Full Length Research Paper

Serials acquisition problems in Nigerian Federal University Libraries

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The study sought to identify acquisition activities and problems in university libraries of southern Nigeria. 58 serials staff were sampled randomly from the 13 federal university libraries in southern Nigeria. A self designed questionnaire made of 7 items was distributed to the sampled staff. A total of 48 (82.7%) of the questionnaire were returned. Data was collated and analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 10.0. The results were presented with tables, frequency and percentages while Chi-square inferential statistics was used in testing the hypothesis. The result shows that serials acquisition operation in southern Nigeria federal university libraries, involves the following activities: Selection of titles, pre-order checking, preparation of final list for order and ordering. Other activities of such operation are verification of receipt, checking in of materials, claiming and renewal of subscription as well as cancellation of order. Serials acquisition operation is more developed in south western university libraries than the other geopolitical zones. Acquisition of serials in southern Nigeria federal university libraries is besieged with problems. These problems are those related to cost of serials, selection tools, nature of serials and subscription decision. Recommendations were made based on the findings.

Key words: Serials acquisition, Serials problems, serials research, serials unit, serials university libraries, subscription.

INTRODUCTION

The unflinching capacity of institutions of higher learning to teach, research published scholarly materials, and even to perceive the heart beat of peers beating space and time is founded on the publication called serials. Since 1609 when the first newspaper was published and the publication of the first periodical in 1665, it has become very easy for researchers to communicate their findings and apply those of others in their research works. Hence, a university is adjudged high class when it can provide adequate information materials especially current serials. This is expected since research at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels have serials as their bedrock. Burch (1990) described serials as a central force in scholarly communication because researchers prefer it for publication of their research results and for retrospective scholarly review. Also majority of texts/monographs produced for knowledge have their

contents derived from serials articles.

In the university community, access to this important research material is primarily through the university library. The latter sources, acquires, processes and make available library materials including serials to accomplish its roles of providing knowledge products to the university community. To achieve this primary role, university libraries ensure that the appropriate serial is selected based on acquisition policy of the institution; selected serials acquired and processed. Oni (2004) described the unit responsible for serials operation in the library as serials unit. Mullis (1992) grouped operations in serials unit into acquisition, cataloguing, classification, retrieval, accessibility, use and preservation. Other authors including Tuttle (1983), Szilvassy (1996) and Woodward (1999) have their various ways of classifying serials operations though with similarities. These processes are performed on foreign and local serials alike. Some of the sources of information for serials acquisition include Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, Ulrich's on microfiche, local lists of serials where available, periodical

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literature etc. Serials are made available in libraries through purchase, gift, exchange and legal deposit (Szilvassy, 1996).

Serials acquisition is hinged on continual financial commitment. Once a subscription is opened for a title, the library continues subscription thereby investing heavily on the titles (Mullis, 1992; De Marcas, 2000; Aina, 2003). The huge financial commitment is also derived from changes in exchange rate, page increase, volume explosion, increase in postage and handling cost as well as basic inflation (Brown and Smith, 1980; Colin,1998; EBSCO, 2001; Elliot, 2003). Szilvassy (1996) observed that lack of tools for acquisition and lack of standard ordering as well as claiming process especially in poor countries are some of the problems hindering serials acquisition. Mason (2007) points out that the problems faced by academic librarians in effort to maintain their serials collection presently include explosion in academic research, budgetary cutback, lack of storage space, increase in price of academic publication, cost of binding and exchange rate. As a result, librarians find it difficult to maintain subscription to all the journals that their scholars want to have access to. To him, solution could be sought through commitment, perseverance, creativity and public relations. Tuttle (1983) mentioned the problems created by changes inherent in serials.

Nigeria, recognized as one of the poor countries in the world could have the above problems as oppositions to serials acquisition. Preliminary survey of users revealed that some university libraries are not providing the needed serials to the university community. Furthermore, the paucity of internet facilities in some of these universities poses an obstacle to scholars accessing the available online serials. Again there has not been any work in southern Nigeria federal universities to ascertain the activities involved in serials acquisition and impediments to the acquisition of serials by these libraries. In effect, this study seeks to:

a) Identify the activities in serials acquisition.
b) Find out the problems that hinder acquisition of serials in southern Nigeria federal university libraries.

