and Okpe (2013) posited that an academic library provides information resources for post graduate students to carry out effective learning and research, to the teaching staff resources to support teaching and research; in all, the library is expected to provide information resources for extra-curricular activities. It is a fact that the quality and strength of any educational program lies on the library; it does not depend on how magnificent the building is, but on the proper use of it. The main goal of an academic library is to support the objectives a university, which are generally in the area of teaching, research and service (Aina, 2004; Mabawonku, 2004; Johnson, 2006).

University libraries are established with the primary goal of providing information to the students, staff and workers of the university community. Yusuf and Iwu (2010) asserted that a University library is an indispensable instrument for intellectual development being a store house of information both for students and staff. One of the objectives of academic libraries in Nigeria is to develop and maintain collections of information resource in all formats print and non-print and to make these information resources available and accessible to all. It is pertinent, therefore, that university libraries facilitate information resource to meet academic staff members' research needs. Supporting this objective, Chisenga (2006) observed that the central purpose of libraries is to provide a service: access to Information, and modern information and communication technologies, especially computers. Nwezeh and Shabi (2011) outlined books, journals, government publications, indexes, abstracts as some of the resources to be made available and accessible to library users.

To achieve these objectives of satisfying the information needs of the user community, the library needs to acquire current and relevant materials in both print and non-print formats. It is the duty of the library to identify the information needs of its users and ensure their presence in libraries for immediate use (Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002; Aina, 2002). The use of information resources is indispensable to the teaching, learning and research activities of postgraduate students in any university system.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were, to:

- determine the extent of utilization of special collections/materials by postgraduate students in the selected university libraries in south west Nigeria; and
- find out the challenges encountered by postgraduate students in making use of special collections in the selected university libraries

Methodology

The study covers three universities in South-west Nigeria, and they all have diverse special collections for their users. These are Lagos State University (LASU), Bowen and Covenant University. One hundred and ninety-three respondents were sampled and used for this study. The descriptive survey and stratified random sampling method was adopted for this study. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. The results of the study are shown in tables using simple percentages and mean.

Findings

RQ1: What is the extent of utilization of special collection materials by postgraduate students in selected academic libraries in Nigeria?

Table 1. Extent of Utilization of Special Collection in University Libraries

s/n	Extent of Utilization of Special Collections	Very Low	Low	High	Very High	Mean
1	Journals	8.5%	5.3%	18.1%	68.1%	3.46
2	Theses and Dissertation	2.7%	7.4%	33.0%	56.9%	3.44
3	Technical Reports	6.9%	21.8%	48.9%	22.3%	2.87
4	Conference proceedings	4.3%	28.7%	52.7%	14.4%	2.77
5	Manuscripts	9.0%	33.5%	32.4%	25.0%	2.73
6	Inaugural/Faculty lectures	8.0%	26.1%	54.3%	11.7%	2.70
7	Africana materials	22.3%	25.0%	15.4%	37.2%	2.68
8	CD-ROM	31.4%	14.4%	16.0%	38.3%	2.61
9	Gazettes	16.0%	35.6%	22.3%	26.1%	2.59
10	Maps and atlases	14.4%	38.8%	23.9%	22.9%	2.55
11	Patents	16.5%	31.4%	39.9%	12.2%	2.48
12	Annual reports	9.6%	43.6%	37.8%	9.0%	2.46
13	Government publications	10.6%	45.7%	31.4%	12.2%	2.45
14	Occasional papers	12.8%	48.4%	27.7%	11.2%	2.37
15	White papers	14.9%	37.2%	43.6%	4.3%	2.37
16	Blue prints	16.5%	45.7%	31.4%	6.4%	2.28

Table 1 above shows the ranking of the degree of utilization of special collection materials by postgraduate students in selected academic libraries in Nigeria as follows:- Journals had a Mean score of 3.46 and was ranked highest, followed by Thesis and Dissertation which had the mean of 3.44, Technical Reports, Mean of 2.87, Conference proceedings had a mean of 2.77, Manuscripts with the Mean of 2.73, Inaugural/Faculty lectures, mean of 2.70, Africana materials Mean of 2.68, CD-ROM had a mean of 2.61, Gazettes, mean of 2.59, Maps and atlases mean of 2.55, Patents, mean of 2.48, Annual reports, with the mean of 2.46, Government publications, mean of 2.45, Occasional papers mean of 2.37, White papers mean of 2.37 and lastly Blue prints which had the mean score of 2.28.

RQ2: What are the factors responsible for the underutilization of special collections in selected academic libraries in Nigeria?

