

Storage, Organization and Exploitation of Non-Print Materials in Nigerian Libraries

INTRODUCTION

The storage, organization and exploitation of non-print materials pose serious problems for library authorities in Nigeria hence the need for an article to generate discussion on this issue so that useful suggestions could emerge.

Nonprint materials constitute an insignificant proportion of total library resources in Nigeria. This is so because of our familiarity with print media since the introduction of western education to the country. It is also true that we rely too heavily on prints in our educational system, a fact which has become the predominant factor when planning our library services.

Library users in Nigeria hardly make use of audiovisual resources in the pursuit of their educational objectives since they regard them as sacrosanct and too sophisticated when compared with prints. A brief visit to our libraries will confirm the sad story that the non-print resources in our collections are not fully utilized and therefore do not justify the heavy investments on them.

However, I strongly believe that the dismal situation will change in future when people begin to appreciate the value and potentials of these materials in their educational, information and recreational activities. For libraries, all resources whether print or non-print materials should be made readily available and be placed on the same level.

In this regard, Anthony Hugh Thompson did not mince words when he says:

"The future development of library services must be based on the whole range of library materials... books, periodicals, micromaterials, records, audiotapes, videotapes, film based materials in various forms - transparencies, filmstrips and cine film. These are all 'records of man's achievement' and as such are carriers of information and are thus the essential tools of the librarian, who must be trained to deal with them"¹

The organization of non-print materials varies from one library to the other. Some libraries favour the conventional classification schemes for purpose of arrangement and adopt them without any modification while others prefer home-made schemes which are either completely new schemes or adulteration of the conventional classification schemes.

The arguments in favour and against those arrangements will be carefully examined in order to highlight their strengths and weaknesses. Another area which needs to be closely examined is integration of non-print materials with books.

Again, two divergent views emerge i.e. complete versus partial integration. Whether complete integration is possible or not has generated a lot of arguments in developed countries e.g. Britain. The issue is still open to discussion in developing countries.

STORAGE

Because nonprint materials are vulnerable to adverse weather conditions like heat, dust and sunlight, special storage facilities are indispensable for their preservation. Suitable storage facilities will be provided when the type of

storage has been clearly defined. According to Helen P. Harrison:

"Three types of storage need consideration; for archival purposes implying the preservation of the material for lengthy periods, reference storage for master material and originals and facilities for currently used stock"²

In case of storage for archival purposes, special air-conditioning units are required for preservation in tropical and sub-tropical countries because of the hot climate. To avoid damage, to materials the same temperatures and humidity should be aimed at through the use of full or partial air-conditioning.

However, because this is very expensive and most libraries do not have adequate funds for this purpose, partial air-conditioning is strongly recommended i.e. provision of air-conditioning unit in the room or part of the library where the non-print materials are kept.

However, where this is not possible Anthony Hugh Thompson provides a solution. He says:

"However, as most libraries cannot afford to instal expensive temperature control plants, preservation copies should be stored in plastic bags inside suitable containers in a part of the library that remains as consistently cool as possible provided the humidity is correct".³

Master material and currently used stock can be adequately stored for normal use in a library environment already suited to print-based documents provided the temperature and humidity are correct. Conventional library equipments such as the filing cabinet and the shelf can be used as storage facilities for nonprint materials.

AUDIOVISUAL EQUIPMENT

Equipment as well as software can be easily destroyed by adverse weather conditions. In very dusty libraries,



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equipment should be kept covered except when in use; in less dusty environment it should be covered when the library is not in use.

Regular equipment cleaning remains as dirt and dust free as possible otherwise playback quality will be impaired and software irreparably damaged. In tropical conditions the equipment, especially video equipment, should be stored in air-conditioned areas with the audiovisual software.

ORGANIZATION OF NON-PRINT MATERIALS

As mentioned earlier, organization varies from one library to the other. The conventional classification systems such as the Library of Congress, Dewey Decimal Classification schemes etc., are equally suitable for classifying non-print materials in libraries where they are already in use.

Conventional classification systems favour an integrated approach. To achieve this, non-print materials must be assimilated into existing information holdings and not kept in isolation as a special collection. Patrons browsing through library collection are able to find valuable materials that might otherwise lie dormant in various cabinets and closets. Students and lecturers can easily locate various materials thereby ensuring maximum utility of both print and non-print resources.

Complete integration of all library materials in one sequence is, however, not possible as there is not available on the market any kind of multi-storage shelving or multi-purpose packaging which permits the full integration of all types of media format in one readily extensible subject sequence. There are available both shelving and packaging methods which permit a degree of integration but they are generally expensive and still involve some broken sequences.

Secondly, some audiovisual formats e.g. gramophone records and audiocassettes may suffer physical damage or loss if integrated with print materials. Finally, some of them e.g. audiocassettes have no browseable element until they are played on their playback equipment.

