

## Preservation and Conservation of Library Resources: A Vehicle for Long-Term Information Availability and Access

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#### **Abstract**

*The library is a social institution charged with the responsibility of disseminating knowledge to the people without any discrimination. Its holdings are the priceless heritage of mankind ranging from facts, ideas, thoughts, accomplishments and evidences of human development in multifarious areas, ages and directions. These past records constitute a natural resource and are indispensable to the present generation as well as to the generations to come. Any loss to such materials is simply irreplaceable. Therefore, preserving this intellectual and cultural heritage for posterity becomes not only the academic commitment but also the moral responsibility of the librarians and information scientists, who are in charge of these repositories. This work therefore takes a look at the concept of preservation and conservation, rationale for preservation and conservation practices, causes of deterioration to library collections, preservation and conservative measures and challenges facing preservation and conservation practices in libraries.*

**Key Words:** Preservation; Conservation; Library Resources; information Access

#### **Introduction**

The library is a place where information materials are organized and maintained for use such as reading, consultation, study or research (Mahapatra & Chakrabatri, 2003). From this definition, it is clear that conservation and preservation of library resources is one the basic functions of the library as they not only serve as information repository but specializes on the information maintenance as well. Preservation and conservation have porously been used interchangeably in the literature. Whereas to preserve and to conserve may literally be seen as synonymous in meaning, in librarianship there is a slight distinctive use of the word. In the words of Ovowoh and Iwhiwhu (2010) material may be preserved in its original form while it could be conserved in some of the forms other than the original.

Preservation and conservation of library resources according to Akissa (1991) can be defined as all managerial, technical and financial considerations applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of the materials to ensure their continued availability. Cedar Digital Preservation Project (2002) equally see it as the controlled use of a limited supply of materials to prevent waste or loss so as to facilitate its use in the future. It implies the active use of preservative measures or processes of repair of damaged materials to ensure

restoration and the continued existence of the individual items.

The library is a repository of knowledge. Their central mission is to collect, organize, preserve and provide access to knowledge and information. It maintains various collections in varied formats which ranges from print, non-print to digital resources. Virtually all these resources are prone to deterioration over time as a result of some factors (Wamuhoya & Mutula, 2005). Therefore, preserving this intellectual, cultural heritage becomes not only the academic commitment but also the moral responsibility of the librarians and information scientists who are in charge of these repositories.

### **Various Types and Nature of Library Materials**

***Print materials/library materials that are in conventional papers form:*** They range from textbooks, novels, reports, serials, references materials etc.

- ❖ Serials as library print materials: Edhebe (2004) defined serials as any publication issued in successive parts, appearing at regular interval and as a rule is intended to be continued indefinitely. In other words, the term serials include all periodicals, newspapers, magazines, numbered monographic series and proceedings, transactions and memos of learned societies.
- ❖ Reference books as a library print materials: The term reference material is a generic term i.e it comprises materials investigated and documented at different levels. They are not normally lent but consulted in the library. Though in book form, they dwell on various subjects but are different from books because they cannot be read from cover to cover instead they are consulted occasionally for specific purposes. Reference books are classified according to their types

and use. Examples are; direction books or guides, language book, biographical book, indexes and abstracts, gazetteers, year book, handbook, etc.

***Non-print/digital materials:*** The over-increasing use of a multiplicity of formats to create, gather and store information has had a major impact on the range of materials found in libraries of particular note has been the growth of non-print materials to support educational, informational and recreational needs. The non-print materials which are often called AV/multimedia are used to indicate information bearing media, not in form of the conventional book format. The development of non-print materials in libraries is tied directly to the technological revolution that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which has steadily gained momentum over the years. Examples of non-print types library resources include- slides, audio-tapes, radio, microforms, computers, photocopiers, videos, films, telephone, televisions, internet access, fax, CD-ROM etc.

