

## Collection Development in Academic Libraries: Challenges and Way Forward

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**ABSTRACT:** *The core of the library is the collection. Library, being an information bank, its pivotal role is enshrined in the basic mandate of stocking information materials to meet the needs of users. The quality of the collection remains the litmus test of service delivery effectiveness in the academic world. It is the functional domain of collection development to peg collection quality high. Well-conceived collection development encompasses a range of activities such as selection, acquisition, user studies, stock evaluation, weeding and interlibrary cooperation. None of these activities is inconsequential in the bid to achieve high quality collection as they all work in synergy. The collection development which composed of the information resources, constitutes the basic instrument of service delivery in the library. Thus, librarians involved in collection development roles must now reach as far as possible into the larger world of prints and web scholarly content to add, organize, promote and make quality material discoverable and accessible. Librarians need to expose the research materials housed in repositories and on the open web, even as these materials are often hidden from scholars due to lack of indexing, inadequate crawling by major search engines, existence of poor quality metadata, or a lack of librarian effort at marketing of material that might maximize usage and accessibility. Therefore, Collection development librarians and subject specialists are best poised to know which public domain materials might best be needed and made more accessible to institutional scholars and to local communities.*

**KEY WORDS:** collection development, academic libraries

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### INTRODUCTION

The core of the library is the collection. Library, being an information bank, its pivotal role is enshrined in the basic mandate of stocking information materials to meet the needs of users. The quality of the collection remains the litmus test of service delivery effectiveness in the academic library. It is the functional domain of collection development to peg collection quality high. Well-conceived, collection development encompasses a range of activities such as selection, acquisition, user studies, stock evaluation, weeding and interlibrary cooperation. None of these activities is inconsequential in the bid to achieve high quality collection as they all work in synergy. Thus,

collection development which compose of information resources, constitutes the basic instrument of service delivery in the library. A library's scope is approximately equal to its area of interest, determined by the perceived interest of clientele. Clientele interest-directed selection will doubtless result to higher library patronage and user satisfaction (Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, 2015). Thus, Edoaka, (2000) in Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, (2015) expressed that the academic library is a purpose-driven organization. It is the major support infrastructure for the tripartite function of higher education- teaching, research and extension. In view of this, the need for live collections in academic libraries is unquestionable. A live collection is one that is well-groomed, active and hence responsive to the needs of users. It is the functional domain of collection development to achieve a live collection in the library. Collection development is a multi-faceted activity. Its scope traverses acquisition, user assessment, policies, selection, weeding and evaluation.

### **Collection Development: An Overview**

Kumar et al (2008) in Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, (2015), identify the constituent parts of collection development as assessing user needs, evaluating the present collection, determining selection policies, coordinating selection, re-evaluating and storing parts of the collection, and planning for resource sharing. None of these aspects of collection development is inconsequential as they all work in synergy to ensure the functional effectiveness of the library collection. Also, collection development is conceptualized by Ojebode (2009) in Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, (2015), as comprising a great number of library activities including selection of resources, acquisition of those materials selected, the development of plans for sharing resources between libraries, the maintenance of resources acquired, weeding and evaluation. In recent times, collection management has been used by some librarians to refer to the maintenance of library materials as part of collection development.

Hence, Chu,(1997) in Giri, Sen and Mahesh, (2015) observed that collection development in an academic library is a two-way process involving the faculty and the librarian. Thus, formal communication between librarian and faculty is needed to cultivate consciously the relationship to make collection development process efficacious in academic library.

### **Collection Development Policy**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when information explosion (both in print and electronic form) is but a common phenomenon, it is impossible to manage libraries effectively and efficiently, without precise consideration of the composition of their collection and how they are going to be developed(Giri, Sen and Mahesh, 2015). Thus, Kumar et al (2008) in Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, (2015) expressed that collection development is guided in most libraries by the collection development policy. It is necessary to have the collection development policy written to make for objectivity in developing the library collection. A collection development policy is essential for a balanced and robust

collection. It specifies the scope of the collection, authority for selection, criteria for allocation of funds and for selection of various types of materials, priorities in selection and criteria for weeding.

In spite of its importance, some libraries do not have comprehensive collection development policies. For example, reporting a six-month exercise aimed at rejuvenating the reference collection of the University of Mauritius Library, Ephraim (2001) in Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, (2015), notes that his team was faced with the daunting situation where there was no collection development policy with clear guidelines on stock building.

