RELEVANCE OF COLLECTION INVENTORY IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI LIBRARY

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Highlights the experience of a recent stock inventory exercise of the Ramat Library, University of Maiduguri. The exercise has demonstrated that there is a significant relevance between collection inventory and library management.

INTRODUCTION

In the advanced countries, attention is probably focussed more on the rate of growth and the rate of obsolescence of their library holdings. Both of these areas form part of stock evaluation strategy with a view to weeding less required items. In the developing countries, attention is probably focussed more on the rate of growth and stock inventory. Stock inventory or stocktaking does not form a major part of the worry of librarians in the advanced countries. Certainly, this creates a great deal of concern for librarians in the developing countries.

Two major factors account for the worries of librarians in the region. The first is that the region is undernourished by publishing industries. For example, it is generally accepted that over ninety per cent of world literature are published outside Africa. The rest is published in Africa. If the ten per cent is to be sub-divided among the various countries, some countries will publish .01 per cent. Such and other countries in this region would therefore have to acquire their bulk of literature from overseas. At a time when access to educational materials has become imposed by foreign exchange difficulties, only meagre amount of literature would be acquired both by librarians and book dealers.

Perhaps under the present hard economic condition, students and scholars might have been expected to purchase their own textbooks; but the textbooks are to be imported and are therefore not available because the booksellers face the same hardship as the librarians.

The total effect of all these is that the few textbooks that are in the library become vulnerable to pilferage and mutilation. This is not to say that there is no pilferage and mutilation of library materials in the advanced countries and that is why librarians in the advanced countries are not concerned about stock inventory. They are certainly concerned. The fact is that they are concerned less because they acquire replacements for lost items with relative ease and their inter-library loan services are well-established and reliable.

The proliferation of educational institutions at all levels in the developing countries has compounded the problem. The increase in the physical number of schools up to tertiary level and the increase in number of pupils have not been matched with locally produced or imported reading facilities in Nigeria in particular. It is therefore a perennial problem for librarians to assess their stock in terms of growth and stock inventory to determine the actual holding of the library. It is no longer enough to use the last accession number to answer a question on, ‘What is the total book-stock of your library?’

It is not clear how often libraries should undertake complete stock inventory. There have been suggestions that such library inventory should be done quinquennially. Some suggest once in a decade. And yet others say it
should be done when opportunity permits. All the suggestions have their merits. It is doubtful if stock inventory should not be more regular in the light of the high rate of disappearance of books from the library and the difficulty now being faced to replace them. If this is done, libraries may be able to determine ways of preventing book disappearance and mutilation. There is no consensus among libraries on this issue. For example, the main library of the Houston Public Library had taken its last complete inventory in 1924 and partial inventories in 1934 and 1943.[1] This Library thus believed in inventory once in a decade. The first was full and the following two had ten years gap or quite close to ten years. But the Library could not continue this ten yearly inventory, probably because it is expensive, disruptive and time-consuming operation. It was in 1968 that they settled for another complete inventory.

Randall, commenting on the exercise of the IRM'S Thomas J. Watson Research Centre Library which had conducted three inventories of its collection over a period of ten years says, "a library inventory is a demanding exercise which imposes a considerable burden on the staff and something of an imposition on the users. The decision to undertake an inventory should be based on the assumption that the cost and impact on staff morale, are less than the benefits to be obtained."[2]

Montclair Public Library had their first collection inventory in about 40 years in 1977 and the results were surprising.[3]

Washington University's Central Library (the John M. Olin Library) did not undertake inventory until 1970 when it desired to consider alternative security arrangements.[4] At that time, the Library stock had grown to over 850,000 volumes. The Library had to settle for sample inventory.

The Library of the John's Hopkins University in 1969, started a systematic inventory of its holdings of approximately 1,300,000 volumes. The inventory was estimated to last for ten years.[5]

In Nigeria, libraries have not been systematic about the frequency of their inventory. In Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, there was full inventory in 1970/71. In 1974/75, there was a pilot inventory and the library stock had then risen to 105,536 volumes. When the Library moved to its new building in 1975/76, it decided to review the areas of high demand; African history and literature. The writer was a witness of the last two and in fact, he coordinated the second inventory in 1974/75.

The Universities of Maiduguri and Jos undertook their first and full inventory in 1985, i.e., ten years after their existence, when their stocks were under 100,000 volumes.