METHODOLOGY

Research hypothesis

This hypothesis was formulated to enable the researcher draw inference:

The response of serials staff of university libraries as regards serials acquisition activities is independent of the geopolitical zone of the country the library is located.

Method

The study employed survey method to ascertain from serials librarians and serials staff of federal university libraries in southern Nigeria serials acquisition activities and impediments to serials acquisition. These universities were grouped according to

their geopolitical location. South East (SE) universities include University of Nigeria Nsukka, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. In the South-South (SS) are University of Benin, University of Calabar, University of Port Harcourt and University of Uyo. Other universities which are located in the South West (SW) are University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, University of Lagos, Federal University of Technology Akure, University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. Of the 160 serials staff in the serials units of these universities, 58 staff was purposively sampled. For each library, a total of 5 were sampled including the serials librarian and four other staff who may be responsible for the various sub-units in the serials unit. These sub- units include acquisition, processing, public services and preservation. The decision to make such purposive selection was based on the belief that such members of staff with knowledge of the serials activities can provide the needed information for the research irrespective of their educational attainment.

Questionnaire instrument made of 7 items was developed to elicit information for the research. Two of the items were developed along dichotomous checklist and those on acquisition operation problems were weighted on 4 point Likert – like scale. The questionnaires were distributed to the various institutions by the help of two research assistants. A total of 48 questionnaires were completed and returned from the 13 universities representing 82.75% of the total questionnaires distributed. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 10.0. The results were presented using tables, frequencies and mean. For results involving percentages, 50% is taken as an acceptable value. The result weighted on Likert-like four point scale has the average score of 2.5. Thus, it is accepted as the mid-point. Chi-square inferential statistics was used to test for independence on the hypothesis.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Serials acquisition operation

The respondents were required to indicate the activities involved in serials acquisition operation in their university libraries. The result is presented in Table 1, which shows that all the activities except financial control are performed in serials acquisition operation considering their 50% positive response. These activities include selection (81.1%), list preparation (83.3%), ordering (85.5%), verification of receipts (84.3%), checking in (88.9%) and renewing of subscription (86.8%) activities. However serials acquisition operation in universities located in the south west is likely to include financial control having recorded 65.2% positive response. Furthermore, Chi (X^2) calculated is higher than the tabular at 0.05 level probabilities for selection of titles, preparation of final list for order, ordering, verification of receipts, checking in of materials, renewing of sub-scription and cancellation of order. Thus the hypothesis that their responses are independent of the geopolitical zone of the country the university is located is therefore rejected for those activities. Invariably, the responses of serials staff of university libraries as regards acquisition operations are not independent of the geopolitical zone of the country the library is located. Since the serial staff from the university libraries in the SW zone are more affirmative as regards the serials acquisition function, the result therefore suggests that university libraries in the

Table 1. Frequency, percentage and chi- square value of responses of staff on acquisition operation.

