

## Serials as Vital Resources: A Bird's Eye View

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### **Abstract**

*Serials are important sources of information to library users. This study examines the serials management in a Law library, the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS). Diverse resources aid research, learning and teaching, among these are serials. They feature as inaugural lectures, public briefings, reports, white papers, gazettes and other government publications, hazards, panels/commissions of inquiry, memoirs, findings, treaties, field trip reports, television or film series, body corporate statements of accounts, newspapers, conference proceedings. The role of UNESCO coupons in paying for foreign journals was briefly mentioned-though these are no longer sent to many Nigeria libraries. The compulsion for all serials editors to write to NLN for an ISSN to enhance the compilation of National Bibliographic Control, like the British Union Catalogue of Periodicals, and collective aim at ensuring a knowledge output consortia among all libraries to 'save the bucks' was also mentioned, this, so many of the knowledge industries do not comply with this statute, unfortunately. The paper discussed the management of serials which include: acquisitions, classification, storage and preservation. The study recommends the need for acquisitions policy reviews, staff skills, suggesting the employment of only possessors of library and information science qualifications in the libraries, preservation and conservation of serials via binding and pre-purchase quality assurance.*

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**Keywords:** *Acquisitions policy, Consortia, Library, NIALS, Periodicals, Serials management*

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### **Introduction**

Serials are basically knowledge publications used in the academic industry, containing information dispensed in successive parts which compulsorily must be numerical, timely and chronological. A serial can be considered a work of collected works or shared authorship (Shadle, 2006) it is taken to be an intellectual piece of work. It must be continued indefinitely and are discipline or user specific and this is why they are called trade journals- only useful among a stipulated profession. Except for a few acquisitions along multidisciplinary lines, it gives current information to users in digested formats. Serials are core diffusion of knowledge, as books alone cannot be sufficient. They engender to these like general and specific periodicals, newspapers, annual reports, directories, journals, film and television series,

memoirs, workshop proceedings, monographic series, societal transactions, inaugural lectures, gazettes, government publications (epileptic), panels/commissions of inquiry/research findings, corporate statement of accounts, memoirs, and so on. The tools in the serials section include, faculty or users' request form, Stripdex, periodicals card file, Kardex, unreceived and received invoices for bursary, index to periodicals received, and routing of content pages for CAS and SDI to the faculty.

Serials are titles published at regular intervals. Serials are synonymous or interchangeable with periodicals, though, this later terminology is elastic and a canopy for all hourly (online), daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or any publication for a period, as the name connotes. This "period" may be regular or irregular. They are often produced by professional bodies and contents must have been sifted through professional peer-review, that is, it must have undergone crucial grilling or 'panel beating' and technical know-how criticism. Full fees must be charged and indeed, professors justify tenure renewals with this expertise to the university and community, in civilized climes on publications reviewed in mostly paper journals. Reviews on publications must be stated, as they are the only way to prove articles are accurate and vital. The subscription charges, and page charges (adverts) or any other charges ever levied are inclusive. Most are born digital as e-journal in this era, the issue of digitization of paper serials have been so thorny, however. Scientists' citation patterns feature more serials than books. Serials support the needs of professional users of the library.

Other characteristics of qualitative journal are that, it must have a stated period in which it is published, its affairs must be coordinated by an Editor-in-Chief or Editor, who heads the editorial advisory board comprising trained and erudite scholars in the field, in its registered office, which must be in an academic group or association, tertiary or professional institute. Advisory members' full names, institutional affiliations, nationality, contact information like functional email. Editorial articles feature in the preceding pages, which summaries the entire content of the journal. There is no given rule about the content page, which guides users to the discourse and sometimes, book reviews, as to whether, it should be at the preceding or back page. Short notes on contributors come at the footnote of the first page of their work(s) or after the editorial note.

**International Standard Serials Number (ISSN):** A major distinguishing feature of serial resources is ISSN. It is the unique code for identification of serials - it is quoted when information on them is to be communicated. National Library of Nigeria is statutorily empowered to collect national intellectual output through legal depository laws. These deposits are utilized in compiling National Union Catalogues (NUC) and National Union List of Serials (NULOS). NUC and NULOS assist in preparing the ground for a consortia and library cooperation. This is a National Library of Nigeria (NLN) programme for resource sharing in Nigeria, so the book vote can be maximized for the benefits of all participants and researchers, especially for the online resources. Coordination of ISSN centre is within the purview of NLN via the National Bibliographic Control (NBC).

