"Transforming Academic Libraries for a Sustainable Future"

ICULA-2023

Proceedings of
13th International Conference

University Librarians Association of Sri Lanka

Colombo, Sri Lanka
October 26, 2023

e-Proceedings

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**13th International Conference
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26ᵗʰ October 2023

Mount Lavinia Hotel, Colombo

Sri Lanka

Contents

INNOVATIVE APPLICATION FOR THE STOCK VERIFICATION PROCESS OF LIBRARY MATERIALS: A CASE OF SEUSL LIBRARIES

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Abstract

With the introduction of a new University Grant Commission circular, all university libraries are required to conduct stock verifications annually if the collection is less than 100,000 items. Libraries with huge collections are facing difficulties with verifying the stock against their accession registers due to the time taken to complete the process. The South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) Library provided an efficient solution for the process since it reduced the extra manual work to compare the database with the verified data and reporting options. Therefore, making awareness of the university libraries about this tool is the main objective of this study. Libraries of SEUSL planned its stock verification process when it was requested to be conducted. Even though all the guidelines were followed as mentioned in the commission circular, the process becomes different at the SEUSL libraries than at other libraries since the library uses this innovative tool. The tool developed by SEUSL used the existing technologies of the universities to minimize data losses and human errors. All the techniques and process lines were developed in-house and allocated staff precisely to collect data using the given guidelines. At the end of the data collection process, all the data were screened for any issues to be noted. The tool helps to match the exact electronic version of the accession register with the physically verified data. The tool instantly provides duplicated items, missing items, shelf-wise or section-wise detailed reports etc. The tool was built using Microsoft Access for the ease of the users and there is a plan to go for an online version of the same to increase the efficiency of it. The staff can locate each item with issues by using the reports generated which consist of location details. This has separate modules and designs in a user-friendly manner. With the use of this tool, SEUSL Libraries conducted two verifications. After that modifications to the system as well as to the process were done. Since the stock verifications have been completed fully within three months, this is a good example for the other university libraries to adopt this for their verifications to finalize the process.

Keywords: *Databases, Innovation, Library tools, Stock verification*

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Introduction

South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) is at present served by two libraries the Main Library and the Science Library. One of the main purposes of stock verification is to find out the loss and damages of the library materials. Verification of library materials (stock) is different from the verification of stock in stores. The library materials are prone to damage due to constant wear and tear. Library materials may be lost for many reasons. Library stock verification is a time-consuming activity that needs a dedicated workforce. Difficulty in generating reports, issues due to duplicated items, and missing items that could be found at the next stock verification make the process complex. The study compares the library stock verification process with the adaptation of new tools during the years 2017 and 2022.

Like any other university library in Sri Lanka, SEUSL Libraries also followed the manual verification process for verifying the stock using the MS Excel package. Hence, MS Excel had several issues when many values of various divisions of the library were compared. It is essential to produce accurate comparisons without duplicating the accession numbers. MS Excel was found to have failed when many data comparisons were carried out due to less system capacity. Therefore, the need for a new approach arose and the SEUSL team planned to go for an innovative tool.

Methodology

To improve the stock verification process, SEUSL Library has developed a tool using the available resources in the library. Hence in this study, researchers followed the case study method to showcase the importance of using this innovative tool for other university libraries to enhance their stock verification process without facing difficulties in finalizing the stock verification report. It was decided to go for a database approach using MS Access as the preliminary requirement to develop a new tool immediately. Then it was tested with the sample data and a test run was done. In 2018, analyzed and generated reports were submitted as annexures of the final stock verification report and were approved by the library committee. The tool was first developed with basic and limited features but it gradually improved from year 2017 to 2022. The modifications for the tool were added based on the requirements of the process improvements. The time taken to verify in manual checking and using the developed tool was compared. Furthermore, the difficulties and usefulness of the new tool were compared between the two methods to conclude the findings of this study. Hence the case study approach was used as the research approach for the study and the

Library of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka was identified as the research location for the study. The results are limited only to the experience obtained after implementing the new tool for verifying the stock process at SEUSL whereas many customizations can made in accordance with the other university libraries.

The Process

The Vice-Chancellor appointed two committees to carry out the stock verification in the SEUSL Libraries including the branch libraries for the year 2017 ended on 31st December. The committee with the support of library staff verified the current stock of the library materials against the accession register of SEUSL Libraries. Committee members were grouped and assigned a certain number of shelves for each group facilitation parallel processing. All the books of SEUSL libraries contain barcodes which enable barcode scanners and mobile phone scanner applications to retrieve accession numbers of each library material. The mobile phone holders were also developed by the bindery staff of the SEUSL libraries with available resources. Physically available items on a shelf were recorded in a customized spreadsheet with the support of a barcode/mobile phone scanner and a computer.

Shelf-wise records physically taken were printed out and duly signed by the person/s who were directly involved in the stock-taking process. Then these files were collected separately for final cumulative counts. Damaged items to be discarded from the library were collected separately. Then the current stock of the library materials was verified against the accession register of SEUSL Libraries which include the Main Library, Science Library and Academic Program Centre (APC) Libraries. The missing list of books was also generated via the tool. The stock verification team first took the stock and the missing items were verified against several registers, reports, and records such as accession register, invoice accessioned, list of books lost in the Tsunami, list of books lost by flood, and declared lost items which borrowed by students and staff, list of books accessioned from Affiliated University College, list of books sent to Academic Program Centre and the previous stock verification reports.

