

## Short Communication

### Use of Library Statistics to Support Library and Advisory Services at the National Library of Nigeria

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#### Abstract

*Statistical information is a vital tool for the management and development of organisations. Keeping statistics of activities is basic to the survival and progress of a library and enables the library to measure its performance periodically as the basis for the assessment of performance and the needs for improvement. The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) places high premium on the library statistics that it compiles yearly as the basis of its research and development in support of its statutory responsibilities and functions as the Nigeria's apex library, bibliographic control agency, and advisory roles on library matters in the country. This paper sheds light on the extent to which the compilation and use of statistics has contributed to the efforts of the NLN to promote library development for sustainable progress in Nigeria. It also highlights constraints being encountered by the apex library along with recommended solution strategies.*

#### Keywords

Library statistics, Library management, National libraries, Nigeria

#### Introduction

Statistical information plays an important role in any field of human endeavour. This is one reason why the United Nations and its several agencies such as the UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme collate and publish global statistics on various socio-economic activities in order to assist

nations to assess their progress relative to other nations or earlier periods and inform the design and implementation of policies to improve their socio-economic conditions. Similarly, it is imperative for every establishment, institution and sector to keep and use statistical records of its operations. In the words of Attah (2003), statistics is a very useful and indispensable tool for research and development for sustainable progress.

Statistical records are basic to the growth and development of each and every library. Library statistics are needed in order to be able to ascertain the level of the different resources and services that a library provides and how the resources and services are being used by different classes of patrons. Statistics is also needed for assessing the level of performances of different library operations, for example, how much time it takes for ordered materials to arrive, how many books are catalogued per period by each cataloguer, how much waiting time patrons have to endure at the circulation desk, etc. These and other statistics are needed in order to be able to assess the extent to which libraries are meeting institutional goals and national or global library standards.

Library development implies the evolution of the library as an institution or agency from a less developed state in terms of institutional resources, size, services and sophistication to a more advanced and highly organised state with continuously improving effectiveness and efficiency in serving the information needs of communities.

Statistics, as a subject of study or discipline, is concerned, according to Attah (2002), with the scientific methods of collecting, organising, summarising, presenting and analysing data, as well as drawing valid conclusion and making reasonable decisions on the basis of such analysis. Statistics, as output, represents data that has been summarised as specific quantitative facts in tables or charts. Library statistics show the strength and weaknesses

of a library in terms of resources, equipment, staffing, finance, use of collections, degree of patronage, services, etc, which, in turn facilitate effective management of libraries and enhancement of their services. Besides, library statistics are equally useful for segmenting users for current awareness services and selective dissemination information. Library data and statistics generated from the records and surveys of the information needs and service preferences of users enable the library to provide them with latest available and relevant information in the appropriate formats, such as lists of newly acquired books or journal issues, content pages of latest journals, abstracts of publications, or complete full text publications (Obilade, 2003).

This paper explores the processes, outputs and impact of the compilation, publication and use of library statistics for decision making and national library system development in the National Library of Nigeria (NLN). It shows how the NLN has been able to plan for and fulfill its statutory responsibilities with the aid of the library statistics that it collects and published annually.

### **National Library of Nigeria (NLN)**

The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) was established by National Library Act (No.6) of 1964 which provided for a governing Board, i.e. National Library Board. The Act was later superseded by Decree No 29 of 1970 which established NLN as a full fledged parastatal, the apex library, and the nation's bibliographic control agency under the Ministry of Education. Since then, the institution has undergone some internal reorganisation and restructuring to enhance its activities. The NLN now has branches in the states of the Nigerian federation, in addition to its corporate headquarters at Abuja, Federal Capital Territory. This is in accordance with the statute establishing it which mandated establishment of a branch in every state of the federation. The National Library of Nigeria consists of seven departments including Planning, Research and Statistics Department (RDD), which is mandated to collect, collate and compile library statistics yearly which are then published and made available for administrative decision making and library system research and development.

### **Compilation and Publication of Library Statistics at the NLN**

The National Library of Nigeria relies heavily on statistics for effective management of its own operations. The statistics compiled and published yearly forms the basis of policy and decision making, planning and implementation and advisory role on library matters. The statistics compilation function is carried out by its National Centre for Library Statistics, a sub-unit of Planning, Research and Statistics Department (RDD) and which itself two sub-units: Internal Unit (National Library of Nigeria Statistics Unit) and External Unit (Other Nigerian Libraries Statistics Unit). The internal unit is responsible for compiling the statistics of NLN itself including its branches, while the external unit collects and collates the statistics of other Nigerian libraries. Questionnaires are administered to the various units and libraries each year to collect data for the collation of the statistics. The statistics cover: library profile; library funding/budget; physical facilities; population served; size of collection; library personnel; library services; library facilities/access; personnel; number of registered users; publications; inter-library loans.

The yearly statistics has contributed immensely to the growth and development of the institution and other libraries in Nigeria in the following ways:

- Publications on the Library Profession in Nigeria;
- Efficient management of the NLN system;
- Enhanced Consultancy/Advisory Role on Library Development;
- Promotion of Intellectual and Research Activities;
- Financial Assistance, Advocacy and Recommendations,
- Guide to Nigerian Government; and
- Planning National Workshop and Seminar Themes and Topics.
- Publications on the Library Profession in Nigeria

The NLN publishes from its statistical data collection activities two major publications: *Annual Statistics of National Library of Nigeria*, and

*National Digest of Library Statistics.* The National Digest of Library Statistics is a biennial title that contains library statistics of all libraries in Nigeria except school libraries. It covers academic, special, public and national libraries. In addition, the annual questionnaire surveys of libraries in Nigeria enable it to publish the following directory information about libraries and registered practising librarians: *Mailing List of Libraries in Nigeria (Directory)* and *Nominal List of Practising Librarians in Nigeria*. These titles, although not statistics per se, nevertheless facilitate easy contact of libraries and librarians in Nigeria for the purpose of exchange of information and resource sharing.

