

## **Serials Processing Activities in Southern Nigerian University Libraries**

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### **Introduction**

The users of serials in university libraries want quick access to the current information contained in serials volumes and issues. Library serials acquisitions processes are organized with that information need in mind. According to Tuttle (1983), whether serials processing is centralized, decentralized, or integrated with other operations, serials requires processing. Adhikari (2000) observes that serials processing begins with acquisition, which includes ordering, checking-in, claiming, payment, and fund accounting. White (1983) emphasizes the importance of serials cataloguing as a step in processing. Szilvassy (1996) lists the steps in bibliographic control for serials:

- Cataloguing and classification
- Filing
- Catalogue maintenance

Adhikari (2000:95) discusses check-in, which is, "making a record that a particular periodical issue has been received." It provides inventory for currently received periodicals, and identifies missing or late issues for claiming and tracking payment records. Osborn (1980) indicates that checking in maintains the integrity of the serials file, and helps the library quickly determine completeness of holdings. Also, the pressure of reference demands requires staff to be able to answer questions about receipt and holdings.

Though serials processing is important, it is bedeviled with problems. One major problem, noted by Brown and Smith (1980), Colin (1998), EBSCO (2001), and Elliot (2003), is the huge financial commitment associated with acquisition and processing. Tise (2001) notes that problems with processing are compounded by the loss of key library staff knowledgeable in serials processing as a result of budget cuts. Szilvassy (1996) mentions the problem of absent or incomplete processing tools. According to him, a majority of the serials produced in less developed countries have incomplete bibliographic information and this makes processing cumbersome. Mullis (1992) expresses the problem of labour intensiveness during check-in and the difficulty in cataloguing. He also notes the absence of standards in classification of serials. Many libraries may not have the required tools for cataloguing and classification.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Among the major operations for making print serials available and accessible is processing. Though every university library in Nigeria gives access to this important research material, no research has been conducted to determine the activities in processing and impediments to effective operation. In

an effort to bridge this gap (in spite of the move to providing electronic access), create standards, and enhance uniformity, the survey sought to identify the serials processing activities and impediments to effective processing. .

## **Objective**

The study sought to

- Identify serials processing activities in Southern Nigerian Federal University Libraries;
- Determine the differences in serials processing activities among the university libraries in the three geopolitical zones;
- Ascertain the impediments to effective serials processing activities

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the activities involved in serials processing in Southern Nigerian university libraries?
2. Is there any significant difference in serials processing activities among the federal university libraries in the South East, South-South, and South West geopolitical zones?
3. What are the impediments to effective serial processing operation in Nigerian Federal University Libraries?

## **Significance of the study**

The result of the research will assist Committee of University Librarians in Nigerian Universities (CULNU) in discussing modalities for harmonizing serials operations (processing) towards consortium building. Newly established university libraries will apply the results in setting up and organizing serials operations. Donor agencies will be informed of the impediments to serials processing in Nigeria, which will help them aid these libraries. The results will also add to the available literature on serials operations in developing countries for the education of library and information science professionals.

## **Data Collection**

The survey was carried out in the three of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria: South East (SE), South-South (SS), and South West (SW). The three zones house thirteen federal universities. In the South East are the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. The University of Benin, University of Calabar, University of Port Harcourt, and the University of Uyo are in the South-South. The University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, University of Lagos, Federal University of Technology Akure, and University of Agriculture Abeokuta are in the South West. Five serials staff were purposely sampled from each of the libraries. The purposive sampling was founded on the expectations that the serials librarian, staff in charge of serials user services, and others should have the knowledge and experience to provide the data. A questionnaire consisting of four items was distributed to the 65 staff sampled from the thirteen universities. Items on serials processing activities were developed as a dichotomous checklist, while the others based on serials processing problems were weighted on a four-point Likert scale. Forty-eight (82.75%) of the questionnaires returned were valid. They were collated and analysed using SPSS version 10.0. The results were presented using tables, frequencies, mean, and percentage. The average of 50% and 2.5 were taken as positive bench-mark for dichotomous and Likert-point scale results respectively. The hypothesis was tested using chi-square statistics.

## **Presentation of Results**

The results reflect serials processing activities and their differences in the libraries under study. The impediments to effective processing are also presented.

### **Serials Processing Activities**

The respondents were required to indicate the activities that constitute serials processing in their university. The result is presented in Table 1. It shows that more than 80% of the staff included collation, stamping, recording, cataloguing, classification, and stock taking. Other activities, which attracted responses from 60% to 78.4% include catalogue maintenance, indexing, and abstracting.

Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) value was calculated to determine the level of difference among the three zones. The result shows that  $X^2$  was higher for the following activities: cataloguing, classification, abstracting, and stock taking. This implies that those activities vary significantly among the geopolitical zones. Since a majority of staff who indicated that they were involved in serials processing activities are located in the SW, the data suggests that serial units in the SW are involved in more processing activities than in other zones.