Table 2. Factors responsible for the Underutilization of Special Collections in the selected academic libraries under study

SD- Strongly Disagree D—Disagree U—Undecided A—Agree SA—Strongly Agree

s/n	Problems	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean
1	Problem with the citation in bibliographic reference	5.3%	7.4%	7.4%	37.2%	42.6%	4.04
2	Poor bibliographic information make the citation difficult	5.3%	8.0%	5.9%	40.4%	40.4%	4.03
3	Non standard organization of the materials	4.8%	8.5%	8.5%	52.7%	25.5%	3.86
4	Problem of illumination in the storage area	7.4%	5.3%	5.3%	62.2%	19.7%	3.81
5	Non-professional layout and format of the special collection	5.9%	8.0%	8.0%	56.9%	21.3%	3.80
6	Inadequate use of special collection by the postgraduate students	3.7%	9.0%	18.6%	42.0%	26.6%	3.79
7	Out-dated collection	6.4%	17.0%	11.2%	48.4%	17.0%	3.53

Table 2 above shows the ranking of the factors responsible for the underutilization of special collections in the selected academic libraries. Problem with the citation in bibliographic reference with the mean of 4.04 was ranked highest by their mean score rating and was followed by Poor bibliographic information which makes the citation difficult mean of 4.03, Nonstandard organization of the materials mean of 3.86, Problem of illumination in the

storage area mean of 3.81, Non-professional layout and format of the special collection mean of 3.80, Inadequate use of special collection by the postgraduate students mean of 3.79 and lastly by Out-dated collection mean of 3.53.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study reveals that journals have the highest utilization, with the mean of 3.46. This can be traced back to their ranking of utilization as shown in table 1 as scoring the highest in utilization. In fact majority of the postgraduates find their university library performance on special collections satisfactory. Users' accessibility and utilization of special collections clearly determine the relevancy of the materials to the users. Lack of accessibility indicates irrelevancy of the materials. Accessing the collections gives an opportunity for the users to critically examine the collection, and make suggestions on how the collection can be improved. The stronger the collection, the more likely it is patronized.

The findings of this study further reveal that majority of the respondents (mean of 4.04) claim that they have problems with the poor bibliographic information which made the citation of the special collections consulted difficult. This could be considered to be too high, this suggests that University libraries need to organize seminars and workshops for publishers, so as to encourage them to constantly include special collections in catalogues and also make bibliographic citations available in national databases, this makes for easy access and use special collections in university libraries.

A group of other respondents (mean of 3.86) were of the opinion that there were no standard organizations of the materials. This implied that there is poor organization of special collections in the university libraries sampled. This buttressed the fact that organization of special collections is difficult.

The study also exposed the underutilization of most special collections and the factors responsible for it. This in itself has affected the usage and perception of postgraduate who need them most. This call for concern because Nigeria has the largest number of Universities in Africa and weaknesses exposed could have far reaching implications to academia and research. The results of the study pose a challenge to libraries and information professionals in that they have to be proactive in order to ensure that library users get quick and easy access to resources they need. Even though special collections need to be properly handled, physically protected and accessibility to these collection should be controlled, I suggest that users should be allowed to roam in the stack because they are likely to pick up materials of interest

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is discovered that special collections in Nigerian academic libraries are comparatively grossly underutilized, and lacks proper coordination for easy retrieval and use, and this makes users believe that universities in Nigeria do not hold materials of interest to them. However, for these collections to be well exploited and utilized, their location must be known, the places of storage must be proper illuminated; there must be a standard way of organization for easy retrieval, and academic libraries should be encouraged to constantly update their special collection to recent collections.

In view of the findings, the study therefore recommends that:

- i. Postgraduates, no matter their status, need special collections for their research. The fact that lots of primary and very recent information could be derived from special collections should be an incentive for using them. Librarians in university libraries should be more committed to meeting the needs of these postgraduates by organizing these special collections in such a manner that will make their retrieval and utilization easy for the users.
- ii. Internet connectivity offers a lot of opportunities to harness networked information. There are many tools online that could be used to access special collections therefore Librarians should avail themselves the opportunity to identify, use and interact with all these tools. They should also make training and re-training a priority so that they can update themselves and acquire new skills required to serve their users better.
- iii. It is also of paramount importance that special collections available in the University libraries that are not born digital to be converted to digital. This will make it easier for users to access and make utmost use of them. Converting such collections to digital will also solve the problem of space and would also afford the opportunity of several users accessing the same material at the same time.

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