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UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

Problems and Challenges of Automating Cataloguing Process at Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper discusses the problems faced by Kenneth Dike Library in automating its cataloguing process since 1992. It further attempts to identify some of the constraints inhibiting the success of the process: inadequate funding, dearth of systems analysts, absence of dedicated commitment to automation on the part of the library management. There are some of the issues discussed. It concludes by proffering some solutions that could ameliorate the problems posed.

Introduction

This paper attempts an examination of the impact of information technology (IT) on the cataloguing of materials at the Kenneth Dike Library (KDL) since its introduction. Can a success story be told as was reported in some African University Libraries?

Information technology (IT) has had great impact on virtually every sphere of activity including the services provided by librarians world over. With the introduction of IT, the expectation is that the mission of libraries would be transformed from routine acquisition of information, organising information, making it available and preserving it, to one of facilitation of access to all forms of information that meet customers' needs. It will also provide the assurance of continuous improvement of resources and the provision of prompt services. For over a decade, many articles have been written on automation processes in Nigerian libraries. The impression emerging there from is that the Nigerian libraries have caught the automation bug. But has the introduction of IT been a success story at the Cataloguing Section of KDL at University of Ibadan?

Kenneth Dike Library

Kenneth Dike Library was established in 1948 when the University College, Ibadan took off. The library system presently serves a student population of about 26,000 (full-time and part-time) and a virile academic community of nearly 2,000. It also provides a back-up for many research institutes and other Nigerian university libraries. It contains over 600,000 volumes and receives over 6,000 current journals and other serial materials.

KDL was first challenged by the IT revolution in the 1970s but the automated idea was limited to the serials catalogue which was jointly produced by the library and the University's Computer Centre up to 1980 when the harsh economic constraints of the 1980s contributed to its failure. By early 1990, the library started serious automation of its library functions. It started with a computer system donated by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation (CTA) in Netherlands for CD-ROM databases search and IBM PS 80-III with 120MB hard disk purchased from local vendor. To date, the library has 30 computer systems of different configurations. The main server is a Pentium 200 Mhz, IBM Compatible Model with 64MB RAM and 2.1 GB hard disk, and an equally powerful IBM Compatible Pentium 75 Micro Computer with 32MB Memory and 2.7GB hard disk as CD-ROM Server. Other computers were dedicated to specific functions such as cataloguing, reference, circulation, OPAC and E-mails.

All the systems are networked, running on a windows MT4 Software. The CDS/ISIS Software donated by UNESCO was first used and was later replaced with TINLIB (Tinman Library) software. The TINLIB is a comprehensive library management and document retrieval system with the following integrated modules: catalogue and retrieval, circulation control, monograph acquisition, serial management and data formatting and transfer within functional report-generator – TINGEN. It is also networked.

CD-ROM technology was introduced into KDL in 1991 through a donation of a CD-ROM workstation by CTA. This came with databases mainly on agriculture. The library went further to acquire more databases in subject areas like medicine, social sciences, education, technology, science and arts. Thus, CD-ROM technology opened up opportunities for searching electronic literature to both students and faculty members. The library also purchased CD-MARC databases in 1992 to facilitate the processing of new acquisitions.

Cataloguing before the Introduction of IT

Under the manual system which has been in practice since the inception of the library, different types of bibliographic tools were used to process materials. In the 70s, the prepared catalogue cards came with the newly acquired books. This helped

in the cataloguing process and in getting the books to the shelves on time. The library also made use of the Library of Congress (LC) classification scheme and (LC Subject Headings, thereby making use of the National Union Catalogue (NUC) as a bibliographic searching tool. When the printed copy of NUC was stopped, the microfiche edition came up in the 1980's, economic crutches, budget cuts and exchange rate fluctuations affected the procurement of these searching tools. Their non-availability made cataloguing processing a bit tedious in the mid- 80s at the KDL. The library had the NUC dated from pre-56 edition to 1982 edition, while the microfiche was ('88 - 90). Books published between 1983 -87 that were acquired were processed mostly through "original cataloguing." Those that came with Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) also facilitated the processing of materials for use. Due to lack of current bibliographic searching tools, the volumes of books processed were reduced.

