

MANAGEMENT AND PRESERVATION OF THESES IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI, NIGERIA, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

By

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Abstract

Theses and dissertations are research carried out as a requirement for the award of masters or doctoral degree. Theses are one significant means through which university libraries enrich their resources. They are grey literature that contain firsthand information that does not pass through any means of traditional publishing. However, the graduating students of Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) are mandated to submit bound copies and a soft copy of their research output at the end of their programme to the postgraduate school from which a copy is deposited in the university library. This article explored various methods and techniques of managing and preserving theses in FUTO. It also identified the challenges hindering its management and preservation and made some suggestions on the way forward. Descriptive survey research method was employed to investigate a total population of 15 staff in the ICT and Serials unit of the library who handle both the e-theses and hard copies of theses submitted to the university library. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the research from the respondents. Findings revealed that epileptic power supply, the inadequacy of storage facilities, inadequate finance to sustain preservation techniques, space constraint, environmental conditions such as flood/dampness was identified as some of the challenges to effective theses management and preservation in FUTO. Suggestions were also made on the way forward in combating these challenges.

Keywords: Management; Preservation; ETDs, Grey Literature, Theses; Dissertations; Scholarly research, Rare collections – Challenges, FUTO Library

Introduction

Libraries in institutions of higher learning especially University libraries are charged with the responsibility to acquire, process, preserve and make material resources accessible to their users. Theses are one significant means through which university libraries enrich their resources. They are grey literature that contain firsthand information that does not pass through any means of traditional publishing. Okoro (2003) asserts that theses, which though unpublished carry original information derived from scholarly research is a significant part of

institutional research output that showcase the indigenous knowledge and local content information of the people that deserves to be managed and maintained carefully for posterity. Prytherch (2000) posits that maintenance, storage and disposition are the fundamental principles necessary for answering recorded information in digital, electronic and traditional methods. Management of research heritage of an educational institution is university library's top priority that requires effective preservation strategy for future use.

Theses and dissertations refer to the research carried out as a requirement for the award of masters or doctoral degree. However, universities all over the world have specific names given to their postgraduate research output. In Nigeria for instance, research outputs of postgraduate students are referred to theses and dissertations. Egonu (1999) states that theses/dissertations are bound copies of research reports produced for the award of a certificate, diploma, masters, or doctorate.

The Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) graduating students are mandated to submit bound copies and a soft copy of their research output at the end of their programme to the postgraduate school from which a copy is deposited in the university library. This process is aimed at building resources for learning, teaching, and research. According to Ilo; Idiegbeyan-Ose; Adebayo and Osinulu (2015), university libraries should ensure that information materials are processed and preserved well and also made accessible to different category of users irrespective of their format. Also, they need to ensure that theses are well processed for accessibility and managed well to preserve them from deterioration of any kind. Despite the reasons for maintaining and preserving theses in FUTO, it is still fraught with some challenges which hinder its smooth operation. Hence this study seeks to ascertain the challenges faced in the cause of managing and preserving thesis in FUTO library

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine how Federal University of Technology, Owerri manages and preserves their theses materials. Hence, the specific goals include

1. To find out the methods of processing theses for easy retrieval in Federal University of Technology, Owerri.
2. To ascertain the techniques of managing and preserving theses in Federal University of Technology, Owerri
3. To establish the challenges associated with the management and preservation of theses in Federal University of Technology, Owerri
4. To proffer solutions on the way forward.

Literature Review

Theses in libraries contain vital information, but its use is hindered due to the absence of easily accessible bibliographic sources like, index, an abstract, classification which are required to provide comprehensive coverage of them as observed by Vijayakumar and Vijayakuma (2007). Amadasu (2010) posits that the management and preservation storage of information materials stems from the need for decision making, date required for past information and data as are necessary for legal matters. Okoro (2003), posit that the reason for the acquisition, organization, preservation, and management of theses and projects is that these unpublished sources have important intelligence information.

