

## **Automation of St. Francis Xavier's Seminary Library at Columbuthurai, Jaffna, Sri Lanka**

A.G.Saverimuttu \*

### **Introduction**

The St. Francis Xavier's Seminary Library, a vital resource established forty years ago, specializes in Theology and Philosophy. Housing approximately 28,000 books, including encyclopaedias, subject dictionaries, multi-volume Bible commentaries, atlases, and various theological journals. It plays a crucial role in theological education. Before automation, readers could only rely on the author card catalogue to find specific books. Since other card catalogues were incomplete, browsing the shelves was often the only effective method for locating books. Additionally, when a book was borrowed, the Library Assistant had to manually record the details on the Reader's Card and mark the return date on the book's slip. Recognizing the need to modernize and improve the library's efficiency, the Seminary Council initiated the automation project in June 2021 with a budget of Rs.1.5 million. The primary objectives were to streamline library processes, enhance service delivery, and make resources more accessible to students and staff.

### **Project plan and Methods**

The project commenced with an introductory session by Dr. S. Ketheeswaren, Deputy Librarian of the University of Jaffna, who continued to guide the automation process. Partnering with Tech2Lib, a Sri Lankan company specializing in library automation, the library secured a cost estimate and subsequently obtained a subsidy from donors in Rome. Due to economic challenges, the project required a revised budget of Rs.1.8 million in 2023. The Tech2Lib company has provided the library with a tailor-made software programme and server connectivity to initiate and maintain an automated library system. This software is based on the Koha open-source integrated library management system (ILS). The library makes use of a cloud server, for which annual fees are paid. Three additional Library Assistants were hired; they were given initial training about library cataloguing using automation. Further, they had weekly refresher training sessions where they presented problems encountered while trying to catalogue various types of books and other resources. They focused initially on the Lending Section, followed by the Reference Section and journal issues. Identity cards with barcodes have been issued to the students and the staff members of the Seminary to automate the borrowing process.

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\*Corresponding author: A.G.Saverimuttu, Francis Xavier's Seminary, Columbuthurai, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.  
[Email: ags\\_saverimuttu@hotmail.com](mailto:ags_saverimuttu@hotmail.com)

### **Findings and Discussion**

The automation project has led to significant improvements in library operations. The Lending Section, consisting of around 16,000 books, has been fully processed, and work on the Reference Section and journals is ongoing. The present cataloguing work began in May 2023, and has been going on for one year and three months as of 08 August 2024. Already the library catalogue is available for readers as an OPAC, and students and staff have expressed satisfaction about the ease of searching for specific information about books. Implementing barcode scanning for loans has simplified the borrowing process, reducing manual errors and saving time. The training of Library Assistants and the integration of technology has facilitated a smooth transition to the automated system. The project highlighted the importance of adequate funding and resources in successfully implementing library automation.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The automation of St. Francis Xavier's Seminary Library represents a significant advancement, enhancing functionality and service delivery. This modernization effort underscores the critical role of technology in maintaining the relevance and efficiency of library services, demonstrating the potential for other libraries to undertake similar automation initiatives. The Seminary Library has enhanced the knowledge empowerment of its members through the automation process, and improved in its role as a catalyst for excellence in theological and related studies.

Suggestions are given as : Expand the automated system to include digital resources and online access; Implement continuous training programs for library staff; Ensure regular maintenance and updates of the automation system; Seek additional funding sources for further enhancements; Incorporate user feedback mechanisms to continually improve the library experience.

**Keywords:** Library automation, Theology library, Library management, Digital transformation, Library services