It is, therefore, clear that there is no agreement among librarians as to how frequently inventory should take place. Each library takes stock as circumstances dictate. But it is obvious from the sample inventories mentioned above that the larger the stock, the more difficult it is to embark on full inventory.[6]

However, stock inventory can be very rewarding when there is a change of leadership in the library. At such time, a complete inventory will assist in identifying the strong and the weak areas in terms of staff, stock, organization, record and above all, it will help to determine the actual holding of the library by identifying losses. In that case, like in any other, stock inventory will assist in the management of both stock and the library in general. However, adequate planning is required to make the stock inventory a success. The objectives of the stock inventory must also be well defined from the beginning. The entire exercise must not be rushed if the desired aim is to be achieved.

RATIONALE FOR THE STOCK INVENTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI LIBRARY

The University of Maiduguri was established in 1975. It inherited the infrastructure of the North-East College of Arts and Science (NECAS). Therefore, the Library of NECAS had to pass on to the new University; its library resources comprised of 19,000 volumes of books, 580 periodical titles, two senior and eight junior library staff.

The NECAS Librarian was appointed the first University Librarian in 1976. He, however, left in 1977 and a Senior Librarian acted as
University Librarian until November 1978, when another substantive University Librarian was appointed. This Librarian served for four years, November 1978 to September 1982. Then there was a Deputy University Librarian who acted from October 1982 to December 1984, before the present University Librarian was employed in January 1985. A library with this type of chequered history definitely would have problems which a substantive University Librarian would like to investigate on assumption of duty. One of the ways of doing this is by stock inventory.

The NECAS was a pre-degree institution. Therefore, its library collection, as a matter of deliberate policy, was highly duplicated. In some cases, there were as many copies of a title as there were students for the courses taught. This collection had to be upgraded in quantity and quality when the institution was taken over by the University. Later, a policy was evolved in 1978 that a maximum of four copies of recommended texts would be acquired. This policy would be discussed later.

The number of staff improved gradually from two senior and eight junior staff, but the growth was too slow for a very meaningful execution of programmes. By 1978, for example, there were twenty-four members of staff. Six were professional staff out of whom two left at the end of the year. There were three typists from 1976 to 1981.

The shortage of personnel, particularly, professional staff and typists resulted in the inability of the Library to prepare and maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date card catalogue. Books were send to the Library without corresponding cards in the catalogue and in the shelf-list because it was felt that the catalogue slips already written for the books would be typed when staffing situation improved. It was at this stage that Blackwell's Company was approached to sell already prepared set of catalogue cards with books to the Library.

The University of Maiduguri is far removed from good libraries and bookshops. Between 1975 and 1980, the nearest good academic libraries and bookshops were in Zaria, which is 750 kilometres from Maiduguri. Till today, there is heavy dependence on the resources of Ahmadu Bello University Library, Zaria, for inter-library loan by the University of Maiduguri. The University of Ibadan Bookshop sent books to its Maiduguri branch situated at a distance of about 1,509 kilometres. That the Bookshop was run at a loss before it was taken over by the University of Maiduguri in 1981, can be well related to the fact that not enough books were sent to the Bookshop which was the only notable bookshop in Maiduguri. And students could not buy their texts even if they had enough money.

All these were responsible for the University library to consider the policy of purchasing four copies of all recommended texts. This policy was however responsible for the purchase of duplicate and in some cases multiple copies of books. Sometimes, multiple copies of already acquired materials were donated to the Library. Apparently, in later years such multiple copies appeared as if they were deliberate acquisitions, whereas, they were not. The policy was good enough at the time it was made. But it lost its value with time. And the Library resorted to the purchase of single copies in 1983. As from 1982, book business became very difficult.

Few books that arrived in Nigeria could hardly find their ways to Maiduguri. The Department of English, in an attempt to solve its book problems has continued to acquire, when possible, multiple copies of text (sometimes up to 50 copies) which were later deposited in the Short-Term Loan Unit of the Library for students' use. This is another reason for multiple copies in the Library. The multiple copies in serials are not because of any policy, but because of improper records.

There are many complaints about missing issues of periodicals and mutilated titles of books. In a raid of students' hostels undertaken on 18th July, 1985, over a thousand volumes of illegally removed, mutilated and long overdue library materials were recovered including books from other libraries around the country.

