THE OPAC: KENNETH DIKE LIBRARY RECONVERSION PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the re-conversion of manual catalogues to machine-readable form at Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan. It examines the relevance of retrospective conversion of Library records in an attempt to improve library services to users.

The paper also examines the various attempts at reconverting the large records of the Library from 1975 till date as well as enumerating the activities of the re-conversion Team at the in-house re-conversion exercise. It also highlights the problems encountered in the course of the project. The efforts and experiences of the exercise will go a long way to facilitate successful retrospective conversion in other libraries in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Retrospective conversion is an important function of the library service in order to make On-line Public Access Cataloguing (OPAC) meaningful; there is the need to reconvert old records. It is in recognition of this fact that the Kenneth Dike Library Management decided to set-up Retrospective Conversion team to facilitate the conversion of manual catalogues to machine-readable form. Considering the fact that previous attempts at retrospective conversion have not yielded satisfactory results, it is important to state the modus-operandi for this project. In doing this however it is important to have a good understanding of 'retrospective conversion".

The term according to Gredley and Hopkinson (1990) means adding to automated catalogues, records of items that were originally catalogued manually. The ideal way to convert existing card or other printed catalogues would be to put them through a machine that could convert them into MARC format yet no such machine has been developed. The main problem for using this devise is that the old cards or printed catalogue were never

intended to be converted in this way. With many catalogues however, only an expert Librarian could analyse what the particular codes and type faces meant Eguavoen (1999.

Beaumant, et al (1989) defined retrospective conversion as a conversion of a library's existing bibliographic records from manual to machine-readable format according to specified policies and standards.

Having examined the term 'Retrospective Conversion', we assess Kenneth Dike Library as well as its efforts at retrospective conversion exercises. Kenneth Dike Library is no doubt the largest academic library in the country with very large collections. The total stock of the library has been put at 550,000 volumes since its establishment in 1948 plus extensive collections of manuscripts maps and music. The collection increases through new acquisition by about sixteen thousand (16,000) annually.

Kenneth Dike Library have made efforts in the past to reconvert the backlog of library materials so as to facilitate the automation of its services. One of such attempts was in 1975 when according to Faniran and Oyemakinde (2000), the Library prepared the Serials Catalogue using the Main Frame Computer that was available in the University at that time, and this exercise was completed in 1978. However, the library at that time, had no computers and could therefore not carry out meaningful conversion of library materials hence, BNA was invited to assist in:

(a) Creating, on magnetic tapes, a machine readable database of both Bliss Collections also referred to as 're-class' and LC collections called 'current cataloguing',

(b) Maintaining an up to date record for the library,

(c) Providing one card each for the shelf-lists as well as one card each for revision purposes on Bliss and LC records and,

(d) To prepare cards for the library record and the National Union Catalogue (NUC).

The BNA crew of two arrived Ibadan in 1975 with their equipment and started work by microfilming the shelf list catalogues with the assistance of Kenneth Dike Library staff. At the end of this exercise, they went back to United States where they continued the reconversion exercise. In order to standardise the records being reconverted by BNA, a list of modifications to LC classification in Class H (Social Sciences) and Class L (Education was complied and sent to BNA to update their records. The project eventually stopped at the microfilming stage and according to Oyemakinde (1979), only two thousand four hundred and twelve (2,412) records on microfiche catalogue were received from BNA as at March 1978 out of over five hundred thousand (500,000) records microfilmed. The failure of this attempt made the Kenneth Dike Library Management to consider other options and made further efforts to ensure the success of the reconversion project. Of all efforts made to reconvert old records in the library, the most viable one was carried out

in the last quarter of 1997 with the project contracted to two outside agents namely – Expert Edge and Busicon. The re-conversion team in place at the time partitioned the records into two major categories – Shelf list cards containing records with anterior numbers like 1; 1U; 2; 2U; 8; ii; 7H, etc., and cards of records without anterior numbers.

The cards with anterior numbers were given to Expert Edge while Busicon had cards without anterior numbers. As the project started, Expert Edge had some difficulties, which made them to withdraw while Busicon completed the entry of ?35,000 records into Kenneth Dike Library database.

In the course of editing however, some of the problems were in the area of data entry. In addition, there were problems that had to do with the amount of workload involved in the project, timing or duration of the project, as well as problems associated with the systems and commitment of library management. As a result of the experience of previous conversion teams and the perceived difficulties involved in the project, it became imperative for a new reconversion team to be set-up and formal inauguration of the Reconversion Project.