Formal written request for ISSN must be directed to ISSN centre of the National Library of Nigeria. The number thus issued, must be printed legibly on the international bibliographic strip – preceded by ISSN and a colon. Volume, number, issue and date also must be stated on

same page or the cover. Any book or serial without ISBN or ISSN is a sub-standard publication, incomplete, lacks credibility and unwelcome in the global committee of serials.

**Purpose of Serials:** The librarian is indeed the eternal ‘former’ on all researches, whether prints or the online resources, they were organized and accessibility provided by documentalists. Olubiyo, Fagbemi and Ogunniyi (2020) posit that serial publications are channels to recent and up-to-date information in various fields in the libraries.

Serials since ages past are regulatory mandatory for the fact that, they keep records of the current news before they fizzle out, they are exceedingly useful to scholars and researchers because of the recency or currency, updated facts and discipline-specific or in-depth subject background of the writer. In these days of sporadic developments through globalization, some concepts can never have much content to be discussed in a textbook for now. They disseminate additional germane information from diverse authors from all zones of the world. These experts entertain the public and keep their contemporaries abreast of developments in the disciplines. Trade journals dwell on advances in the given field and also authorize practitioners to adopt the new measures. It aids scholars who for time content or financial constraints may not attain to the honour of being a book author to extend their frontiers. Academics also actualize the mandate of ‘publish or perish’ for promotion and measurement of intelligent quotient (IQ), project new discoveries via such publications. Faculty also needs where to publish to earn some foreign currencies-that is they can be income-generating too.

Serials/periodicals as defined by AACR2, in all libraries, must entail:

- a) Acquisitions/Bequeathals (bob-a-job).
- b) Documentation (very painstaking)-vendor information.
- c) Periodical style subject indexing (3”x5”).
- d) Binding/Shelving.
- e) Display for access.

### **Eye Witness Account - Activities in the Serials Section**

In the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS) Library, the under listed are the sectional activities:

**Acquisitions:** depend and vary according to parental body’s mission statement, that is to say, support for the needs of users of the library. It rolls back years- every year, an older year falls off to make room for most current, considering the dwindling vote. Since they are on a periodic basis, bibliographic and order information are linked to catalogue and acquisitions records- this check in display must be dutifully kept by the library. Annually, librarians must ‘affirm’ the parameters for serving the users the selected journals. Aside mortality of journals, the library may discontinue ordering, due to low rate of consultation by users, poor editing, dwindling resources (get e-copies/open access journals), or brittleness, concept flimsiness, discourse anachronism, epileptic supply, lack of inclusivity (blind users) – especially, if the journals are for gifts and exchange with the organized, developed world. Check-in records may be created for all serials including newspapers, periodicals, loose-leaf, numbered/unnumbered monographic series, membership stuff and others defined by the library expected issues to be checked in with a single keystroke. Selection and control made via request forms, purchase, security and preservation of serials in all formats. Many now are electronical, in databases,

without a print counterpart and cannot be found on book shelves. Such may require subscription to the databases due to quality discourse.

1. Access to contents to support education, teaching, learning, research and entertainment of basically the parent body must be created, via routing of content pages.
2. Reasons must be adduced for obtaining or routing of such serials.
3. Ordering, invoice preparation, collation of costs for the bursary/Late UNESCO coupons.
4. Checking-in, vetting, kardex (record of acquisitions), cataloguing, returning 'unreceived' issues to vendor, binding against pilferage, maintaining holdings records in the stripdex and catalogue
5. Up-to-date information by indexing for academics via SDI/CAS to the faculty/beyond. Content pages may be sent by email/WhatsApp where the facilities are available.

