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CATALOGUING BACKLOGS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent of cataloguing backlogs in academic libraries as well as the causes and remedies towards having a lasting solution to backlogs in academic libraries. A survey research design was employed for this study. The study population includes fifty cataloguers selected from ten academic libraries in Nigerian universities. A Cataloguing Backlog Assessment Questionnaire (CBAQ) was developed to elicit information from respondents and chi square statistical method was used in analyzing the data at 0.05 significance level. The result showed that there was no statistical significance in the size of backlog and volumes of acquisitions, level of automation as well as staff capacity. Based on these outcomes, recommendations were made that more librarians be involved in cataloguing processes and cataloguers with weak subject background be made to specialize in areas in which he or she is very strong, Universities increase budgetary allocations to libraries to enhance library automation and that Para- professionals be trained to get involved in the cataloguing process.

Keywords: *cataloguing; backlogs; academic libraries; Nigeria*

Introduction

Academic libraries acquire materials to satisfy the information needs of students, teachers and other members of the academic community. Since collections in the libraries are intended to support all academic programmes offered in the institutions, the materials will only be meaningful if they are easily made accessible to library users through prompt and proper organization of the acquisitions. Libraries may acquire relevant and required materials which may not be made accessible to users due to cataloguing delays. When this happens, the materials gradually build up into a pile referred to as backlog. This is a serious challenge faced in most academic and college libraries in Nigeria.

Library users are discouraged and their interest dwindles when their information needs are not met when they get to the library. Since the catalogue is the index to library's collections, librarians must strive to ensure that they carefully and properly catalogue the materials in order to make them easily accessible to users when needed. However, observation in many academic libraries revealed the existence of cataloguing backlog which are caused by many reasons namely: information explosion, acquisition of many titles in a library, lack of skilled personnel or that the rate of cataloguing cannot match that of acquisition thereby making the materials lose their values as they are not made available for use when needed.

Cataloguing is the most technical responsibility of a practicing librarian. It is a function that exerts much energy, requires great concentration, commitment and application of high intellectual ability on the part of librarians to be able to perform creditably well in the onerous task of information processing. (Eguavoen 2000)

The issue of cataloguing backlogs in libraries has become a very crucial one to both librarians and library users. The problem varies from library to library. Cataloguing of materials is usually delayed in most libraries indefinitely while they are segregated and housed in a separate area inaccessible to users. This act denies the user of access to some materials whereas the purpose of a library is to provide access to all available information for its users without delay. The basic purpose of cataloguing is first and foremost to provide a record of what resources are available in the collection or collections being described. The second purpose is to enable users of these collections to find information on those subjects they are interested in. Where there are cataloguing backlogs, users are denied access to relevant information. The aim of this research therefore is to ascertain causes and extent of cataloguing backlogs in selected Nigerian universities libraries. Specifically it is aimed at:

- To investigate the existence of cataloguing backlog in selected academic libraries in Nigeria
- To determine the extent of cataloguing backlog in selected academic libraries
- To determine the cause of cataloguing backlog in academic libraries
- To suggest remedies for eliminating cataloguing backlog in academic libraries Nigeria

Literature Review

Danskin (2007) defines cataloguing by incorporating different kinds of activities as description of resource sufficient for the purpose of identification and for differentiation from other similar resources. It deals with the control of access points, subject analysis of resources, assignment of subject indexing terms and most importantly assignment of classification numbers, labeling and production of cards for the catalogues. Cataloguers are responsible for all these cataloguing processes. Cataloguing is a significant part of the technical services provided by a library. Eguavoen (2007) stated that a library may acquire relevant and required materials which may not be accessible to users due to cataloguing delays. In the event, these materials gradually build up into a pile referred to as backlog.

According to Aina (2004) "if there were no prior organization of objects, it would be difficult to retrieve a particular object from among the various objects in the collection when needed". In a research conducted by Yu (2007), the feedback from the different institutions was compared and tested by T-test and ANOVA to examine the difference in frequency of occurrence of these issues among the libraries in different types of institutions. Some significant findings in this study were found to be lack of manpower, accumulating backlogs, high turn over rate of student assistants, difficulty controlling the quality of cataloguing and limited chances of on-the-job training are the five most frequently occurring issues on cataloguing operations of the technological university and college libraries in Taiwan.