Preservation is activities associated with maintaining library materials for use either in their original physical form or in some other usable way (Sawant, 2014). The International Federation Library Association (IFLA) (2010) sees preservation to include all the financial and managerial considerations including storage and accommodation provision, staff levels, methods involved in preserving library materials, policies and techniques and information contained in them. UNESCO (1990 P.1) charges developing countries to set up institutional

databases and provide access throughout the world to increase information flow through modern technologies. Preservation of resources in the library is to allow continued access, use and easy retrieval of information resources for present and future use and to protect them against threats for as long as possible. Without effective digital preservation of information resources in libraries, access via digital devices will produce little or no resources of research, teaching, and learning in the library.

Olalokun (2008) surveyed the various techniques used in preserving library materials in selected university libraries in Nigeria and findings showed that cleaning and dusting of library materials was the most commonly used technique. It also revealed that though some of the libraries use some digital preservation techniques, they are still not effectively used. The study established that there are indeed cases of deterioration, the most distinguished being books becoming torn and cracking and roughening of digital materials.

Ogbodo (2011) on the other hand, studied the preservation of information sources in polytechnic libraries in the South Eastern States of Nigeria. The study ascertained that the challenges of conservation of information materials in the polytechnic libraries are the disintegration of books and dust and that the library did not adopt the use of modern technology. Popoola (2003) stated that the management of libraries and archives has a poor maintenance culture of infrastructural facilities such as electricity, buildings and control devices. These factors are responsible for the quick deterioration of their collections.

Nweze (2010) identified the inadequacy of storage facilities as one of the challenges of preserving theses in Nigerian universities. Sunil and Kumar (2009) stated that for any preservation programme to succeed in libraries there must be adequate and well-trained workforce due to the fact that preservation is a specialized field of knowledge that requires information professionals who understand the chemical and physical nature of the materials in their library. Ifijeh (2014) citing Kiondo (2004) observed that the method and techniques practiced by academic libraries in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) for the preservation of theses are inadequate and ineffective.

Furthermore, a survey of literature on preservation and conservation of library materials in Africa as stated by Popoola (2003) and Olatokun (2008) revealed that the prominent challenges to effective and efficient preservation of information materials including theses in African libraries, archives and record centres include the following: inadequate finance, inadequacy of equipments/materials, unfavourable government economic policies, tropical climate, manpower and other infrastructure, lack of preservation and conservation policy, quality of paper and ink, maintenance culture and administrative problem.

Methodology

The Survey research design was used for this study. However, a structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents comprising 15 staff in the Serial and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) unit of the library as regards the hard and soft copies of theses. These units were used for the study because the research output of postgraduate students of FUTO is domiciled in these two units for processing and use. The questionnaire was designed using a four point likert scale.

Results

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean and Percentage were employed to present data. The following was used in calculating the mean from the responses based on likert scale: Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1 for research objectives 2, 3 and 4. To obtain the mean value, $4+3+2+1 = 10$. Where mean value is $10/4 = 2.5$. For objectives 2, 3 and 4 statement with mean of 2.5 and above were Accepted whereas below 2.5 were Rejected.

The study sought to find out the methods of processing theses in Federal University of Technology Owerri.

Table: 1. Methods of processing theses in Federal University of Technology Owerri.

S/N	Methods of Processing Theses	Yes	No
A	Cataloguing of Theses	12	3
B	Classification of Theses	12	3
C	Assignment of keywords	11	4
D	Shelving of Theses alphabetically according to author	14	1
E	Shelving of Theses alphabetically according to subject	13	2
F	Shelving of Theses alphabetically according to the department	14	1

From table 1. above, majority of the respondents numbering 12 indicated that cataloguing and classification are methods of processing theses, 11 respondents indicated Assignment of keywords, while 14 respondents affirmed Shelving of Theses alphabetically according to author and according to the department. However, 13 respondents indicated that Shelving of Theses alphabetically according to subject is one of the methods of processing theses in FUTO.

