

Deconstruction of Collection and Preservation Terminologies: Implications for Teaching and Research on Indigenous Knowledge

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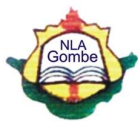
Abstract

With a worry on how indigenous knowledge can be effectively collected and preserved for the future generation, this paper adopted deconstructionism approach to interpret the meanings and applicable implications of “collection” and “preservation” as agelong terminologies in librarianship. The analogy revealed that the etymology and lexis of “collection and preservation” encompasses the act of collecting pieces of data from relevant sources to produce a distinct information material, and the activity of recording vital information and knowledge respectively, both of which are the nitty-gritty of documentation studies. From the perspective of librarianship, the paper concluded that the traditional thought that “collection” denotes the quantity of information materials accumulated by a library while “preservation” centres on book protection measures are distinctly marginalised. The paper that library and information science educators should explore and teach scientific methods of documentation studies, and also deepen the scope and coverage of indigenous knowledge to include how to document different aspects of indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, collection and preservation, deconstructionism, librarianship

Introduction

Going by the changes in today's society, orchestrated by modernization, developments in technology, and the consequent behavior modification of people towards information, deploying the philosophical tool of deconstructionism to critique and dismantle certain traditional modes of thought in librarianship is a crucial need of the hour. This becomes more imperative in the face of anticipated dormancy and possible extinction of librarianship in the nearest future (Griffith, 2015). To subsist as a profession therefore, librarianship is now faced with the unavoidable alternative of rebranding and reintegrating services that are relevant to mankind and society (Courant, 2016; Velsey, 2017). In the light of this concern, this paper finds it necessary to analogically interpret the meanings and applicable implications of “collection” and “preservation” as agelong terminologies in one aspect of librarianship called indigenous knowledge. Significantly, such attempt provides deeper understanding of what is



required of librarians as job roles in the context of collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems of traditional societies.

Deconstruction Theory

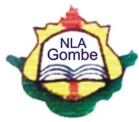
Deconstruction is a philosophy propounded by Jean Jacques Derrida in 1967. It is a scientific idea applied in the field of social sciences to show that meanings of words, phrases or terms are unstable and can have alternate connotations, especially in the workplace context. Hence, deconstructionism embodies the thought processes of identifying both the central and the marginalized meanings of terminologies in a practice, drawing from parallel assessment of what is generally accepted and what is ideally correct. The goal of any deconstruction analogy is to aid the interpretation and understanding of relationships between texts and meanings and is therefore needed to provide scientific grounds to frame responsibilities that will guide a practice. Hence, the philosophy of deconstruction in scientific research provide grounds to define and re-interpret professional vocabularies in a way that portray the range and scope of activities required of professionals in a given profession. Despite being unpopular in the field of library and information science, it is worthwhile to understand through the lenses of deconstructionism the practical meanings of collection and preservation as terminologies in library practice, and thus, underpins the social sciences foundation of librarianship.

Librarianship as a Profession

Librarianship is basically a profession that deals with information and knowledge collection and preservation. The profession cut across evolving disciplines ranging from documentation studies, library science, library and information science, information studies, information management, information and knowledge management, and information and archival studies. The ultimate goal of librarianship is to provide access to arrays of information and knowledge materials and ensure effective preservation of same for present and future use (Venkatasubbarao, 2013). User of libraries are grouped into distinct circles that amount to the followings as broad types of libraries: academic, school, special, national, and public libraries (Uzuegbu & Naga, 2017). In each type of library, collection and preservation are indispensable terminologies that summarize the diverse activities and functions executed by librarians.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is an aspect of librarianship. It is widely regarded as traditional knowledge or local tradition. It is the conglomeration of agelong beneficial practices of native races across the globe. Being cultural, environmental based, and predominantly expressed in local language, indigenous knowledge cut across knowledge that existed before the dawn of modern scientific knowledge (Tharakan, 2017). Unlike modern scientific knowledge where facts are built upon theories, indigenous knowledge emerged from several years of trials and errors (Uzuegbu & Onwubiko, 2021). Yet, as against possible precautions in the face of imaginable blunders, scholars have argued that indigenous knowledge is as effective as modern scientific knowledge and seems to offer the best of answers to the sustainability concerns of United Nations and its organisations (Abbott, 2014; Cornell, 2013; IFAD, 2016; Nordin, Hassan & Zainol, 2012; Pardo-de-Santayana & Macía, 2015).



The work of Uzuegbu and Onwubiko (2021) has shown the rich benefits of indigenous knowledge. In their paper, the impact of indigenous knowledge on modern science and technology, societal values, people's lifestyle, and sustainable development are enumerated. The problem therefore is not whether indigenous knowledge is beneficial to mankind or not, but is basically how to effectively collect and preserve indigenous knowledges across native communities before they disappear (Issa, Owoeye & Awoyemi, 2018; Mole, Ekwelem, & Din, 2018). Studies have reported that some indigenous knowledge of most native societies, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, cutting across traditional medicinal practices of the fore-parents, organic farming methods, informative festivals, cultural dances and songs, ancient handicrafts and lots more are fast disappearing from native communities (Reyes-García et al., 2013). So, in a situation where it is possible that most custodians of indigenous knowledge exit the planet earth without passing down the knowledge they held, or are abandoned in the buzz of today's modernization, coupled with the obvious observable disinterest of the present-day generation of native people in indigenous knowledge transmission, how then can indigenous knowledge be collected and preserved for the future? This is the worrisome question that triggered this paper and prompted the need to rethink about the meanings of "collection and preservation" as library practice terminologies, and understand their applicability in recovering or retaining indigenous knowledges of native societies.