Home-made schemes are used in some libraries to organize non-print materials. Few alternatives are possible. First, the materials may be arranged by format and under each format arrangement is alphabetical. Chronological arrangement may be employed in some libraries while others adopt a system whereby materials may be arranged in cabinets in numerical sequence.

Alphabetical arrangement is easily understood by users and it does not require in-depth training to get people to understand its use. Chronological arrangement according to the date of purchase of the materials is another logical method, but in order to facilitate the use of this method, date of purchase of each item must be properly recorded.

The last method of arrangement presupposes the labelling of the cabinets with numbers which are regarded as the basic element for locating the material. Home-made schemes make integration of print and non-print materials virtually impossible. Besides, the use of separate classification schemes confuses readers.

While it is clear from the reasons advanced earlier that complete integration is not possible, partial integration is, however, possible and it is up to the librarian to decide which materials need to be integrated into the main sequence and why.

CATALOGUING

The first essential prerequisite is to determine what is adequate or necessary for a particular library and to aim at selecting the most suitable methods of cataloguing both visual and audio media; and then to integrate the result with the book catalogue. Since most media publishers provide title which conveys the subject content of an item, title cataloguing is the simplest and most useful indexing method for educational media, particularly visuals. The Anglo-American Cataloguing Code 2nd edition takes care of nonprint materials when compared with previous edition and provides full cataloguing data for each format.

EXPLOITATION OF AUDIOVISUAL RESOURCES

In this context, exploitation simply means the handling and use of audiovisual software and their equipments. Audiovisual software needs to be handled with care. In general, the surfaces containing the recorded information should not come into contact with any rough surfaces or be touched by hand, as fingermarks attract dust and other impurities in the atmosphere.

This could lead to 'distortion' on playback, could be difficult to remove from recorded surfaces particularly the grooves of audio discs and the emulsion side of photographic film and could lead to permanent damage of the software. Gramophone records should be handled by the rim and label areas only and be stored inside the inner sleeve within the outer informative cover.

The open end of the inner sleeve must face a closed edge of the outer cover thus forming a dust proof container. Photographic film materials should only be handled by the edges, unless approved cotton film handling gloves are worn.

Filmstrips are best converted to slide formats with glass mounting of slides being recommended for reference collections, group presentation or for tape/slide sequences. Master slides for duplication purposes are best kept in plastic mounts only.

Film handling gloves should always be worn when mounting slides or splicing cinefilm. The recording surface of magnetic recording tapes should not be handled except for repair or splicing purposes when film handling gloves can be worn for extra protection.

HANDLING AUDIOVISUAL EQUIPMENT

What is required is in-depth knowledge of all media formats and basic training in the operation of equipment. Commenting on the essence of training in the use of audiovisual equipments, Musa Bakre says:

"Training should after all, not be regarded as a one time activity, necessary only to create the conditions on which a media service is based. It is a continuing, life-long process. As techniques alter, so personnel need up-dating and refresher courses; it is likely, too, that staff will change their roles several times in a lifetime, and will need retraining and reorientation courses"⁴

Basic skills in handling and operation of audiovisual equipments can be acquired through on-the training, induction and orientation courses and through continuous and development training programmes.

ORGANIZATION AND EXPLOITATION OF NON-PRINT MATERIALS IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

Besides university libraries, arrangement of non-print materials in other kinds of libraries in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. In most public and school libraries non-print materials are not arranged in any logical order. They are usually locked up in rooms instead of treating them as useful and valuable educational and recreational materials which should be made readily available for their clientele.

For the purpose of this article, I would like to focus my attention on two university libraries i.e. University of Ibadan Library and University of Ilorin Library. The arrangement of non-print materials in both libraries is similar, but with minor differences. Both libraries adopt the Library of Congress Classification Scheme in combination with other elements e.g. accession number, format and chronological date of acquisition to form the call number.

The non-print materials are not integrated with books on the shelves but kept in a different location. Finally, both libraries use the abbreviation of each format for purpose of identifying non-print materials. The University of Ibadan Library differs as it adopts close classification for non-print materials as for books and adds the cabinet number containing the non-print materials and the chronological date of acquisition of each material to form the call number.

The University of Ilorin Library uses the main classes of Library of Congress Classification Scheme, the accession number and the abbreviation of each format to form the call number. By this arrangement, neither full nor partial integration of print and non-print materials is possible in the University of Ilorin Library because of the conflicting call numbers. Besides, the call number becomes unnecessarily cumbersome and confuses users.

The University of Ilorin Library practice is basically one of the home-made devices of arranging non-print materials and it has its own advantages. However, its disadvantages outweigh its advantages. The University of Ibadan practice is more acceptable since it facilitates partial integration of print and non-print materials especially those packaged like books e.g. videocassettes, slides etc. The practice is therefore recommended for libraries in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, the needs of the users and staff have to be carefully considered before a final decision is taken. Whatever arrangement is adopted, the ultimate aim is to ensure the maximum and efficient use of non-print collections in our libraries and harness them with our print resources in order to provide better and efficient services for users.

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