Thus the stage for stockinventory had been set to enable the new leadership to know exactly where he was to begin.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STOCKINVENTORY

The objectives of the stockinventory exercise were as follows:
a) To reduce the frustration of the library user who is falsely led to believe either that a book is not available in the library because such a book is not represented in the public catalogue, or that a book is available in the library when the book has actually been withdrawn.

b) To identify any discrepancies in cataloguing and classification and other technical errors with a view to correcting them.

c) To determine the extent of damage and loss of library materials.

d) To weed out outdated or worn-out materials while identifying those materials for repair and rebinding.

PROCEDURE

A Stock Inventory Committee was formed with Mrs A. Akinnigbagbe, the Law Librarian, as Chairperson. The major part of this paper is based on her report [7]. She worked very hard with her team to evolve specific procedure for books and journals, as outlined below. The procedure for journals became unworkable because it was realised later that it would be better to develop work-sheets basing the journals available on the shelves rather than relying on the records. Duplicates and multiple copies which were discovered were immediately removed.

The management of the manpower was also the responsibility of the Stock Inventory Committee. The shelves were divided among the staff with a fairly experienced staff as a Leader who ensured that his/her group knew exactly what was expected of them. Each shelf bore some class marks which acted as a guide for the group in undertaking the exercise in the Readers' Services, Reference Service, Special Collection and Serials. They were also to count physically, how many books were on their respective shelves.

Although all books were recalled, issue trays were also checked. Books in other parts of the Library, i.e., the Workroom and Bindery, and those known to have been donated to the College Library in Yola, were also counted. There were several transactions of donation to the Primary School. Duplicates and some multiple copies, put away in the store, were discovered after the stock inventory. However, the following procedures were followed in the stock inventory exercise:

a) Procedure for books -
i) "One staff member pulls out a book from the shelf, reads the title, the call number and accession number for the book. Another staff member holding the shelf list tray locates the correct shelf list card. The staff member holding the book, marks the book pocket or shelf list accession number (in case of reference books) with year of stock inventory (1985) in red. The staff with the shelf list tray also writes the year of stock inventory (1985) in red beside the accession number located.

ii) When a shelf list card is not to be found for a title, the third staff member in the Group prepares a temporary shelf list card. This card will be used later by the Cataloguing Division to update the shelf list and the public catalogue.

iii) When a title or volume is not located on the shelf, the shelf list card is withdrawn from the shelf list tray. If it is a volume, a question mark (?) is given beside the accession number of the missing volume.

iv) When a title or volume is established to be withdrawn or weeded from the Library collection, the staff member with the tray writes (W), i.e., 'Withdrawn', beside the accession number of the withdrawn volume or against the title, if all the volumes are withdrawn.

v) The withdrawn shelf list cards for African materials must be kept separately from the other withdrawn shelf list cards so that they can be checked further in the Special Collections Unit.

vi) A book that does not belong to the Library must be removed from the shelf.

vii) When the physical matching of books and shelf list is finished, the staff member
will arrange the withdrawn shelf list cards, in alphabetical sequence and pull out the matching catalogue cards from the catalogue cabinet if the title is missing. If a volume is missing the shelf list card and the matching catalogue cards will be collected and sent to the Cataloguing Division later to enable them make the necessary changes on the catalogue cards and arrange to file the cards at their own convenience.

vi) When a journal title could not be located on the shelf, the representative shelf list card is withdrawn from the tray.

vii) When a shelf list card cannot be found for a title, the third staff member in the Group should prepare a temporary shelf list card. Information about year, volume and issues available on the shelf must be used by the Periodicals Unit to update their Kardex records.

viii) When a book is found on the periodical shelf, the inventory is taken and sent later to the Group Leader that inventoried books of the same call number.

ix) All unclassified journals must be inventoried to alphabetical order of the title. They will be classified later by the Periodicals Units.

x) Wrongly shelved journals must be pulled out of the shelf to be taken to the correct shelf.

xi) The Head of each Group will write a report indicating -

1) The number of shelf list cards written.
2) The number of missing titles.
3) The number of missing volumes.
4) The number of withdrawn titles.
5) The number of withdrawn volumes.
6) The number of books that are not owned by the Library.
7) The number of catalogue cards withdrawn from the public catalogue.
8) Problems encountered.
9) Suggestions, if any”[8].

b) Procedure developed for periodicals -

Although this procedure was not eventually used, it is being included in this paper for the information of readers.

i) “One staff member reads out the call number and title on the representative shelf list card.