Also, according to a study embarked upon by Flatley and Prock (2009), the results of the survey generally expressed the experience of electronic resource collection development policy. In the words of the researchers, when selecting electronic resources there were some definite processes and criteria involved most of the time, but most libraries reported having no collection development policy in place for selecting materials. Of the 18 libraries that completed the survey, 10 had no particular process for evaluating resources before purchase. Six had an informal process but two had a formal definite process. When asked who is evaluating resources, responses ranged from a committee of all librarians to one individual decision maker. Thus, Flatley and Prock (2009) suggested that developing a collection development policy for both print and e-collections should be part of larger collection development criteria or a stand-alone one. And the key is to develop one that is in agreement with your institution's mission and goals. Developing this policy demonstrates that the library is being proactive and also will serve to help the library justify decisions to cancel a resource or get something that is requested.

In a study carried out by Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu (2015), it was asserted that the researchers enquired from the subject librarians if their libraries operated a written collection development policy and all 109 (100%) subject librarian answered 'no'. This result is worrisome in the light of the importance of collection development policy as a guide in discharging the collection development function. The absence of a written comprehensive collection development policy in the studied libraries implies a lack of systematic approach in the discharge of the various facets of the collection development function. Thus, the study confirmed the lack of written comprehensive collection development policy in most academic libraries in Nigeria.

In addition, Ojebode, (2009) in Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, (2015) found that gifts constituted the main means of acquisition for the libraries he studied but these libraries had no policy guidelines on gifts. Hence, he recommended that "there should be written collection development policies, particularly on acceptance of gifts in academic libraries in Nigeria ..." This he opines would shield the libraries from being dumping grounds for unwanted materials from donors (Nwosu and Udo-Anyanwu, 2015).

Hence, the library is striving to follow policies in determining the maximum limit as to the number of copies on a particular title. The above formula is found to be very useful when library receives

request to procure several titles in a subject. While applying collection development policies' formula, the practical limitation arises in determining the weight of a subject of a course in a given semester. For this purpose, the library should adopt a mixed policy. Whenever a new subject/course is introduced, the library requests the course coordinator/concerned faculty to indicate at most three major titles in the subject that may be primarily used by the students for the subject, so that they may be procured in multiple copies. Even in that case, the library should purchase at most three copies and after observing the students' needs, it goes for additional copies. For books in a subject that are already being taught in a semester and available in the library, the usage data of consecutive two years for the semester are used in determining the weight of the subjects when a large number of copies of several titles are recommended for procurement (Giri, Sen and Mahesh, 2015).

There is problem arising when a given title is required by students of other courses at the same time. For example, computer language programming by C was needed by the students of 3rd semester of Mechanical & Automation Engineering (MAE) students as well as Electronics & Communication Engineering (ECE) students at the same time. In that case, maximum value for MAE for 3rd semester and maximum value or ECE for 3rd semester has been compared and higher value has been taken as maximum limit for purchasing initially. After that, feedbacks from circulation department as well as from students were collected. When it was observed that more copies were needed, additional copies were purchased phase-wise keeping demand structure in mind up to a maximum to the sum total of requirements of the two departments (Giri, Sen and Mahesh, 2015). Thus, an earlier survey in Sweetland and Christensen (1997) in Dinkins (n.d) stated that the two most important reasons for selecting a title are relevance to curriculum, and requests by faculty.

### **Collection Development in Digital Age**

Mullen, (2010) in Mullen, (2011) asserted that collection development in academic libraries has undergone a major transformation in the digital age. Along with the increasing inclusion of toll based electronic resources in collections comes the need to evaluate and integrate all manner of open access electronic scholarly content. While librarians have heard a lot about open access resources from their own libraries and library organizations, there are some backgrounds needed to understand the various flavours and colours of open access resources, and how this movement is affecting the work of librarians building collections and working daily with users. Librarians who vet materials and organize the collections of academic libraries create the underpinning for all academic services and library outreach efforts. The prevailing attitude of many is that all information will eventually be free on the web; that the internet may even replace the library. However, the library must retain its relevance as collections move to digital formats.

Mullen, (2011) expressed that librarians must continue to build meaningful and useful digital library collections in an ever more complex situation, keeping in mind that many library users are

overwhelmed by the deluge of information choices available to them. The library must still be the place where scholarly materials may be discovered, accessed, read and used. Librarians make sense out of mountains of internet offerings, and know all too well that print collections still make up a tremendous amount of library collections. Nonetheless, with so much talk of open access information resources, librarians still seek to build digital collections made up of a variety of formats, and from a plethora of information providers, including commercial, society, and university presses.