The issue of cataloguing backlog is further worsened by the process of library conversion. Converting the libraries' backlog of manual card catalogues to MARC format is also a very big task being undertaken by the libraries to facilitate online cataloguing. The basic purpose of cataloguing is first and foremost to provide a record of what resources are available in the collection or collections being described. The second purpose is to enable users of these collections to find information on those subjects they are interested in. Morris and Wool (1999) summarized four important values of cataloguing namely:

an effective reference service depends on quality cataloguing;
effective collection management depends on quality cataloguing;
effective resource sharing depends on quality cataloguing; and
effective database automation depends on quality cataloguing.

In other words, they felt that cataloguing was an essential building block of a library and the basis for the successful operation of a library. During the past decade, cataloguing operations have changed considerably. Modern information technologies, including PCs, CD-ROMs, and the Internet, are increasingly providing more powerful and more user-friendly computing platforms to the cataloguers. The cataloguers are increasingly capable of performing multiple tasks on their desktops, such as accessing local systems, bibliographic utilities, online cataloguing publications and OPACs of their own and other libraries. In addition, the explosive development and growth of information technology, including electronic publishing and the development of digital libraries have had major impacts on how information is organized in the library today (Wang 2000). As a result, cataloguers must face these changes and challenges and must develop effective ways to cope with the new cataloguing requirements.

Stamm (2000) commented that the key to the management of a successful cataloguing operation today consists of three important factors: flexibility, the willingness to take risks and try new things, and the acceptance of the inevitability of change. This is where cooperative cataloguing comes in. Share (1988) found that cooperative cataloguing has significantly increased the cataloguing backlog as more libraries try to avoid original cataloguing and hold materials until others have catalogued them.

White and Roos (1988) noted that backlogs have generally been treated as a management problem which could be followed by adjusting staffing patterns or adopting less arduous cataloguing criteria. In a survey conducted by Chiang (2004), she surveyed 89 university and college libraries, all of them with experience in outsourcing cataloguing. The results of her questionnaire based survey, indicated that the key reasons for outsourcing cataloguing were lack of manpower, substantial backlogs, increasing costs and a lack of strong language skills and subject background on the part of the cataloguers. A survey was conducted by Lin (2001) where a total of 17 cataloguing department heads from libraries in the universities and colleges in the southern part of Taiwan were interviewed in person. That survey found that "lack of manpower" and "accumulating backlogs" were the most serious issues among these seventeen universities and college libraries in Taiwan. Tang (2003) also found that

large backlogs among others are the major problems common to most academic libraries in Taiwan. According to the experience of Yale University Library, the main difficulties they faced included human resources issues such as recruitment of new cataloguing librarians, qualified support staff, as well as staff training and development. In addition, they also strove to increase their cataloguing production, rationalize the workflows, and improve the managing of their backlogs (Swanekamp 2000).

In the Lied Library in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the library administrators restructured their organization to prepare for future role changes, from dealing with printed materials to dealing with digital and electronic materials (Eden & Bierman 2002). While large institutions might pursue specialization, this may not be possible for smaller institutions. For instance, the staff at a small college library, like in Warren Wilson College, performs a variety of tasks wider than that of their counterparts in a larger library in a major university. Since cataloguers at small college libraries often need to cover functions other than cataloguing, maintaining a good quality of cataloguing can become a major challenge. The use of part-time resources, such as student assistants, is a common method to provide additional support to the need for human resources. However, the high turnover rate and the limited professional knowledge of student assistants is an additional challenge to the already overburdened cataloguers who now also have to train these students (Mah 2000). In Nigeria there is dearth of literature on this subject, hence the researcher's attempt to provoke further discussion in this regard.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There will be no significant relationship between the volume acquired by the library and size of cataloguing backlog
- There will be no significant relationship in the staff capacity of the library and the size cataloguing backlog
- There will be no significant relationship in the level of automation in the library and size of cataloguing backlog

Research Methods

The design employed for this study is a descriptive survey. The instrument used for data collection is a questionnaire designed by the author based on the study objectives and a review of the related literature, as outlined above. The sample population for the study consists of 50 cataloguers who are professional librarians randomly selected from selected academic libraries in Nigeria. A 38 item questionnaire titled "Cataloguing Backlog Assessment Questionnaire (CBAQ)" on the nature of backlogs; size of the backlog, causes as well as prospects in eliminating backlogs. Different types of institutions such as state university libraries, university of technology libraries, university of agriculture libraries and federal university libraries were represented in the data collection. The 38 items on CBAQ consist of two parts; the first part contained the respondent's socio-demographic data while part two consisted of thirty three

structured questions. These were rated by the respondents as often, occasionally, never, large extent, minimal, very low extent, high, very high, and simple yes or no. They were personally administered at each of the institutions and were collected back on the spots. Hence, 100% of the questionnaire were duly completed and returned for data analysis. Data collated were edited, coded and transferred into computer readable format and the statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) version 11.0 was used to edit the data and to run the analysis with descriptive statistics.

