

**STATE OF THE LIBRARY CATALOGUE IN
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE**

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Abstract

The objective of any library or information system is that its resources and services should be effectively utilized. Utilization justifies the cost of acquiring the resources and the pains takes to process and organize them. If materials are available, they should be easily located and retrieved when needed. The library catalogue therefore becomes the most essential tool for accessing library collections as it lists all the holdings of the library as well as the call numbers of the materials so listed together with their locations on the shelves. The study sampled all the three universities in Benue State which are: the University of Agriculture, Makurdi, the Benue University Makurdi and the University of Mkar. Survey method was used for this study. A total of 300 copies of questionnaire was distributed out of which 285 (95%) were correctly filed and returned for analysis. The study found that all the university libraries in Benue State use the card catalogue. The catalogues were ill-maintained as many books found on the shelves had no cards in the catalogues while additions to the stock as well as withdrawals were not reflected in the catalogue in one of the libraries while cards

were also not filed in strict alphabetic sequence. Some useful suggestions were made among which were the establishment of a Catalogue Maintenance Unit in all the universities libraries for proper maintenance of the catalogues to enable users have easy access to the collection.

Introduction

Accessibility to resources in any library depends on expert processing and sound organisation of these resources (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002, Eze, 2008, Ugah, 2008). The most important tool for accessing information materials is the library catalogue. In libraries with very small collections such as private and small school libraries, materials can easily be retrieved without resort to a catalogue. Even then a system of recording the contents of such a collection is inevitable. However, when library collections grow larger as in public and academic libraries, it becomes cumbersome if not impossible to retrieve materials without resort to the catalogue. Management of such a collection also becomes pretty difficult at this point; a functional catalogue becomes a sine qua non.

What then is a library catalogue? As fashion designers have catalogues to enable their customers select the designs they prefer, the library catalogue helps readers know what the library has as well as enable them access the resources they need. A library catalogue may therefore be defined as a complete list of the holdings of a particular library which includes books, serials and non-print media and arranged

systematically or in some specific pattern for easy retrieval. A group of libraries could also come together to have a common catalogue which indicates the holdings of each library within the group. This kind of library catalogue becomes a union catalogue.

There are various types of library catalogues, such as the card catalogue, the printed book catalogues, the sheaf catalogues, the computer based catalogue or Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Of all these, the two popular library catalogues today are the card catalogue, followed by the computer based or Online Public Access Catalogue. However, due to numerous advantages over the other types of catalogues such as flexibility, ease of use, effectiveness, ease of maintenance, allowing many users at the same time and non-use of electric power, the card catalogue remains the commonest in Nigerian libraries. It is also the focus of this study.

The essential elements of the catalogue card include the author, title, subject, publishers, place and date of publication, International Standard Book Number (ISBN) as well as edition statement. Armed with this information, a reader can move to the catalogue cabinet to search for the material of choice. Books must be correctly classified and catalogued with cards representing them in the catalogue cabinet. Additions to the collection as well as withdrawals must be reflected accordingly and appropriately to make the

library catalogue reliable and dependable.

In order to guarantee dependability of the catalogue, some libraries create a catalogue maintenance unit whose specific duties are to ensure that cards are properly filed, that the catalogue is regularly updated and that readers do not tamper with the filing, among others. The principle of the regular updating of the library catalogue applies to the other types of catalogues as well. The foregoing explains why a library search should begin from the catalogue and terminate on the shelves rather than the other way round. It also explains why the catalogue is an indispensable retrieval device in any library.

Significance of the Study

A library catalogue can only be a key to the collection if properly maintained. This study will therefore be of benefit to the library administration in the institutions studies as it will show the true state of their library catalogues. If there are inadequacies, these are expected to be rectified for the benefit of users. This will lead to easy access and effective utilization of the resources of the libraries.

Other library administrations could also juxtapose the findings from this study with what obtains in their libraries with a view to improving access to their collections. The study will also provide research information for those interested in this area of service as well as add to the literature on the subject.

Review of Literature

The strategic importance of the library catalogue as a retrieval device can never be overemphasized. Its importance could be likened to the steering of a vehicle without which it cannot successfully reach its destination. Due to its importance in a library, many authors have written on the subject matter.

Obinna (1990) stressed that, for quick retrieval of recorded information, the best approach is through the library catalogue which helps users confirm if the library has the needed information as well as obtain it. Eze (2008) also noted that the success of any library service must be based on sound organisation of the resources pointing that the catalogue is the major tool for organizing library materials. He continues that a good catalogue should tell what books the library has by a given author or on a specific subject and where they could be found in the library. Similarly, Muigilin (2001) points out that the library catalogue enables a user to locate any book whose author, title or subject is known, whether a particular book or edition is available and or which shelf it could be found through the use of the call number and shelf guide. Igbashal and Oyebanji (1994) opined that the main purpose of preparing a library catalogue is to facilitate access to information materials. In the same vein, Taiwo (2008) emphasized that the library catalogue remains a veritable tool for accessing the collections of any library, adding that the

major objective of any library is to ensure maximum utilization of its resources and services.