By mid-1992, KDL purchased Library of Congress CD-MARC databases to facilitate the processing of books that had been put aside due to lack of bibliographic materials before then. The statistics of processed books picked up again in the 1993/94 session, although there were other factors that reduced the statistics hitherto (e.g. incessant strikes, shortage of cataloguers, etc).

The success of the impact of IT on cataloguing process has been extensively reported in the literature. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan discontinued the use of traditional card catalogue in 1984 and adopted a computerised database system in 1989, according to Ogunrombi and Oladokun (1992). This was followed by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Library in 1991 when Tinlib software was adopted for its library services (Oni, 1998). Specially, the application of IT for cataloguing process were reported by Nkereuwem (1997) in Calabar and Abolaji (2000) at Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library (O.A.U. Ife). University of Ibadan started the application of IT to cataloguing process in 1992. Ojedokun (1996) reported on cataloguing and CD-MARC in the KDL, while Adeniyi (2000) also reported on the use of library automation software packages at KDL.

Application of IT to Cataloguing Process in KDL

The creation of a database for the library is the major task of the cataloguing section. With the introduction of IT, necessary equipment- both hardware and software were given to the library. The CDS/ISIS was the software first used for cataloguing of books. The manual input worksheet was re-designed to reflect the new ideas which staff found difficult to comprehend at the initial stage but got used to later. But CD/ISIS was eventually replaced with TINLIB. Data were down-loaded from CDS/ISIS software into the new TINLIB database. TINLIB became fully operational in September 1993. However, it was soon discovered that no software is problem-free. TINLIB software had been giving a lot of technical problems which the

systems librarian could hardly manage and the vendor's help desk response rate to queries from the library was not encouraging. The consequence was an incessant breakdown of the system, frequent network errors and low operational speed of the system. All these problems slowed down the automation process in the library. The library is still making use of this software for its database maintenance. CD-MARC, was made available in the 1992/93 session for searching of materials and it proved especially useful for the processing of about 15,000 World Bank Books acquired in 1992 and processed in 1993.

The whole gamut of book processing was instantly made easier: bibliographic details of books were searched from the CD-MARC, data were readily put into a worksheet for cataloguers to edit and passed to data entry clerks for onward input into the KDL database using the TINLIB catalogue module. The advantages derived from the introduction of IT could have been enhanced were it possible to import records found in CD-MARC into the existing database. Unfortunately, that was not possible because of the incompatibility of CD-MARC import file with that of TINLIB. As a result, every found item had to be keyed into the system. Because of lack of technical know-how of the TINLIB software on the part of the system analyst, a lot of records were lost, some missing, and there was the backlog of records awaiting to be keyed into the database. The resultant effect was a delay in opening the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) to library users. But the enthusiasm of using CD-MARC to process was doused when the CD-ROM Towers that was needed to read the MARC got spoilt during the 1998/99 session. Thereafter, processing of materials reverted to "Original Cataloguing" or use of "Cataloguing in Publication" (CIP) where it existed.

What further compounded the rate of processing was that the Library of Congress had gone on Internet and KDL could not be connected to it to get information because it lacked needed facilities and the required financial resources to be linked on to the Internet. An alternative tool was sought and the Head of Technical Services, introduced a new software ITS for Windows by The Library Corporation (TLC). This alternative tool is currently in use as a bibliographic searching tool as well as for data creation. Trial runs were being made to determine the extent to which the new software can alleviate, if not solve, the problems that had been encountered with other software.

Impact of IT on Cataloguing Process

The impact of IT on cataloguing at the KDL has not been totally significant compared with the reported progress made in some other universities even within Africa McBride (1983) recounts how automation changed the trend of her career. Her paper alluded to the close down of card catalogues, the development of on-line systems, the joining of bibliographic utilities, standardisation of cataloguing records, formation of networks with resources being shared and staff being re-assigned. Efforts have been

made to utilise technology and cut costs without harming the budgets. These developments affect the individual library and the cataloguers and changed their assignments from original serial cataloguing to supervising copy cataloguing operations.