Techniques of Managing and Preserving Theses in Federal University of Technology, Owerri Library

The study also sought to identify the techniques of managing and preserving theses in FUTO

Table 2. Techniques of managing and preserving theses in FUTO

S/N	Techniques	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
a	Theses should be stored in air conditioned environment	8	7	-	-	15	3.5	Significant
b	Smoking is not allowed in the theses room	8	7	-	-	15	3.5	Significant
c	Theses room is fumigated from time to time	10	5	-	-	15	3.7	Significant
d	There is constant dusting and cleaning of the theses	10	5	-	-	15	3.7	Significant
e	Theses are constantly de-acidified	7	8	-	-	15	3.5	Significant
F	E- Theses are uploaded to the Institutions repository	9	6	-	-	15	3.6	Significant
g	Hard copies/back issues are digitized	8	7	-	-	15	3.5	Significant

From table 2 above, analysis of data showed that the mean response on the techniques of managing and preserving theses in FUTO library was significant. This is because the mean value for the statements was high. This shows respondents were positive that: Theses should be stored in air conditioned environment (3.5), Smoking should not be allowed in the theses room (3.5), Theses room should be fumigated from time to time (3.7), There should be constant dusting and cleaning of the theses (3.7), Theses should constantly be de-acidified (3.5), E- Theses should be uploaded to the Institutions repository (3.6) and Hard copies/back issues should be digitized (3.5).

Challenges to the Preservation of Theses in Federal University of Technology, Owerri Library

The following were identified as challenges affecting the management and preservation of Theses in FUTO

Table 3: Challenges affecting the management and preservation of Theses in FUTO

S/N	Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
a	Poor maintenance culture	4	10	-	1	15	3.1	Significant
b	Epileptic power supply	11	4	-	-	15	3.7	Significant
c	The inadequacy of storage facilities	5	10	-	-	15	3.3	Significant
d	Inadequate finance to sustain preservation techniques	6	9	-	-	15	3.4	Significant
e	Space constraint	5	10	1	-	15	3.3	Significant
F	Nonchalant attitude of staff	2	6	7	-	15	2.7	Significant
g	Lack of quality of paper and ink	3	4	7	1	15	2.5	Significant
h	Administrative bottlenecks	3	6	6	-	15	2.8	Significant
i	Lack of preservation policy	2	5	8	-	15	2.6	Significant
j	Environmental conditions such as flood/dampness	6	6	3	-	15	3.2	Significant
k	Lack of adequate well-trained workforce	3	7	2	3	15	2.7	Significant
l	The inadequacy of equipment/materials	2	9	4	-	15	2.9	Significant
m	Staff inefficiency	2	2	9	2	15	2.3	Not Significant

Analysis of data on table 3 above showed that the mean response on the challenges hindering the effective management and preservation of Theses in FUTO library was high in the following areas: Poor maintenance culture (3.1), Epileptic power supply (3.7), inadequacy of storage facilities (3.3), Inadequate finance to sustain preservation techniques (3.4), Space constraint (3.3), Environmental conditions such as flood/dampness (3.2), The inadequacy of equipment/materials (2.9), Administrative bottlenecks (2.8), Nonchalant attitude of staff (2.7), Lack of adequate well-trained workforce (2.7), Lack of preservation policy (2.6) and Lack of quality of paper and ink (2.5). However, the mean response on staff inefficiency was low (2.3) showing that it was not a challenge hindering effective management and preservation of Theses in FUTO.