Bibliographical details and the price of the missing items were taken referring to the accession register and invoice accessioned. At the end of the verification, all the reports for the given sections were generated using the tool used for the process as elaborated in Figure 1.
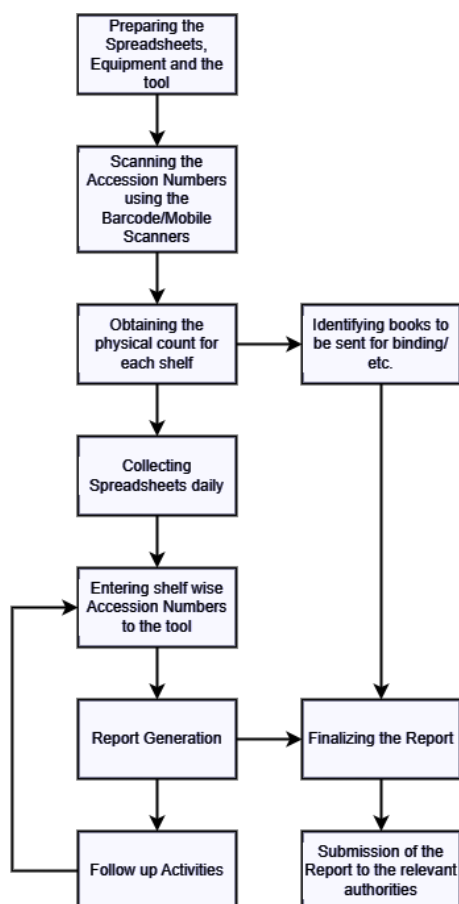
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│  Preparing the  │
│  Spreadsheets,  │
│ Equipment and the│
│      tool       │
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│  Scanning the   │
│ Accession Numbers│
│   using the     │
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│    Scanners     │
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┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│  Obtaining the  │      │ Identifying books to│
│ physical count for│───▶│ be sent for binding/│
│   each shelf    │      │      etc.       │
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│   Collecting    │               │
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│Report Generation│─────▶│Finalizing the Report│
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│Follow up Activities│   │ Submission of the │
└─────────────────┘      │Report to the relevant│
                         │   authorities    │
                         └─────────────────┘
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Figure 1. Stock Verification Process Carried out at SEUSL Libraries

The Tool

The inception of this tool began with a System Analyst, guided by the Librarian, SEUSL. Subsequently, an Assistant Librarian enriched it with numerous features, culminating in its current version. This tool operates as a standalone application built on Microsoft Access, empowering users to independently retrieve pertinent information through queries and reports. Once queries and reports are designed, the tool facilitates instantaneous retrieval of data. Figure 2(a) visually illustrates the tool's evolution from its initial stages.
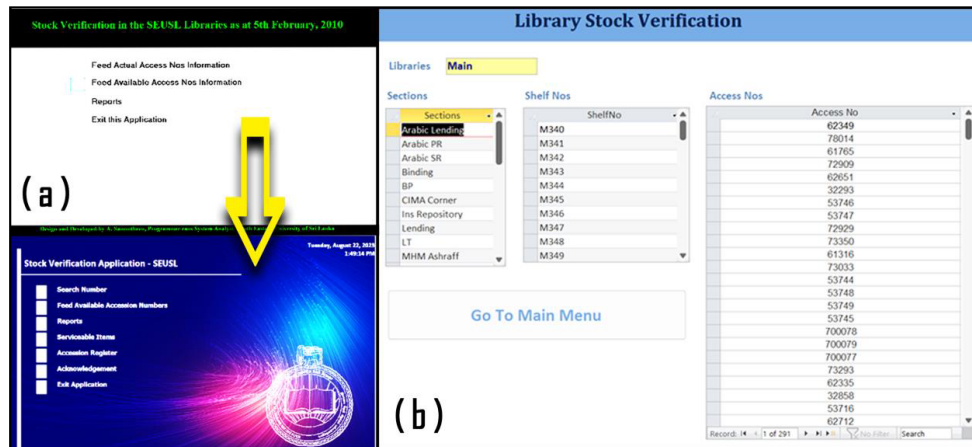
Figure 2. Home Page of the Tool at the Startup and Current Version

Results and Discussion

The previous verification processes took more than three months to finalize the full verification process. With the help of this tool, it minimizes the total collection time to a maximum of three months, which comprises approximately 100,000 library materials within the library. The tool offers features to facilitate the verification process as outlined below.

The collected data is entered through a form designed as shown in Figure-(b). All shelf-wise data gathered during the physical verification process is input into this section, which provides all the necessary information to later identify duplicate items. Upon completing the data-entry process, users can instantly generate pre-designed reports using the provided data. These generated reports serve as annexures for the final stock verification report, which is submitted to the Library Committee on time.

While this may seem like a simple and straightforward task, verifying the stock at libraries is a time-consuming process without the use of new technologies and tools. This development by the SEUSL libraries is one such attempt, and with experience, the library is exploring ways to transform it into an online version of this standalone application. Once this is accomplished, any library can customize the application for their data and complete the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, the tool developed at SEUSL Libraries offers a innovative approach to library stock verification. The pre-designed reports generated by this tool can seamlessly align with the reporting requirements outlined in the new University Grant Commission Circular No 01/2022. Therefore, as the content of the manually processed reports and the tool-generated reports are comparable, researchers recommend adopting this novel approach in other libraries to expedite the finalization of the verification process.

Acknowledgement

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