Activities	All staff		SE		SS		SW		X^2 calc.	Remark
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Selection of titles	43 (43.0)	81.1 (81.1)	11(10.5)	25.6 (20.8)	9 (12.2)	20.9 (17.0)	23 (20.3)	53.5 (43.4)	6.40	S
Pre-order checking	43 (43.0)	79.6 (79.6)	11(11.1)	25.6 (20.4)	9 (11.9)	20.9 (16.7)	23 (19.9)	53.5 (42.6)	5.93	NS
Preparation of final list for order	45 (45.0)	83.3 (83.3)	11(11.7)	24.4 (20.4)	9 (12.5)	20.0 (16.7)	25 (20.8)	55. 6 (40.3)	11.11	S
Ordering	47 (47.0)	85.5 (85.5)	13(12.8)	27.7 (23.6)	9 (12.8)	19.1 (16.4)	25 (21.4)	53.2 (45.5)	12.10	S
Verification of receipt	43 (43.0)	84.3 (84.3)	10(10.1)	23.3 (19.6)	9 (11.8)	20.9 (17.6)	24 (21.1)	55.8 (47.1)	6.83	S
Checking in of materials	48 (48.0)	88.9 (88.9)	13(12.4)	27.1 (24.1)	10 (13.3)	20.8 (18.5)	25 (22.2)	52.1 (46.3)	10.84	S
Claiming	41 (41.0)	75.9 (75.9)	10(10.6)	24.1 (18.5)	10 (11.4)	24.4 (18.5)	21 (19.0)	51.2 (38.9)	1.75	NS
Financial control	23 (23.0)	47.9 (47.9)	3(5.3)	13.0 (6.3)	5 (6.7)	21.7 (10.4)	15 (11.0)	65.2 (31.3)	5.47	NS
Renewing of subscription	46 (46.0)	86.8 (86.8)	14(13.0)	30.4 (26.4)	8 (12.2)	17.4 (15.1)	24 (20.8)	52.2 (45.3)	14.94	S
Cancellation of order	34 (34.0)	69.4 (69.4)	6(8.3)	17.6 (12.2)	9 (9.7)	26.5 (18.4)	19 (16.0)	55.9 (38.8)	6.34	S

Tabular X^2 (= 0.05, df = 3). Figures in parenthesis are expected frequency, percentage figure in parenthesis are % of total; S = Significant, NS = Non significant.

south west zone are more aware and exposed to those activities than their counterparts in the universities in the SE and SS zone.

Hindrances to serials acquisition and processing

Cost

Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement to the statements with reference to cost that hinder effective acquisition of serials in their libraries. Their mean response is presented in Table 2. It shows that all the staff affirmed that the indicated variables relating to cost of serials hinder serials acquisition. Hence the mean scores are above the bench mark of 2.50. These variables include continuous increase in price of serials, reduction in budgetary allocation for serials acquisition and devaluation of the nation's currency.

Selection tools

Staff responses to variables related to selection tools which hinders serials acquisition is presented in Table 3. The result shows that respondents consider lack of current selection tools, local serials catalogues, and information on local serials in standard bibliographic tools as hindrances to serials acquisition in southern Nigerian university libraries.

Nature of serials

Staffs mean responses on the variables relating to the nature of serials that hinders effective serial function is presented in Table 4. The result shows that fragmentation of serials; increase in titles, and

cessation of publication are some of the variables which respondents consider as problems that hinder effective serials function. Changes in serials from print to electronics and compact disk (CD) had mean score of 2.14 therefore was not considered as a problem that hinder serials acquisition by the respondents.

Subscription difficulty

The mean response of staff on subscription difficulty as a factor that hinders effective acquisition operation is indicated in Table 5. The result shows that the opinion of staff to delay in claims (mean = 2.60) and loss of contact with agents (mean = 2.88) are high suggesting their affirmation to those as problems. Conversely, the respondents do not agree that decision on the subscription agent (mean = 2.39) and the personnel to select serials (mean = 2.13) constitute a problem.

Table 2. Mean scores on variables within cost factor hindering serials acquisition.

Variables	Mean score of staff
The price of serials continues to increase.	3.14
Budgetary allocation for serials subscriptions has been drastically reduced.	3.03
There is continuous devaluation of the nation's currency	3.37

Acceptable mean score = 2.5 and above.

Table 3. Mean scores on variables within selection tools factor hindering serials acquisition.

Variables	Mean score of staff
There is lack of current selection tools	2.78
There is lack of locally published serials catalogues.	3.15
Information on local serials are not found in standard bibliographic tools thereby reducing awareness to their availability	3.26

Acceptable mean score = 2.5 and above.

Table 4. Mean scores on variables within nature of serials factor hindering serials acquisition.

Variables	Mean staff score
Continuous increase in titles and fragmentation of serials hinders adequate provision of serials	2.88
Cessation of publication of serials does not allow for continuity in the library .	3.16
Changes in serials to electronic or CD has made the acquisition of print forms difficult	2.14

Acceptable mean score = 2.5 and above.

