

The Effect of Computer Use on the Performance of Public Libraries in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Musferah D. Al-kathami

Abstract

This study explores the effect of computer Use on the performance of Saudi public libraries. The study problem lies on the unclear vision of the current status of automation in Saudi public libraries. Few studies and reports regarding this topic are available.

The main goal of the study is to answer the following question “ To what extent did automation affect the performance of Saudi public libraries, specifically in the following fields: acquisition, cataloging, circulation, online public access catalogs (OPACs) ?

Moreover, this study shed a light on the present situation of those libraries in order to help them on future planning for automation.

The descriptive research methodology was adopted to conduct the study. Instructed interview was used to collect needed data.

The most important findings of the study are :-

- 1- Most of the libraries are using in-house systems (70%) and commercial systems are rarely used.
- 2- Cataloging is the most common automated activity and as for the services, OPACs and reference services are the most common.
- 3- The majority of the population confirmed the strong effect of automation on saving the staff time (92%).
- 4-Regarding the performance, the study population agreed that it was strongly affected by automation based on all the four factors with slight differences.

- 5-The study population also confirmed the strong effect of automation on the effectiveness and quality of the work based on all the five factors with slight differences.
- 6- The study proved that automation has strongly affected the organizational structure of the libraries as well as the number of employees, their positions and ratio of professionals to non-professionals.
- 7-The study revealed that the most significant difficulties that face libraries in their automation projects were related to the hardware and finance.

Based on study findings, several recommendations were made :

- 1-The study proved the strong effect of automation on the performance of the libraries as well as the quality of their work. The total number of automated public libraries in the Kingdom is 10 out of 110 libraries, i.e. 9% only. Therefore, libraries which have not been automated yet should consider automation to enhance their performance. The same fact applies to those libraries who have partly automated their activities and services.
- 2- The researcher recommends public libraries to use ready-commercial automated systems due to their high quality comparing to in-house systems.
- 3- It is recommended that King Abdulaziz Public library in Riyadh should take the lead in automation cooperation between Saudi public libraries due to its resources and previous experiences.