INAUGURATION OF THE RECONVERSION PROJECT

Due to the shortcomings of previous efforts at reconverting the library's records, the management of Kenneth Dike Library set-up a new reconversion Team while formally inaugurating a more meaningful RECON PROJECT on Monday 31st May, 1999.

The new Recon Team had as term of reference, to reconvert all library materials with LC classification system from 1974-1993. in carrying out this project, shelf list catalogue trays were to be edited and all other activities to be carried out step-by-step procedural manner, as would be explained later in this write-up.

At the inauguration, the University Librarian pointed out that the library is into full automation in an attempt to improve its services to library users. While stressing the importance of computer in library services, the University Librarian highlighted efforts made in the past to reconvert manual records into machine-readable form. The Recon Team were charged not to build ghost records in the database but to purify our records so that on picking a card, the information there-in, will enhance retrieval of needed materials. On expectations of the Library Management, the University Librarian stated that as staff of this great library, he wants the Recon Team to tackle this great but difficult project with the seriousness it deserves in order to bring about a sense of accuracy of records since it was in realization of this project that the entire Reconversion Team were selected through recommendations, as reliable and dedicated staff.

RECONVERSION ACTIVITIES: FLOW OF WORK

Having inaugurated the project, the Recon Team started the first phase of the reconversion with the editing and filling of cards in the main shelf list trays as well as compiling list of items withdrawn from the shelf list trays and down loading the records in the diskettes submitted by Busicon – an agent based in Lagos. The Recon Team were divided into three groups to carry out this assignment under the supervision of the co-ordinator, supervisor and the systems Librarian. The group, which downloaded the records in the six diskettes and supervised by the Systems Librarian only carried out general editing of records, downloaded which focused only on how the records were entered.

Editing of the shelf list catalogue trays which was meticulous had the various activities performed in an attempt to purify the library's holdings:

i.   Erasing all inscriptions on the shelf list cards

ii. Cards for titles I the Faculty/Departmental Libraries withdrawn from the main shelf list trays, filed in empty trays before eventually taken to the different faculty/departmental libraries for stock taking exercise.

iii. Cards with anterior numbers for titles on closed access withdrawn from the main shelf list and filed in trays meant for cards with anterior numbers.

iv. Cards prepared on temporary cards since 1993 numbering two thousand and forty five (2,045) were withdrawn from the main shelf list trays, their detailed bibliographic information written out to enhance transfer of the information into the library's database.

v.   Proper filing and editing of the trays was carried out by six professional members of the Recon Team. The trays were shared out at the rate of fifteen trays per participant and this activity was completed within two months.

At the end of editing of the shelf list trays, the recon Team immediately commenced with Stack taking. The stacks as well as the edited shelf list trays were shared out among twenty-three professional librarians and sixteen assistants that took part un the stock-taking exercise.

The shelf list trays were carried to the floors one at a time to cross check the titles on the catalogue cards with the titles of materials on the shelves. When a title on the card was found on the shelf, it was ticked right [√]. Any title that was not on the shelf was marked 'missing'. Any worn out material was marked 'NM' meaning 'Needs mending'. Finally, the cards of books on the shelves without their cards in the shelf list trays were generated. At the end of the above-mentioned exercise, the Recon Team proceeded to the Circulation Desk and the Bindery where the missing titles were checked. The cards of the books on loan or physically available in these areas were ticked.

The exercise above was done along side with weeding and the materials weeded include:

(i)   volumes that have deteriorated beyond repairs

(ii)   un-needed duplicates,

(iii)   older editions in Science and Technology with new editions already in he library.

(iv)   very old titles

(v)   titles in foreign languages not commonly used by readers and

(vi)   a little that has not been browsed in the past ten years.

To note the weeded materials, the Team resolved to write <u>weed</u> on the top right hand corner of the shelf list cards.

The statistics taking exercise is clearly stated in the table below:

Table 1: Statistics of the stock taking exercise

Vols. Shelf read	No. of Vols. that need repairs	Weeded Vols.	Missing Vols.	Titles without cards in the shelf list tray
43,635	2,068	1,131	14,636	7,440

EDITING OF WEEDED MATERIALS

The weeded materials in the floors were transferred to the circulation work room where further editing was carried out on them by five Academic Librarians. In the course of this exercise, materials found to be useful were shelved back in their appropriate places while cards for them were filed back in the shelf list trays. The cards for the weeded materials were collated and handed over to the data entry clerks for typing for records purpose.

