AUTOMATING SERIAL HOLDINGS IN A SELECTED ACADEMIC LIBRARY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

University of Ilorin Library, due to perceived advantages of automated library system attempted to automate her serial holdings, certain factors constrained the task. The study aimed at finding out the method, problems, benefits of the conversion and propose ways to improve on the task. The bibliographic information on existing titles were input automate the system. The problems affecting the task include inadequate staffing, bibliographic information on the publications inefficient enabling environment TINLIB software was not appropriate because it did not accommodate some information required for the conversion. SLAM and Library portal and KOHA are local softwares and recommended as alternatives. Among others, large scale automation would improve performance of some library routine jobs, provide data necessary for managerial activities and facilitate library management.

INTRODUCTION

In many modern libraries, computers are established feature of many mode Libraries despite the fact that existence of electronic libraries was yet to materialize. Computers have been used since 1960s to good effect, to carry out many library function. Computers accomplish both repetitive and tedious library tasks Rowley indicated the libraries in developed countries started computerization of some of their services in 196 University and research libraries were targets of early computerization. The stage application of computer to libraries in developing countries was, however, a far-cry from the in developed countries. The skeletal library applications of computer became visible' developing countries, including Nigeria in 1970s and 1980s.

Amongst Nigerian University libraries, university of Ibadan was the first to apply computer technology to record her serial holdings in April, 1973. The attempt was close. Followed by both university of Nigeria, Usukka and university of Benin, Nigeria. University of Benin Library constituted a research group in 1975 to establish the best method generating computerized serial holdings of the University library and harmonize her list with those of other libraries, so as to promote library cooperation amongst the libraries.

University of Ilorin Library came to existence in 1976 and had branches at 4 different locations of varying distances from the main library. In her collection it has 2,200 titles local and foreign journals, the record of which was initially kept manually. Automatic Serial Holdings in A selected Academic Library in Nigeria

With availability of funds from NUC, University of Ilorin Library joined other libraries carry out in large scale automation project on their routine library jobs. University of Dorm library therefore felt the need to urgently retro convert the records of her collection to a computerized system. Having almost fully converted all her monograph collection that of serials was yet to be fully automated.

Statement of Problem

1 University Library, University of Ilorin
Automating the manually performed library routine tasks remains a major problem in Nigeria libraries. There is therefore a need to computerize the library systems to improve then service delivery. Most libraries forge ahead to automate their activities. Despite their efforts, University of Ilorin Library had not achieved formidable success in automating their serial holder. However, there was great feeling that automating the records would improve the library service generally. what was the mode of automating the record was the problem of investigation of this study.

Objectives

To examine the process of conversion of serial holdings of University of Ilorin Library to an automated system.
To identify constraints to the conversion.
To propose solution to the constraints with the aim of improving the process and facilitating the completion of the conversion.

Scope

This study covered the conversion of serial holder of University of Ilorin Library, Ilorin, Nigeria. The serial title for conversion covered all the title held at the Library from its inception in 1976 the records of which were initially kept in card catalogue and Kardex.

Research Questions

(1) What was the mode of conversion of the Library serial holdings into an automated system?
(2) What were the constraints militating against the conversion?
(3) What were the likely effects of the conversion on the library services?
(4) How could the identified problems be solved?

Justification Review

As the time of this study, there was no formal guidelines for retro conversion projects Nigeria, the findings of this study would therefore serve as guidelines in decision making decision towards and on undertaking retro conversion of library holdings. This was more so certain problems associated with the project would be unfolding during the study.

Literature Review

Gellatly (1982) opined that as far back as early 1980s, a substantial body of library literature addressed automation of serials and the process of conversion. IFLA (1990) revealed that many broad articles covered retrospective catalogue conversion, retrospective. Bibliography and on other versions of conversions in Australia, Britain, Portugal, France, Italy, Federal Republic of Germany, Spain and Socialist countries. Hardly could any be found in developing countries. He conclusively remarked that complete conversion of our retrospective catalogues had become so much as ideal as a necessity.

Olorunsola (1997) posited that one of the major challenges in many Nigerian University Libraries would be retrospective conversion of books and serials. He stated that burden of retro conversion in Nigeria University Libraries particularly in Federal University Libraries would dominate few years of the century because automation of library serials had expanded rapidly and was currently being applied in most Federal University libraries. Idowu (2000) opined that repetitive and routine tasks yield more readily and easily to the capacities of automated systems and that any attempt to keep to status quo leads to obsoleteness and rigorous manual routine jobs resulting in low productivity and unsatisfactory information service and
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retrieval. The libraries of today are to choose between automation and suffocation and so, automation of library procedures was then order of the day in library and information set-up.

