

CENTRALIZATION OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SERVICES IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF IBADAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Centralization or concentration of control in one source is nowadays a notable feature of libraries in institutions of higher learning of the developed countries of the world. The most popular type involves administrative centralization with decentralised services, although varying from institution to institution, the most popular approach appears to be that in which all the library units within a university (with one campus) or university system (with several campuses) are centrally administered by a single administrative unit headed by an executive officer: variously designated Librarian, Director of Library Services, etc. In some places, especially where centralization started early enough in the development of the institution, physical centralization (in which all library units are located either in a single or in a restricted number of locations) exists.

Administrative centralization of library facilities is the most common practice in British Universities. Here, book collection is housed in varying number of separate repositories but administered centrally as a unit. A similar situation applies in a number of United States Universities. In Ohio State University, for example, the libraries, formerly separate, are currently administered centrally, so also are the Main Library and two science libraries of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. At Harvard University, there exists a system designated "Co-ordinated Centralization" which involves the co-ordination of separate libraries through budgeting. In Cornell University, the services are decentralized in the acquisition and processing of books.

The situation in the developing world is quite different. To use Nigeria as an example, the National Universities Commission (NUC) 1975 has taken an unequivocal position recommending physical centralization for the Universities. The University Librarians have however expressed strong reservations on this position with arguments that physical centralization is only one form and not the only feasible basis for designing University Libraries.

This is well borne out by the existing practises in the older universities. The University of Ife, Ile-Ife, practices what resembles physical centralization, but, at the same time, it has two faculty libraries and a number of departmental collections. A new library building is being constructed to house these faculty and departmental collections. The University of Nigeria with campuses at Nsukka and Enugu respectively, practises a form of administrative centralization, with the Chief Executive, i.e. the University Librarian at the head of administration. At the University of Ibadan, administrative centralization has now been adopted after decentralization had been practised for



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approximately two decades. The problems involved and the successes achieved are described in what follows:

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

There are many advantages in centrally organized library system. Centralization helps to standardize the quality of services rendered at various locations of the system. In the case of administrative centralization, for instance, the usually high quality and standardized services of the Central Library are extended to faculties and departmental reading rooms. By so doing these sub-units become better organised and better administered. Among other things, the hours of service, staffing and the assistance to users are standardized. Moreover, dynamic and co-ordinated development of resources are brought about within the library system. This minimizes unnecessary duplication of titles and at the same time constituted a safeguard for detecting inadvertent occurrences of serious gaps in the overall collection. Furthermore, the reading community within the system has a more direct access to materials both in the Main Library and in its branches by the use of the Union Catalogue which may be placed in the Central Library or better still, replicated in the sub-units. Finally and more importantly, centralized planning and execution helps in making the best use of the financial resources any institution can allow for library services.

Although critics have found several faults, especially during the early stages of the centralization process (see below) the serious disadvantages of centralization of library facilities are

relatively few. One possible disadvantage relates to the acquisition and processing procedures of books and other materials. There is no doubt that these processes are time consuming and are likely to cause delays. Readers are therefore not likely to get books on the shelves as soon as they are purchased. Another possible disadvantage relates to reader/staff relationships, which are not likely to be as close and as cordial as in cases where individual units recruit their own staff and control them. Nevertheless, the advantages of centralization (some of which are stated above, especially the economics afforded the system) far outweigh the disadvantages. This position is illustrated here with the experience at the University of Ibadan, where a centralized system of library facilities was introduced about seven years ago.

THE IBADAN UNIVERSITY EXPERIMENT

As far back as April 1967, discussions had been initiated, on the takeover, by the Main Library, of the faculty libraries and departmental reading rooms that have developed on their own over the years. Many of these units were not organized in any acceptable form and most of those who manned them were typists, cleaners and messengers who neither had an idea of what a library was, or should be. They also had no training whatsoever in library work. Books in some of these reading rooms were locked up in cupboards and students had access to them only when the so called librarians, who usually had other duties to perform, had the time to open these cupboards.

In some cases, where the reading rooms were manned by students, these rooms were left open for as long as the students wanted. Titles were purchased from departmental votes directly from the University Bookshop or ordered from publishers, or acquired as gifts from individuals and organizations. Students' essays, term papers, conference papers and reprints were also stocked. Some of these reading rooms were used as coffee rooms as well. A few of them had no chairs for readers. In some cases, important books were kept in the heads of departments' offices, or other lecturer's rooms.

Some faculty libraries especially the Latunde Odeku Library (formerly *University College Hospital Library*) and Institute of African Studies Library were better off because they were manned by trained librarians from their inception. Consequently, the arrangement of books and maintenance of their catalogues conformed with the acceptable standards and offered ease of use. Nevertheless, the need to centralize library facilities in the university was clearly obvious and the University Library seized the earliest opportunity to set this in motion.

A few major developments were noteworthy in this connection. In March 1968, a circular was sent to all Heads of Departments titled "*Survey of Libraries, Reading Rooms and Book Collection in the University.*" In this survey, the University Librarian sought to investigate the available library/reading

room/book collection facilities in the university. Arising from this survey, a case was made to the Development Committee of the University which in May 1970 decided that the University Library should take over the development of faculty and sub-libraries. It further recommended the continued maintenance of well-established faculty libraries staffed by professional librarian who should be under the general supervision of the University Librarian.

In May 1974, the Development Committee re-affirmed its earlier decision that the Main Library should take over the administrative control of the Faculty Libraries and Departmental Reading Rooms. After this re-affirmation, the Acting University Librarian in July 1974, issued guidelines regarding the operation of Faculty Sub-libraries and Departmental Reading Rooms. The area covered include staff, equipment, materials, salaries, recommendations for books and journals.