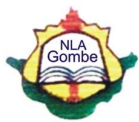
Etymology and Lexis of Collection and Preservation

The term "collection" was coined in the 14th century from the old French word *collection*, and from the Latin term *collectionem* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The term collection has been used to mean the process of collecting or gathering something together, as well as being the number of things assembled together. From McDonald's (2006) interpretation of the action of collecting, collection is a practice necessitated by need and or predisposition to bring material things together. This is to say that collection focuses on gathering together what is hitherto not assembled, both into a single form and into a pool. Hence, as much as collection is a set of distinctive practice, it is also a changing exercise. While it entails the assembling of already-made materials for circulation purpose, it also includes the gathering of information about people, objects and things from sources including human beings in other to create new material.

On the other hand, preservation is a 15th century term made up from an old French word *preservacion* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Preservation is a noun of action from the past-participle stem of "preserve", meaning "to guard beforehand". More often than not, the term preservation is generally used to infer protection; the act of keeping something safe or sound. According to Gardiner (1994), preservation is a concept that precede and or prevent conservation. Thus, as conservation is usually confused with preservation, their observed lexical ideologies differ. Preservation encompasses conservation to include all efforts made to protect a material object from becoming damaged, destroyed, or neglected. But conservation represents all actions geared towards sustainable use of preserved materials.

Collection and Preservation: Traditional Connotations in Librarianship versus Actualities

In librarianship literature, the term collection is fundamentally about the quantity of information materials assembled together in a library, sufficing the phrase "library collection" (Nworie & Magnus, 2017). In the same vein, preservation encompasses the library activities of dusting of books, sowing and binding of worn-out pages and covers, fumigating of

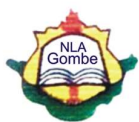


shelves, maintaining of optimal temperature and humidity and so on to prevent print collections from being damaged (Amankwah, Bilson & Atisoe, 2022). With these, the idea of collection and preservation as terminologies in librarianship are pigeonholed in the library building, where a pool of information materials assembled for circulation and use defines collection, and the modalities put in place to protect and sustain continued use of the information materials describe preservation. Unfortunately, this is not a complete representation of the applicable meanings of these terminologies.

Apparently, the sense that “collection” is also an act of gathering something together is clearly marginalized in the prevailing librarianship practice. Traditional library practice regards “collection” as the sum total of objects assembled together, and basically not about a compilation of information to produce a single piece of document. Yet, it is by act of collecting several pieces of data and information that a document is made, whether as a compilation or as a compendium. Hence, it is not inconsistent in meaning to refer to “collection” as a methodical process of collecting pieces of data from relevant sources to create a unit document. Such analogy is true about librarianship going by the agelong practice of documentation, which is a well-accepted aspect of librarianship (Frohmann, 2004). So, apart from being the quantity of information materials accumulated by a library, collection is also the act or process of collecting pieces of data from relevant sources to produce a distinct information material. In other words, as much as it is professionally correct for libraries to hold collections, it is also within the domain of library practice to produce new information materials that will add to existing collection through documentation studies.

In the same vein, preservation exercise is not limited to protection of book materials. In the field of librarianship, scholars at various level use the term “preservation” to describe the: safeguarding of culture and heritage (Drijfhout & de Boer, 2015; Roy, 2015; Scazzosi, 2018); documentation of indigenous knowledge (Jain, 2008); and codification of tacit knowledge and retention of organisational best practices (Janus, 2016). To IFLA, preserving peoples’ culture and heritage is not only a focus on literature and other documentary works, as libraries are increasingly engaged across a wider range of tangible and intangible forms of expression, including involvements in exchange, research, standards development and learning opportunities (IFLA, 2023). Notably, the research aspect of the preservation initiatives of IFLA is basically hinged on documentation studies and selective compilation of heritable sites, place names, and things – since all heritage of the past generations are not heritage until such is selected by society (Logan, 2007). For Jain (2008), preserving indigenous knowledge is a systematic blend of documenting and doing audio and visual recordings of traditional knowledge to promote their shareability and use. On preserving knowledge which resides in human brains and retaining organisational best practices, Janus (2016) relates preservation to the provision of mechanisms for identifying and capturing the important expertise and experience held by people working in a given organisation in order to create self-contained knowledge assets designed for relevance, searchability, and shareability. In the light of these arguments, it is therefore lopsided to pigeonhole preservation in explicit knowledge materials only, because preservation also encompasses all documentation processes done with a view of retaining vital tacit knowledge.

