

2.2 Botswana

Retracing the Impact of Information Communications Technology on Academic Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa: Case Study of the University of Botswana Library

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Introduction

Early attempts by libraries to employ some semblance of technology to transact business are recorded in the 1930s (Harter 1997). But it is from the 1960s that major development of information technology applications in libraries started to be undertaken. These included online interactive processing and telecommunications, production of the keyword in context or KWIC index for articles appearing in the Chemical Abstracts. The MARC standard made it possible for libraries to exchange and share bibliographic data as well as undertake migration of data between systems (Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services 1967). This was followed by major strides in 1970s in the use of information technologies in libraries that saw librarians working closely with Information Technology (IT) units and using programming skills of IT departments to develop library based applications. The 1980s became a period of gradual transition from in-house built systems to integrated library management systems created by third party vendors (CAVAL Limited 1987). These developments were followed in the 1990s by the growth of the Internet and the evolution of digital libraries (Nelson 2001).

Since 2000 content providers emerged and began to publish content on their own domains. Academic libraries in sub-Saharan Africa did not partake effectively in the early library automation initiatives compared to their counterparts in Europe, North America, and Asia. The laggard position of sub-Saharan African academic libraries may in part be explained by the lack of funding to purchase costly commercial software, inadequate or complete lack of information technology policies and limited IT skills on the part of library staff to spearhead and manage library automation projects. Largely, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by academic libraries seems to have been at the behest of donor funding. Thus most of those academic libraries that have automated their library collections have been assisted to a large extent by donor agencies providing both hardware and software.