There are many new creators of scholarly material in the new information landscape, and librarians are able to evaluate this avalanche of information to pull out value for collections. While some say collection development is of lesser importance than in the past, there are actually new roles for librarians in building collections that are digital in their makeup. Today's scholarly collections comprise both purchased/licensed material and a variety of quality open access content. Librarians will continue to build the collection of the future, exposing all relevant scholarly content, building discovery tools around that content, and working on organizing all materials in meaningful ways for library patrons and the reference librarians that serve as a bridge between the user and the material (Mullen, 2011).

Mullen (2011) stated that librarians involved in collection development roles must now reach as far as possible into the larger world of web scholarly content in this 21<sup>st</sup> century to add, organize, promote and make quality material discoverable and accessible. Librarians need to expose the research materials housed in repositories and on the open web, even as these materials are often hidden from scholars due to lack of indexing, inadequate crawling by major search engines, existence of poor quality metadata, or a lack of librarian effort at marketing of material that might maximize usage and accessibility. Collection development librarians and subject specialists are best poised to know which public domain materials might best be digitized and made more accessible to institutional scholars and to local communities.

According to Mullen (2011) collection development librarians can identify new digitization initiatives, seek grant funding, and leverage collaborations and partnerships to maximize the availability and dissemination of open web scholarly research materials. These are new roles for collection development librarians, many of whom have seen other changes to their positions in an increasingly digital age. Collection development librarians add value by integrating valuable open web contents alongside traditional library materials. Organizing available quality scholarly materials through weblists, research guides, LibGuides, course management systems, and integrated library systems can and must include free web materials. Collection development with open access materials requires a different skill set; one not dependent on traditional patterns of acquisition or the usual benchmarking for quality that may be dependent on traditional metrics or publisher reputation. Thus, vetting of relevant, quality open access resources requires knowledge of all sources of such materials.

## **Challenges to Collection Development**

### **Number of Copies' Issue**

Giri, Sen and Mahesh, (2015) asserted that collection development in academic libraries has many challenges and one of them concerns determining the number of copies of some books that are required in multiple copies in the library. The researchers added that five major academic libraries in New Delhi were surveyed to understand the prevalent policies and practices on determining the number of copies of books that are required in multiple copies. It was found that there was no consistency in the approach to deciding the number of copies in the libraries studied. Further it was noted that all the libraries arbitrarily decided on the number of copies to be purchased.

### **Busy Schedule of Library Advisory Committee**

Khan (2010) in Giri, Sen and Mahesh, (2015) opined that generally, the Library Advisory Committee (LAC) should take final decision as to the items to be purchased for the library. However, in most of the Nigerian libraries, Chief Librarians and in some cases Acquisition Librarians which are the Library Advisory Committee who are responsible for collection development are 'disadvantaged and encumbered' by other duties as they have to devote much time in many administrative and planning works and have very little time to understand the students' needs.

### **Scarcity of E-Books in Developing Countries**

Also, an alternate proposal of purchasing e-copy of books (wherever available) to avoid acquisition of multiple copies were also in consideration. But e-copies of many prescribed textbooks are scarce in developing countries. Majority of the university-prescribed textbooks published by the developing countries' publishers are not available in e-form (Giri, Sen and Mahesh, 2015).

### **Fund Issue**

Fund is not easy to come by in the developing countries for the purchase of library information resources. Government of developing countries do not see library as anything because educational sector is being relegated to the background. Thus, library collections are always dwindling at all times.

### **Environmental Issue**

Information resources that are available in developing nations are majorly from the western world. The issues treated in those books are not in line with local environmental issues. They are foreign in nature to the users of the library.

### **Inadequate Subject Librarians**

Science and Technology Subject Librarians are rare especially in Africa. Hence, relevant and recent textbooks are few in the academic libraries in Nigeria in particular.

### **Inadequacy of Proper Weeding**

Old and unfashionable materials can occupy the shelves without proper and timely weeding. This gives room to poor collection development as many who come to the library see the entire shelves being occupied but not knowing they contained old, obsolete and irrelevant materials

### **Dependency on Faculty**

Faculty are invited during acquisition process in academic libraries. However, some of the faculty look down on this invitation especially in the academic institution of developing countries. This have a negative consequence on the collection development as some relevant textbooks and other information resources are left out unselected.