**Current Awareness Services (CAS):** Access to serials is the most pronounced problem of all librarians due to their appearance- no serendipity as they are monolithic. Saving the users' time is pivotal as serials affect research performance counts (Iyoro, 2004). Classed into three-New additions, subject index to periodicals received and contents of current periodicals received, the last two sound like tautology but, the difference shall be clear soon. Tables of Contents (T.O.C.) generally feature as the preceding pages to both - non-print or print formats. It is called current content or current awareness service, delving into these two terminologies shall come up later-no matter how undesirable the contents of the said publications, access to contents must be granted. Routing lists may be printed for issues received automatically or on blogs, so as to check and vet records at all levels.

a) **Subject Index to periodicals received:** This ordinarily appears twice a year-June and December. They must be passed round to all members of the faculty and registered members on selective dissemination of information (SDI). This is a subject index to all periodicals received by any library in the last six months to the date of its publication. That is to say, it is retrospective- the issues from July to December appear in the second edition at the close of the year. Subject headings are in tandem with the subject catalogue.

**Content of Current Periodicals Received:** Fortnightly photocopies of contents of periodicals received must be routed to all the faculty members for keep. Other library patrons utilize the other copies on the display shelves.

It is easier and faster to look through these indexes or content of periodicals received than wading through thousands of serials for both readers and faculty- more so, serials are unified in presentation.

Due to the 'backbone' nature of serials, they are exceedingly useful to the academics, diligent investigation of contents, necessitates a periodical index utilizing the subject headings of the receiving library, with due regard to authority control. It is the pillar to all academic researches. Observatory studies at University of Ibadan, Nigeria, revealed that serials are readily accessible and available as 94% of even undergraduates cite them. Also, at the University of Lagos Library, serials are available and very accessible to patrons, local and foreign. Whether as books, reports, gazettes, or other serials publications and even e-resources, indexes must be prepared for each library to save users' time. Though some journals come with indexes, which are placed by the side of such journals on the designated shelves. These are mostly foreign

journals, which, but for the sake of promoting ‘local content’, are highly preferred for low mortality rate, aesthetics, classy discourse layout and editorials.

**STRIPDEX:** This is a ‘two- leaf’ stand of about 15 inches, on the top of public card catalogue, arranged in alphabetical sequence to list out old and new serial holdings of the library. Serials listings and attendant policies, vary from library to library, some mix local with foreign.

**Periodicals card file:** This is like serials register. Entries are useful, if the periodicals carrying the desired article is in the library, it is manifest immediately. Libraries interfile periodical card file in the card catalogue- this helps to determine the collection status of the given periodical- whether available or not. It exposes interruptions in the purchases, and available issues.

### **SERIALS MANAGEMENT**

Bala, Isah and Ibrahim (2023) assert that serials are backbones to success of every research, and therefore should be managed effectively. Managing serials entails acquisition, which involves selection, deselection and subscription; organization and use which involves processing and display on racks; and maintenance which involves updating, filling the gap, preservation, binding of back issues and repair of damaged issues (Akinbode & Nwalo, 2017). There are no exact rules though, serials policy and treatment are intrinsically same globally. The peremptory norms are taught at the inception of the profession and must be adhered to, nillywilly. In NIALS, journals are housed on the ground floor opposite the quick reference shelves. Alphabetically arranged from A to Z. Indexes to them are visibly displayed or given on request. Some journals feature as law reports, since reports are dominant in law libraries than journals, they must be treated as reports. For inexplicable reasons, some libraries place reports with journals- the dilemma is that reports are separated by jurisdictions- Queen’s Bench, Chancery, Family law division, Exchequer, for instance, are all English Reports. Nigerian reports like Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (NWLR), Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgements (SCNJ), Labour law reports, etc, are separately placed to reflect court, dates, topics/content or its gifts/ bequethal nature (origin).

For some reasons like space, certain libraries like the Ogun Judiciary simply shelve journals with law reports. Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (NWLR), Federation Weekly Law Reports (FWLR), Constitutional Law reports, are not separately placed to reflect courts, dates or contents or jurisdiction even when foreign. In developed world, all fields have various specialists, serials librarianship should be a special branch, the technicalities should not be dabbled into by librarians who do not have a passion or disposition to ferret out the message of each serial.

