



# *The Nigerian Cataloguer*

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## *The Nigerian Cataloguer*

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## PREDISPOSING FACTORS TO EXISTENCE OF BACKLOGS OF UNPROCESSED INFORMATION RESOURCES IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

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### Abstract

*The paper focuses on frequently rhetorical questions in the quest of cataloguing books in order to strengthen cataloguing skills in libraries with a view to reduce or eliminate backlog in Nigerian libraries. Respondents are delegates present at the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference/Workshop of the Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Section of the Nigerian Library Association. Copies of a self-developed and pretested question were administered, using total enumeration method, on the delegates. It was discovered that there are backlogs of unprocessed materials in the respondents' libraries and environmental factors frequently responsible for the backlogs is relatively high. These factors include lack of enough staff to do the prescribed job, lack of professional skills and lack of required competent of available staff to work. The study recommended improving on organizational structures and cultures such as putting in place appropriate incentives measures for staff, employing of academic librarians on subject specialist basis, provision of working tools, training and re-training of staff, creating friendly atmosphere among staff with a view to encourage team work and knowledge sharing, etc, be considered as strategies to reducing backlogs in Nigerian libraries.*

**Keywords:** Cataloguing, Backlogs, Libraries, Information resources, Nigeria

### Introduction

One of the parameters of measuring effectiveness in Cataloguing and Classification Section vis-à-vis the overall library effectiveness could be processing of acquired information resources accurately within the quickest possible time, place them on the shelves and communicate such to the public. The primary stage in the processing of information resources can only be done effectively on proper understanding of what the statement of responsibility otherwise known as the access point or entry point should be. In doing this, some of the crucial rhetorical questions such as what should be the access point or statement of responsibility should be addressed by the cataloguer. To a seasoned cataloguer, these questions may not prove difficult since they are at prima facie very clear and this is why I have referred to these questions as rhetorical

questions. But to a beginner, these questions may overtly or covertly pose challenges. Therefore, inability to properly understand the statement of responsibility will inevitably lead to accumulation of unprocessed books and this will in turn have negative effects on effectiveness of the Cataloguing and Classification Section. This is why every library manager should take the issue of backlog very seriously.

The main purpose of cataloguing in librarianship is to bring the user to the book or the book to the user within the quickest possible time. Therefore, efforts must be made to get the cataloguing done accurately. While cataloguing makes accessibility of information resources possible, classification makes retrieval of information resources from the shelves possible. Classification just like cataloguing is a universal language that cut across almost every discipline. Simply put, classification in a general term is the grouping of similar things according to specific characteristics. Horticulturist or the Botanist would classify plants according to similarities.

### Statement of the Problem

Library is traditionally known as service centre and as such, continuous patronage of these services by the target clientele remains very crucial to the justification of establishment of library by its parent body. To this extent, it is not only enough to just acquire information resources but they must be equally processed and made available for use within the quickest possible time. When this is not done, problem has occurred. One of such obstacles to achieving organizational effectiveness in libraries as observed by the present researcher is having backlogs. Despite this, there seems to be very scanty literature on backlogs in Nigeria library and information science literature as at the time of this study. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to find out if there are backlogs of unprocessed books in Nigerian libraries and if yes, what are the environmental factors responsible for having the backlogs. It is, therefore, hoped that this study will contribute to knowledge by filling the existing gap in library literature on backlogs.

### Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the paper is to sensitize library staff on the importance of mastery cataloguing skills of information resources with a view to reduce backlog of unprocessed books in Nigerian libraries. However, the specific objectives are:

- To find out the existence of backlogs of unprocessed books in Nigerian libraries.
- To determine the volume of existing backlogs of unprocessed books in the Nigerian libraries.



- To investigate environmental factors responsible for the backlog of unprocessed books in the delegates' libraries.

### Seeking Clarifications

#### What is Library Routine?

Library routine refers to tasks performed by library staff in the selection, acquisition, processing and circulating of information resources for public use. In cataloguing section, these include cataloguing, classification, preparing the catalogue cards for the processed information resources, interfiling them in the library catalogue and/or making the same information available on the On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) through which the public can access them. Other duties performed at the cataloguing section include preparation of shelf-list that indicates arrangement of books on the shelves, creation of authority files, general maintenance of cataloguing cabinets, etc.

