

# Use of Special Collections in Nigerian University Libraries: A Case Study of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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## Abstract

This study investigates the use of special collections resources at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, by postgraduate students, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A case study research design was employed for the study. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 7 staff of the special collection division of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and 200 postgraduate students of the university who are duly registered with the library for the 2005/2006 academic session. The sample of the study consist of all the seven (7) staff of the special collection division and twenty (20) postgraduate students selected using accidental sampling technique. This means that only postgraduate students that were found on their seats using special collections were used for the study. This was done to ensure that the actual users of the special collections are used for the study. Data were collected from seven (7) library staff of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and twenty (20) postgraduate students of the university through questionnaire and presented in tabular form and analyzed with the use of frequencies and mean. Findings revealed that Postgraduate students used the collections such as thesis and dissertation, materials Africa, United Nations publications, government documents and archives. They used these materials mostly for vital information in the areas of their research. However, postgraduate students encounter the absence of network with other special collections resources worldwide, none updating of catalogue, unavailable current materials needed are not available etc. The study therefore, recommends that the library should establish a good network with other special collections resources worldwide so as to enhance effective utilization of special collections resources in this library.

**Keywords:** Use, special collections, Nigerian Universities

## INTRODUCTION

Universities are institutions concerned with teaching, learning and research. Since the library's objective is to assist what goes on in the parent institution, it has to provide adequate quality and quantity of information resources in relation to demands of various levels, of programmes. Of these levels, the postgraduate programme has the largest research components.

These resources are usually organized in some sort of according to their degree of likeness- by subject or by form. Okoye and Ekere (2009) noted that resources are organized using specific types of classification scheme to collocate materials in a given subject together. However, university libraries in most cases provide and organized separately another category of materials called special collections.

Special collections are created by individual universities who own it. Special collections according to Harrod's Librarians Glossary (2006) is a collection of books connected with local history, celebrities, industries etc or a certain subject or period or gather for some particular reasons in a library, which is general in character. Special collections are considered as materials, which are distinguished by their age, provenance, subject matter or some other defining characteristics. They are traditional features of many academic libraries, and an important resource for primary research in the humanities and historical social sciences (Love and Feather, 1998). Special collections in university libraries require some special attention to be giving to it in terms of organization and preservation.

Special collections usually contain highly valuable materials that could aid in teaching, learning and research. A good number of resources in special collection divisions in many university libraries are primary literature which because of their currency, are used in updating knowledge. Some of the materials have local or international dimensions, which are suitable for various kind of research. One other valuable component of the special collection is a number of statistical information materials that present current data on almost all aspect of human activities.

Special collection resources are in most cases house in a closed access room. In Nnamdi Azikiwe Library,

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Special Collections Division is one of the four principal divisions of the library. The division is housed in a closed access room in the first floor of the main library building. The division is then subdivided into three units namely the Africana Unit, Government Documents and Archives Unit as well as United Nations Organization Documents Unit. The division also houses other small collection such as the Achebeana and the Biafrana.

In spite of the closed access nature of the special collections division and its resources, postgraduate students are given access to the collections may be as a result of their level of maturity not to mishandle the special collections within the library or the library has identified the materials therein as relating much to their research needs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Special collections are an essential part of university library collections because they are an assemblage of materials that are highly useful for teaching, learning and research. The materials are particularly valuable to postgraduate students who need current, up to date and precise information and data for their research. The staff of the university library assumes that the postgraduate students know how to use the special collection and therefore leave them on their own. But the questions are: Are the postgraduate students making optimal use of the special collections? Do they need assistance from library staff?

These are the questions that need to be investigated. If nothing is done to find out whether the postgraduate students actually made use of the materials, they may be suffering in silence and their research may be hindered. The result may be either difficulty in completing their research work or producing poor quality research work. This therefore, calls for urgent investigation into the use of special collections by postgraduate students, problems they encounter in using the materials and ways of solving these problems.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of special collections resources by postgraduate students of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Specifically, the study sought to

1. Identify the type of special collections information materials used by the postgraduate students of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
2. Ascertain the purpose for postgraduate use of special collections in the library;
3. Determine the problems encountered by the postgraduate students in using the special collections;
4. Determine the strategies to be adopted to bring about effective use of the special collections by postgraduate students.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. What are the types of special collections information materials used by the postgraduate students of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
2. What is the purpose for postgraduate use of special collections in the library;
3. What are the problems encountered by the postgraduate students in using the special collections;
4. What strategies to be adopted to bring about effective use of the special collections by postgraduate students.

### **Literature Review**

The importance of special collections as a primary source of information for research is not to be over emphasized. Okore (1998) defined special collections to include materials such as Africana, Achebeana, Biafrana, Government documents/Archives and United Nations publications. Berner (2003) defined a special collection as one that had a specific subject focus and was thereby specialized.