Also, automation of cataloguing was reported to have enhanced efficiency and produced new assignments for copy cataloguers. It brought in OPACs, which are replacing card catalogues. Authority work has been made faster and more efficient and standard records are produced for libraries and making room for copy cataloguing and giving a more responsible role for the paraprofessionals. Evidently, automation has taken the 'heat' out of the job traditionally performed by professional cataloguers.

But in contradistinction to the success stories reported elsewhere, after about ten years of dabbling with IT at KDL, the OPAC is yet to be ready for use. Most of the processing is still being done manually. The database created is still not error free. The reversion project which was initiated about two and half years ago has been abandoned due to lack of interest and funds, para-professionals are still at their routine jobs (i.e. checking and filling of cards, etc.). The card printer for printing from the computer is not functioning and cannot be replaced for lack of funds. Typists still type units cards for every processed material, while data can not be imported from the Library of Congress and CD-ROM databases to KDL database.

In relative terms, the number of professionals on ground are still high – eight, including the Chief Cataloguer. There is no resource sharing among university libraries in Nigeria, in spite of the overt use of a common TINLIB software and university libraries are not networked.

Admittedly, reference and information services are changing under the influence of technology while books are no longer the only source of information. Computers, however, are expensive, need re-trained staff and an enthusiastic management. All of these are happening at a time of severe budget cuts and stringency. The foregoing partly explain the failure of KDL to drive and enjoy the full benefits of IT. Human and technical factors equally militated against the achievement of a success story. In specific terms, some of the identified problems can be described as following.

Factors Militating Against Automation

There are many factors that have made automation of the cataloguing process in many Nigerian university libraries a failure. Some of these factors are listed below.

The Attitude of Management to Automation

Most university librarians in Nigeria are still very conservative. They see automation* as a myth which they do not want to demystify. Their ideas of computerisation stop at buying a few PCs to give the impression that automation is going on in their establishments. They are not committed to using computers to generate information for their users. They would rather acquire printed materials than develop databases. There is an urgent need for re-orientation of university library managers to embrace the right vision of IT. Literature abound on developments taking place in other parts of Africa. They need to be exposed through regular re-fresher courses and visits to other libraries outside the country to up-date their knowledge and to better appreciate the benefits of developing databases. In this regard, appropriate well-funded policies could be devised. There is the need to interact with other librarians through conferences, seminars and workshops.

Capital-Intensive Facilities and Cash Constraint Problems

The advent of IT and its attendant acquisition of computers coincided with the period of dwindling resources available to universities. Since the late 1980s to date, the austere times experienced by Nigerian universities came not only with budget cuts but also with irregular release of approved allocations. The result is that while librarians strive to automate piecemeal, oftentimes, their attempts are stultified by current technological advancement and innovations which render their stock of acquired computers obsolete.

A way out of this vicious circle is for library managers to take full control of their resources and ensure effective budgeting to optimise desired goals. Under the current practices in Nigerian federal universities, ten per cent (10%) of total university recurrent budget is earmarked for the management and running of the libraries. At the KDL of the University of Ibadan, it is often a case of virement from the library portion of the recurrent grant to meet other needs whenever the University faces a cash flow problem. Besides, what further compounds the problems for the library is that such virements are usually made without the knowledge of the University Librarian who is not made a signatory to the library account! This kind of scenario makes it difficult for library managers to buy print and non-print materials as well as provide funds for purchase and maintenance of equipment. Consequently, KDL has, by and large, depended on the funding for computerisation projects from donor agencies.

To keep pace with current technological advancement, library managers need to supplement donor funding. But as Msuya (2001) observed in his paper "experience shows that many automation projects in developing countries, especially in Sub-

Saharan Africa are donor-funded.” The first computer at KDL was donated by CTA. Due to inadequate funding as well as poor financial management, when the CD-ROM Tower for the cataloguing section broke down it could not be replaced until eighteen months after.

As earlier observed, a way out of foregoing short comings is for library managers to take full control of the ten percent (10%) of the total University recurrent budget earmarked for the management and running of the library. The University Librarian should be a signatory to the account of which between five and ten percent should be set aside for hardware and software development and maintenance. With a predictable level of funding, library managers will be encouraged to develop a five-year plan for the library.