MISSING TITLES

At the end of the stock taking exercise, a total of fourteen thousand six hundred and thirty five (14,635) titles were found to be missing. That is, no longer in the library's holding. The Recon Team worked on these titles in the circulation desk where the cards for the missing titles were marched with the borrowers' records. In the event, the Recon Team confirmed that two thousand three hundred and fourteen (2,314) titles were borrowed between 1991 and 1999. the materials are yet to be returned to the library hence, the Recon team prepared a list which is already typed, of the borrowers. In doing

this, the Team produced a detailed list of the borrowers, which will facilitate retrieval of the materials in the stated format below:

(i)   Name of borrower

(ii)   Author

(iii)   Title

(iv)   Year

(v)   Department/Hall

In addition, some of the titles were also matched with generated cards from books in the circulation workroom and the Bindery. This effort led to the discovery of one thousand seven hundred and twenty six (1,726) titles, making the status of four thousand and forty (4, 040) titles known out of the fourteen thousand six hundred and thirty five (14,635) titles said to be missing.

TITLES ON THE SHELVES HAVING NO RECORDS IN THE CATALOGUE

During the stock taking exercise, a total of seven thousand four hundred and forty titles were found on the shelves being circulated amongst library users yet there is no record for them in the catalogue. The Recon Team then commenced work on these titles by generating cards for them. The titles were searched from the author/title catalogue where those found had their bibliographic details copied out, typed and the cards filed in the shelf list trays, nut for those titles without bibliographic information in either the author/title catalogue or the database, the titles were withdrawn for original cataloguing. At the end of which the cards were typed and filed in the shelf list trays.

The statistics of work done on the seven thousand four hundred and forty titles having no records in either the catalogue or the database is stated below:

Shelf list cards matched with worksheets	Generated Cards matched with catalogue	Generated Cards matched with worksheet cards	Generated Cards matched with books on floors	Generated Cards searched with books on floors	Generated Cards found in database	Total
1,464	1,963	1,013	124	1,493	358	6,415

From the statistics above it is evident that a total of one thousand and twenty five titles were not worked on due to management's decision to put the project on hold by re-deploying staff who participated in the re-conversion exercise, back to their former schedules in the library.

PROBLEMS

The Re-conversion Team were faced with some difficulties which militated against timely completion of the first phase of the re-conversion exercise. These problems are discussed briefly below:

(i)   Staffing:

This was a major problem to the reconversion project. Since the project is a very involving one, it therefore requires a large number of staff participants who will be well qualified to make it a success but since the library is grossly understaffed, the first phase of the reconversion exercise was adversely affected.

(ii)   Finance:

Lack of adequate finance adversely affected the reconversion exercise Eguavoen (1999), posited that a lot of equipment and manpower are needed for the successful completion of the reconversion project but that since Kenneth Dike Library like other academic libraries in Nigeria is grossly under funded, it became difficult for the library to make all the human and material resources needed for the project available to the Recon Team.

(iii)   Systems' Problem:

The Recon Team also had problem with the computer systems. This is particularly true because the systems occasionally broke down and would be out of use for days and sometimes, weeks before the consultants come to fix it up. This time lag usually affected the reconversion exercise, as data entry will be stopped as well as editing of records in the database.

(iv)   Power Outage:

Nigeria for the past few years have been experiencing power outage. There has been problem with generation and distribution of power in the country and this equally had untold effect on the reconversion exercise in Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan.

(v)   Strike Actions:

This is one problem area that affected adversely, the reconversion exercise in Kenneth Dike Library. For example, strike actions by workers in academic communities to press

for improved conditions of service and general welfare of workers. The bottom line of this action is that the reconversion of the library's records is prolonged than the anticipated time for the completion of the project.

Apart from the general problems which affected the Recon Team in the course of the reconversion project, certain specific problems were also encountered. These problems are summarized below.

During the shelf reading exercise, it was discovered that books were not properly shelved and this will hinder retrieval of needed materials. Besides, pamphlets found to be shelved with books giving the impression that the Circulation Assistants involved in shelving are not doing their job properly. In addition, Departmental Books were also found amongst Main Library collection.

CONCLUSION

The first phrase of the retrospective conversion in Kenneth Dike Library was brought to an end at the last quarter of 2001. the conversion efforts brought about proper re-organisation of the library's records as well as the retrieval of many library material that were borrowed many years ago and the location of very useful materials in the circulation workroom and the Bindery. This exercise also facilitated the input of sizeable numbers of records into the library's database that were adequately edited to conform to international standard which will in turn, enhance easy retrieval of needed materials. Successful as the first phase of the reconversion was, it was however beset with numerous problems which when minimised will make the second phase of the retrospective conversion on library materials in closed access easier and timely.

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