Extent of Automation in South Eastern Nigerian Libraries

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EXTENT OF AUTOMATION IN SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

BY

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AND

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Abstract:

The paper x-rays the extent of automation in South East Nigerian libraries. Ex-post-factor research method was adopted for the study, involving the study of 35 libraries in the South Eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study revealed that out of six public and five ministries of Education/Information Libraries, none is automated. The study also revealed that out of the 24 academic libraries, only two are automated. This figure represents only 8.33%. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made: all the three tiers of government should automate their government departmental libraries to ensure the efficient storage, retrieval, and dissemination of government information; state and federal governments should provide ICT facilities in their public and academic libraries; adequate opportunities for students and researchers should be created to use ICT applications; and there should be adequate supply of electricity to power the ICT facilities.

Introduction

From antiquity, man’s ambition had been to reduce the time of performing a given task to the barest minimum. Emphasis was, therefore, placed on accuracy and quality of work. Man, therefore; moved from the Stone Age through the Bronze Age in order to improve on his tools for higher productivity. The same need to produce more at a shorter period of time, with accuracy, without compromising quality, gave rise to the Industrial Revolution era which spanned from 1760 to 1850 AD.

In factories, automatic control of production is achieved by machines which move a product from place to place for successive operations. In the libraries,

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however, tangible goods are not produced but information has to be managed. With the increase or high growth in the degree of specialization, libraries are now faced with the problem of how best to manage information. The computer is a technology that is very useful for information management as it is able to handle large mass of information coming into the libraries. The use of computers in libraries has come to solve the problems associated with manual method. These problems include bibliographic access problems, physical access problems, lack of effective service with dispatch, managing library users, storage and preservation problems. The paper, therefore, aims x-raying the extent of computer automation in the South Eastern Nigerian libraries.

Concepts: definition of

Chambers 21st century dictionary, revised edition, (2004) define extent as the area over which something extends, amount, scope or degree. Automation is defined by Prytherch (1995) as the computer-assisted system to undertake tasks, leaving staff free to carry out other, more satisfying duties. Eyitayo (2007) asserts that library automation system (LAS) is defined as a computer system designed to automate tasks in a library. Automaton in libraries is, according to Nwachukwu (2005), the application of computers and other related technologies to the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information. One major characteristic of automation is that it is associated with feedback.

Automation in libraries is synonymous with the application of Information Technology (IT) in library operations. Uchendu (2005), citing Aloa, refers to it as the new technology of gathering, storing, manipulating, and transferring information. Sometimes too, this concept is referred to as information and Communications Technology (ICT). ICT according to Nwachukwu (2007), is any device or tool that allows for collection, storage, processing or the communication of information. While IT is limited to the manipulating, and retrieval of information, ICT has to do with sending information over telephone networks.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to find the extent of automation in South Eastern Nigerian libraries. The specific objectives include:

1. To ascertain the number of automated libraries in the South-East geopolitical zone of the country.
2. To ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of library automation
3. To identify the problems associated with automation in libraries.
4. To proffer solutions to the problems associated with automation.

Significance of the study
Firstly, the library patrons, especially, researchers, on knowing which library is automated would avail themselves the opportunity offered by the application of computers in libraries by visiting such libraries. Also, the findings of the study would motivate the parent institutions of various libraries that are not automated in the zone to put in place policies and programmes aimed at employing computers in their library operations. Finally, the recommendations would add to a body of knowledge already existing in the field of Library and Information Science.

Literature Review
A review of related literature for the study is based on the following headings
- Automation of South Eastern Nigerian government departmental libraries.
- Automation of South Eastern Nigerian Public Libraries.
- Automation of South Eastern Nigerian academic libraries.
- Problems associated with automation in libraries.
- Solution to the problems associated with library automation.

Automation of South Eastern government departmental libraries
Government departmental libraries are libraries established in government ministries and departments to collect, organize and disseminate information held in government documents to facilitate government business (Okiy, 2007). Odumwo (2001) states that the resources and services of libraries in government departments leave much to be desired even in the 21st century. Speaking in the same vein, Okiy (2007) says that the scenario on the ground with regard, to ICT application in the various government departmental libraries is such that very few of them have websites, e-mail, and interest services due to poor funding and/or sheer apathy on the part of management. She observes that the situation in Botswana is different as all the key government ministries and departments have their documents and services computerized. Okiy (20070), for example, tells us that by the end of 2003, the number of microcomputers in government departments in Botswana had increased to over 14,242. However, the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs, National
Universities Commission, National Library of Nigeria, Raw Materials Research and Development Council, and the Nigerian Institute for Tropical Agriculture are all computerized. These are federal government institutions. The extent of automation at the state levels is poor, including South Eastern states.

On what should be done to turn the situation around, Okiy (2007) recommended the commitment of funds to the development of ICT in government departments, noting that adequate fund is a sine qua non to the provision of the right type of computer systems and accessories, skilled staff for operating and maintaining the systems, networking and internetting and the general growth of the organization.

