

MANAGING PAST QUESTION PAPERS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES.

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ABSTRACT

The work discusses past question paper management practices in academic libraries in Imo state, namely Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO); Imo State University Owerri(IMSU);Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri (FPN); and, Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri(AICE). Visits were paid to the libraries where the Schedule officers in charge of question paper management were interviewed on the acquisition, processing, organization and use of the subject. Personal observations were also made to confirm the information provided by the interviewees. The libraries use three methods of acquisition: standing order deposit, request by the libraries and serendipity. On acquisition, past question papers are processed by some of the libraries by stamping and sorting according to the course of study and stored in files, folders and bag envelopes. Some of the libraries create access through indexing. Open and close access services are being practiced in the use of past question papers. Lack of cooperation from faculty is one of the problems that hinder complete acquisition. The fragile nature of the materials and constant use pose danger to their preservation. The libraries are also contending with theft and mutilation emanating from open access. The use of Information and Communications Technology is expected to ameliorate the rigour of acquisition while reducing the problems associated with handling.

INTRODUCTION

Information materials housed in any academic library serve two major purposes: for immediate use and for prosperity through preservation. Among the very essential, but often-neglected, information materials found in some academic libraries is the question paper. Its management follows the basic principles of records and archival management. Basically, it involves scientific and systematic control of recorded information involving its creation; maintenance, utilization, storage, retrieval and disposition (Kanter, 1987) The importance of question paper management is revealed by the manner students troop into the library toward the end of every semester in search of past question papers; the production of past question paper pamphlets of large and national examination bodies like WEAC and JAMB; and the manner

in which some teachers make their questions similar to the already existing questions. Furthermore, past question papers could be used to trace the historical development in any body of knowledge or course of study. Legal action against anybody involved in an examination malpractice could be substantiated using question papers. Past question papers could be used to ascertain the strength or weakness of any course of study during accreditation. Hence, Johnson and Kallaus (1987) reiterated that Information materials are stored because the information contained in them helps in making decisions, assists departments in communicating with each other and outside world, provides a record of the past, and supplies data useful for legal purposes.

The management of these important archival materials follows a typical information cycle viz.

- Collection;
- Retention;
- Storage;
- Retrieval;
- Transportation;
- Use;
- Return;
- Destruction

Therefore, the management of past question papers from the academic library parlance involves acquisition, processing, use, and storage/preservation.

The traditional mode of acquisition of purchase, gift and exchange may not apply to past question papers as it were, recognizing that it consists of the university document emanating from the various departments. The processing, use, and storage/preservation may depend on the importance each institution attaches to its archival materials. For the developed nations emphasis is placed on collecting, processing and preserving historical papers, records, books etc. As a result some countries have Special Collection Departments with the sole aim of assisting in preserving their history by selecting and caring for papers, photographs and other related materials of historical importance. ([www . lib. iastate . edu](http://www.lib.iastate.edu)). Some of their practices to ensure the posterity of the needed materials include:

1. Storing the paper in cool, dark places with relatively stable temperature and relative humidity;
2. Avoiding storage in basements or garages;
3. Using of storage folds and boxes; and,
4. Protection from ants, pests and other pollutants.

Jackson County Historical Society (www.jchs.org/preservation.) uses the same method to increase the posterity of documents. The Society and many others appreciate the role archival materials play in the life of a society and take proper care of them. Though the importance of past question papers is quite glaring, not much has been written about its management in academic institutions which are custodians of every archival document from the institutions.

It is against this background that the work seeks to find out methods of past question paper management in some academic libraries in Imo State. Specifically it intends to find out:

- a. The method of past question paper acquisition;
- b. The method of processing and storage;
- c. The mode of use.

Finally, it will proffer suggestions to improve the management of this important material.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study was collected through interviews and personal observation. Visits were paid to libraries of the four academic institutions in Imo State, namely Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO); Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU); Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri (AICE); and Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri (FPN). Interviews were held with Librarians in charge of past question paper management. Observations were also made to confirm the availability of these archival materials, the mode of processing and the organization system. Unfortunately no user was observed as the study was carried out at the beginning of the semester when students were busy settling down and others attending lectures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was discovered that the libraries of the research institutions have evidence of past question papers at different degrees of management.

Acquisition

Three methods of past question paper acquisition are applied in the libraries under study. Table 1. Shows the methods and the institutions using each.

Table 1: Past Question Paper Acquisition Method in Imo State Academic Libraries

Acquisition method

Acquisition Method	Libraries	Total	Percentage
Standing Order Deposit	AICE	1	25%
Request by the Library	FPN	1	25%
Serendipity	FUTO, IMSU	2	50%

The libraries of FUTO and IMSU have no formal method of acquisition. Rather the materials are collected by any staff that has access to them. In FUTO, question papers of examinations taken in the library are usually collected many of which are engineering and general courses. That justifies the prevalence of more engineering-based past question papers in that library. Examinations are not conducted in IMSU library so there are very few of such materials in the library. The serendipity method is not a healthy method of acquisition especially where librarians are not involved in examination supervision. Such method is a matter of chance. Hence it does not ensure completeness and continuity in any library collection. FPN and AICE employ written communication and standing order methods respectively. Both methods are effective, especially where the institution recognizes the importance of the archival functions of the institution. However, where there is laxity on the part of faculty, written communication is encouraged. Faculty can always be reminded through this method.

Processing and Organization

The libraries of FUTO and AICE house past question papers in the Document Unit of the library. They are located in the Reader Services, at the FPN and IMSU libraries.