Not long after this circular was issued, a memorandum was sent from the Office of the University Librarian that each faculty should set up a Library Committee. This was followed in December 1974 by another set of guidelines on the operation of sub-libraries and reading rooms. Emphasis in this last set of guidelines was on administration, books and equipment, local purchase orders and liaison with the Main Library. In effect, the University Librarian gave directives that as from the 1974-75 session, the responsibility for faculty libraries and departmental reading rooms became that of the University Library.

The position just stated necessitated certain decisions and actions on the part of the University Library. Among the more important actions were the following. First, professional librarians were chosen as representatives of the University Librarian at Faculty Library Committee Meetings, to discuss problems encountered by these sub-libraries and take steps to ensure a smooth take over. Next, in April 1975, the University Library sent out a circular informing each department that the entire collection of the faculty departmental reading rooms belonged to the University Library system and access to them was to be on the same basis as that of the Main Library collection. Lastly, a Co-ordinator of Branch and Faculty Libraries was appointed, assisted by a Library Officer who organized the Reading Rooms and took an inventory of available materials in these reading rooms. The Co-ordinator was to vet the selection of books sent in by the academic staff of the different branches before the final approval was given by the University Librarian.

Under this re-organised structure, the Ibadan University Library operates on the basis of a centralized administration but decentralised services. The ultimate authority as stipulated in the guidelines for both administration and services was vested in the University Librarian.

THE PROCESS AND THE ATTENDANT PROBLEMS

The administrative centralization has however not been without its attendant problems. The most

glaring is the opposition from some members of the academic staff. This is to be expected for several reasons. In the first place, a lecturer could have in his possession as many as twenty titles from departmental collections for a period of three years or more without returning them to the library and without any record that he has borrowed them. In effect some lecturers used library books as if they were their private property. Their uncompromising attitude could therefore be understood in that centralization would definitely deny them of their former freedom of action and 'private ownership' of University books. Secondly, books in these Reading Rooms were purchased with Departmental votes and the lecturers could not see the justification for their being acquired by the Main Library.

Some of the lecturers on the other hand, complained about the alleged deficiencies in the Readers' Services Section of the Main Library. They complained that users could not readily locate books on the shelves using the catalogue, a situation they would not want to see extended to the Faculty and Departmental Units. To users, the filing of cards in the Main Catalogue is poor. Finally several lecturers complained about the time taken in acquiring and processing recommended books for reader's use. It is gratifying that despite the spate of criticism and protests the centralization process was undeterred. With the administrative centralization and decentralized services of Ibadan University, most protests have subsided.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

A survey of the University of Ibadan sub-libraries and reading rooms was conducted by two senior staff of the University Library in 1979. Their observation include:

1. That some of these libraries had no catalogue cabinets and so have no place to file the catalogue cards sent from the Central Library.
2. That those with catalogues maintained them poorly.
3. There was no uniformity in the cataloguing systems adopted. Some of the Libraries used Library of Congress Classification (L.C. Scheme), a few used either Bliss or Dewey, while others used 'home made schemes'.
4. The system of filing cards was very poor. Cards produced centrally with L.C. classification scheme were kept together with those with Bliss or Dewey Classification Schemes. Others interfile L.C. cards with their locally made cards.
5. Shelving of books was poorly done. Books classified by the Library of Congress classification scheme were shelved together with books, classed using other schemes.
6. Some of the libraries were short-staffed. In some cases, where the Main

Library could not fill its vacant posts, staff from these libraries were withdrawn to keep the services in the Central Library going. These are the problems which the Central Library is currently trying to find solutions in the efforts to ensure success for the centralization exercise.

In the mean time it is pertinent to note the following achievements. The University Library is now catering for twenty-eight sub-libraries and reading rooms. It is now responsible for the recurrent expenditure in respect of staff, reading materials, movable equipment and stationery. The appointment and deployment of staff are also effected by the Central Library. Faculty Libraries are now headed by professional librarians of sub-librarian grade or above, with supporting clerical and technical staff. Departmental libraries are manned by staff of clerical cadres, Departmental Reading Rooms in the Faculty of Arts are supervised by a Library Officer.

Furthermore, titles selected by these branches are edited by the Collection Development Librarian who also gives approval and sends the titles to the Orders Section. On arrival the books belonging to the Faculty Libraries are sent to these libraries to be processed by the Librarians in charge. Those for the Departmental libraries are processed in the Cataloguing Section of the Main Library. Finally, there is a Union Catalogue where the main entry cards of all the books processed in the faculties and those processed centrally for departmental reading rooms are filed.

CONCLUSION

Centralization of all library facilities is not really advisable on a large campus as that of the University of Ibadan; elements of decentralization are desirable. This is why Ibadan has chose administrative centralization with decentralized public services. In this system, any member of the university with a valid library ticket can make use of the resources of the Main Library as well as those of branch/faculty libraries. This situation is unlike what obtained before the take-over exercise. Then, only members of a faculty or department were allowed to use the facilities in their faculty or departmental library. The twenty-eight units of the University Library System are now working together to support teaching and research programmes of the University and its scholars.

It is unfortunate that owing to the timing of the centralization, which coincided with the period of lean financial resources in the university, many of the advantages of centralization are yet to be fully realised. Two major areas of deficiency are in the recruitment of qualified staff and the acquisition of books. Many vacancies could not be filled, recommended books could not be bought; while subscription to learned journals could not be taken in desirable numbers.

Nevertheless, the level of success achieved is commendable. There is therefore every hope that as the financial situation in the university improves,

these problems would disappear and the university community will be afforded the opportunity of enjoying the full benefits of centralization.

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