### **Efficient Management of the NLN system**

Compilation of statistics on the activities of the NLN itself has paved way for effective organisation and management of the large institution over the years. The yearly statistics gives insight into the activities of the NLN in terms of resources, personnel, equipment, services, patronage, finance, etc. It forms the basis for planning and implementation of its programmes and services.

Each department keeps statistics of its activities and uses them to enhance its performance, and to identify its needs for sustainable progress of the department. For instance, the Public Services Department compiles and uses its statistics daily in respect of the following:

- Size of users through attendance, door and hourly counts to ascertain the level of patronage and satisfaction derived from the services rendered;
- Size of used collections in different subjects showing the subject area with the largest and least used collections;
- Use of catalogue;
- Statistics of reference questions answered and unanswered;
- Legal deposit materials received and submitted to Collection Development and Processing Department(CDDP) for processing. This enables the latter to keep tab on the intellectual output of the country published yearly in NBN; it also shows the level of compliance of

publishers to legal deposit law;

- ISSN/ISBN requests received from publishers and channel to National Bibliographic Control Department(NBCD) which is the issuing authority. This helps in knowing the number of requests satisfied as well as the response rate of publishers in obtaining the ISSN/ISBN for Nigerian publications. Above all, it sheds light on the state of publishing in Nigeria;
- Revenue generation and expenditure – This statistics of revenue generated and expenditure incurred daily and yearly enables the department to keep proper records of its revenue and expenditure for auditing to guard against misappropriation. Besides, the statistics helps in knowing whether the department is generating sufficient revenue to offset the administrative costs of its services and maintenance of its facilities; and
- Current awareness services /selective dissemination of information.

Such data shed light on the level of patronage and satisfaction with the services, adequacy and relevance of the collection, community support, needs, other essential services required, the state of the Nigerian publishing industry, the extent of compliance of Nigerian publishers with publishing standards in respect of ISSN/ISBN, CIP and the legal deposit law. Above all, the statistics enable the department to evaluate its services and measure its progress daily, monthly, quarterly and annually.

The statistics collected has been used for enhanced consultancy/advisory role on library development, promotion of intellectual and research activities, financial assistance, advocacy and recommendations, guide to nigerian government, planning national workshop and seminar themes and topics.

### **Enhanced Consultancy/Advisory Role on Library Development**

The library statistics has been used and contributed greatly to the provision of consultancy and advisory roles by the NLN to external organisations, particularly government agencies. Armed with the data and statistics on the different types and status

of all types of libraries across the country, the NLN is able to do the following: advising on the setting up of libraries in libraries-short locations and the training of their staff in skills-short aspects of library operation and management; evolvement of minimum standards for Nigerian school libraries; contributing to the growth of public libraries by way of advice to state governments and local authorities; assisting the Education Tax Fund (ETF) in the targeting of its financial aid to Nigerian libraries; financial assistance to a number of library schools and special libraries such as those for visually challenged users and National Information and Documentation Centre for Science and Technology (NADICEST); supporting the Nigerian Library Association; fostering national discussions on the state of Nigerian libraries through workshops and seminars (e.g. discourse on the distressing state of public libraries in a motion titled 'Revitalizing Libraries in Nigeria' presented at the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) meeting in February 2001, (Omolayole, 2003).

### **Promotion of Intellectual and Research Activities**

Nigerian library statistics has been a vital tool in intellectual and research activities, particularly in the field of librarianship, and has aided scholars, students, researchers in their intellectual activities. Since library statistics mirrors the state of Nigerian libraries, it serves as a platform for research activities in library and information science in Nigeria leading to presentation and discussion of papers at workshops and seminars where issues of professional importance are discussed. The statistic guides Planning, Research and Statistics Department in generating research proposals and seminar/workshop themes and topics since the statistics offer insight into the status of Libraries in Nigeria leading to issuance of communiqués to libraries and institutions. The statistics are also made available for those who want to engage in empirical studies in librarianship.

### **Financial Assistance, Advocacy and Recommendations**

Owing to library statistics collected and compiled by the National Library of Nigeria, libraries in Nigeria

have continued to enjoy financial assistance, book donations and supply of computer systems from multi-national corporations and international organisations such as UNESCO, Book Aid International and Education Tax Fund (ETF). This is so because the apex library in the cause of discharging its function particularly its advisory role on library matters often makes use of library statistics to make a case for financial and material assistance for libraries in Nigeria. According to Omolayole (2003), many Nigerian libraries have enjoyed assistance from Education Tax Fund (ETF) through the efforts of National Library of Nigeria.

### **Guide to Nigerian Government**

Library statistics gives government at all levels insight on library development in Nigeria, thus enabling them to plan adequately for library as an integral part of the Nigerian educational system, for an educational system without coherent library service is a hollow enterprise

### **Planning National Workshop and Seminar Themes and Topics**

Workshops/seminars on library development in Nigeria are held annually with communiqué issued at the end of workshops/seminars. Library statistics serves as a guide in planning for workshops/seminars and discussion of issues leading to issuance of communiqué to all kinds of libraries and institutions, as it gives insight into the state of libraries in the country. It facilitates empirical comparative studies of different groupings of libraries in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Some Challenges faced by the NLN include low response when questionnaires are sent out, inadequate funding and authenticity of the information collected. To further enhance the collection and collation of library statistics in Nigeria for sustainable progress by the National Library of Nigeria, the following measures are recommended to stakeholders in library development i.e. all tiers of government, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Nigerian Library Association (NLA), and libraries.

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