ii) Another staff member writes the holdings on the Kardex cards indicating title, call mark, year, volume, issues.

iii) If all the volumes of a journal title are found in the correct location, the third staff member writes on the Kardex card ‘85 O.K.

iv) When a volume or issue is missing, the space for the volume or issue is left blank on the Kardex card to indicate a gap.

v) All the available volumes must be checked to see if any is mutilated. The mutilated volume or issue must be withdrawn from the shelf.

vi) When a journal title could not be located on the shelf, the representative shelf list card is withdrawn from the tray.

vii) When a shelf list card cannot be found for a title, the third staff member in the Group should prepare a temporary shelf list card. Information about year, volume and issues available on the shelf must be used by the Periodicals Unit to update their Kardex records.

viii) When a book is found on the periodical shelf, the inventory is taken and sent later to the Group Leader that inventoried books of the same call number.

ix) All unclassified journals must be inventoried to alphabetical order of the title. They will be classified later by the Periodicals Units.

x) Wrongly shelved journals must be pulled out of the shelf to be taken to the correct shelf.

xi) The Head of each Group will write a report indicating -

1) The number of shelf list cards written.
2) The number of shelf list cards withdrawn because the Library does not subscribe to the title.
3) The number of missing titles, volumes/issues.
4) Problems encountered, and suggestions, if any”[9].

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

a) Statistical Report for Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of books on the shelves</td>
<td>55,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of books in the Workroom</td>
<td>1,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of books withdrawn for repair</td>
<td>3,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of duplicates sent to Yola before the exercise</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of missing titles</td>
<td>5,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of missing volumes</td>
<td>8,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovandue books on loan in the Library</td>
<td>1,111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) **Statistical Report for Periodicals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of titles</td>
<td>3,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of unreceived</td>
<td>992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volumes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number unreceived issues</td>
<td>8,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of duplicates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound volumes</td>
<td>1,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbound issues</td>
<td>9,254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

Out of 55,467 volumes of books on the shelves, 11,000 books were not reflected in the catalogue. Another finding was that books on geography, anthropology and economics, philology, European literature, language and literature of Asia, mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology, that is G-GB, P-PN and QA-QH respectively, recorded the highest loss of 2,582 volumes altogether.

If the number of 8,071 missing volumes, are added to the number of books on the shelves (55,467 volumes), and the number of books in other areas of the library i.e. 3,371 volumes in the bindery; 1,534 volumes in the Workroom and 732 volumes sent to Yola Campus, then the total collection adds up to 69,175 volumes. The number of books on loan is 1,111. If all these are returned to the Library, the assumed total holding will be 70,286.

This number falls considerably short of the estimated library holding of about 87,000 volumes as shown by the last accession number at the time of the stock inventory. It then means that faulty records have made it impossible for 16,714 shelf list to be written and missing figure, if any, to be detected in the course of the exercise.

**SHORTCOMINGS OF THE EXERCISE**

a) It was thought that the shelf list was comprehensive enough for the stock inventory. But it was later discovered that 12,105 temporary shelf list cards had to be written in the course of the stock inventory exercise.

b) There were about 2,000 volumes of backsets of journals which had been catalogued and these were erroneously recorded among the lost books because the practice of cataloguing backsets of journals had ceased some time past and no staff seemed to recall this.

c) The turn-over of staff had not made it possible to keep track of books that might have been donated to other libraries which might have been processed before the donations were made.

d) The target set for the work was very short and made the stock inventory fairly a hurried work. There were about 1,146 bound volumes and 9,254 issues alleged to be duplicates. After the stock inventory, when the Serials Division was cross-checked, it was discovered that 69 volumes and 44 issues were not at all duplicates. This discovery was made after the Library had presented the report of the exercise to the University community.

**CONCLUSION**

The stock inventory was successful in spite of its shortcomings. It helped the Library to detect the technical errors, and the total number of books physically present on the shelves. It assisted the Cataloguing Division to know the state of the shelf list and the catalogue cards. For the serials, it was useful in straightening the records in the Stripdex and cards. It also helped in seeing to it that all backsets are accessioned and that the backsets are labelled with the appropriate classmarks.

In fact, the exercise is a type of self-auditing in terms of performance. Ever since the stock inventory was done, the sense of direction was again re-awakened in all the staff of the Library.

**REFERENCES**


8. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

9. Ibid., pp. 12, 18.