LIBRARY STOCKTAKING: THE CASE OF BOWEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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Introduction

Stocktaking exercise in any library is usually a project most libraries will rather not carryout. This is simply because of the tedious and monotonous nature of the exercise. Although stocktaking is a tedious task but it is a necessary procedure a library must carry out because it helps the library to have up to date record of what is available in the library. It also enables a library to determine the state of the collection i.e. whether the collection is in good shape or not, that all titles are listed in the catalogue. Stocktaking also helps the library to identify missing items which can help to determine the need for tighter security or not.

Bowen University Iwo, of the Nigerian Baptist convention was established on 17th of July 2001 but commenced her academic activities on the 4th November 2002. Bowen University started with three faculties namely; Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Science and Science Education and Faculty of Social and Management Sciences. Faculty of Health Sciences was added in 2008. In other words, the University now has four faculties. The student population is about 4,400 while the staff population is about 600. The university Library was established in 2002 at the same time the academic activities commenced. The library collection is constantly being improved upon to support the information needs of the various users in the University and to support teaching and research. As of the time the stocktaking was conducted, the library has 16,000 volumes of books, made up of 10,817 titles 95% of which were published between the years 2000 till date and 233 journal titles both local and international of which 95 are current. There are electronic databases which are accessible through the library portal.

The library personnel includes seven librarians, one systems analyst, three library officers, seven library assistants and seven supporting staff

which gives a total of twenty (25) staff in the library.

The library operations and services were automated using Koha Library Management Systems in September 2007 and the use of the automation started in October 2007. The retro conversion of the card catalogue to OPAC was completed in 2008. The automation has enabled the library to improve in her operations and services to the patrons. At the beginning of 2009, patrons started complaining that they could not find books on the shelves as indicated in the OPAC. In it, a book status is shown as either 'available or on loan'. It was discovered that some books whose status indicate available cannot be found on the shelf. The circulation staff also observed that whenever patrons come with a book to borrow and they use barcode scanner to scan the book barcode, the system would respond that the book was on loan and indicate the name and matriculation number of the patron whom the book was loaned to. All these caused confusion and lots of questions came to mind; why are books indicated available in OP AC are not on the shelves? Why the system did indicate that a book at hand was already on loan? The library tried to put the shelves in order thinking that some of the books could have been wrongly shelved but that did not solve the problem. In order to find solutions to all these problems the management team of Bowen university library decided to embark on taking stock of her collection.

Objectives

The objectives of the stocktaking project were initiated out of the need to:

♦ Ensure that the library Online Public Access Catalogue is an accurate record of the holding of the library by identifying books with wrong call marks and barcodes, books on the shelves but not listed in the catalogue, books in the catalogue and not on the shelve.

♦ Determine the items missing from collection and arrange for replacement

♦ Identify mutilated and damaged items so as to repair or replace as the case may be.

Literature Review

Stocktaking is a very important exercise libraries should embark on if they want to ensure the integrity of their records and enable users to locate books without any difficulties. Corroborating this, Nwali (1992) stated that library stocktaking is vital in order to ensure that all the books listed in the

catalogue can be accounted for in the interest of library users. To keep an active collection in order, it is essential to do annual or regular inventories (Nixon, 2009). Edoka and Okafor (2002) opined that stocktaking is a necessity for academic libraries to assess their stock before automation. They further stated that stocktaking goes beyond checking the list of books, overdue list and other circulation statistics but involves observing the books physically on the shelve in order to know the condition of the title.

Many libraries have attributed their reasons for stocktaking to miss-shelving books, loss of materials, etc, among them are Nixon (2009) who conducted a study on inventory in order to find solution to mishelving problems as complained by users. According to the author, the humanities, social sciences and education library had not been inventoried in nearly 25 years because inventory is time consuming and expensive to do. Emery (1990) also reported that University of Waterloo inventoried their collection of 574,823 volumes using portable scanners and LPPORT, an inventory management programme to generate reports. It was found out that 2.76% of the collection were lost, 44% of the missing items were found to be miss-shelved. Freese (1989) in Nixion (2009) also reported that Hofstra University's Axinn Library used smart bar coding project as an inventory method. The library found out that the loss rate was more than 7% of their collections and as a result of the loss they began a periodic inventory. Cook, (1981) studied serials inventory project of over 400,000 volumes at Texas A &M University Library. According to him, the project was successfully completed and it shows that an inventory of a large serial collection remain/ a sound method in managing serials collection. Adelphi University library also completed physical inventory of its collection of about 465,629 volumes.

Some libraries believed that stocktaking is expensive in terms of personnel and also time consuming, but there are various methods libraries can adopt when they want to embark on stocktaking. The method to adopt depends on the volumes of their collection. Some libraries with large collection use sampling methods because they feel that complete inventory is very expensive. Among such libraries is California State University Library in 1982 with 19 campus collections as reported by Creaghe (1982) that the library conducted inventory every three years by taking sample of an identified number of items in each Library of Congress letter classification and if loss rate was more than 1% for two years in a row, it indicates that there is need to conduct full inventory of their collections. Chrzastowski et al,

(1989) also conducted a study on library collection deterioration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign stated that a random sampling of the collection serves as an indicator for the rest of the collection. He further stated that if all the items were accounted for in a random sampling then it can be assumed that the rest of the collections' record is just as reliable. This may seem best for libraries with large collection but it will be difficult to accurately identify loss rate. This may not be true in some cases.