Processing and Organization of past question papers in these institutions include stamping, creating of access and storage.

(a) Stamping:

In FUTO, AICE and FPN libraries, question papers are stamped as they are acquired. Such practice is not available in IMSU library as observation shows that their materials are not usually stamped. Stamping is very essential for library materials as an indication of ownership with inherent security

tendency. The position of stamp is at the discretion of the library provided it is located in an area that cannot be easily torn.

(b) Organization:

Two libraries; FPN and AICE have professional methods of organizing these materials. They are arranged chronologically according to faculty/schools; then departments, levels/year and the course. No formal method of organization is used by IMSU while FUTO organizes the materials according to levels (year of study) only. The method of arrangement employed by FPN, AICE is an enhancement from the unarranged method of IMSU. Such will facilitate retrieval by staff and save the users' time. Where question papers are not organized, retrieval becomes cost intensive in view of the number of users that come for these materials.

(c) Storage:

The organization method in AICE and FPN make for ease of storage. The materials so organized are put in bag envelopes/folders conforming to the storage equipment recommended for such materials by Johnson and Kalaus (1987). According to them, a continuous collection of past question papers is expected, so these libraries should be mindful of the type and volume; degree of required protection; efficiency and ease of use of the storage equipment (Johnson and Kalaus 1987).

(d) Access creation:

AICE creates access for library staff that render the service. Indexes are prepared and pasted on the surface of each envelope. With such index, the schedule officer sees, at a glance, the contents of each folder/envelope. Other libraries have no evidence of index, access point or call number either for staff or users.

Use

The nature of past question paper storage with restricted access, or as in some cases, absence of access points has made the use of past question papers in these libraries an onerous task. At the AICE and FPN, students present their requests to the schedule officer who retrieves the required question paper. FUTO and IMSU allow the students to sort and find the needed question papers. In all the libraries, students are required to deposit their library identity cards for security before they are allowed to make photocopies. The approach whereby students are allowed to sort the question papers themselves creates a problem of disorganization. In such libraries, question papers are rarely in any order. The close access practice by FPN

and AICE presents great pressure to the schedule officers. Evidence of this is when a large number of students clusters to collect these materials.

PROBLEMS

The problems associated with the management of past question papers in the academic libraries are enormous. It ranges from the acquisition through processing, use and preservation. Actually several of such problems have already been touched upon in the body of this paper. It is necessary, though, to recant them.

All the libraries studied have encountered some difficulties in an effort to acquire and preserve these important historical university documents. In some cases, the faculty members are reluctant to release the question papers, a situation peculiar to materials acquired through serendipity. Using the later without co-ordination implies that the schedule officer may not have access to the examination centers always. Heads of Units or Deans tend to forget batching the materials to the library as at when due. Where they are informed through official request, some treat the issue with little or no importance. The result is inconsistency and gaps in the past question papers acquired.

The completeness of acquired information material notwithstanding, its organization and storage justifies the professional prowess of a librarian. Thus the scenario where past question papers are gathered into one storage facility without any in-house method of organization leaves much to be desired. Time and energy of both schedule officer and users are wasted in an effort to retrieve the desired question papers. Furthermore, the wear and tear resulting from continuous shuffling reduces longevity of these materials. Storage facilities are not exempted in the deteriorating problems. Libraries that receive the question papers in batches also have the problem of high labour requirement for sorting and organization of the bulky materials.

The gravity of the problems created by the use of question papers is relative to the nature of access being practiced. Open access operation experiences the major problems of disorganization, theft and rough handling by students. Disorganization requires daily and continuous reorganization. Such problems in addition to theft deprive other students' access to the needed question papers on real time. Though close access practices may not be liable to the above problems, a lot of demand is made on staff that serve these students, especially during revision periods. Situations abound whereby the number of question papers continues to reduce in the library until a complete

disappearance of a set is observed. Also, many of these materials are mutilated by some mischievous students who are not willing to photocopy.

PROSPECTS

As the libraries studied continue to grapple with the problems of past question paper management, they are not without hopes. The optimism is that faculty will get to appreciate the place of academic libraries as custodians of university documents. To achieve this, the library will continue to create awareness. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is presenting a lot of hopes for the archival functions of academic libraries. Past question papers could be received on-line or scanned into the computer system and stored in a folder. Such can reduce the time and energy employed for its management. The incidence of theft and mutilation will be drastically reduced if not totally eliminated. Workstations will also facilitate use and reduce time, energy and money spent during the retrieval and photocopy services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The management of past question papers is one of the archival functions of academic libraries. Evidently, the four libraries studied are involved in the functions. Three methods are employed in the acquisition. AICE has standing order deposit agreement with Deans of Faculties /Schools, while FPN makes regular formal requests. FUTO and IMSU collect question papers by chance. Some of the libraries apply professional processing and organizational method on the materials. FUTO and IMSU practice open access while AICE and FPN provide the materials on request. Both practices are not without attendant problems. The future seems very bright for the management of past question papers. Such materials could be posted on-line or scanned and users access them via the workstation.

However, the libraries under study should not wait for the dawn of ICT in the institutions. Collections of today will enhance the services of tomorrow. As such, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Efforts should be made to collect every question paper produced in the institution; where faculty members are not co-operative, visits should be paid to Deans;
2. Libraries should apply every processing technique required of archival materials on the question papers. An in-house classification scheme could be developed for them;
3. Schedule officers should pay visits to neighbouring libraries where they can brainstorm on the way forward with reference to past question paper management;
4. Duplicate copies should be made and used to serve students.

REFERENCES.

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