The following suggestions were identified to help in combating these challenges affecting effective management and preservation of Theses in FUTO Library

Table 4: Solutions on the way forward

S/N	Solutions	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
a	There should be proper maintenance culture	9	6	-	-	15	3.6	Significant
b	There should be a constant power supply	9	6	-	-	15	3.6	Significant
c	There should be sufficient storage facilities	9	6	-	-	15	3.6	Significant

d	There should be provision of funds	9	6	-	-	15	3.6	Significant
e	There should be enough space provided	8	7	-	-	15	3.5	Significant
f	Library staff should wake up to their responsibilities/duties	5	10	-	-	15	3.3	Significant
g	Quality papers and ink should be used	5	10	-	-	15	3.3	Significant
h	There should be a standing policy for the management and preservation of theses	6	9	-	-	15	3.4	Significant
i	There should be adequate well-trained workforce	4	11	-	-	15	3.3	Significant
j	Staff should be constantly trained	4	11	-	-	15	3.3	Significant

Analysis of data on table 4 above revealed that the mean response on suggestion on the way forward in combating these challenges affecting management and preservation of Theses in FUTO were high in all the areas listed which include: There should be proper maintenance culture (3.6), There should be a constant power supply (3.6), There should be sufficient storage facilities (3.6), There should be provision of funds (3.6), There should be enough space provided (3.5), Library staff should wake up to their responsibilities/duties (3.3), Quality papers and ink should be used (3.3), There should be a standing policy for the management and preservation of theses (3.4), There should be adequate well-trained workforce (3.3) and Staff should be constantly trained (3.3).

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed the methods of processing Theses in Federal University of Technology, Owerri Library. The findings showed that Theses are being processed for use in Federal University of Technology, Owerri. Also, the study identified various techniques employed by FUTO library in the management and preservation of Theses such as: Storage of theses in air conditioned environment, prohibition of smoking in the theses room, periodic fumigation of the theses room, constant dusting and cleaning of the theses, uploading E- Theses to the Institutional repository and digitization of Hard copies/back issues. These techniques are essential because theses are important information sources and their deterioration means loss of original knowledge.

The study also discovered various challenges encountered in the process of managing and preserving theses in Federal University of Technology, Owerri library. Epileptic power supply, inadequacy of storage facilities, inadequate finance to sustain preservation techniques, space constraint and environmental conditions such as flood/dampness were identified. These challenges may be as a result of inadequate finance. Fund is the life wire of any organization. Availability of funds will go a long way in the acquisition of materials needed to aid management and preservation of theses.

The study further sought opinion of respondents on ways to combat the challenges they face in management of theses. Majority agreed that there should be proper maintenance culture, constant power supply, sufficient storage facilities, provision of funds, adequate space. Furthermore, respondents affirmed that library staff should wake up to their responsibilities/duties, Quality papers and ink should be used and constant training of the workforce should not be overlooked. From the foregoing, the management of the institution

and that of the library should wake up to their responsibilities and find ways to implement these suggestions for effective and efficient management and preservation of theses.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Theses and dissertations contain indigenous research and often times convey information which may not be found elsewhere. To preserve them for posterity, it is imperative that these rare collections are properly managed. The study has shown that Federal University of Technology Owerri library plays a key role in the management and preservation of theses and dissertations. However, various factors were identified to demoralize this noble pursuit. Whereas these challenges abound, they are not insurmountable. The issue of fund scarcity has always been a recurring decimal in several academic projects. Be that as it may, library management and staff have a major role to play in ensuring the preservation of theses and dissertations which form an integral part of the library collections.

Arising from the above, this study recommends that:

1. Library staff should be given adequate orientation on the place of theses and dissertations as important reference materials for current and future research. It is reasoned that an understanding of the important roles theses and dissertations play in the academic life of researchers will help staff adequately take care of these rare collections.
2. There should be a standing policy for the management and preservation of theses. This will see to the efficient and effective management of theses and also give room for a standard procedure.
3. There should be well-trained workforce for the management and preservation of theses. This is due to the fact that preservation is a specialized field of knowledge that requires information professionals who understand the chemical and physical nature of the materials in the library.
4. The library should fully adopt digital methods of preserving theses and dissertations for quick and simultaneous access. This will go a long way to curb the challenges of space and environmental conditions such as dampness and humidity.
5. There should be proper maintenance culture especially on infrastructural facilities such as electricity, buildings and control devices as these factors may be responsible for quick deterioration of the collections.

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