Results, Analysis and Discussion

Ho1: There will be no significant relationship between the volume acquired by the Library and size of cataloguing backlog.

To test the first null hypothesis, the result showed that there was a significant relationship in the volumes acquired by library and the size of cataloguing backlog. The analysis showed that the computed of (χ) of 1.621 with degree of freedom of 4 at 0.05 alpha level. Table 1 shows the summary of the findings. Hence the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 1

A 2X2 contingency summary comparing responses along the index of volume collection

Volume collection	Cataloguing backlogs					
	Yes	No	Row total	χ^2 obs.	χ^2 critical	dF P
Less than 100,000	10	4	14(28%)	3.199	1.621	4 0.525
250,000 – 499,000	4	2	6(12%)			
750,000 – 249,000	1	-	1(2%)			
100,000 – 249,000	12	10	22(44%)			
1,000,000 and above	6	1	7(14%)			
Column total	33(66%)	17(34%)	50(100%)			

Ho2: There will be no significant relationship in the staff capacity of the library and the size cataloguing backlog

This hypothesis was tested and it was found that there was a significant relationship in the staff capacity and cataloguing backlog. As summarized in table 2, the value of the observed χ is 0.467 while the value of the critical value of χ is 0.13 at the degree of freedom of 2. Hence the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2

Staff Capacity	Cataloguing backlog		Row Total	χ^2 Obs.	χ^2 Critical	Df	P
	Yes	No					
1 – 5	9	3	12	0.467	0.13	2	0.792
6 – 10	11	5	16				
Above 10	14	8	22				
Column Total	34	16	50				

Ho3 There will be no significant relationship in the level of automation in the library and size of cataloguing backlog.

The result of this hypothesis showed that there was no significant difference in the size of backlog and the level of automation in libraries. This is evident in the result of the hypothesis which indicated that the observed χ^2 is 7.517 and the critical value of χ^2 is 5.413 at the degree of freedom of 2. Table 3 shows the summary of this result.

Table 3:

Library automation level	Cataloguing backlog		Row total	χ^2 Obs.	χ^2 Critical	df	P
	Yes	No					
Fully automated	4	8	12	7.517	5.431	2	0.0233
Partly automated	7	9	16				
Not automated	17	5	22				
Column Total	28	22	50				

The outcome of this study as shown in the tables and analysis above indicates that volumes of books acquired by the libraries as well as staff capacity have no significant relationship on the size of cataloguing backlogs. This means that different factors could be responsible for cataloguing backlog in libraries. However, the findings also show that the level of automation in libraries play vital role in reducing backlog. For example, libraries with low level of automation have the highest size of backlog which increases on annual basis. This finding is in contrast with the findings of Share (1986) and Ocran (1990). The study further reveals that lack of adequate tools play a major role in creating backlog as the cataloguers will be willing to work where and when working tools are adequately provided thereby reducing backlogs to the barest minimum. Budgeting was also found to be a major factor contributing to the pile up otherwise known as backlog.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has identified certain grey areas in cataloguing which need to be visited by academic libraries. There is the need to reduce cataloguing backlog to the barest minimum so that library users will adequately have access to these materials within the shortest possible time and thus enhance effective service delivery in academic libraries. In order to achieve this, the following recommendations are made:

- More librarians should be involved in cataloguing processes and cataloguers with weak subject background should be made to specialize in areas in which he or she is very strong. This will increase productivity and thus reduce backlogs
- Universities should as a matter of priority increase budgetary allocations to libraries to enhance library automation which in turn will bring drastic reduction in cataloguing backlog when materials are processed electronically.
- Training and re-training should be emphasized for the paraprofessional staff of academic libraries in order to enhance effective cataloging process which will have drastic reduction in backlogs

The above recommendations will go a long way in reducing cataloguing backlog in academic libraries in Nigeria.

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