

Computerization of Serial Services in Some University Libraries in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

This article looked at the problems associated with the above services. The researchers also looked at the need for the computerization of serials services in the libraries, the prospects which amongst others include creation of awareness on computerization of serials, showing its importance to researchers which will encourage them to make use of current information materials. In view of this, it recommended that, the complexity in administration should be reduced to help create awareness of the importance of computerization of libraries in general and serials in particular. It concluded by showing the need for government, professional bodies and more especially the institutions' management to work together to actualize this dream.

Keywords: Computerisation, Serrial Services, University libraries, Problems Prospects.

Introduction

Serials have proven to be the most difficult type of material to control in a library. This difficulty is due partly to the fact that most of the serials are highly perishable. They tear easily and are short lived. Markuson, (1972) maintained that, serials are difficult to control bibliographically because of their susceptibility to change of title, scope, publisher, frequency of publication, duration and price. Another disturbing situation in handling serials is in deciding what exactly constitutes serials publication. Libraries vary greatly in the kind of materials classified as serials. However, the consensus is that, serials are publications issued in successive parts, issued at intervals, and intended to be continued indefinitely. Woodward and Pilling(1993) affirmed that, serials is a publication in any medium in successive parts bearing numeric or chronological designations and intended to be continued indefinitely. Serials include periodicals, newspapers, annuals (reports, year book, etc) journals, memoirs, proceedings, transactions. According to Osborn (1980) the elements which, by and large, constitute serial publications are:

- a name, and
- either periodical or serial numbering of the successive parts of a work which appear under the original name or a later name.

Serials are considered important because of their up to date information on various fields and subjects. They are essential for research as they contain current information. If the Librarian decides to computerize, there are three basic things that should readily come to his mind:

- Should he think of a single function?
- Should he think of a major operational area? or
- His total library as constituting the system?

If the Librarian decides to take option A, then one of his first point of contact should be the serials services because of its importance to the users in providing quick up to date information. The ultimate goal of all computerization of library services should be to improve the services supplied

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to the users. The development of computer-based serials services has been greatly influenced by the university libraries, whose large serials collection are essential to their research and teaching activities. To computerize means to furnish with a computer or a computer system or to enter, process, or store information in a computer or system of computers; that is to say, computerization is the control of process by computers. To computerize could also be viewed as; the act of implementing the control of equipment with advanced technology, usually involving electronic hardware, (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2009).

Computerization of library services is intended to modernize the entire library to ensure accuracy, efficiency, effective information management, reliable user services, enhanced interlibrary cooperation and library prestige, (Enyia, 1991). The computerization of serials services in libraries especially the academic libraries which is a major information providing institution should also not be overlooked. Following the Oxford Advanced Dictionary (1998), computerization means, to provide a computer or computers to the work of something. Computerization has to do with automation which is the application of machines to a system to enable it carry out its responsibilities on its own with or without human interference. Thus, computerization in libraries is the application of computers or computer technology in library based services.

They support teaching, learning and research with information materials of various types. Among these diverse information materials, serials are needed especially by faculties and research students. According to Tuttle (1983), the functions performed by the serials unit include: acquisition, processing, public service and preservation. With the developments in the field of Library and Information science, these objectives will be effectively met with computerization. The skill of the Librarian must be found in the ability to choose the right medium for each application. Serials and serials control in one form or the other are going to be the heart of the library for many decades to come.

Computerization of Services in Libraries

Oyedum (2006), wrote, that computer is now applicable in all aspects of library and information work such as administration of library, acquisition, cataloguing and classification of library materials, circulation, reference services, information retrieval and serials control. In libraries where computerization has fully taken place, library activities such as time keeping, leave rosters, file maintenance, telephone directories, mailing lists, current staff addresses, word processing, statistics for planning and decision making, system analysis, financial management, selective dissemination of information and current awareness services could be effectively carried out using computer terminals. Potentials and capacities, of the computer to enhance the profession cannot be over emphasized. Nowadays, the library community as a whole has realized that apart from the immediate practical advantages, computers and information technology in general are the tools of information era just as the invention of the printing machines with movable type was the tool of information era which started with Gutenberg and lasted until the middle of the 19th century, Oyedum (2006).

Need for Computerization of Serials Services in Libraries

Some major reasons for computerization according to Markuson (2007) are outlined below:

- Serials are often the most important and most used materials in the library's collection, consequently, control is essential.
- The cost and time required to acquire and process serials is constantly increasing; therefore computerization of routine functions is highly desirable.
- The control of serials is a significant and complex problem in the manual system that often requires a large clerical staff. A large staff leads to high turnover and increased training requirements.
- Access to serial data is limited in a manual system; the production of various output products increases access and use.

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- Because of the size and number of files used for serials control and the repetitive nature of file usage, technology can be used to advantage.
- Serial control function can usually be isolated with minimum disruption of other library functions.

The delicate nature of serials materials and their importance to library users and researchers has made the need for computerization of library services paramount. Many factors called for the computerization of library and serials services, among them are:

- The failure of the existing traditional manual method to cope efficiently with the increasing volume in the library.
- Need to control volume of activity efficiently and accurately
- The perishable nature of serials has made it necessary that it should be computerized.
- It deals with the most current information which are contained in periodicals, newspapers, reports, yearbooks, proceedings and journals.
- The problem of manually processing and items from the library collection.

Approaches to the Computerization of Serials in University Libraries in Nigeria

There are several approaches to the computerization of serial services in university libraries in Nigeria. Below are some of the basic approaches which can be explored by any library that wants to computerize its serial collections and services.