#### What are information Resources?

Information resources are in various formats, and they are usually classified as print and non-print. They include books, serials publications, government publications, CD, audio tapes, video recordings, microform, digital materials charts, cartographic materials, etc. Cataloguing and classification of these resources are slightly different. For published books, the required information for cataloguing are the bibliographic information such as author's name, title of book, imprint, collation, while for audio tapes, the required information includes name of the artist creator, the producer and date of production. Technically speaking, it is at the cataloguing stage that access point is determined by the Cataloguer.

Librarianship is about specifications. Therefore, the cataloguer must pay attention to details and provided the AACR2. In addition to paying attention to the details, the cataloguer must also write legibly so as to avoid unwarranted mistakes when Data Processing Officer is producing catalogue (3 x 5) cards or in-putting the information in the Online Public Access catalogue (OPAC). Remember, it is what you write or what your writing looks like that would reflect on the catalogue 3 x 5 cards or in the OPAC, unless a good editorial work is done. Some of these mistakes may be in form of errors of omission by not paying adequate attention when writing or as a result of bad handwriting. Cataloguer's writing must be very clear to avoid taking "Michel" to mean "Michael", "Publication" to mean "Publisher", "Houseloright" for "Housewright",

"McCarthy" for "McCarthy", "Word" for "Ward", "Samud" for "Samuel", "Fonge" for "Forge" just to mention a few.

### Literature Review

Backlog is a phenomenon which has attracted attention by researchers in library and information science discipline. It refers to accumulation of unprocessed books by cataloguers. Therefore, in general speaking, backlogs are the accumulation of works that needs to have been done, which for one reason or the other is delayed for some time. Cataloguing and classification of information resources are very crucial to effective library services. This has, perhaps, places Cataloguing Section as the most important aspect of any library because selection or purchases of information resources are of no significant value to library services unless information resources are promptly processed and placed for utilization by library clientele. Therefore, delay in processing of information resources hinders library effectiveness vis-à-vis the relevance of library. It is against this backdrop that backlogs in library should be seen as management issue just like security in library is.

Newton (1997) cited by Howarth, Moor and Sze (2010) defined backlog as library materials, such as books and non-print materials... that represent an unfilled obligation for technical services treatment. To Sibley (2008) cited by Howarth, Moor and Sze (2010) submitted that, backlog constitute materials for which processing had been delayed. In another contribution, Share opined that, "a library has a backlog when it cannot cope efficiently with day-to-day cataloguing workloads". In a more recent study, Custy (2016) described backlog as:

Things still to be done, or a quantity of unfinished business or work that has built up over a period of time and must be dealt with before progress can be made. Work that you should already have done, or an amount of work or other things that you should already have done or dealt with.

Causes of backlogs are enormous, ranging from one library to another and even from one continent to another. Howarth, Moor and Sze, (2010) were therefore correct when they stated that what constitute backlogs in libraries of the western world may not be the same in the African countries. However, some of the problems as identified by them originate from within the cataloguing department, while others may be beyond the direct control of cataloguers. In the study conducted by the trio, they found out that inadequate staffing as contributing factor of cataloguing of books among 60% of the respondents. Other causes as identified by them include lack of professionally trained cataloguers and lack of full-time cataloguers. In the same vein, experience has



shown that some of the contributing factors to backlogs in Nigerian university libraries ranges from problems of identifying Access Point, understanding language of books written in foreign languages such as Arabic, French, German, Spanish, etc, especially when such books are not in the on-line classification schemes.