Dearth of Systems Analysts

Shortage of management and technical expertise is the bane of IT development in Africa. According to Ojedokun (2000), only Egypt and South Africa have IT skills in abundance in Africa. The mobility rate of system analysts employed in university libraries is high due to the poor pay structure that exists in the universities as compared with the private sector. Even when staff are trained, once they acquire the coveted expertise and experience, they leave for greener pastures. At KDL, the Computer Unit was set up in 1990 and within a spate of eight years, the headship or the personnel in charge had changed four times. Three out of the four left for jobs in Botswana and America. Such frequent changes have affected the development of the unit.

Ill-Equipped Library Schools

The product of Nigeria Library Schools are not prepared to face the ever-changing demands of information technology. This is because, due to paucity of funds, the schools themselves lack the needed equipment to teach practicals, thus, automation is taught in abstract. Non-dynamic school curriculum continues to deal with methods and routines that are essentially obsolete in the competitive technologically advanced environment. There is a compelling need on the part of the library schools to constantly upgrade their curriculum which should be well-funded to ensure, as Ojedokun (2000) observed, that teachers “... changed their role from being teachers of pre-fabricated facts to facilitators of active learning.”

At KDL, a great deal of manpower time is lost training newly recruited librarians in the practice of librarianship. Often, because of their ill-equipped background, their rate of skill absorption is slow and expensive. Even graduate systems librarians who are expected to be versed in computer usage had to be re-trained by the University's software vendor. This means that the benefits of such training and re-training take a long time to manifest.

Lack of a Maintenance Culture

Frequent systems breakdown due to lack of maintenance is another hindrance to IT application at KDL. Automation requires regular maintenance – a culture which an average Nigerian has not imbibed. All types of equipment are acquired and subjected to continuous use until they break down. Even where maintenance funds is not the problem, the attitude tends to be “why bother when the equipment is still working.”

Given the inadequate level of funding and the irregular release system, the account books of KDL were not up-to-date to clearly indicate what was budgeted for IT maintenance. Available data showed only estimates without reference to actual expenditure. As an example, there was no indication from the records that any agreement fee was paid to the software vendor over the past three years. The obvious consequence of this is the lukewarm response often received from the vendor when called upon to help revive broken-down systems. And when the systems librarian tried to by-pass the vendor by contacting the international agencies via e-mail, the agent, always advised the systems librarian to contact the University's software vendor. At the end of the day, the level of maintenance effected often depended on what the systems librarian could do. Also, software vendors' response to distress calls have not been encouraging either. All they have been interested in is in making rip-off charges because there was no contractual agreement or service contract between them and the library before the installation of the system. Because software vendors are few in number they come on “recommended status” to library management deprived of selection from a free and wide market of vendors. Lack of competition allows and encourages vendors to be less proactive in attending to client's distress calls. To put an end to this kind of nonchalant attitude, library managers should devote serious attention to a careful selection of software vendors with a view to selecting those who can serve them better and effectively too. Besides, a service contract should also be agreed on and signed by both parties from the onset.

Non-Existence of a Staff Development Programme

KDL has not had a staff development programme since the computerisation of the cataloguing process started. In fact, there has never been a comprehensive in-house training for the various categories of staff in the library. Whereas to be able to cope with modern technological advancement, staff need to be trained and re-trained regularly. The needed training could take the form of attendance at conferences, workshops, seminars and formal course of study. There has been no serious effort at KDL to train staff to cope with the demands of automation, though occasionally, a

few staff had attended workshops. The management's position at KDL was to advise the staff interested in acquiring computer or IT skills to do so at their own expense. Such a position is unwholesome. There is need for the authorities to set aside funds for training and encourage all categories of staff to acquire IT skills.

Conclusion

What emerged from the foregoing is the need for the management of KDL to embrace IT with the dedicated seriousness it deserves. For a success story to be told, the problems outlined above should be addressed and urgently too to keep abreast of developments in university libraries within Nigeria and globally.

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