### **Factors of deterioration to library materials**

Deterioration is a change of original state of any material by interaction between the object and the factors of destruction (Mwiyeriwa, 1998). The different types of deterioration of paper based materials are reflected in wear and tears, shrinkage, cracks, brittleness, warping, bio-infestation, discoloration, abrasion, hole, dust and dirt accumulation etc. IFLA Principles for the Care and Handling of Library Materials (2010) stated that the library materials are susceptible to deterioration by the following factors:

- ❖ Environmental/climatic factors: Environmental factors of library resource deterioration includes such elements like light, heat, humidity, moisture, dust and dirt and water.

- ❖ **Biological factors:** The deterioration caused by biological agents such as micro-organisms, insects and rodents are generally known as bio-deterioration. Almost all book components be it paper, leather, textiles or straw board used for binding are prone to attacks by these biological agents. The problem of bio-deterioration is a matter of considerable significance of tropical hot and humid climate. The climatic condition accelerated the growth and multiplication of living organisms. There is perhaps, no library which has not suffered the ranges of these agents of bio-deterioration. These agents can be sub-divided into; micro-organisms, insects and rodents.
- ❖ **Chemical factors:** In the manufacturing of paper, sometimes fibres are used with low cellulose contents and some chemical compounds like alum etc are used for sizing off paper which cause acidic effect and facilitate chemical deterioration of the paper with the passage of time.
- ❖ **Human factors:** Apart from physical and chemical factors, a serious cause of deterioration often is the casual attitude of the lib staff as well as the users of the library towards books as physical objects. Librarian in charge of documentary heritage are directly responsible for the overall conservation and preservation of their collections. But they are not always aware of how to handle, store and use collections carefully to minimize damage and help preservation. The standard of care and handling of books by their custodians and users is often pretty low. Improper storage, faulty repairs, rough handling, deliberate abuse, folding the fore edges of pages as a mark or reading marking by ball pen, mutilation, vandalism are all

examples of deterioration of books by human.

- ❖ **Disasters:** No library is exempted from the devastations that can occur as a result of natural or manmade disasters. In libraries, archives and museums there is likelihood of fine as the collections are mostly organic in nature, once fire starts this is difficult to save those materials which get fine. Items not directly engulfed in flame can be charred by heat and smoke. Heat emitted from fire causes bindings to shrink and warp and plastic base materials to melt. Water used for fighting can cause enormous damage. Besides fire, floods, high winds, cyclones, earthquakes are also agents of deterioration for the library collections.

### **Ways of Preventing Deterioration of Library Resources**

Preservation methods are adopted based on location weather, and environment (Kemoni, 1996). These conditions can be attained using an appropriate environment and the various other methods like chemical treatment, fumigation, restoring faded inks, bleaching etc. Sahoo in one of his works (2012) described the preventive measures under the following sub-headings:

**Environmental factors:** Control of environmental factors partially begins from selection of site, the planning and the construction of the library building and also the soil on which it will be constructed because these elements have greater impact over the impact over the environmental control inside the library building. It is very important to choose the best architectural design for the library having cross ventilation facilities for free air circulation within the building.

**Biological factors:** since stagnant air, dampness and dark places increase biological pests, good

housekeeping and maintenance of optimum storage condition is necessary to control the propagation of the insects. Attending to cracks holes and loose joints on the floors and walls eliminate the possibility of insect hiding in these places. Presence of edibles inside the library should not be allowed. Periodic use of insecticide at dark corners walls and beneath the cracks is a good precautionary measure to prevent insects.

**Chemical factors:** If air pollution is controlled, there will not be any external acidity in the paper materials. One of the best ways of controlling atmospheric pollutants is filtering of the air intake into storage areas, which can be attained by air conditioning system operating or 24 hours throughout the year. No chemical formulation should be applied directly on to the book covers since it may have adverse effect on the books.

**Human factors:** The fundamental factor in minimizing unnecessary damages to the library materials also depends on the careful handling of the materials on the part of the both staff and users. Video tapes or slides regarding the handling of books should be shown to the new employees and users. Readers with stealing inclination should be checked through preventive measures like spying and installing thief catching devices.

**Disaster preparedness:** Disasters are generally unexpected events with destructive consequences to a collection. Therefore it is vital for any library to take very possible precautions to prevent the occurrences. Disaster planning is an essential element of preventive measures. It is also necessary to identify any external and internal threats that might cause problems for the collection and measures to meet the threats.

