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The Effect of Economic Recession on University Libraries in Nigeria

THE CASE OF THE KENNETH DIKE LIBRARY

Georgina Dien Ekpenyong

Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Dike Library, formerly known as Ibadan University Library, was founded in 1948.

At that time, the University of Ibadan was the first and only University in Nigeria. It was the only meaningful academic library not only in Nigeria but in West Africa. It did not serve only as an academic library but was made to serve as a national library, special library and to a certain extent as a public library. The collection housed varied from academic materials to general reading materials, etc. This library acquired its collection from various sources, most of which were bequests from Henry Carr Library, Library of the Higher College, Yaba (which consisted mainly of medical materials), the Dyke Library (mainly materials on tropical agriculture), the Leeds Clergy Library (materials on church history); gifts from the British Council, Sir Charles Orr Library (works relating to Nigeria), Herbert Macaulay Library (materials containing valuable manuscripts relating to the history of Nigeria) to name just a few. The library collection in 1960 was built around this core collection. As faculties developed, an acquisition policy was formulated whereby books bought represented subjects taught. This library now has a collection of about 560,000 volumes, over 6,000 journals and serials and seats 1,250 readers. From this brief history, we can see that from bequests, this library has inherited many unique materials on Nigeria,

West Africa and indeed sub-Saharan Africa which are unavailable in the traditional book market and some are so rare that they may only be found here.

The library also has an Arabic Book and Manuscript Collection, Publications Ordinance Collection and Government Documents Collection.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

As faculties developed, it was thought necessary for the library to establish an acquisitions policy. This was done in the early 1960s in order to make the library collection credible and to reflect the subjects taught. About 50 per cent of the total book budget was allocated to journals acquisitions since the primary source materials needed for research were found in journals.

Apart from acquiring stock based on the aims and objectives of the University, this library also seized the opportunity to develop special collections of national significance. This has made the library a centre of excellence in Nigerian (all works published about Nigeria, by Nigeria and works published in Nigeria).

A shortage of funds started plaguing the University of Ibadan in the late 1970s. As a result of this, very few books and journals could be purchased. Periodicals were most affected and it is no surprise that in the journal holdings of the library, there is a gap in acquisition between 1982 and 1987 when nothing was received. Table I gives a clear picture of what happened to journal acquisition during this period. Serial publications, though expensive, are generally known to be the most important primary

information sources for research in academic libraries.

The inability of the Kenneth Dike Library to purchase these important primary sources of materials resulted in acute frustration for research students and academic staff in the university. With the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) book acquisition progressively decreased.

A look at Figure 1 shows the state of book acquisition in Kenneth Dike Library for a 20-year period, 1970-1990. The figure shows that the peak reached was in the 1976/77 session with an acquisition of about 17,000 volumes. This figure dramatically reduced to as low as 1,770 books acquired in the 1989/90 session. Of course, the reduction has also affected the reading habits of students and research information obtained by the university academia. In fact the decline in the acquisition of books and journals resulted in the accumulation of old and outdated books. While journals may still serve as research materials, new discoveries in the research world are unknown to researchers within this university environment.

Journal currency	Comparative periods/ volumes acquired	
	1982/83 session	1988/89 session
Current journals received	3,626	317
Non-current journals received	2,506	0

TABLE I.
Journal Acquisition in the 1980s in Kenneth Dike Library

Table II shows the currency of library books as of 1990.

Table II is very revealing! It shows the following: Pre-1960-1980, about 143,921 books were processed; 1981-1990, only 5,414 books were processed! This further shows that current books make up only about 3 per cent of the total collection; in effect about 97 per cent of the collection is obsolete!

For the university researcher, this shows that he has no modern tool to work with, especially in a university environment where change is a dynamic phenomenon.

Since some of the library collection was received as bequests and gifts, not only are they now old but they may not now be relevant in an academic library. Table III shows the broad subject analysis of books in Kenneth Dike Library.

The Humanities and Law had most volumes followed by Science and Technology and finally Social Sciences.

This table reveals that during the "Oil Boom" years, between 1970 and 1979, more

Period	Currency of library books
Pre-1960	62,958
1960-1964	21,393
1965-1969	22,476
1970-1974	23,707
1975-1979	13,387
1980-1984	3,990
1984-1990	1,424

TABLE II.
Evaluation of the Kenneth Dike Library Collection: Age-range of the Collection Using Shelf-list Cards

