

THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper presents the state of Bibliographic Control (BC) in Nigeria. The article highlights and discusses the significant roles played by bibliographic control in the present information age. National bibliography is a source that attempt to list ,as comprehensively as possible, the publications of a particular country during a specific period. These could come out in any kind of intellectual output, regardless of its format. It is important to note that the national bibliography has evolved as each nation has evolved, that the motivation behind its compilation often greatly influences the content and accessibility of the resource. However, the problems encountered in the acquisition and classification of these publications, include the inaccessibility of published materials, lack of adequate bibliographic control, lack of adequate good writers, the multiplicity of native languages, inadequate funding, and the underdevelopment of the book industry. Advances in information technologies have vastly increase our capacity to know, achieve and collaborate, these technologies are creating not just new opportunities for National Library and bibliographic services in general but challenges as well. Suggestions, which might enhance the acquisition and processing of published materials in Nigeria, are offered.

Introduction

Bibliographic control is the organization of library materials to facilitate discovery, management, identification, and access. Bibliographical control refers to the general term covering a range of bibliographic activities, including standardization of bibliographic descriptions and the distributions of union catalogues (Keenan, 2000). It is the identification, description, analysis , and classification of books and other materials of communication so that they may be effectively organized, stored, retrieved and used when need (Infoplease, 2000). On a national level, bibliographic control provides a system, which makes the identification and location of information sources within the country's borders possible (Snyman and Retha, 2000).

National bibliographic control (NBC) activities in Nigeria have always been aimed at making public available sources of information by Nigerian authors such as books, journal articles, theses, archival documents, non-print media and other types of indigenous sources. Nigeria libraries of today need to recognize that they are but one of players in vast field, and that market conditions necessitate that libraries interact increasingly with the commercial sector. The expanding and evolving bibliographic environment is today very much Web-enabled and, as such, crosses international boundaries. Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control (2007) observed that:

The library is of course, only one link in the supply chain of bibliographic information between author and reader. It needs are unique, but not necessarily exclusive. All parties contribute value through the vehicle of the bib record: Creator, Publishers, Vendors/ Distributors and stores/ Libraries. To date, there is not a strong tradition of sharing data and metadata throughout the publication cycle. It may be useful, then to think about what information is available at each stage, and how to aggregate and build on that foundation. What value is added at each stage. How can the existing value be captured and leveraged in the next? (page 18).

The concept UBC means universal or worldwide bibliographic control, a goal associated with IFLA that endorses UBC as a long-term programme for development of a world-wide system for the control and exchange of bibliographic information (<http://www.ifla.org/vi/z/icnbs/fina.html>). IFLA is taking practical steps supported by UNESCO to make it a reality. It aims at the creation of an

international network made up of component national parts, covering a publishing and library activities. There is general consensus that bibliographic control at the national level provides a system that makes the identification and localizing of information sources irrespective of formats within the country's borders possible.

NBC represents two important concepts, namely: identification, recovery, collection and preservation of the physical items (books and other information materials), which originated in the country, and creation of bibliographic records which describe and identify the publication (IFLA International Office for UBC, 1979). There is a general consensus that bibliographic control of books and non-book materials is a difficult and complex matter. The development of the BC system will take time, and progress in some areas may be slow. Nigeria presents its own distinctive problems. The major problems, and those most difficult of solution, seem to arise from the historical and cultural evolution, geographical nature of the country, its linguistic complexity, the underdeveloped state of the library services and the slow pace of the publishing industry. Studies have also shown that other problems of BC in Nigeria are the organization of national bibliographic agency, legal deposit, irregularity, frequency and speed of production, and classification and cataloguing.

A current national bibliography is a mirror that reflects the culture, character and current interest of a country by listing its publishing output. Not only does it serve as an historical recorder, but when distributed to other countries, it serves as a "window" to that country (Barbara, 1987). Mona (1998) opined that "the primary sources for all types of bibliography are the national bibliographies that is, each country's records of the literature that is published or have been published within the borders of that country.

Although the National Library Decree No. 29 of 1990 empowers the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) to be the compiler and repository of the national bibliography of Nigeria, the inability of the NLN to monitor the bibliographic control is attributed to the political instability of Nigeria. There has been frequent military interventions in the politics of Nigeria between 1960 (independence) and 2010. Nigeria has produced about fourteen (14) regimes till date within its fifty (50) years of existence as a sovereign and independent nation. The various governments in question lack continuity as each government that emerges sets up its own agenda, while it makes every effort to discredit its predecessors' achievements.