Studies have, however, reported the contrary, indicating that readers are not enjoying the full benefits of the catalogue. Oshinake, Folorunsho and Abba (2002) found in her study that the library catalogue of the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan was in disarray, thereby, preventing students from putting it to full use, Ugah (2008) reported among other findings that students of the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike were unable to effectively utilize the library catalogue. He therefore recommended that library orientation on the use of the catalogue as an effective tool for information retrieval should be intensified. Similarly, Amaakaven (2006) reported that adequate access was not provided for the available resources in the Benue State University Library, Makurdi. Esin (2011) in his study of catalogue use in the University of Calabar Library found that most students of the university do not use the catalogue until in their final year when they are to write project. This is rather ridiculous. This shows that such students are not aware of the place of the library in the educational process and therefore do not heavily patronize it.

The literature reviewed so far points to the fact that the library catalogue is indispensable if users are to access and effectively utilize the resources of any library. This is with the assumption that the materials will be expertly processed and

represented in the catalogue. It is also assumed that the catalogue will be efficiently maintained through correct filing of the cards and by keeping it as up-to-date as possible, otherwise, the main purpose of the catalogue will be defeated.

The review also points to the fact that many libraries do not properly maintain their catalogues (Oshinake, Foliurusho and Abba 2002; Amaakaven, 2006). This situation has led to users' inability to fully exploit the resources of such libraries (Ugah, 2008). In order to arrest this situation, libraries have to constantly and regularly revise and update their catalogues not only to show what the library truly has but also to facilitate access to the resources.

Statement of the Problem

A catalogue is crucial to quick and effective access to the resources of a library as such it has to be effectively maintained and constantly updated to reflect the holding of the library, indicate the location of materials by assigning the correct call numbers to the materials and by appropriately making references (including cross reference) that help readers locate the materials. At the moment, it is not certain if this is true state of the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State? How adequately are they serving the purpose they were intended to serve?

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the true state of catalogues in university libraries in Benue State of Nigeria.

Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Find out the types of catalogues that are in existence in university libraries in Benue State.
2. Find out whether university libraries in Benue State have functional catalogues.
3. Examine the extent to which the catalogues reflect the actual holdings of the university libraries in Benue State
4. Find out whether the catalogues of the university libraries in Benue State are serving the purpose they were meant to serve.
5. Find out whether there are obstacles to the effective use of catalogue in university libraries in Benue State.
6. Find ways of overcoming the obstacles.

Research Questions

1. What are the types of catalogues used in university libraries in Benue State?
2. How functional are the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State?
3. To what extent do the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State reflect the stock of the libraries?

4. Are the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State serving the purpose they were meant to serve?
5. What are the obstacles militating against effective use of catalogues in university libraries in Benue State?
6. How can these obstacles be addressed?

Methodology

The survey method was adopted for this study. The instrument used for collecting data was a structured questionnaire.

A total of 300 copies of questionnaire were distributed to students of the three universities in the area of study. One hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to students of each of the three universities from 200 level upwards, 100 level students had not fully settled down at the time of this study. The students were issued the questionnaire as they entered the library and were requested to fill and return them upon leaving the library. In this way, 285 copies were properly filled and returned, giving a return rate of 95%. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the data generated.

Findings/Discussions

Research Question 1

What are types of catalogues used in university libraries in Benue State?

To answer this question, data on the types of catalogues used in university libraries in Benue State were, analyzed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Statement	Freq	%
The card catalogue is used in our library	225	78.9
The sheaf catalogue is used in our library	00	00
The printed book catalogue is used in our library	00	00
The online public access catalogue is used in our library	00	00
The computer based catalogue is in our library	00	00
Undecided	60	21
Total	285	100

Table 1 above shows that 225 or 78.9% of the respondents affirmed that only the card catalogue is available in university libraries in Benue State while 60 or 21% were undecided. Discussions with some library staff of these universities studied revealed that work on computerization of two of the libraries was started but stopped somewhere along the line. Computerization of the library is an essential step towards IT compliance. This should be taken seriously by any library that hopes to provide effective access to its collection.

Research Question 2

To what extent do the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State serve as reliable retrieval devices?

To answer this question, data on the catalogue as a

retrieval device were , analyzed and presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Statement	Freq	%
I find the catalogue a very reliable retrieval	53	18.59
I find the catalogue moderately reliable	104	36.49
I find the catalogue unreliable	80	28.08
I find the catalogue very unreliable	48	16.84
Total	285	100

Table 2 above shows that only 36.49% of the respondents found the catalogues moderately reliable while 28.08% found them unreliable. About 16.84% however found the catalogues very reliable. This does not paint a good picture of the reliability of the catalogues as retrieval device. This clearly shows that there is need for library instruction to be accompanied by practicals to ensure that students clearly understand what is taught in theory (Meadow, 1991).

Research Question 3

To what extent do the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State reflect the stock of their libraries?