## **Challenges Facing Preservation and Conservation of Library Resources**

Ogunmodede and Ebijuwan (2013) summarized the prominent inhibitors to effective and efficient preservation and conservation of information materials in libraries in the following key points:

- ❖ **Inadequate finance:** Almost all African libraries and information centers do not allocate adequate funds in their annual budget for the preservation and conservation of information materials in their holdings. This has really caused the low priority or lack of desired attention given resources by the management of such libraries information.
- ❖ **Inadequacy of equipment/materials:** Lack of suitable or inadequate equipment and materials contributes significantly to the present poor status of preservation and conservation for information materials in African libraries. Some of the essential materials and equipment required for setting up functional conservation and restoration laboratories in libraries are not available locally.
- ❖ **Unfavorable government economic policies:** The economic policies of most Africa governments do not favour library services so preservation and conservation activities are not given the priority attention they deserve. Such economic policies include those concerning high duties and tariffs charged on imports of preservation and conservation equipment.
- ❖ **Tropical climate:** The effects of tropical climate of excessive temperature high relative humidity, dust and rodents that feed on paper-based materials cause rapid deterioration and decay of information resources in libraries. These agents of rapid deterioration and decay of information materials add more to the

costs associated with conservation and restoration of information materials in libraries.

❖ ***Manpower and other infrastructure:***

For any preservation and conservation programmer to succeed in libraries these must be adequate and well-trained manpower. This is because preservation and conservation of information resources is a specialized field of knowledge that requires information professionals who understand the physical and chemical nature of the materials in their library and archive holdings. There is need to expose librarians to conservation and preservation practice during their training. Such a training programme should include operating environmental control, storage and housing operating environmental systems, designing new building or renovation of buildings.

❖ ***Lack of preservation and conservation policy:***

Most African countries do not have a national information policy which makes the formulation of preservation and conservation policies in the libraries out of the question. Literature revealed that most libraries do not have a disaster control plan. The absence of such a plan means that in the event of a disaster they would not be in a position to respond to the disaster with the urgency that is required.

❖ ***Quality of paper and ink:*** The low quality of paper and ink used in the production of information materials especially library books, materials and paper-based records in libraries pose serious danger to preservation and conservation of information materials in African countries.

❖ ***Maintenance culture:*** African culture generally lack maintenance culture. The management of libraries in Africa have poor maintenance culture of

infrastructural facilities such as telephones, electricity, water supply, laboratory equipment, building disaster control devices etc meant for their preservation and conservation operation. In fact, this factor is responsible for the quick deterioration of their collections preservation of information resources calls for constant cleaning of the library building as well as information materials therein. Restoration techniques such as binding and lamination of paper-based information may be used to reduced conservation cost.

❖ ***Administrative problem:*** Majority of the library managers concentrate much on the effective provision of information services to users. There is lack of proper recognition of the need for preservation and conservation of information resources.

❖ ***Cooperative preservation and conservation venture:*** African countries lack cooperative preservation and conservation venture either at the regional or local level. With limited resources and diminishing budgets, African libraries can undertake cooperative ventures which may involve the setting up of a joint conservation and restoration laboratory or microfilming unit. Such a venture can deal with the repair of information material and training conservation and preservation staff.

❖ ***Public enlightenment campaign:*** Lack of public enlightenment campaign had been the bank of poor preservation and conservation of information resources in libraries. Information professionals often times criticize the government for not giving sufficient consideration to preservation and conservation of national heritage. It must be noted that the information managers must embark on public enlightenment campaigns on

the need to preserve and conserve national heritage in their countries.

### Conclusion/Recommendations

The breakdown of information materials in libraries and information centers especially book materials is currently identified as one of the fundamental problems incapacitating libraries and information centers from meeting the information needs of their clientele. The longevity of information materials depends upon the quality of management, handling and the storage conditions. This calls for an integrated policy involving the creators, users and custodians. Preservation and conservation should be seen as a thread running through the total life of the record and a responsibility of all not only the conservator or the Archivist. Therefore, it is recommended that if any library will meet its objectives in the performance of its obligations it must take further steps to conserve and preserve information materials for posterity.

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