In spite of the progress Nigeria has made in the social and educational spheres, progress in the library services has not been on a comparable scale. That is why Akinyotu (1988) observed that most governments are apathetic to the fact that libraries are essential components of the school system and that reading materials and non-print materials are essential and indispensable tools to all levels of education. Experience has shown that the past governments have given more attention to urgent problems such as defence, social and welfare packages. Many scholars are of the opinion that if Nigeria is to play a full part in world systems, such as UNISIST and UBC, she must build up the necessary infrastructure of library services. Prominent among the problems facing the library services in Nigeria is lack of adequate economic resources. In the light of this, we all agree that it is vital for all libraries to consider the future direction of our bibliographic policies and practices and re-examine our priorities for the future. These are issues the library and information science profession must address to ensure that libraries continue to play a major role in the information landscape for forthcoming generations of researchers. There is a general consensus that economic advancement depends on information in its widest sense, which is the function of libraries to provide. Song (2000) lends credence to this when he opined that we are living in a time where the level of utilization of information resources has become the yardstick for determining a country's economic advancement and strength. Access to information is supposed to be a fundamental right of all citizens in Nigeria.

What shape and form the future of bibliographic control will take is a question that the National library, libraries and information professionals in general will continue to investigate periodically. The reason behind this investigation has been the dynamic transformation of the field of librarianship brought about by digital technologies. The best way to enable Nigeria to catch up with western scientific knowledge and technology is to establish a sound basis for librarianship adapted to local content. Co-operation amongst the librarians and library associations in Nigeria is very important. Society today is experiencing a veritable explosion of different new information resources and formats. In spite of all these, the printed book remains the most important medium for the

preservation and transmission of thought and knowledge in Nigeria, the majority of books produced or imported are textbooks and other educational works.

Following the indigenization laws of the 1970s, ownership of former multinational publishers has largely been transferred to indigenous hands. As a result of this, publishing is concentrated in the private sector, owing to difficulties such as undercapitalization, flawed book policies, excessive competition, excessive and irregular taxes and duties and frequent contractions and lay-offs of skilled staff. Other problems which prevent the publishing of large and cheap editions for mass internal markets, are the multiplicity of native languages, absence of reading habits, low literacy level and lack of good writers. Scholars are of the opinion that the major problems facing the book industry in Nigeria include a shortage of libraries, a lack of reading consciousness, frequent changes in educational curriculum and textbooks, shortage of qualified personnel and editors and falling value of the naira and irregular power supply and political instability which prevent innovations.

Rationale for National Bibliography in Nigeria

The purpose of bibliographic control is to list information sources in a systematic manner to enable us become aware of what information is available, and where it can be located (Bahrens, 2000 cited in Hjørland, 2006). Hence all stakeholders in bibliographic control in Nigeria must ensure that incoming generations of information professionals are fully prepared for the increasing complexity of the information environment within which they will work and develop their careers. Also the researchers believe there is a strong international dimension to this. In a nutshell, the National Bibliography of Nigeria, like the British Books in Print, is very important for acquisition purposes. It helps the acquisition librarian to have necessary bibliographic information about what to acquire and therefore to enhance his selection. In spite of this, studies have shown that the underdevelopment of the book industry is a major obstacle to the production of an up-to-date national bibliography, and a national bibliography is a prerequisite to UBC.

The UBC programme aims at a world-wide network of national bibliographies to secure a basic standardized registration of and through that a possibility of retrieval of documents published all over the world. For national bibliographic control to be effective, there need to be:

- ❖ A legal deposit regulation
- ❖ A regulatory, controlling and advisory body
- ❖ Supporting committees and investigations
- ❖ A wide selection of bibliographic tools covering various facets of the national recorded heritage
- ❖ Compliance with national and international standards as well as technological developments (e.g. computerization, use of the internet)
- ❖ National support from institutions, consortia, professional associations, interest groups, and qualified and dedicated individuals
- ❖ Research programmes and initiatives
- ❖ Literature reporting on national bibliographic control (Flourie and Burger, 2007)