The special collections division houses the traditional rare works as well as works of delicate condition requiring special attention and protection to preserve them. Other library materials housed by the special collection department include books, printed works, and manuscripts of a single author as well as genre collection.

In libraries in general and university libraries in particular, information collection and usage is very important. As such, the use of information sources available in the library is the concern of the library. Nwoye cited by Omeje (2006) asserted that library surveys should critically examine user satisfaction and difficulties, issues that should be looked into include; who uses various units of the library; how much and for what purpose; the factors that affect use such as accessibility of books, teaching methods and learning regulations.

Stressing the importance of special collections with particular reference to government documents, Child (1981) stressed that government publication is a mirror of the functions of government and its agencies and its instrumentalities and its subventions. Government publications as part of the special collection have a wide range in scope. It has such materials like government gazettes which are very useful to the retiring officer who needs the

document to authenticate his claims to retiring benefits and the lawyer and judge who need to be currently informed of the new laws, statutes, decrees, and so on. Other documents such as annual reports of relevant government organizations, feasibility studies of government projects, in house memoranda, report of government-appointed commissions, government papers and various issues and subjects are very useful for the various researches by the postgraduate students.

Similarly, United Nations Organizations Documents as well as other publications of international organization like African Union, UNESCO, WHO are treated in forms and levels which meet the demands of governments, non-specialists, teachers, policy makers and administrators, business community, the military, lawyers, researchers and indeed many other information users. They give a fair representation of the various developments and practices across the globe and comparison can be made of the different countries of the world. Their contents usually emanates from specialists in various fields. Feather (1996) has called attention to the proper handling of library materials by all of those involved as a sort of inexpensive measure by any library or archive to begin its programme of preservation, which can, at least, prevent damage to materials which would have been caused by simple ignorance.

In spite of the importance people have attached to the special collections based on its value to research and other general uses, it has been reported that special collections information resources are not optimally used. For instance, Work in Omeje (2006) while discussing the use of international documents in an international symposium pointed out that 85% of such documentation goes unread. The non utilization of these collections is attributed to so many factors. According to Ifidon (1990) inadequacies of book supply in the Nigerian University libraries during the period 1981-1990 constitute a major problem. According to him the budget for books supply within the ministry of education budget was just between 0.3% to 0.4% per annum. This shows that there was no much consideration given to the acquisition of books. Another problem is that of lack of future scholarly access to deteriorating source materials (Ronald and Joan, 1987).

Mulrenin and Geser (2001) concurs that the conversion into bits and bytes opens up a completely new dimension of reaching traditional and new audiences by providing access to cultural heritage resources in ways unimaginable a decade ago. Bradley in Ekwelem, Okafor and Ukwuoma (2011) argues that libraries, museums and other cultural institutions are committing increasing amounts of time and money to digitization in order to improve access to their collections. According to Burdick cited by Ekwelem et'al (2011) certain styles of copy machines help to minimize damage to bound materials. According to him, V-shaped cradle copiers that allow a volume to be copied while lying face up are not yet widely available, so the best solution is to use a machine that has a copy surface that extends to one outer edge of the machine. Also, Ogden (1993) wrote that traditionally, libraries and archives independently have undertaken activities to preserve their collections by providing proper housing, protection from mutilation and theft, library binding, and occasional repair and restoration.

In summarizing the literature review, it has been noted that much research has been undertaken on the general users while none has been found specifically on a particular group of people such as the postgraduate students, which create a gap that this study is centered on. It is hoped that this will fill the gap which has been created as a result of this absence.

## **Methodology**

A case study research design was employed for the study. Three research questions guided the study. The study was carried out in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The population of the study consists of 7 staff of the special collection division of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and about 200 postgraduate students of the university who are duly registered with the library for the 2005/2006 academic session. The sample of the study consist of all the seven (7) staff of the special collection division and twenty (20) postgraduate students selected using accidental sampling technique. This means that only postgraduate students that were found on their seats using special collections were used for the study. This was done to ensure that the actual users of the special collections are used for the study. Data were collected from seven (7) library staff of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and twenty (20) postgraduate students of the university through questionnaire and presented in tabular form and analyzed with the use of frequencies and mean.

## **Findings**

### **Special Collections Information Materials Used by Postgraduate Students**

This research question sought to collect data on the type of special collections materials used by the postgraduate students duly registered with Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. To achieve this data collected from respondents are tabulated and analyzed thus;

**Table 1: Special Collections Information Materials Used by Postgraduate Students**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Africana	18	90%
2	Government documents	12	60%
3	United Nations publication	13	65%
4	Archives	04	20%
5	Theses and dissertations	20	100%

The table above presents the type of special collection materials used by the postgraduate students. From the table, it is indicated that 20 or 100% of the postgraduate students consulted theses and dissertation. 18 representing 90% of the respondents consulted Africana materials while 13 or 65% of the respondents consulted United Nations publications. Whereas 12 or 60% of the respondents consulted government documents, 4 or 20% consulted archives.