There is a great nexus between backlogs of unprocessed books and information process activities, which involve cataloguing and classification. There will be fewer backlogs of unprocessed books if cataloguing and classification are properly understood by cataloguers. Nwalo (2003) stated that cataloguing describes a book, pointing out its subject content which ultimately places the book in a subject class. The process of cataloguing of a book begins from the 'title page,' where the title of the book, author's name, publisher's name and address are displayed. The other side of the title page which is called the 'verso page' is where date of publication and a repeat of the publisher's name and address are displayed. Collation begins from the next line, and the collation consists of the entire page, illustration (if any) and length in centimetre. The ISBN is on the next line and followed with a 'Note' (where applicable) also on the next line. Immediately after the ISBN or 'note' where applicable is/are subject (s) of the book as identified by a particular classification scheme with relevant notation. However, one cannot write out the class mark unless a particular classification scheme along with other tools has been consulted. The class mark that is usually written on the top hand corner of the catalogue 3 x 5 card is allocated to the first subject (where the book is focusing on more than one subject) that the book is all about. The rule is that you place the book on the dominant subject. Please note, not every book have 'illustration', and 'note'. Please note also that cataloguing styles varies; while some libraries give details cataloguing other libraries may not. However, the basic information to enhance information access and retrieval must be provided.

Cataloguing is the bibliographic description of information resources. This description comprises of the author's name, title of the book; the imprint (place of publication, publisher and date of publication); collation (pagination, illustration, graphs, charts and length or height), ISBN and Note (if any). It is called descriptive cataloguing or copy cataloguing because the cataloguer is not adding or removing from what had been provided in the book by the publisher. Bowman (2003) submitted that cataloguing can be divided into subject, and to some extent the terminology is ambiguous. The division is descriptive cataloguing and subject cataloguing. Descriptive cataloguing is describing the item, and allocating the access points to it and the subject cataloguing is the classification subject headings of the book. Cataloguing is highly technical

requiring some level of skilled to maintain standards in bibliographic representation of information resources that have been set in Anglo American Cataloguing Rules. It is the pre-exercise before the classification is done.

Keenan and Johnston (2000) defined cataloguing as the processes involved in constructing a catalogue; describing document so as to identify and characterize them by providing entry points otherwise known as access point that is peculiar to document, e.g. author headings or title headings. In the word of Nwalo (2013), "universal access to information is an evolution that is geared towards meeting user needs. Since the origin of libraries in the ancient times, cataloguers have been at the centre of the effort to organize information resources for easy identification, organization, storage, access and use. Nwosu (2012) made a submission that cataloguing involves all the processes required to prepare information resources for the shelves, files, or databases or make entries for the catalogue, either card catalogue or on-line catalogue or web catalogue. Unegbu (2013) defined cataloguing as the process of preparing a bibliographic record that will become entries in a library catalogue. Reitz (2004) cited by Unegbu (2013) opined that "activities involved in physically preparing books for the shelf usually performed under the supervision of a librarian trained as a cataloguer".

In librarianship, a cataloguer is not different from a classifier." Tracing the history of cataloguing, Unegbu (2013) recounted that a lot of ideological problems have erupted in the world of cataloguing and cataloguers. Notably among these ideological problems according to Unegbu are original cataloguing, copy cataloguing, online cataloguing etc. original cataloguing is the preparation of bibliographic record from the scratch whereas copying cataloguing is finding existing cataloguing record for a particular item. Online cataloguing is adopting already bibliographic information stored in online catalogues.

Ojo-Ade and Jagboro (2000) stated that in cataloguing, the application of the standard cataloguing rules and classification schemes have been known to create some communication gaps especially between the cataloguers and the users. The cataloguer professionally abides by the standard way of making entries, particularly subject entries in the catalogues, while the users, unaware of the standard, make searches using the general terms they think or know about. To bridge this gap, cataloguers make conscious effort to provide additional guides without necessarily sacrificing the standards.

In many libraries, an ample use is made of "see" and "see also" reference in the subject catalogue. In their study of subject catalogue use at the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, they reported that 10.6% of the respondents said they found the subject catalogue difficult to use and understand, and some of the reasons given for finding subject catalogue difficult are arrangement is complex, related subjects not properly



linked terms used are unfamiliar, alternative terms are not linked to the terms used.