Elikharmenor (1990) revealed that the employment of computer in the performance of core library functions of book ordering, cataloguing, circulation, reference and information services was not widespread. Rowley (1988) stated that coincidentally, University Libraries and large libraries in Nigeria are early computerization targets as was the case in developed countries. Alabi (1996), Ugbogu and Gupta (1987) reasoned that lack of computer personnel, hardware and soft wares among others accounted for the slow pace of the usage of computer in Nigerian Libraries. Alemna (1996) advised that the libraries should shun the notion that automation would take over. their functions and their usefulness. He argued that the notion might result in a failure to use to the challenges posed by computerization. Rather they should begin by acquiring some knowledge of both computer language and the language of sciences and to become acquainted with the theoretical foundations of communications.

Aguolu and Aguolu (2000) elucidated problems and prospects of academic and research libraries in Nigeria. They stated that libraries in Nigeria could not afford the large amounts of money required to purchase and maintain computer hardware, software and personnel unless the funding authorities were ready to provide the necessary funds to purchase the computer facilities and the library staff sponsored to acquire computer skill. The authors reaffirmed that it is in the context of libraries with substantial regular funding that the practice of library automation could be meaningfully discussed. Country's infrastructural inadequacies such as lack of steady electricity supply and inefficient telephone services constituted fundamental constraints to speedy library computerization.

Farajpahlou (2002) referred to a 1999 Australian survey which examined a 26 item scale developed regarding three major automated library systems issues which approved 23 items that represented yardsticks for the success of automated library systems, and ejection of the remaining 3 items. The same scale was converted into Farsi in the year 2000 and distributed among 240 library managers and systems librarians in 120 Iranian educational institutions. 24 out of the 26 scale items were accepted by the library managers and systems librarians rejecting on 2 items which were not identical to those of Australian survey. The discrepancies were mainly raised by boundary issues. He however revealed that attitude towards management, technicalities and usage of automated library systems of both Australian and Iranian colleagues seem to be identical. He concluded that, the scale, so far, had proved reliable and valid at least with 21 of its items. Magara (2002) analysed applications of digital libraries and electronic technologies in developing countries. He adopted a qualitative approach with a purposive strategy and limited the study to practical, experiences on the services and applications that made the basis of analysis. The stud revealed that the majority of organizations apply IT in bridging access across networks an’ sharing of information between different organizations. He observed that the current ICT systems in Uganda did not enable it to reach the majority of the community. He therefore concluded that digital libraries and electronic technologies had contributed effectively t collaborative applications between institutions in Uganda. He recommended that services need to be integrated into the organizations strategic objectives coupled with knowledge and skills.

From the foregoing one will realize that many studies had been carried out on library automation. However, there are still needs to find out more about library automation in developing countries in particular.

Methodology
This is a study through examination of existing records on serials, observation of the conversion process and a survey of the opinion of the serial section staff by interviewing and discussion on the conversion process and its attendant problems. The opinion of would-be users, library staff inclusive were also sought on the advantage that the conversion would bring to the users and the library in terms of her service delivery. Bibliographic information - the library serials holding of 2,200 titles were examined to ensure the degree of conformity f their description with the standard bibliographic description on serials.

Discussion was specifically held with the serial staff (serial librarian, two library assistants and typist) on how to obtain required information for worksheets. Visits were made the various branches of the library to have bibliographic information directly from the physical publications.

Findings and Discussions

The University of Ilorin came into existence in 1976 and made attempts to automate. Circulation activities in cooperation with the University Computer Centre in 1983. It was revealed that this early attempt was unsuccessful due to insufficient knowledge of the project handling. Further efforts resulted in a measure of success by the end of 1997. As a result cataloguing, circulation and acquisition modules were being put into use while OPAC was partially in use and serial module was not at all in use.

Man power Need

The installation of a new automated system in the library needed specially trained personnel. At the library a crop of staff were trained internally to meet the specific need of e task. At the take-off period, the training was in two phases. The first phase covered librarians, library officers, library assistants and the typists while the second phase covered the Heads of Library section such as those of cataloguing, acquisition, circulation and serials. serials section was staffed with a librarian, a library officer, two library assistants and an put clerk. The staffing situation was not adequate.

A contract was with a commercial firm for the installation of monographs, documents d serial holdings into the Computer.