#### **Purpose for Postgraduate Use of Special Collection Materials**

The above research question sought relevant data on the purpose for postgraduate students utilization of Special collections materials in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Data collected from respondents are presents and analyzed below;

**Table 2: Purpose for Postgraduate Use of Special Collection Materials**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	For vital information in the areas of their research	18	90%
2	For specific bits of statistical data	10	50%
3	For international perspectives on particular issues	8	40%
4	For administrative records	6	30%
5	Information on policy issues	5	25%

Results from table 2 shows that 90% of the postgraduate students used special collections materials for vital information in the areas of their research. Whereas 50% used it for specific bits of statistical data, 40% used it for international perspectives on particular issues. Others representing 30% and 25% used it for administrative purposes and information on policy issues.

**Table 3: Problems Encountered by Postgraduate Students in Using Special Collections Materials**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Absence of network with other special collections resources worldwide	20	100%
2	Catalogue is not up to date	18	90%
3	Current materials needed are not available	16	80%
4	Absence of photocopying services within the division	13	65%
5	Catalogue is difficult to use	8	40%

Table 3 indicates that the major problem encountered by postgraduate students' use of special collections resources is absence of network with other special collections resources worldwide with 100% response. This is followed by non updating of catalogue with 90%, current materials needed are not available with 80%, absence of photocopying services within the division with 65% and difficulty in using the catalogue with 40% respectively.

**Table 4: Strategies for Enhancing Effective Utilization of Special collections Resources**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Establishment of network with other special collections resources worldwide	19	95%
2	Constant revision of the catalogue	18	90%
3	Speedy organization of the available resources	16	80%
4	Photocopying services within the division	14	70%
5	Postgraduate students should be taught to use the catalogue	12	60%

The table above shows the strategies for enhancing the use of special collections by postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Result shows that 95% representing establishment of network with other special collections resources worldwide is the major strategy for enhancing effective utilization of special collections resources in this library. Other strategies are 90% representing constant revision of the catalogue, 80% representing speedy organization of the available resources, 70% representing photocopying services within the division and 60% representing postgraduate students should be taught to use the catalogue.

#### **Discussion of Major Findings and Conclusion**

Finding of the study based on the special collections information resources used by postgraduate students revealed that majority of the postgraduate students consulted theses and dissertation. Other special collections consulted

by postgraduate students are Africana Materials, United Nations publications, government documents and archives. These materials are used by postgraduate students, mostly for general background reading in areas of specialization. Other reasons include specific bits of statistical data, international perspectives on particular issues, administrative purposes and information on policy issues. This does not agree with Work in Omeje (2006) who found out that 85% of such documentation (the use of international documents) goes unread. Thus, postgraduate students used special collections information resources mostly for general background reading in the areas of specialization.

In spite of the types of special collections information resources used and the purposes to which the resources are used for, the study also identified problems encountered by postgraduate students' use of special collections resources as absence of network with other special collections resources worldwide, non updating of catalogue, current materials needed are not available, absence of photocopying services within the division and difficulty in using the catalogue. All these are attributed to poor management which Feather (1996) has called attention to the proper handling of library materials by all of those involved as a sort of inexpensive measure by any library or archive to begin its programme of preservation, which can, at least, prevent damage to materials which would have been caused by simple ignorance.

In view of the above problems, the study suggested the establishment of network with other special collections resources worldwide as the major strategy for enhancing effective utilization of special collections resources in this library. Other strategies are constant revision of the catalogue, speedy organization of the available resources, photocopying services within the division and postgraduate students should be taught to use the catalogue. This is inline with Mulrenin and Geser (2001) who concurs that the conversion into bits and bytes opens up a completely new dimension of reaching traditional and new audiences by providing access to cultural heritage resources in ways unimaginable a decade ago. Therefore the library should establish network with other special collections resources worldwide as the major strategy for enhancing effective utilization of special collections resources in this library. Bradley in Ekwelem et'al (2011) argues that libraries, museums and other cultural institutions are committing increasing amounts of time and money to digitization in order to improve access to their collections. It is also in line with Burdick cited by Ekwelem et'al (2011) who also noted that certain styles of copy machines help to minimize damage to bound materials. According to him, V-shaped cradle copiers that allow a volume to be copied while lying face up are not yet widely available, so the best solution is to use a machine that has a copy surface that extends to one outer edge of the machine".

In conclusion, special collections information resources are the primary sources of information for research. Postgraduate students used the collections such as thesis and dissertation, materials Africa, United Nations publications, government documents and archives. They used these materials mostly for vital information in the areas of their research. However, postgraduate students encounter the absence of network with other special collections resources worldwide, none updating of catalogue, unavailable current materials needed are not available etc. The study therefore, recommends that the library should establish a good network with other special collections resources worldwide so as to enhance effective utilization of special collections resources in this library.

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