Automation of South Eastern Nigerian Public Libraries

In her study of the status of ICT in Nigerian public libraries, Achebe (2005) observes that the use of ICT in the 34 public libraries she used for the study was poor. According to her, the zone with the highest number of ICT-based public libraries is South-West with (51.3%); South-East (44.1%); Federal Capital Territory (33.3%); North-Central (30.3%); North-East (25.0%); North-West (28.6%) and South-South (18.2%). Her study reveals that there was no ICT policy in all the public libraries in Nigeria. ICT facilities, according to her, exist mainly in public libraries that have international-donor-agency funding and the state governments do not find ICT programmes in their public libraries.

Automation of South Eastern Nigerian academic libraries

As far as the computerization of Nigerian academic libraries is concerned, the picture is slightly different. This is because as centres of research and teaching, the academic libraries are well positioned to employ the ICT in their library operations. For example, Úchendu (2005) opines that computer-assisted searches of literature are increasingly becoming fashionable, and it is available in almost all the university libraries. Also, Ajayi (2009) asserts that many of these libraries are being digitized or being ICT compliant for the purpose of carrying out their functions effectively. The authors accept that some are yet to be properly equipped with ICT equipment.

It is however, taken for granted that the research or special libraries are in the forefront of computerization of their library operations. A mention had earlier been made of such libraries as the Institute for International Affairs, Lagos, Raw Materials Research and Developmental Council, and the Nigerian Institute for Tropical Agriculture at Ibadan. The nature of services they render require that they must
employ ICT in their operations for effective services delivery and the fact that they service a highly specialized group of users. However, the truth of the matter is that all the federal and majority of the private university libraries have undergone one level of automation or the other. Yet, a lot needs to be done.

Advantages of library automation

There is abundant literature on this issue but we will only take a few of the view of scholars. Nwachukwu (2007) avers that the following are the advantages of ICT application to library services. It:

- Allows easy integration of various services,
- Facilities cooperation and formation of library networks,
- Helps to avoid duplication of efforts within a library and between libraries in a network;
- Eliminates some uninteresting and repetitive work;
- Helps to increase the range of services offered;
- Provides marketing opportunities of its services;
- Ultimately may save and/or generate money;
- Increases efficiency;
- Uchendu (2005), on the other hand, posits that ICT offers the following advantages. It:
  - Makes information to be more up-to-date;
  - Creates faster access to information than manual library services,
  - Makes students to have remote access to information without visiting the library shelves;
  - Can help students to get information anytime of the day without the assistance of librarians;
  - Provides access to much more information,
  - Creates high profile for the library;
  - Increases convenience for the library users;
  - Breaks the barriers of geographical distance for library and other information seekers.

Problems associated with the automation of library services

Ifidon (1985) asserts that he does not see any serious or major advantages of automation. He is of the opinion that there are factors which should be considered
before automating library services. These factors are invariably the problems of computerization. They include:

(i) Economic factor: As at the time of publishing his work, that is in 1985, one university computer was purchased with a whopping sum of N2 million. Considering the rate of inflation in the country, the cost would be more than fifty times now. Included in this factor is the issue of maintenance. Ifidon (1985) states that the annual cost of maintaining IBM 370/135 at a particular university was N250,000 as at 1985.

(ii) Non availability of spare parts.

(iii) The procedures may be of low quality, leading to the danger of feeding in wrong data which would equally produce more errors and wrong information.

Nwachukwu (2005) is of the view that the application of IT to library operations in developing countries should be approached with caution. There should be caution because IT application in developing countries are associated with the following problems:

(i) Lack of adequate infrastructure such as telecommunications and power supply;

(ii) Exploitative local computer market and unsatisfactory after sales, and maintenance support;

(iii) Inadequate technical staff for maintenance;

(iv) Poor IT skills on the part of library personnel and users;

(v) The conservative disposition of library staff in their resistance to the use of ITs in library operations;

(vi) The observed user resistance and failure to adapt to the new use of digitized information;

(vii) The database conversasion problems;

(viii) Frequent changes in technology;

(ix) Problem of funding.

Solution to the problems associated with library automation

Providing the way forward, Achebe (2005), in her findings, suggests the following:

(i) Favourable ICT policy by the government;

(ii) Proper funding of ICT facilities and programmes by state government;
(iii) Improved electricity supply;
(iv) Dedicated telephone line;
(v) Building of ICT databases in Nigerian public libraries from where users may take decisions on their information needs.

Nwachukwu (2007) enumerates some factors that would contribute to effective application of ICTs to library operations. These are:

(i) Inclusion of the library and their programmes within the school ICT policy;
(ii) ICT facilities in the library reflect curricular use;
(iii) The creation of adequate opportunities for students and researchers to use ICT applications;
(iv) Inclusion of ICTs within learning-skills programmes;
(v) A complete catalogue of software relevant to teaching, learning and research provided in the library to encourage their use;
(vi) Adequate funding for ICT application;
(vii) Regular evaluation of ICT applications to library users as it relates to education and research goals.