Bibliographic Information Records:

Information required for the automation of the serial holdings of the library was contained on catalogue cards and Kardex kept in the serial section of the Library. Information some of the publications was inadequate for the conversion into automation. 85% of the 2,2200 serial titles in stock were covered with adequate information on catalogue card and . Kardex. Adequate information on 9% of the stock was made up by physical examination of publications on the shelf at their various locations. The information on the remaining 6% of the stock were inadequate for the 'conversion process. The publications with inadequate information were predominantly of local origin.

The Record Conversion

The Library made use of TINLIB software in the automation of her serials record doing so, the basic information relevant to the conversion as applicable to TINLIB software package are:

- List of both local and foreign agents
- List of addresses of agents
- Full library address for receiving journals
- Full library address for receiving library invoices
- Name of staff who has authority to approve serial purchase
- Outstanding subscription
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- Serial allocation procedures
- Current and foreign exchange translation policy.

In order to obtain the information required for the TINLIB software, the staff had no other option than to trace journal titles to the shelves at various locations, when the information on the catalogue cards and Kardex were not sufficient.

The library adopted conversion of library catalogue to machine-readable form which is an in-house creation of the whole entry. This implies that library assistants copied from original catalogue entry and the description entered manually, into the database. Other information requirements of TINLIB software package are Editor-in-Chief and Corporate Editor, Date of first publication, holding, subject group estimating the workload. Information on each were found insufficient.

Output

Monograph input clerk that actively participated in the monograph conversion project keyed 50 worksheets on average daily. As a result one would assume that a serial input clerk would also key 50 worksheets daily and require 44 days to key all the 2,200 titles of the serial holdings of the library. However, this is subject to no power interruption and stress. Also, it was estimated by averaging output that a support staff generated 20 worksheets per day subject to the same conditions stated above. Owing to certain constraints such as power interruption stress, insufficient information on serial titles, the expected output were hardly met and slowed down the process.

PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDED SOLUTION

Despite the foregoing efforts, the conversion was bewildered with certain problems which undermined the achievement of the library goals on the projects. These require certain solution to bring about desired goals on the project and make the conversion of the serial holdings real.

Staffing and Management Style

The serial section was inadequately staffed to meet the challenges of the conversion process. The section at the beginning of the exercise had serial librarian, the only professional, one paraprofessional, two library assistant and only one typist (an input clerk).

Though the staffs were given both theoretical and practical training on the job, the staff strength was inadequate to cope with the conversion under the time frame for the conversion of the existing serial record to automated system.

The danger of inadequacy in staffing slowed down the work and eventually led to abandoning the project, making it unattainable goal.

The university library administration should increase the staff force of the section or constitute a task force to enhance the conversion. Staffing for a conversion project of any sort must be of crucial consideration. More so the library did not have the option of requesting the vendor to return to complete the . Inadequacy staffing is detrimental to the automation project. There was need to support serials librarian with an additional professional staff. There was deployment of most the staff shortly after the project started. The only librarian was moved and it became difficult for the incoming serials librarian to understand the procedure and process with the time frame given for the handover. No staff of the section survived the redeployment exercise. The employment of staff before the conversion was badly timed; it created tardiness in the conversion.

The management ought to accord the project the importance it deserved while efforts could be made to improve the competence of the staff handling the project. The manual activities involved in the generation of the worksheets before data input were labour intensive and skillful. It was not easy as it
seemed to transfer the needed skills for the project to incoming staff. As a result the progress of project was hindered. Management should consider assigning priority to the project in relation to regular duties so that staff member know how to allocate their time. The success of the project rest on good personnel management such as providing motivation and incentives to the staff. The sense of job satisfaction of staff would have effect on their performance. The management style in the library should take into consideration in dealing with the staff. Also, the vendor did not fully execute some aspects of the contracts awarded him particularly its failure to handle the conversion of the serial holdings. This and other related issues account for the low level of success attained on the automation of serial holdings in the University Library.

**Software in Use**

There are problems arising from the adoption of TINLIB software. Apart from the fact that the software is inadequate to cover the various disciplines of the collection of University Library, it was not easy to key data directly from the catalogue. The provision in the TINLIB software requires some mandatory fields for which information should be contained from the catalogue cards. These are the levels of description prescribed by the software. Here, the bibliographic and other holding information were frequented, scattered and found or available on different sources and locations within the library catalogue. This is not harmonize worksheet designed for the serial record conversion with the package containing a number of fields.

The various fields that were concerned with the information requirement of TINLIB software package were difficult to provide. These are:

- **Data of First Publication**
  
  This information in some cases was difficult to determine for local journals that had been previously processed. Some of the journals did not bear the information and there was in current bibliographic information on Nigerian (local) serials.