Management of serials involves effective planning for acquisition, classification and organization/storage in the library for access and use. Priya and Abdul Majeed (2015) posited that serials require continuous management process. In serials management, binding is a vital issue. Workflow must be documented as bulk ordering alone can give consistent binding schemes. Ditto for funding and selection of appropriate serials for binding, manual is diverse from automated binding in these days of digitization. Missing cover pages, volumes, poor pictures and other unprofessional displays must not be sent out to users. Article downloads must be sound before an online article can be collated for library web. Metadata concepts help in this aspect.

### Classification of Serials

Most classification schemes allow novel approaches to this classification. Its organization is as such the simplest exercise ever, but its abstracting, routing and so on require expertise. The technicality is that, the first letter of the journal is written under letter “K” (340). Alphabets numerically arranged – that is to say “A-Z” is No.: 1-26.

Thus Berlin Law Journal will be:

**K**  
**2**  
**.E8**  
**Vol. 12(4)**

B = 2, the next alphabet is ‘E’ and ‘R’ cuttered for is 8. The volume follows and the number or issue. Entry in the card catalogue must appear like that. It is possible that more than one journal start with same alphabet. No two diverse materials must bear same mark, as a classification rule. The novelty permitted by Moy’s scheme simplifies this by giving a free hand, though with due regards to the consistency, professionalism and logical creativity of a cataloguer. Class “K” is assigned to law serials. Arrangements allow updating as new serials debut.

Another example is taken from Journal of Management; using Library of Congress classification scheme, the class mark is:

**HD**  
**1**  
**Vol. 10(1)**

### Recommendations

For good serials management in the library, the following recommendations are made:

**Need for acquisitions policy review:** No significant number of serials added to major libraries around the country, except through gifts, as UNESCO coupons seem to be the bail-out, serials are highly valued, and values increase with the years. The costs increase more than living realities, this has weighed down the libraries. Open access and attendant archives help. Some like books, run in parts, examples are encyclopedia, compendium of professional gatherings, conference communiqués. Subscription to the oldest and best round the world due to financial constraints- is out of question for the libraries. Only reawakening of the UNESCO coupons can help out, TETFUND for books can also do in universities and higher institutions. In NIALS for instance, monographic pamphlets constitute a major part of serials – such work should be upgraded to international levels via painstaking editorials, so as to attain to the ISSN or ISMN listing as monographic series at the global level; it is a form of internally generated revenue (IGR).

For the fact that Nigeria does not have bookshops in tandem with Her Majesty’s Stationery Office Bookshops, acquisitions of materials like journals and other serials is an ordeal. Mostly foreign journals are desirable for comparative, aesthetics, promptness, exposure and low mortality rate. Oftentimes, they are shipped and are not received on time with the attendant disaster risks- flooding, theft or miscarriage. Air freight is an alternative, but the cost is outrageous. In order not to miss out any issue, blanket or Standing Order is the norm, so no

issue is left out, as retrospective acquisition costs more, once they are out of prints – that is, if they will be disposed to help out at all. For local serials, a standing order with government printers who will supply all government publications like treaties, gazettes, regional laws like edicts, bye laws, Hanzards (Legislative Houses), law periodicals, pamphlets, etc. These materials are not found in any regular book markets – local or foreign.

**Staff Skills:** Library success profiles entail assessment of user needs, literature searches to meet needs, stock selection, onward service provision by document delivery to end users. Evidence-based service provision or user satisfaction is alien to Nigerian libraries, for several undisclosed political reasons. No field of human knowledge can be dabbled into by untrained hands. Possession of a diploma in librarianship is a desideratum for engaging any staff in a research or academic library. The academics are preoccupied with “publish or perish” tunnel vision, and no suitable staff of “like passion” to help out often. Qualifications in line with libraries should be a standing rule for recruitment now. Mentoring is near impossible for certain cadre of staff, as some simply cumber the space. The town and gown approach of seasonal workers like students’ work/study schemes to clear backlogs, and perform word processing is most welcome.