From the review above, the first issue raised was that there is a need to take stock of library collections to ensure that all the books listed on the library catalogue can be accounted for. Another issue raised was that stock taking helps libraries to identify missing items, lost items and miss-shelved books. The review also indicates that stock taking is an important aspect in managing library collection in the interest of users.

Preparation for the Stocktaking

To achieve the objectives stated above, a three man committee was constituted by the library management to determine the modalities for carrying out the project. The committee held some meetings and came up with the mode of operation for the project as follows:

- Stocktaking would be carried out during the long vacation i.e. June 2009;
- Ensure all borrowed books are returned to the library before patrons go on holiday and stop issuing out books during this period;
- Meet with all library staff to intimate them on the importance of the project;
- Generate lists of all library items from the database using the barcode, call number, and the title. These were seen as suitable for the project.

The list generated from the database by the Systems Analyst was printed out and shared among the staff for the project. To ensure that all borrowed books were returned to the library before the commencement of the stocktaking, notices were sent to all faculties and announcement was also made at University Chapel to recall all library materials at user's possession within two weeks. In addition to this, charging of books stopped immediately the notices were sent out and patrons were made to understand the importance of the stocktaking. The project required all members of staff in the categories of librarians, library officers, library assistants and data entry clerks. This implies that all Library staff members except the university librarian, the deputy and supporting staff were

involved. Therefore all library staff that was to go on leave had to defer it till the project was completed. The project took the library a whole month i.e. the whole of June 2009. This was only possible because the books were not yet so much and all members of staff were committed to the project. In addition, the first one week was used for shelving and shelve-reading and two weeks for the inventory, while the last week was used to make corrections in the database and on the book(s) itself.

Methodology

Having considered various methods of stocktaking used by other libraries, the library decided that a full stocktaking method is appropriate. The reason being that the collection is small and this is the first time the library would embark on stocktaking. The stocktaking includes all books on the shelves and reference collections. However, the stocktaking did not include audiovisual items and serials collections. This is because patrons were not allowed to borrow such material but are used within the library. In order to have a proper inventory exercise, the first one week was used for shelving and shelf-reading. This is to facilitate the physical checking of items on the shelves because the list generated from the database will, to some reasonable extent, follow the sequence the books on the shelves were arranged. The shelving and shelf-reading involved all librarians, library officers as well as library assistants.

The library staff was also grouped into five with a librarian as the head of each group. Each group includes a library officer and a library assistant. Each of the groups was assigned portions of a shelf. It involved the library assistant reading out the call number of the physical book on the shelf and the librarian cross checked the information on the list (i.e. title, call mark and barcode) to determine if it is the exact book. If it is the exact book, it is ticked on the list and the book returned to the shelves. If it is not found, N/F (i.e. Not Found) is written beside the title on the list. Alongside this, books identified with varying problems were withdrawn from the shelves and worked on after the project was completed. In addition, each book withdrawn had its problem specifically written on a 3 x 5 card and inserted into it.

Findings

After the stocktaking was completed there are two major findings; missing books and books with various problems. Table 1: Missing books by subject area.

Subject Area	Volumes
Social Sciences	395
Science and Technology	122
Agricultural Science	25
Medicine	4
Fiction books	72
Total	618

Table 1 shows the volume of missing books by subject area. It is worthy to mention here that 750 volumes were discovered missing initially, but after thorough checking of the list of books sent to the bindery, list of overdue books (because some borrowers failed to comply to earlier notices sent requesting them to return all library books in their possession for the stocktaking purpose) and list of all reported lost books by borrowers which had not been declared lost on the database, it was then discovered that 618 volumes of books were missing and no amount of search would find them. From the table it was discovered that the highest volumes of missing books was found in Social Sciences with 395 volumes, this is followed by Science and Technology with a total of 122 volumes. A total of 72 volumes of fiction books were missing while Agricultural sciences and Medicine missing volumes are 25 and 4 respectively.

Table 2: Books with various problems

Problem	Number of books
Items with barcode problem	600
Wrong call number	850
Wrong labeling	552
Incomplete records in the database	102
Mutilated and damaged books	98
Total	2,204

From the table above a total of 2,204 volumes of books were withdrawn from the shelves due to one problem or the other. The highest number of books withdrawn from the shelves was due to wrong call number with 850 volumes of books. This is followed by books with various barcode problems which accounted for 600 volumes of books, while books which are wrongly labeled amounted to 552 volumes. 102 **books were** found to have

incomplete records in the database and 98 volumes of books were mutilated. During the exercise, some barcode problems were discovered which includes books with duplicated barcodes; books with no barcode in the database but with handwritten barcode on the book; books with barcodes in the database but not pasted on the book; some barcodes were even skipped.