In a nut shell, the prevailing meanings of “collection and preservation” in librarianship obviously marginalises the length and breadth of the terminologies in a more balanced context. From the theoretical lens of deconstruction therefore, it is clear that there is need in



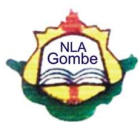
librarianship to harness and integrate practices that will collect and process data to create reliable and credible information and knowledge materials. This seems to be a vacuum in librarianship and has a couple of implications.

Implications of Collection and Preservation Deconstruction in Teaching and Research on Indigenous Knowledge

From the perspective of indigenous knowledge, a couple of insinuations can be drawn from the deconstruction of collection and preservation terminologies. First and foremost, from the grounds that the term collection is also regarded as an act of gathering something together, it means that the activity of assembling data to produce a distinct information material or knowledge resource is not out of place. A product of such effort underlines the principles of documentation studies – aptly defined as the study of recording and retrieval of information (Berard, 2003). Unfortunately, insights from personal interactions with librarianship scholars show that documentation research is barely regarded as a scholarly effort that is meritorious of advanced research. Yet, it seems impracticable to successfully preserve (or protect) indigenous knowledge and traditional systems through any scientific means other than documentation research.

In the light of the foregoing therefore, it is high time documentation research and study is rekindled in the library and information science discipline, with diversifications on systematic compilations of extraordinary sites, place names and things, events and festivals, sustainable farming practices, medicinal plant names and uses, amongst others. In fact, in the spirit of advanced research, probably at doctoral level, emphasis can be made on scientific collection and utilization of data from indigenous people to create local content websites on specific indigenous knowledge areas; produce audio and video recorded copies of definite traditional knowledge; and, convert tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge (occurring as research reports eventually become published as historical and didactive books). These and many more are what librarianship scholars in Asian countries like India, Singapore, Malaysia, and Pakistan are doing basically as doctoral theses and dissertations in a bid to preserve their agelong cultures and create a heritage for their future generation. Instances of such researches can be seen on *Shodhganga*, – an open access repository of all PhD theses emanating from Indian universities (Kumar, Jagdish, & Suboohi, 2016).

Another important understanding from the deconstruction exercise of this paper lies on the curriculum and teaching of documentation studies and practices in library and information science schools. Documentation studies is not just about some bibliography compilation as it is erroneously held in most African climes (Garfield, 2006; Harner, 2015). Instead, documentation studies reflect the totality of the study of systematic means and procedures of assembling and recording knowledge that is hitherto not accessible in any single print or electronic form of information material (Berard, 2003). With the successful synchronization of information science with traditional library science, upon which librarians now receive trainings on information science and have evolved from custodians of print books (as collection in its central meaning) to information and knowledge creators and distribution beyond physical library spaces (relating to the marginalized sense of “collection”), future librarians should be trained on how to use information and communication technologies to collect and preserve local knowledge of indigenous people. Librarianship courses such as Website Design and Data Management should not only be directed towards digital library services, institutional repositories, online database services, and the emerging electronic



hosting and publishing of institutional journals, but should impact practical knowledge of website creation for indigenous knowledge contents of rich cultures and societies. In other words, future librarians should be thought how to design and populate websites designated for specific indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, librarianship curriculum should deepen its content on rural librarianship and bolster oral literature collection and preservation through podcast, iPods and other relevant emerging technologies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

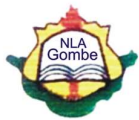
This paper adopted the deconstruction method of research to interpret the meanings and applicable implications of “collection” and “preservation” as age long terminologies in librarianship. The paper finds that the prevailing meanings of “collection and preservation” in librarianship obviously marginalises the length and breadth of the terminologies in a more balanced context. In traditional librarianship, “collection” is dominantly used to refer to the quantity of information materials accumulated by a library, while “preservation” denote book protection exercises such as binding, fumigation, dusting, and others aimed at protecting library book materials from becoming damaged, destroyed, or neglected. Yet, these are not the comprehensive meanings of the terms. For example, the sense that “collection” is also an act of collecting pieces of data from relevant sources to produce a distinct information material, and that preservation encompasses all recording and documentation processes done with a view of retaining vital information and knowledge are etymologically and lexically correct, but are clearly marginalized in contemporary librarianship practice. It is probably the relegation of these meanings that affect librarians’ effective participation in the collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge of native societies, and the undertaking of scientific research in the same area. In the light of these therefore, this paper recommends that:

- i. Documentation exercise, which is not only indispensable in human society but a lively field of research, brings the marginalised meanings of collection and preservation to practice in librarianship and should be explored.
- ii. Library and information science educators should explore and teach scientific methods of documentation studies, and also deepen the scope and coverage of indigenous knowledge to include how to document different aspects of indigenous knowledge.
- iii. Researches (especially of qualitative methods) focused on documentation of indigenous knowledge should be promoted and encouraged among library and information science scholars and postgraduate students.

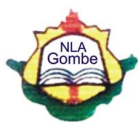
The above recommendations are attainable and will ensure proactive collection and preservation of heritable knowledge and culture of native societies across the globe.

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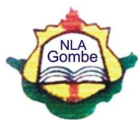


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