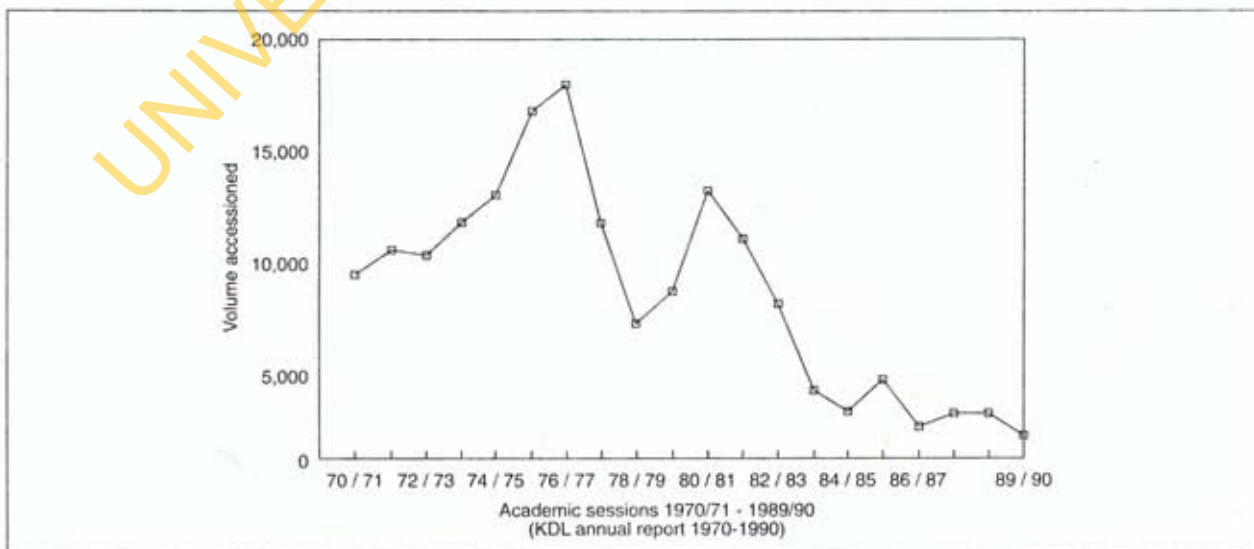


FIGURE 1.
Book Acquisition in Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan (1970-1990)

money was given to the university and the library for book purchase. As a result of the economic situation in the country, 1985-90 has seen a drastic decline in book purchase. This means that most of the materials in the library are inadequate for research. In 1982, however, there was an unprecedented financial crisis in the country which led to drastic cuts in budgetary allocation to universities. In addition drastic restrictions were placed on overseas purchases. Even when the budgetary allocations were improved later in the late 1980s, the devaluation of the naira (₦) coupled with global inflation resulted in an excessive increase in the cost of overseas purchase.

The result of this is the decline in book acquisition between the period 1985-90. From this table it is apparent that between 1980-90, the number of books acquired can hardly be said to be adequate.

A look at the statistics of student registration over the years (see Figure 2) has shown an exponential increase while the annual budget allocated for the purchase of current books and journals has shown a progressive decrease.

Figure 2 shows that between 1988 and 1990, a total of 8,817 students matriculated whereas the number of books acquired totalled only 1,424!

THE EFFECT OF FINANCIAL CONSTRAINT ON BOOK ACQUISITION

Prior to the World Bank Credit of 1990, each federal university was mandated by the National University Commission (NUC) to set aside 5-8 per cent of its total annual budget for the purchase of current books and journals. This policy notwithstanding, the federal universities were unable to carry out the NUC directive not only because of the drastic cut in annual allocation to universities but also due to the fact that the budget was no longer given once but quarterly. The thirst for knowledge (increase in student population) has not matched book and journal acquisition. Igwillo[1] observed that while the demand for reading materials is increasing, access to these materials is diminishing.

As a result of this dilemma the academic staff of universities cried out for help as

	Period for comparison						
Broad subject areas	Pre-1960	1961-64	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-90
Humanities, Law	1,911	1,004	2,258	6,550	5,174	1,626	423
Social Sciences	550	398	957	3,554	3,303	1,086	356
Science, Agriculture and Technology	1,146	940	1,595	4,545	4,593	1,478	645