Conversion from hard (paper) copies into soft (digital and or machine readable) form. Retrospective conversion entails changing documents (in this case, periodical) from manual to automated, computerised systems or forms (Okoroma, 2010). Conversion to computerized forms entails changing them into digital forms. Digitisation is one sure way of computerizing serial collection. Fabunmi, Paris & Fabunmi asserts that, digitization is the art of converting the contents of a

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periodical from hard copy to machine readable form thus making them available electronically. This, they say can be done through electronic snapshots (for artwork, scenes of events, three dimensional objects, realia etc); scanning (for photographs, printed texts, manuscripts etc, as cited in Eke, 2011).

This can be done with the use of in-house staff and materials or with the use of vendors and agencies. The choice of which one to use depends on the level of proficiency of the staff in the use of computers, the readiness of the library institution and sponsors to finance staff training for the project, the ability of the management to see the need for the involvement of their staff rather than outsiders as well as other considerations like the lobbying prowess of the vendors that may come to play.

Use of library software. After the retrospective conversion and digitization of the serial materials, the library will consider the software to use in serving the library users. A good number of library software are available for use. Valatin (1981) outlined some of the good attributes of CDS/ISIS as being capable of handling different lengths of records, having ability to handle various lengths of files as well as varying occurring fields, sub-files and long descriptive abstracts (as cited in Pondicherry University-Amanda Rangapillai library, nd). Ajalla (1997) on the other hand looked at the benefits of using TINLIB library software. It is said to be user friendly, versatile and have ability to take care of all library operations especially in academic libraries that have large store of serial publications.

Subscription to serials based databases. This is an alternative way of getting access to journals and other serial publications for the users. Nigerian universities can subscribe to databases that contain serial publications in different disciplines which can be made available to them in soft copies. They will in turn make them accessible to their users. On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has databases like book database, serial database, thesis database etc. Subscribing to serials database of OPAC is

one sure way of having access to journal issues to be accessed through the computer.

Problems Associated with Computerization of Serials Services in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

Despite the numerous benefits that emanates from computerization of library services in general and serials in particular, there are still problems in certain areas hindering the continuous development of the computer usage in the library. These problems as summarized by Islam (2007) are as follows:

1. Administrative barriers: This problem is much more acute in the public university libraries than private university libraries and special libraries. Administrators, policy makers and government executives are not fully aware of the importance of ICT. Moreover, library administrators have failed to make its importance clear.
2. Lack of knowledge of technological development has created a significant barrier to the installation of ICT facilities in libraries.
3. Lack of skilled manpower: library professionals in Nigeria do not have adequate knowledge regarding computer application and installation.
4. Lack of financial support: Inadequate financial support from government and other corporate bodies has made the possibility of computerization in libraries more complex.
5. Lack of infrastructure: An inadequate physical facility is one of the major bottlenecks hindering the growth of serial services computerization. Telecommunication infrastructure and uninterrupted power supply are of crucial need for Nigeria; hence serial services deals greatly with current information.
6. Lack of ICT resources: ICT means more than the use of computers. Less or no attention has been paid to other communication and related technologies. Some libraries have no internet connection most have a manual circulation operation; most libraries are using micro computers only with no server.
7. Psychological effects: most of the library personnel feel reluctant to embrace new technologies, and this

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- generally hinders the growth of computerization in libraries.
8. Lack of computer training programs: there are no training programs for serial librarians.

Prospects

When serial services in the libraries are computerized, it will help to control materials wastage, and for the staff therein, more job opportunities would be created.

Computerization of serials services just like every other service in the library will give the University a face lift in terms of rating.

Skilful librarians in the library who have the knowledge of Computerization should by all means do journal abstracting and exhibition and even as consultants can send such to the departments, as this will go a long way to helping researchers.

Awareness should be created on computerization of serials, showing its importance to researchers.

There should be provision of proper financial support to the libraries, as this will enable the librarians in acquisition and maintenance of the hardware as well as planning

Recommendations

For the creation of awareness on the importance of computerization of libraries in general and serials in particular, there is need for libraries to employ human resources who are skilful and have the zeal to work and not people who work because there is need for employment.

- ✓ The government of Nigeria should make library services a part of national development initiatives, efforts and plans hence it will have a positive effects on all the units of the library including serials.
- ✓ Professional organizations such as NLA and library administrators should organize short term training programs for librarians in computer application and usage in library and information services.
- ✓ Libraries should improve in training of new staff and

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- retraining of existing staff because the reason why they shy away from embracing computerization could be as a result of technophobia.
- ✓ Networking is one of the most effective ways of meeting users' needs comprehensively. Networked access to data bases help get newly published information to researchers and other library users.
 - ✓ Government should be generous in contributing to the growth of computerization of library services through donations, awareness and training.

Conclusion

Information and communication technology is changing the work of libraries and information centres. An increased number of users, a greater demand for library materials, an increase in the number of materials been published Islam (2007), are the major problems that gave birth to library computerization.

The serials service is one of the areas that should be computerized with urgency. This urgency is due to the fact that serials are highly perishable. They tear easily and are short lived, still they contain very important and up to date information that are very useful to students and lecturers. The government, professional bodies like NLA, the school management should all come together and make the computerization of serials services a reality if it has to continue on dissemination of current information for researches. The work also talked about the need for computerizing serials services in the libraries, the factors that called for the computerization of serials services. It treated the major problems associated with computerization of serials services, prospects and some recommendations which included that there is need to employ human resources who are skilful and have the zeal to work and not people who work because there is need for employment.

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