Research Method

The study which adopted ex-post-facto research method specifies the following procedures used in carrying out the study

Research design
Ex-post-facto method was used as, according to Akuezuilo and Agu (2007), it seeks to find out the factors that are associated with certain occurrence, outcomes, conditions, or types of behaviour by analysis of past events or of already existing conditions.

The area of study
The area of study is South Eastern Nigeria

Population of Study
The population of study comprises the libraries, whether public, government departmental, or academic libraries in the South-East zone of Nigeria. This area comprises Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States.
Sampling techniques

Purposive sampling technique was adopted, resulting in the selection of library boards, academic libraries, and state Ministries of Education/Information libraries in the area of study.

Presentation of data

This section presents the data as obtained in the tables below:

Key:

A = available
NA = not available

Table 1: Available or otherwise of automation in the public and state ministries of information/education libraries of the South East zone

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Abia State Library Board</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anambra State Library Board</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ebonyi State Library Board</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enugu State Library Board</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Imo State Library Board</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>National Library of Nigeria, Enugu State branch</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Enugu State Ministry of Information Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Abia State Ministry of Education Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Anambra State Ministry of Information Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ebonyi State Ministry of Information Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Imo State Ministry of Information Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the figure, it is noted that all the public and government departmental libraries in the South East zone of Nigeria are not automated. This corroborates Odusanwo (2001) and Okiy's (2007) views that the resources and services of libraries in
government departments leave much to be desired even in the 21st century as none of the public and government departmental libraries is automated.

Table 2: Availability or otherwise of automation in the academic libraries of the South East zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Library Name</th>
<th>Automation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, UNN</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Prof. Festus Nwako Library, NAU</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>Enugu State University of Science and Technology Library (ESUT)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>Anambra State University Library, Uli</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Caritas University Library, Amorji-Nike, Enugu</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>Imo State University Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>Ebonyi State Ministry University Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>Abia State University Library</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>Institute of Management and Technology (IMT, Enugu Library)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>Alvan Ikoku Federal University Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>Enugu State College of Agriculture, Iwollo Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>Osisatech Polytechnic Library, Enugu</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>Institute of Ecumenical Education, Enugu Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>College of Education, Ikwo Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>Federal Polytechnic, Nekede Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>Federal Polytechnic, Oko Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>Federal Polytechnic, Afikpo Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>College of Education, Nsugbe Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24)</td>
<td>School of Social Work, Emene Library</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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It is noted from the table that only two libraries are automated out of the twenty four libraries. Abia State University library is the only state owned university library that is automated, while Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, UNN is the only federal university library that is automated. Although Ajayi (2009) and Uchendu (2005) maintain that many of the academic libraries are being digitized, we know that digitization is different from automation.

Discussion of findings
A careful analysis of the data presented above indicates that all the eleven public and government departmental libraries in table 1 are not automated. This finding is in tandem with the views of Odusanwo (2001) and Okiy (2007). Also of the 24 academic libraries in table 2, only one federal and one state libraries are automated. The only automated state academic library is that of Abia State University, while that of federal is the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, UNN. In the case of Abia State University, there is no OPAC but the reference section which houses serial materials, projects, and special collections are fully automated. Abia State University uses KOHA but problems associated with automation in the library include, lack of fund for upgrading, lack of training of staff, lack of adequate professional staff and technical support, and epileptic power supply. An authoritative source informed us that no area is completely automated at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library. The much that was done regarding OPAC, according to the source, was attacked by virus. It is intended that as soon as full automation is achieved, it would be hoisted to the net. In summary, not much has been done about automation in South Eastern Nigerian libraries. This finding is a big challenge to both the federal and state governments that they must double their efforts in seeing to it that academic libraries in their domains are automated. The gains are, however, enormous.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:
1. All the three tiers of government in the country should provide adequate funds for ICT facilities for the efficient storage, retrieval and dissemination of government information in government departmental libraries.
2. State government should provide ICT facilities in public and academic libraries.
3. As Nwachukwu (2007) rightly pointed out, adequate opportunities for students and researchers to use ICT applications should be created.
4. There should be adequate supply of electricity as epileptic supply of electricity does not favour the proper functioning of ICT.

Conclusion
The paper has convincingly established the need for automation in libraries. Nobody is in doubt that the computers are well suited for information management. The advantages are very numerous. Apart from necessary precautions/considerations that need to be taken before introducing automation in the libraries of developing countries such as the cost of setting up the system, cost of maintenance, etc, automation has no visible disadvantages.

In view of the enormous advantages associated with library automation, all categories of libraries are advised to embrace it. Before the fruits of automation are reaped, libraries should do a careful analysis of what it takes to introduce ICT in library operations. This analysis is by no means easy. After all, Mason (2000) says that unless you enter the beehive, you can't take the honey.

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