- **Editor-In-Chief and Corporate Editor**
  
  This was not available in the Kardex records for checking in journals or the card catalogue. For acceptable level of information to be provided, physical journals had to be checked from shelf. This proved cumbersome and time consuming.

- **Holding**
  
  Entries on holding that ought to be given the most attention in the conversion were not fully indicated on and could not be obtained from the catalogue cards. Kardex had to be consulted for record for each journal one by one for full detail of what the library held for each title. This process was cumbersome, time consuming and involved a lot of paper work in worksheet generation.

- **Subject group**
  
  The library applied Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) to determine the approved subject access. Though the subject headings were assigned by the serial librarian based at main library. The journals after processed were distributed to other locations as relevant to their coverage. The branch libraries were in different locations of various distances from the main library. For instance, medical and mini-campus libraries (14 kilometres) and law library (200 metres) away from the main library. The implication of this was that the serial staff at the main library would have to leave their duty post for other libraries to obtain required information. This required handling the serials physically. This affected the generation of the worksheet by the support staff.

  In order to solve or minimize the problem of the software in use, the library should try to develop her own software to replace TINLIB to take are of her local needs or cooperate with other libraries to use other locally developed software that are already in use. Such software includes:
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SLAM ~ Strategic Library Administration Management in use at University of Benin, Igbenedon, Federal University of Technology and other libraries.

Library Portal in use by Redeemed University, Nigeria, and KOHAH in use at Bowen University library.

Estimating Workload.

It was difficult to determine the workload of the staff. For instance, the time taken to input records is dependent on:

- Completeness of description
- Standardization of catalogue entries
- Transliteration problem
- Reliability of the converted data depending on the degree of checking involved.

Enabling Environment and Stress

Apart from the above, there are problems of enabling factor, the incessant power interruptions, stress and other non-conducive condition such as poor illumination and weather condition which constrained the progress of the conversion into automation. Having realized these problems, management should not excessively be optimistic with respect to the number of worksheets that could be generated or converted in a specified time period or the time to convert the total collection in the library. Rather, the staff should be motivated towards greater productivities.

The university library should be provided with enabling factors such as a standby generating plant against incessant power interruptions, air cooling devices to provide conducive weather condition and proper illumination of the section. Vehicle should also be provided to allow hitch free movement to other locations from where serials were to So as to delay generation worksheets on the affected titles and their subsequent input for conversion.

As for the stress, there could be change of task by attending to other assignments and responsibilities. Also there could be rest of short periods during the task. For instance a 15 minute alternate task is recommended for two hours performing jobs with moderate visual demands and every hour for working on highly visually demanding task. This is to allow eyes to focus and rest the eye muscles. Others may be allowed shorter time break.

Conclusion

All conversion projects have similar characteristics and share similar problems. There is no doubt that the situation of serial holdings conversion at the university of Ilorin library might be replicated in any other libraries in a developing country as Nigeria. The successful engagement of staff in the conversion process would show the measure of its project. If the project is properly executed as installation of the system, other libraries especially in the developing countries would be able to draw upon the experiences of the library in planning their own reconversion project. Also, members of the unit or other staff that took part in the exercise would have gained some wealth of experience constituting an asset to them individually and make them qualify for better position. Despite the problems faced by the serial section in particular, and the university library in general, the library had recorded a noteworthy success in automation though the serials holding of the library was not fully automated yet at the end of this study.

University system is vital to quality higher actualization. Automation of library system in our universities such as university of Ilorin, Ilorin would improve accessibility to information content in the library and create worthy international centre for learning, research, probity and service to humanity.

There is no doubt that large scale automation project would improve the performance some library routine jobs. It would play a major role in its application to library procedure, which are already under
heavy strain and provide data necessary for the management of some activities and facilitate library management. Automating the serials record would offer quicker and easier of carrying and increased workloads elf library tasks with greater efficiency. The gains that the automation would bring to the library and her users would be tremendous and should not be ignored and effort should be made to overcome the constraints of the automation.

Finally as automation is gaining ground in most Academic and Research libraries in Nigeria, there is need to formulate guidelines to assist management of the libraries in making decision on retro-conversion of their holdings into automated system. To me, Nigeria Library association (NLA) should lead by setting up a working party on retrospective conversion is task could be assigned to the Academic and Research Libraries CARL) section of the NLA. One can then conclude that Libraries in Nigeria have welcome the idea of library automation and efforts must be geared towards sustaining automation of University of Ilorin library in particular and Nigerian Libraries in general.
REFERENCES