The National Library of Nigeria needs to be strengthened in the light of the above in order to implement BC. The development of BC and the improvement of Nigeria National Library are complementary. It is pertinent to note that the basic means of achieving a complete national bibliography in Nigeria is the 'legal deposit law'. Originally intended as a kind of supervision of all publishing, these laws are now seen as the best means of collecting information for a national bibliography. The national bibliographic control department of the NLN houses the Nigeria ISSN centre, the ISBN agency and the legal deposit division. The relevance of the National Bibliography depends upon the frequency, regularity and speed of production. These however depend upon skilled manpower, funds, processes used and the technical equipment available. National libraries receive legal deposits, which by law they are required to use in publishing an annual national bibliography. Lack of adequate funds and effective management has made this impossible to achieve (Nwoga, 2005). She went further to observe that publishers now rely on the African Book Publishing Record (ABPR) to record and maintain their data, but regional communication problems have contributed to materials arriving late or not at all.

Obstacles to National Bibliography

The national bibliography in Nigeria is faced with the problems of cataloguing and classification scheme used by the NLN, adopted from the "DT" class for Africa of the Library of Congress. It is important to observe that these classification schemes are inadequate to treat the cultures and religions in Nigeria. Ajidahun (2006) lends credence to this when he opined that the diversity of classification and retrieval pose problems for both librarians and the users of the library. However, in order to remedy this situation, the NLA should implement the UNESCO conference (Paris, 1977), which encourages library associations and national bibliographic agencies to create their own expansion of the classification systems to address their country's needs, history, literature and geography.

In Nigeria, ethnic diversities, new forms of materials and the increasing multilingual imprint, pose a series of separate problems for the cataloguer, which require professional skills and linguistic expertise to deal with them. The Anglo- American Classification Rules Second Edition (AACR₂) widely used in Nigeria, is not particularly helpful when dealing with personal names, and details of the works of non-western and non-Christian authors, and of corporate and governmental bodies. In supplement to AACR₂, rules for the treatment of names in other languages have recently been given by the IFLA international office for UBC.

The Future Trends in National Bibliography

Our society is now being reshaped by advances in information technologies – computers, telecommunications networks, and other digital systems- that have vastly increased our capacity to know, achieve and collaborate (Attali,1992,` Deming and Metcalfe, 1997, `Kurzweil, 1999,` Brown, 2000).These technologies enable us to disseminate and access information quickly and widely , linking distant places and diverse areas of endeavor in productive new ways, and to create communities that just a decade ago were unimaginable. The rapid evolution of digital technologies are creating not just new opportunities for National Library and bibliographic services in general but challenges as well. Powerful computers and networks can be used to deliver bibliographic services to anyone any place, any time breaking the barriers of distance . The extensive network is bringing peoples and cultures together and creating new social dynamics in the process of information handling and dissemination. This extraordinary pace of information technology evolution is not only expected to continue for the foreseeable future but could well accelerate (<http://www.napeedu/catalog/10545html>).

Researches have proved that the hypertext link is overshadowing the print bibliographic citation, making original source materials available to all via their own computers. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. The distinction between the book and the library may itself become blurred as the internet evolves into a seamless mesh for probing the world's "collection"(The National Academies , 2002).

A holistic approach to effective bibliographic control in Nigeria ultimately contributes to universal bibliographic control (UBC), and the success of both depends on the cooperation of individuals and institutions in the information community . Hence a variety of bibliographic control tools and supporting services have to be developed through technologies.

Conclusion

Nigeria since independence till date has had inadequate bibliographical control. There is also a lack of any comprehensive retrospective bibliography. Studies have shown that bibliographical services are not well developed in that there are no union catalogues, periodical indexes, serials, union lists, or inclusive national bibliographies. Besides, old documents are often destroyed before thought is given to keeping these materials in the proper manner by a responsible agency. As a result of this inadequacy of the present mechanism, bibliographic control in Nigeria will need the establishment of a comprehensive and ICT – enhanced systems of control. To effectively promote national bibliographic control, we need to understand the past and learn from research efforts. Within the scope of this paper, we have traced a few developments leaving no room for reflection on problems, shortcomings, etc. and how these can shape our knowledge base for future decisions. Given the availability of a variety of formats with which to distribute the national bibliography, the Nigeria

national bibliography services should embrace one or more appropriate formats to meet with future challenges.

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