### Some frequently asked rhetorical questions in cataloguing

One of the critical issues that usually create problem of backlog in libraries is the identification of access point, and since cataloguing has to be done before classification takes place, it is therefore imperative that cataloguers must be able to identify what should be the access point for various categories of information resources. In doing this, cataloguer must address some of the frequently rhetorical questions such as what should be the access point for:

- Single authored book
- Two-authored book
- Three-author book
- More than three-authored book
- Conference proceedings
- Symposium
- Non-printed materials

Access point is a household name in cataloguing of information resources. It is also known as the 'Statement of Responsibility' or 'Main entry' or 'Entry points'. It is at this point that the fate of information resource is determined. Simply put, access point deals with the question of whom or what should be the search link in the catalogue, and this is usually followed by added entry. In a traditional library environment, the rule is strictly followed and limited to just few access points, notably name of personal author(s), title or name of a corporate body. Whereas in an online environment, there are more access points, such as the keyword search, ISBN, subject, etc. and each are effectively equal. Please check Chapter 21 of AACR2 for more details on access points. Also associated with Access Point is added entry. Added entry is embedded in the tracing. It is information that is provided after the subjects, and usually numbered in roman figure. Added entries include name(s) of a joint author(s), name of the corporate body, series statement.

### Methodology

Respondents for the study were the 104 delegates, who attended the 36th Annual Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Conference/Workshop Section of the Nigerian Library Association at the University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria between 24th and 28th October, 2016. One hundred copies of the

questionnaire which was chosen as the research instrument were administered, using total enumeration method, on the delegates.

The questionnaire is a self-developed, structured instrument that contained items that elicited data about personal characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, and number of years spent in the cataloguing unit of their libraries in part in part A. It also harvested information about the existence and volumes of backlogs in the respondents' libraries; the environmental factors that might be responsible for backlogs of unprocessed materials in the cataloguing rooms. Eighty copies were retrieved out of which sixty-five copies were found useful for analysis.

### Results and Discussion

Demographic information of the respondents

**Table 1: Showing respondents' demographic variables**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	48	73.8
Female	17	26.2
Total	65	100.0
Type of Libraries	Frequency	Percentage
University Library	39	60.0
Polytechnic Library	7	10.8
College of Education Library	2	3.1
Public School Library	2	3.1
School Library	1	1.5
Special Library	14	21.5
Total	65	100.0
Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
20-30 years	6	9.2
31-40 years	15	23.1
41-50 years	24	36.9
51 years +	20	30.8
Total	65	100.0
Years of Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage
<5 years	13	20.0
5-10 years	17	26.2
11-15 years	9	13.8
16-20 years	6	9.2
21-25 years	10	15.4
25 years +	10	15.4
Total	65	100.0



How long have been working in cataloguing section?	Frequency	Percentage
<5 years	25	38.5
5-10 years	22	33.8
11-15 years	13	20.0
>15 years	5	7.7
Total	65	100.0
Will you like to be transferred to another section?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	32	49.2
No	25	38.5
Not applicable	8	12.3
Total	65	100.0

Table 1 above reveals demographic information of the respondents. The study revealed that 48(73.8%) of the respondents are males while their female counterparts are 17(26.2%) and 44 (68%) were between ages 41 and above. While 21 (32.3%) were between ages 20 and 40 years. This means more males attended the workshop than the female and that majority of them were adult as well. The study also revealed that majority 39(60.0%) of the delegates are from the university libraries and this is followed by 14(21.5%) of them from special libraries. Delegates from Polytechnic, colleges of Education, public and School libraries were extremely poor as the recorded 7 (10.8%) 2 (3.1%) and 1 (1.5%), respectively.

The study further revealed that 17 (26.2%) of the respondent have had just a total library work experience of between five and ten years, with less than five working experience in cataloguing section. This is considered not healthy enough to be able to discharge effectively as cataloguers.