Another problem discovered was that of call numbers. The findings revealed that some books had their call numbers wrongly typed in the database, wrongly labeled on the books, while some are peeled off. It was also discovered that books with same title and author have different call numbers. The result also identified books that were physically on the shelves but had no record in the database as well as those in the database but for one reason or the other were not found on the shelves. It also shows that some books are mutilated and some are damaged. Some of which need mending while some are to be sent to the bindery. As a result of this 2,204 books were withdrawn at the end of the exercise as books that had problems and needed to be attended to as shown in table 2 above.

Actions taken on the Problems Identified

After the books on the shelves and those on the list have been completed, the Cataloguers, other librarians and library officers sat back to handle each problem i.e. each staff had a system and made the necessary corrections which involved:

- Correcting wrong call numbers in the database and ensuring they are the same on the books on the shelves.
- Correcting books that were wrongly labeled by determining which book had the correct call number from the classification schedules. These were handled by cataloguers.
- Filling in the complete records of books that have incomplete records.
- Pasting appropriate barcodes on the books.
- Giving new barcodes to duplicated ones.

After all corrections were effected both in the database and on the physical books, they were passed to the labelers to re-label and a librarian was assigned to cross check the books before returning them to the shelves.

Table 3: Summary of books in the Library

	Volumes
Total collection	16,000
Missing books	618
Books with various problems	2,204

Table 3 above shows that 618 (3.86%) of the total collections were missing and 2,204 (13.77%) are books withdrawn for one problem or another. This also indicates that 82.37% of the collections had no problems while books with various problems had been taken care of.

Challenges

There are always challenges in stocktaking especially when one considers the task as tedious. Although challenges might differ from one library to another library, however, the following challenges were faced in Bowen library:

♦ It was time consuming. The time allotted was increased especially when the missing books were discovered. Instead of one month allotted for the procedure, two weeks were added before the inventory could be completed.

♦ The list generated from the Koha database did not align with what was on the shelf. This was because the computer arranged the books by chronological order and not by shelf order. Therefore, staff initially had a difficult time locating the books but it was eventually overcome.

♦ New librarians just employed had to be quickly trained so that staff strength on the project will increase. This slowed down the process a bit.

♦ Some shelves were not properly arranged i.e. some books were not in their proper places as a result, two weeks were used in putting the shelves in order for easy stocktaking.

♦ Internet services were disrupted in the library at that time, the catalogues were unable to check the Library of Congress Online Catalogue to confirm correct call number when it was discovered that some call numbers pasted on the books were different from what were on the database. As a result of this, original cataloguing was done for all with wrong call marks. This actually took some time.

♦ Despite notices sent to patrons prior to the stocktaking, not all borrowers complied with the notices sent to return all library books in their

possession. When the rate of missing books was many, the list of overdue items was later downloaded from the database. It was discovered that some books that were earlier ticked missing were among the overdue list.

Conclusion

The method used in this exercise i.e. matching physical books on the shelf with the list of title, call mark and barcode generated from the system enabled the library to discover that not all the items on the shelves were in the catalogue; as a result/effort was made to include these items on the catalogue. The list generated also allowed missing items to be identified which made the library management to increase proper security of the library collection. The exercise also revealed that many items are mutilated and damaged and need repairs. Indeed, stocktaking is a great task but the gains of the exercise really far outweigh the challenges. The frequency and method of stocktaking may differ from library to library, depending on the size of the collection and the number of staff but stocktaking is a necessity to ensure data integrity and security of library holdings. Although, one cannot rule out the fact that some library patrons would prefer to steal or mutilate library books than going through the process of borrowing; but the stocktaking would identify stolen and mutilated books. Therefore libraries are encouraged to stock take in the interest of their users.

Recommendations

In spite of the challenges enumerated above, it is a worthwhile exercise that gives opportunity to the library to correct catalogue and labeling of items, rearrange the shelves to minimize overcrowding in order to prevent damages of resource. From the findings of the stocktaking project the following recommendations were made:

(i) Stocktaking should be done every 3 years for integrity of the library database and for completeness of the collections;

(ii) As much as possible, the library staff handling the barcode for resources in the library needs to be consistent and extra careful to avoid duplications, wrongly pasted barcodes and wrongly entered barcodes;

(iii) All cataloguers and data entry clerks should be more thorough in the way records are entered. In addition, the Head cataloguer should be relieved of some general tasks in the library so as to face editing of

the records entered by the other cataloguers and data entry clerks;

(iv)   A cataloguer should be assigned to cross check the call mark pasted on the books by the labelers, and ensure that it is the same with what is inside the book as well as on the database. Circulation Librarian should also check that the details on the book correspond with the details on the system before the book goes to the shelves;

(v)   There should be adequate security so as to reduce mutilation and lost of library materials. Installation of electronic security system is hereby recommended for the library.

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