### **Collection Development: Way Forward**

Neville, Williams and Hunt, (1998) in Giri, Sen and Mahesh, (2015) opined that procurement of multiple copies of books demands the librarian to take responsibility of the collection development since as at the end of the day, it is the librarian who is held responsible for the quality and performance of the library's collection. If the collection is deemed inadequate by accrediting agencies, it is the librarian rather than the faculty will be asked to take the appropriate steps to improve it.

Neville, Williams and Hunt, (1998) in Giri, Sen and Mahesh, (2015) expressed that the librarian/ acquisition staff should also make conscious and continuous efforts to harness the expertise of the faculty as it is vital to the health of the collection. Continuous interaction with faculty and students as well as regular scanning of incoming materials have the potential to give them broader perspective as well as enlighten them about the new developments which eventually help them to play the leading role in collection development. It also underscores the necessity of subject librarians in academic library system.

But on the other hand, Giri, Kan and Sen (2014) in Giri, Sen and Mahesh, (2015) expressed that to reduce dependency on physical contact with the faculty, several communication channels are being used to reach them. These include recommendation through group e-mailing system with a link to e-recommendation form created in Google Docs, social networking site (e.g. Library Facebook page, Twitter); and a permanent link in library blog. As a result, it is found that there is about three-fold jump in faculty participation in book recommendation process.

Dinkins (n.d) added that at the root of all library acquisition decisions is the goal to add to the collection those materials that meet users' needs. Compiling circulation statistics is one way of assessing users' needs which in turn can aid collection development and allows extrapolation for the future. So there should be compilation of library users' statistics for the purpose of collection development.

Many repositories still seem to be silos in the information landscape, and contents may be best found by searches of Google and Google Scholar, or OAISTER (Catalogue of Open Access Resources). OAISTER is a search engine to repository content. It is however, somewhat of a challenge to see how to integrate the millions of items searchable by OAISTER into library collections except as a search engine on the list of indexes and databases. Institutional repositories contain mixed content, and even though many are crawled by Google, collection development librarians can certainly add value by integrating any of the subjects in the repository more deeply into library collections (Mullen 2011). For instance, many universities now have ETD (Electronic Theses and Dissertations) programs, and this category provides a large free source of dissertation material from many universities. There is an effort to pull together all of the disparate ETD initiatives in the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (Mullen 2011).

Another great value added service for librarians will be to find ways to integrate and provide discovery to this material. Most universities with ETD programs have this material available from repositories. ETDs are also searchable via Google and Google Scholar, and librarians can aid searchers in finding dissertations using these tools. Also, PsycINFO (Psychological Information Database) and Modern Language Association (MLA) International Bibliography, both subscription products, use ProQuest's dissertation service for subject indexing of dissertations, and so there may be some challenge to pulling together subject collections of free dissertations for researchers (Mullen 2011).

As such, it is stressed that librarians can create vast subject collections of open access materials for use by researchers. Especially for libraries without rich subscription, librarians can create valuable collections by linking to resources made available by authors, commercial publishers, digitization efforts of many kinds, and university repositories. Those librarians tasked with providing collections focused on area studies may want to integrate dissertation material as another category of valuable scholarly work as they include rich bibliographies of source material (Mullen 2011).

Wikipedia has, in some cases, become the place for pre-research, the first stop for people worldwide to begin a search for information. Groups of scholars, including some in the music as well as the medical communities have decided to participate in adding knowledge to Wikipedia. With more than 250 languages, Wikipedia depends on communities of scholars to create an open access encyclopedic treatment, complete with references, to many topics of interest and importance. Librarians may wish to integrate open access tools such as Wikipedia further into the library as well as contribute to content in local languages. Many students use Wikipedia as a resource to articles on topics, and adding references to Wikipedia, especially open access references for all information sought. Librarians have been called upon to contribute actively to Wikipedia by adding to various language sections as well as to enhance the entries for library and information science (Mullen 2011).



## CONCLUSION

To conclude, Collection development librarians will need to continue to assess the need for both more traditional and electronic books if usage is declining. With budgets suffering, an open access collection strategy allows for extension of library collections that is without precedent and without cost. The library can continue to be known as the place where scholarly content is made available, vetted, organized, made more useful, and preserved. Best practices and policy development will guide the integration of open access web content into the excellent collections and services for all academic libraries. Excellent collections and the services that scaffold them, including the integration of open access resources, will allow academic libraries to continue a vital and integral role in the life of every academic institution (Mullen 2011). Thus, collection development should be the continuous focus of all librarians and faculty to be able to achieve the goal of satisfying users' information needs.

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