To answer this research question, data on the extent to which the catalogues reflect the stock of the library was presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Statement	Freq.	%
Books listed in the catalogues are usually on the shelves	155	54.38
Some of the books on the shelves have no cards in the catalogue	70	24.56
Additions to the collection are not always reflected in the catalogue	35	12.29
The catalogue often contains cards of withdraw books	25	8.77
Total	285	100

Table 3 above shows that 54.38% of the respondents affirmed that books listed in the catalogue were usually found on the shelves 24.56% asserted that some of the books found on the shelves had no cards in the catalogue while 8.77% indicated that the catalogue sometimes contains cards of withdrawn books, 12.29% similarly affirmed that additions to the collections are not always reflected in the catalogues. This finding is peculiar to Benue State University Library.

If catalogues must reflect the actual holdings of their libraries, they must ensure that all the books placed on the shelves have cards in the catalogue, that additions to the collection are accordingly reflected and the cards of withdrawn books are equally withdrawn from the catalogue. It is only in so doing that the catalogues will be said to be a true reflection of the holdings of their libraries.

Research Question 4

Are the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State serving the purpose they were meant to serve?

The data for this research question are presented in Table 4

Table 4

Statement	Freq.	%
I consider the catalogue as adequately serving its purpose	149	52.28
I consider the catalogue as moderately serving the purpose it was meant to serve	105	36.85
I do not consider the catalogue as adequately serving the purpose it was meant to serve	31	10.87
Total	285	100

From table4 above 52.28% of the respondents considered the catalogues as adequately serving the purpose they were meant to serve, 36.85% saw the catalogues as moderately serving the purpose they were meant to serve while 10.87% thought otherwise.

Even though 52% of the respondents considered the catalogues as adequately serving the purpose they were meant to serve, the reality is that much needs to be done in that regard more so 52.0% is an average percentage.

Research Question 5

What are the obstacles militating against effective use of catalogues in university libraries in Benue State. Table 5 provides the data for answering this research question.

TABLE 5

Statement	Freq.	%
Entries are not always correctly filed	95	33.33
Entries are not regularly updated	76	26.67
Some books have no cards in the catalogue	64	22.45
Books listed in the catalogue are not always found on the shelves	30	10.52
Some withdraw books still have cards in the catalogue	20	7.01
Total	285	100

Table 5 above shows that 33.33% of the respondents felt that the entries catalogues were not always correctly filed, 26.67% further indicated that the entries were not regularly updated while 22.45% attested that books listed in the catalogue were not always found on the shelves. Even though only 7.01% of the respondents said that withdrawn books still have their cards in the catalogue, it is nevertheless amazing. Normally, once books are listed for withdrawal, their cards also have to be withdrawn from the catalogue at the same time. The above mentioned factors constitute obstacles to effective use of the catalogue. Many factors could account for books listed in the catalogue not being found on the shelves. Selfish readers could hide them away to monopolize their use while some might have been loaned out. Regular shelf reading and meticulous checking of records of loans as well as records of weeded books could tackle some of these problems and make the catalogue more useful to users.

Research Question 6:

How can these obstacles be overcome?

In order to answer this research question responses from the respondents were collated, analyzed and presented in Table 6 below:

Table 6

Statement	Freq	%
Establishment of a catalogue maintenance unit to oversee the catalogue	94	32.98
Filling of the cards should be done by experienced library staff from the rank of library officer and above	66	23.16
Additions to the collections should be reflected in the catalogue immediately	81	28.42
Constant review of the filing to detect and correct errors	32	11.23
Cards for withdrawn books should be automatically withdraw	12	4.21
Total	285	100

Table 6 shows that respondents agreed with all the suggested methods of making the catalogues in university libraries in Benue State more reliable and useful as retrieval device. Establishment of a catalogue maintenance unit to oversee the catalogue (32.98%), additions to the collections should be reflected in the catalogue among others were major ways to overcome some of the obstacles hindering the effective utilisation of library catalogue. By implication, all the items on the checklist have to be adequately addressed if users are to enjoy the full benefits of the library catalogues. The implication of this is that the catalogues in universities in Benue State are not true reflections of their collections.

Conclusion

The findings from this study have revealed that the only type of catalogue used in university libraries in Benue State is the card catalogue. The study also showed that only 18.6% of the respondents sampled found the catalogues to be very reliable retrieval device while 36% found them moderately reliable and 16.00% as very unreliable. Similarly, users did not see the catalogues as true reflection of the holdings of the libraries studied since additions to the collections as well as withdrawals were not always reflected in the catalogues just as many of the books found on the shelves were not represented in the catalogues a sign that they were not fully serving the purpose they were meant to serve.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made with a view to improving the quality and consequently, utilization of library catalogues in universities in Benue State.

1. Catalogue Maintenance Units should be established in all university libraries in Benue State to oversee the catalogues and ensure that they are kept in order.
2. The unit should also ensure that filing of cards is done by experienced library staff from the rank of library officer and above.
3. All the library books in circulation should be

catalogued and their cards properly filed just as additions to the collections as well as withdraw titles should be immediately reflected in the catalogues to make them reflect the true holdings of their libraries.

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