**Table 1. Frequency, Percentage & Chi-square value of the response of staff on the various processing activities.**

| Activities                      | All Staff Freq. %           | S E Freq. %                 | S S Freq. %             | S W Freq. %             | X <sup>2</sup> -cal | RMK |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----|
| Collation of acquired materials | 54<br>98.2(54.0)<br>(98.2)  | 13 24.1<br>(13.7)<br>(23.6) | 15 27.8(14.7)<br>(27.3) | 26 48.1(25.5)<br>(47.3) | 2.98                | NS  |
| Stamping of materials           | 53<br>96.4(53.0)<br>(96.4)  | 13 24.5<br>(13.5)<br>(22.6) | 14 26.4(14.5)<br>(25.5) | 26 49.1(25.1)<br>(47.3) | 1.86                | NS  |
| Recording of materials          | 53<br>96.4(53.0)<br>(96.4)  | 13 24.5<br>(13.5)<br>(23.6) | 14 26.4(14.5)<br>(25.5) | 26 49.1(25.1)<br>(47.3) | 1.86                | NS  |
| Cataloguing                     | 43<br>81.1(43.0)<br>(81.1)  | 8 18.6<br>(10.5)<br>(15.1)  | 15 34.9(12.2)<br>(28.3) | 20 46.5(20.3)<br>(37.7) | 6.77                | S   |
| Classifications                 | 42<br>80.8(42.0)<br>(80.8)  | 6 14.3 (9.7)<br>(11.5)      | 15 35.7(11.8)<br>(29.4) | 21 50.0(20.2)<br>(40.4) | 11.05               | S   |
| Catalogue maintenance           | 40<br>78.4(40.0)<br>(78.4)  | 8 20.0 (9.4)<br>(15.7)      | 15 37.5(11.8)<br>(29.4) | 17 41.4(18.8)<br>(33.3) | 5.92                | NS  |
| Indexing                        | 33<br>66.3(33.0)<br>(67.3)  | 11 33.3<br>(8.1) (22.4)     | 9 27.3(8.8)<br>(18.4)   | 13 39.4(16.2)<br>(26.5) | 5.14                | NS  |
| Abstracting                     | 32<br>66.7(32.0)<br>(66.7)  | 12 37.5<br>(8.7) (25.0)     | 9 28.1(8.7)<br>(18.8)   | 11 34.4(14.7)<br>(22.9) | 7.2                 | S   |
| Stock taking                    | 42<br>84.0(42.0)<br>(84.0)  | 7 16.7<br>(10.1)<br>(14.0)  | 14 33.3(12.6)<br>(28.0) | 21 50.0(19.3)<br>(42.0) | 7.76                | S   |
| Translation                     | 19 41.3<br>(19.0)<br>(41.3) | 5 26.3 (5.0)<br>(10.9)      | 8 42.1(5.4)<br>(17.4)   | 6 31.6(8.7)<br>(28.6)   | 3.6                 | NS  |

Note: Table X<sup>2</sup> (a = 0.05) = 5.99. Figures in parentheses are expected frequency; percentages in parentheses are % of total.

S=Significant; NS=Not Significant

## Impediments to Effective Serials Processing Functions

Respondents were asked to indicate the impediments to effective serials function, with reference to processing tools and the nature of serials. The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

### Processing Tools as Impediments

The respondents were asked to rate the variables related to processing tools that hinder effective serials processing. The responses as presented in Table 2 show that all but one of the variables have a mean score above the bench mark of 2.5. Hence they are accepted as impediments to serials processing. These variables include a lack of current selection tools and locally published serials catalogue, unavailability of serials processing tools, and absence of local serials information in standard bibliographic tools.

**Table2: Mean Scores and % Response on Processing Tools Impediments to Effective Serials Processing**

| Variables   | Mean Score | % Response |
|---|------------|------------|
| Lack of current selection tools   | 2.78       | 85         |
| Lack of locally published serials catalogues                                      | 3.15       | 83.3       |
| Serials processing tools have not been available to facilitate serials processing | 2.80       | 80         |
| Inadequate resources for recording serials, e.g., Kardex.                         | 2.49       | 90         |
| Information on local serials are not found in standard bibliographic tools        | 3.26       | 85         |

### Nature of Serials as Impediment

The respondents were asked to indicate the variables related to the nature of serials that hinder effective serials processing function. The result as shown in Table 3 reveals that the increase in number and fragmentation of titles of serials, changes in frequency, abrupt cessation of publication, and provision of incomplete sets, supplements, and special issues are impediments to effective serial processing.

**Table3. Mean Scores and % Response on Nature of Serials Impediment to Effective Serials Processing**

| Variables  | Mean Score | % Response |
|--|------------|------------|
| Continuous increase in fragmentation and titles of serials | 2.88       | 90         |
| Changes in serials frequency, numbering, titles and format | 3.00       | 95         |
| Cessation of publication of serials                        | 3.16       | 75         |
| Incomplete sets, supplements, and special issues           | 2.92       | 90         |

## Discussion of Findings

The list of serials processing is consistent with the position of Szilvassy (1996) that serials processing in developing countries involves cataloguing, classification, filing, and catalogue maintenance. More positive response on the activities from the SW implies that serials processing is more developed in that zone than others. A low response on translation activity implies that minimal or no translation activity is performed on serials written in languages other than English. The impediments to serials processing coincide with the views of Mullis (1992). It also reveals the poor serials services obtainable in these libraries as users cannot access unprocessed resources. The nature of serials as a problem confirm

Tuttle's (1983) position on the problems associated with serials. It implies that that the problems of 20th century are still persisting in the 21st century. The problems posed by serials are not restricted to university libraries in developing countries but are present globally.

## Conclusion

Serials serve a very important purpose for research and teaching in the university. They are accessible only if the required processing is completed. Conclusive evidences from the survey include:

- Serials processing activities in Nigerian universities include collation, stamping, recording, cataloguing, classification and stock taking.
- Catalogue maintenance, indexing, and abstracting are also carried out.
- Processing activities differ significantly among the university libraries in the South East, South West and South-South zones
- Serial units in the South West zone are involved in more processing activities than the other zones.
- Impediments to effective serials processing include lack of locally published serials catalogue and current selection tools, unavailability of serials processing tools and absence of local serials information in standard bibliographic tools; Nature of serials which is manifested by a continuous increase in the number and fragmentation of serials titles, changes in frequency, abrupt cessation of serials publication.

It is recommended that Committee of University Librarian of Nigerian University form a consortium to make policy statements on ways of ameliorating the problems associated with processing tools.

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