**Imperative of a ‘Current Index to Periodicals’:** No heuristics discovery in serials is possible as they appear almost homogeneous. One may be scanning or browsing through shelves and find titles on the spine of books that are related to the research interest. This does not exist in serials search. A journal may contain over twenty (20) articles! The table of content or content page cannot be scrutinized by any librarian or researcher for reading list in the library by a researcher – none has time for such. Subject index based on ‘subject headings to periodicals received’ is a sine qua non to utilization of these unique resources. The story is very sordid in all libraries – either no diligent word processing, non-collation of indexed work or slow pace of the work or other impediments the scenario is best imagined.

**Resource sharing as a bail out:** There are over five hundred (500) journals published now on Criminal Law and Criminology alone. It is fool hardy suggesting all titles to a law library. Not only will book vote not stretch to cover such, but treating all will wear out the librarians. Consortia have been proposed since the 80s, but till now nothing in the horizon to suggest actualization. Australia, USA and Europe all have a long history of resource sharing, which is sharing bibliographic materials like books and journals and other e-resources. Consortia in a digitized era assists in fewer resources for a common good, via vouchers, interlibrary loans, other cooperative ventures, libraries here can create union lists of serials, exchange programmes, access to one another’s resources online. Nothing yet in place as the NLN does not yet have the right information and personnel for such, ditto for Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL). Perhaps, when the old brigade quits the stage, even though on regional lines, the exercise should commence. No library does not delight in ‘saving the bucks’ and still accessing all its needs.

- **Preservation and conservation of serials:** The Gestapo and fascist attempts in creating serials sections must be nipped. Diligent spadework, blueprints for survival and actionable build must be stated, *abinnitio*. They must be kept in better and restricted access rooms before binding – its sleeky size aids theft. Libraries worldwide dread unfettered access by vagrants as humans can use our highly developed vertebrate brains

to unleash chaos and destruction on serials in particular. Binderies must be housed near this section, they run out fast and successive parts must be brought together by saddle stitching to forestall pilferage and mishandling on the shelves. When the pages are brittle due to high 'ph' level, they may be reproduced, treated with ergosterol and the brittle copy kept away. Preservation and conservation of serials via binding and pre-purchase quality assurance, compulsory and early production of the statutory location directory in 'Index to periodicals received' are crucial.

- **Sectional acquisition rules:** It should be borne in mind that due to the learning of rapidly emerging fields in social or economic areas hitherto devoid of legalism, new titles of serials have emerged that must be added to the serials collection, once vetted by the officer in charge and approved. It is not yearly tailor made like book selection that virtually upgrade the editions. This should necessitate handsome and meaningful budget for the unit.

### **Conclusion**

Available texts of International Standard Book Description (ISBD) listed ISBD (Serials) only in 1977 which was the first standard edition, obviously there must have been some "substandard edition". These ISBD have been translated into multilingual variations of French, Arabic, German, Japanese, Spanish, etc. The Universal Basic Catalogue in London is the depository of all versions; it was only in the 80s that International Standard Serials Number (ISSN) was devised. Librarians must put hands on deck to find solution to constraints of internationally accepted standard, serials are published as monographs but bear ISSN – "the appearance is Esau, but the voice is Jacob's". It has all typifications of a book but has an ISSN. Some carry ISSN but are actually monographs. Serials are 'seriously' not reckoned with, though very crucial to researchers and even in reference or reading lists compilations, serials are side lined; since usage determines visibility and reckoning, serials are not too strongly recommended or acquired by libraries due to the lean purse or some other dilemma. This should not be so. Libraries should come to agree on how to make serials unification, they are too sporadic in appearance and no library can have half of its needs in this realm. Consortias certainly have a lot of appeal as professional journal digestion is among the core activities that enhance career development. Contentious as serials usage may be, due to its nature, their indispensability make them a vital addition to the collection. Not only for the recency of topics, currency, expansion of the frontiers of research globally, helping to discuss what others fear to write in nations with 'fettered freedom' like ours, but being the only avenue for actualizing the 'publish or perish' mandates of academics' assessment and promotion. The work concludes by suggesting that the employment of only possessors of library and information science qualifications in the libraries to forestall the 'garbage in and garbage out' syndrome. Also, the commencement of consortia is imperative to avoid duplication of efforts and resource wastage among libraries. Green horns will glean much from this slot.



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