TABLE III.
Broad Subject Analysis of Books in Kenneth Dike Library

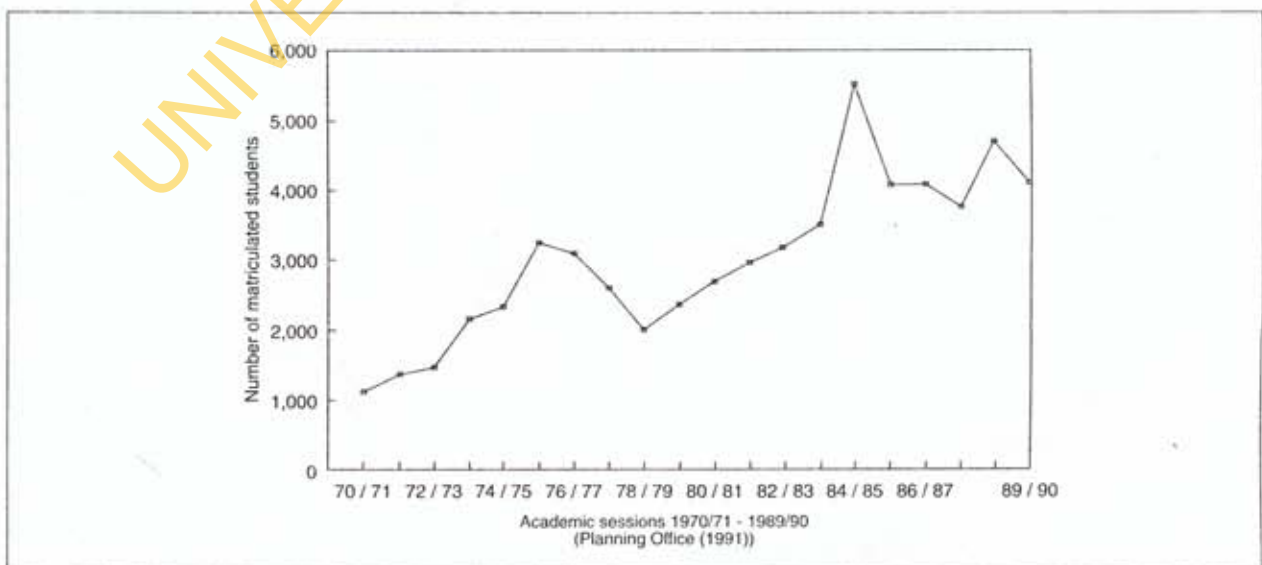


FIGURE 2.
Student Registration Over a 20-year Period, 1970/71-1989/90

research was virtually paralysed. The World Bank came to the rescue of the universities towards the end of 1989.

In July 1992, the National Academic Staff Union of Universities embarked on industrial action to back up their request for improvement in allocation of funds for the purchase of books and journals among other things.

It was as a result of this that the Federal Government in September 1992 made available the sum of ₦137m to each federal university to restore facilities for research and teaching, purchase of new equipment and repairs.

WORLD BANK PROJECT

At the end of 1989, the World Bank came to the rescue of federal universities in Nigeria with the allocation of \$120m for the purchase of current books and journals and purchase of new equipment to enhance research. Nigerian federal universities were grouped into first, second and third generation universities. The University of Ibadan rightly belongs to the first generation universities of which there are six. The Ibadan University was allocated the sum of \$17.5m which is to be spent within three years.

LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD BANK PROJECT

It was believed that the World Bank Project would take off by the end of 1990. As a result of this expectation, no financial provision was made for the acquisition of current books and journals from 1990. Because of the current economic recession in Nigeria, even the 5-8 per cent of the total university budget which was supposed to be used for the purchase of current books and journals was not given to the Kenneth Dike Library. As a consequence of this, the KDL was not able to subscribe to most of its journals from 1990 to 1992 and new books were not purchased at all! From 1990 to 1992, this library depended only on gifts as all current books received were donated. The few journals that trickled in came from the following sources:

- (1) Outstanding credit with our overseas book agents such as Blackwell.
- (2) American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS): Many of our current journals in the Basic and Applied Sciences were gifts from AAAS, Journal Distribution Programme.
- (3) A few others came in as exchange for our local journals.

Luckily, however, the first batch of the World Bank books arrived at Kenneth Dike Library in February 1993! We still do not know when the journals will come in.

CONCLUSION

That the present economic state of the country has stagnated research in this country cannot be overemphasized. At present we are not sure that the World Bank Project will cover 1993 journals. These have not been subscribed to since the supposed 5-8 per cent NUC allocation for the purchase of current books and journals has not been received.

The consequences of lapses and gaps in serial publication holdings is immense. There are gaps between 1982-1988 and 1990-1993! The World Bank Project does not relate to back issues!

Economic recession in Nigeria has affected every aspect of Nigerian life but centres of learning and research bear the brunt of the situation. The effect of this has been felt very much in the quest for knowledge by students and research information by university researchers. The country cannot continue to depend permanently on outside gifts in a desire to build its research capabilities. In fact, the economic recession in Nigeria has seriously affected the nation's social and educational systems. The Government does not even have money to finance non-profit making activities like book or journal publishing. Despite the often-announced and orchestrated but currently belated increase in the salaries of university academics, books and journals are the last items on the shopping list of intellectuals.

It is not enough to blame the emptiness of our shelves in libraries on lack of foreign exchange only. About 60 per cent of foreign currency earnings in most of Africa is spent on debt repayment. Books do not make profits in Third World countries and SAP and the World Bank which supports it always work on the premiss that anything that does not turn in a profit and does not give a quick return for repayment of debts and interest is discarded. The country now needs a renewed policy on books and journals for our universities before we regress into the pre-Gutenberg societies, without books, without printed literature.

□

Reference

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Further Reading

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