Table 5. Mean scores on subscription difficulty factor hindering serials acquisition.

Variables	All staff mean score
Universities have not agreed on who does the final selection of serials, thereby delaying decision for subscription	2.13
There is difficulty in deciding the best subscription agent to work with in order to get prompt renewal	2.39
Loss of contact with subscription agents always delays renewal	2.88
Absence of standard claiming facilities delays claims and availability	2.60

DISCUSSION

Acceptance from above 50% of the respondents that selection of titles, pre-order checking, preparation of final list for order, ordering, verification of receipt, checking in of materials, renewal and cancellation of order as activities in serials acquisition operation confirms that serials units in these universities are developed. Conversely only university libraries in the SW accepted financial control as an activity in serials unit. This is unexpected since in many university libraries in Nigeria, the control of finances is the prerogative of University Librarians and Bursars contrary to many institutional practices as informed by (Adhkai, 2000). The significant difference noted among geopolitical zones in some of the acquisition activities reflected high response from the SW. This shows that serials units in the SW are more developed than their counterparts in other regions.

Acceptance of all the variables relating to cost factor as hindrances to serials acquisition reveals that one of the major problems hindering provision of serials in university libraries is finance, thus confirming the findings of Mullis (1992), Dole and Changa (1996), Garson (1998), De Marcas (2000) and Fackler (2000). Lack of current selection tools indicated problems that impede serials acquisition could be explained by the difficulties encountered in the acquisition of the important serials selection tools such as Ulrich's International Periodical Directory, Ulrich's on Microfiche and Ulrich's Plus. They are all published and acquired from overseas. In some of the libraries visited, the selection tools are missing and where available, are as old as 1980s and early 1990s edition. Though efforts have been made by individuals and groups to have a local serials vendor or subscription agency, non-is available now. Consequently there is no proper documentation to help in the acquisition of local serials.

The mean score of above 2.5 for all the variables grouped under nature of serials as factor except changes from print to electronic form is a confirmation of those problems as hindrances to serials acquisition. The finding is consistent with the findings of Edoka and Anunobi (2008) which also identified the nature of serials as a problem to its processing operations. Nature of serials as a factor is not restricted to federal universities in southern Nigerian but concerns all the stakeholders in serials: the publisher, subscription agents/vendors, libraries and serials users. Many writers on serials management for instance, Osborn (1980), Brown and Smith (1980), Tuttle (1983), Mullis (1992) and Szilvassy (1996) confirmed that serials are characterized by their bibliographic instability. Such instability could hinder visibility and accessibility which are important factors for acquisition. Change in the nature of serials from print to electronic form may not be considered a problem since some libraries may decide to acquire and use both or opt for one.

The respondents' acceptance of some of the variables within subscription difficulty as hindrance to serials acquisition could be inferred from some of the mailing and communication problems experienced in Nigeria. Again unsatisfactory services from subscription agents and other logistic problems related to agents may stimulate loss of confidence on a particular agent. However, the availability of electronic mail could help ameliorate this problem.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The place of serials in scholarly research visibility and communication has posted it as a very important information material in university libraries. Thus every university that is worth its name makes effort to acquire serials for the community. Serials operations in southern federal university libraries, a part of which is acquisition involves the following activities: Selection of titles, pre-order checking, preparation of final list for order and ordering. Other activities of such operation are verification of receipt, checking in of materials, claiming, and renewal of subscription and cancellation of order. Serials acquisition operation is more developed in south western university libraries than other geopolitical zones.

Acquisition of serials in southern Nigeria federal university libraries is besieged with problems. These problems are those related to cost of serials, selection tools, nature of serials and subscription decision. Based on that, the following recommendations are made:

1) University libraries in southern Nigeria should form a consortium to have a shared responsibility to some of the problems inherent in the acquisition of serials.
2) University libraries should consider the acquisition of electronic serials many of which are provided freely on the internet.
3) Government should assist university libraries in the acquisition of serials by either organizing for pulling of acquisition, providing adequate resources or making available low exchange rate for such acquisition.

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