Existence of backlogs of unprocessed books in respondents' libraries

Table 2: Presence/absence of unprocessed books in respondents' libraries

Do you have a backlog in your cataloguing section?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	76.9
No	15	23.1
Total	65	100.0

Table 2 above reveals backlog of unprocessed books in the respondents' libraries. Majority of the respondents 50 (76.9%) indicated "Yes" to mean that there is backlog of unprocessed books in their libraries, while 15 (23.1%) indicated "No," meaning there is no backlog of unprocessed books in their libraries. Therefore, since majority indicated "Yes," it may be safe to generalize that there are backlogs of unprocessed books in Nigerian libraries as at the time of this study. This corroborated the finding of McCain and Shorten (2001), who in their study of twenty- seven libraries reported that twenty-two (81.5%), out of the twenty-seven surveyed confirmed having a backlog of unprocessed materials in their technical services department.

Volume of existing backlogs in respondents' libraries

Table 3: Volumes of backlogs in respondents' libraries

How will you rate the volume of the backlog in your cataloguing section	Frequency	Percentage
Large Volume	40	61.5
Moderate Volume	18	
Low Volume	7	
Total	65	10.8
		100.0

Table 3 above reveals volume of backlog of unprocessed books in the respondents' libraries. The finding shows that majority 40(61.5%) of them indicated that level of backlog of unprocessed books in their libraries is "large", 18(27.7%) indicated "moderate volume", while a non-significant number 7(10.8%) of the respondents indicated "low volume". From the above, it is confirmed that there are relatively high backlogs of unprocessed books in Nigerian libraries as at the time of this study.



**Factors responsible for backlogs in respondents' libraries****Table 4: Factors responsible for backlogs**

S/N	Which of the following is contributing to backlog in your section?	Yes	No	I don't know	Mean	S.D
1	Problem of identification of the Access point	59 (90.8%)	4 (6.2%)	2(3.1%)	2.88	.41
2	Problem of interpreting the language of the monograph	51(78.5 %)	7(10.8 %)	7 (10.8%)	2.68	.66
3	Lack of adequate trained cataloguers	47 (72.3%)	10(15.4 %)	8 (12.3%)	2.60	.70
4	Lack of adequate staff	38 (60.0%)	12 (18.5%)	14 (21.5%)	2.40	.84
5	High level of staff turnover	33 (50.8%)	20 (30.8%)	12 (18.5%)	2.32	.77

As shown in Table 4, the percentage of those said 'Yes' to the suggested factors responsible for the presence of backlogs were high with 'problem of identification of access point' being the highest (90.8%). It can then be inferred that all the environmental factors are responsible for the presence backlogs of unprocessed books in Nigerian libraries.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study attempted to provide answers to some of the frequently asked questions at the point of cataloguing of books. The questions are hoped to guide cataloguers in creating appropriate access points for books and other printed formats. The study discovered that there are backlogs of unprocessed books in the respondents' libraries. Some of the factors responsible for the backlog included lack of enough staff, lack of professional skills and lack of competent

staff to catalogue the books. This was in agreement with the findings by Howarth, Moor and Sze, (2010) and McCain and Shorten (2001), respectively.

In their studies, Howarth, Moor and Sze, (2010) discovered that 60% of the respondents surveyed indicated that inadequate staffing was one the contributing factors to having backlogs in the studied libraries. So also, McCain and Shorten (2001) reported that twenty-two (81.5%) out of the twenty-seven surveyed in their study were having a backlog of unprocessed materials in their technical services department.

The study therefore recommended that, efforts must be made to engage in a more active on-the-job training among members of staff in general and particularly among members of staff of cataloguing section. By extension, team work and knowledge sharing should be encouraged as this will go a long way to strengthen the acquisition of technical skills in cataloguing process. Also, frequent transferring of staff in and out of cataloguing section should be minimized so as to allow members of staff at the cataloguing section develop the required technical skills in over cataloguing and classification activities.

Improving on organizational structures and cultures such as putting in place appropriate incentives measures for staff, employing of academic librarians on subject specialist basis, provision of working tools, training and re-training of staff, creating friendly atmosphere among staff with a view to encourage team work and knowledge sharing, etc be considered as strategies to reducing backlogs in Nigerian libraries.

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