INFS 326: COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Lecture 4 – Selection of Library Materials (Part I)

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• A renowned writer (Carlos María Domínguez) once said: “to build up a library is to create a life. It’s never just a random collection of books”.

• The identification of relevant information resources for a library entails quite a lot of activities. This session delves into the first part of these activities.

• The session establishes the meaning of Selection and the factors that may affect the selection process.

• It also discusses the nature of selection as shaped by the type of library.
The key topics to be covered in this lecture are as follows:

• **Topic One:** Understanding Selection
• **Topic Two:** Factors affecting Selection
• **Topic Three:** Selection by type of library
• **Topic Four:** Responsibilities for Selection
Reading List


UNDERSTANDING SELECTION

Topic One

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Introduction

• The selection process is one of the essential parts of the Librarian’s job, and perhaps the most creative and interesting.

• This is because one of the criterion on which a Librarian is often judged is undoubtedly the quality of the resulting collection from his/her selection activities.

• This aspect of collection development is very important as it involves thoughtful decision-making, evaluation and identification of the most appropriate material for the library.
What is selection?

- In the library environment, selection is defined as the ability to decide which materials to add to the library stock and in what quantities.
Selection can also be defined as...

• The process of deciding which materials to add to the stock, and in what quantity through the evaluation of individual titles.

• It involves the identification of the various sources of information about each book; the use of the selectors own judgment in interpreting these sources, and the examination and evaluation of the book itself.
Steps in the Selection Process

• Identification of collection needs in terms of subjects and types of materials.

• Determining how much money is available for collection development.

• Developing a plan for identifying the material.

• Conducting a search for desired materials.
• There are two schools of thoughts in the process of selecting library materials. These are:

• Selection By Quality

• Selection By Quantity
Selection by Quality

• This school of thought argues that library materials should be selected based on their quality. Thus, only materials that will improve the cognitive levels of the users should be selected.

Selection by Demand

• This school of thought argues that libraries are funded by public tax. Therefore what the taxpayer wants is what should be provided. This is also referred to as the selection by quantity.
It might be necessary to bear in mind these laws in adhering to any one of the selection philosophies.

• Books are for use.
• Every book, its reader.
• Every reader, his book.
• Save the readers’ time.
• A library is a growing organism.
FACTORS AFFECTING SELECTION

Topic Two
FACTORS AFFECTING SELECTION

• Subject matter
• Relation to the collection
• Bibliographic consideration
• Special features
• Cost/price
• Date of publication
• The subject matter in a book should be related to the needs of users of the library.

• For example, academic libraries serve universities that teach specialized subjects.

• These libraries must therefore provide materials suitable to the academic community.
Relation to the collection

• Each material that is selected has a role to play in the general collection.

• It should be able to fill a gap in the collection or complement what is already in the collection.
Bibliographic consideration

• This has to do with the popularity or otherwise of the author or the publisher.

• If an author is an expert in his field, libraries are more likely to select his materials than an unknown author.

• Similarly, materials from a popular publishing house are more likely to be selected than the less popular publishing houses.
Special features

• This refers to indexes and bibliographies. An index directs the reader to names, terms and topics used in the book.

• A bibliography on the other hand tells the reader the sources of materials used to write the book.

• Apart from fiction, any good book should have an index and bibliography.
Cost/price

• This is a major consideration for a librarian in the selection of materials.
• Price is also important because it can determine the number of copies to be bought.
• However, there are some reference materials such as encyclopaedias and some scientific materials that must be purchased despite the cost.
Libraries depend very much on the currency of materials.

- However, care must be taken not to confuse an edition with an impression.

- A new edition of a book means that the book has been revised and new material have been added.
- On the other hand, an impression means a book has been reissued without any change of the original material.
Selection by type of library
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

• They are setup to support the curriculum and research needs of the institution.
  • Selection is based on academic programs that are offered by the institution.

• The materials found in university libraries are often advanced in content and diverse because they cover undergraduate programs, graduate programs as well as professional programs.
• Selection of materials at the university libraries is therefore specialized.

• A librarian needs to have a general knowledge, technical knowledge and possibly knowledge of languages in order to do effective selection.

• They are established to serve a larger community.

• Diversity is therefore a basic characteristic of public library collection.
• We have people from different ethnic background, different ages, different educational backgrounds and levels of skills and knowledge.

• Selection in the public libraries therefore cut across race, tribe, sex, age, religion and colour.

• Community need is the main determining factor in the selection. Selection is broader since everybody in the community has to be catered for.
• Growth in public library collection is modest.

• This is as a result of space limitation. Weeding is therefore done very often to make room for new items.

• Most items in the public library collection are current imprints.
• **Retrospective buying** is usually limited to replacement of loss of informational, educational, recreational, research and cultural items.

• In addition to educational and informational need, another distinctive feature of public library collection development is the emphasis placed on current materials.
SCHOOL LIBRARIES

• These are often referred to as school media centre.

• As in the case of academic library, school libraries are established to provide curricular support for the schools.

• Selection in the school library then is said to be similar to the academic library.
• The difference between selection in academic and school library is that,

• the school must also include materials that will expand the knowledge of the children such that the collection will aim at providing materials for achievement, leisure or recreational reading and devotional reading.
• Materials in the school library will include textbooks, reference materials and novels.

• A school library should have greater number of audio-visual materials.
• Collection development policies are relevant in school library collection
  ➢ because parents and other interested parties are actively concerned about the performance and content of materials that children will be exposed to.
• Therefore a clearly stated collection goals and selection criteria help everyone to operate effectively and safely.
• These are often set up for specific purposes and they are very diverse in their environmental settings and may be found in research institutions, example CSIR.
  • They may also be found in corporate institutions, example Bank of Ghana and in industrial as well as technical institutions.
• Materials in special libraries are restricted because the users often come from the same background.
  • This makes selection in Special Libraries comparatively easier than other libraries.
• Weeding is therefore a regular feature and part of activities in special libraries.
  • Special libraries depend on collections that are very current.
• The collection are therefore built for immediate use and not for future use.

• Most of the materials are very technical in nature and are of importance to only a small number of specialists.
• Special libraries collect information in formats that are not found in most types of library.

• Example of such formats are:
  • patent and trademark information
  • research reports
  • microforms.

• With ICT, electronic materials, and online database access has become part of the information provision in special libraries.
RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SELECTION

Responsibility for Selection in:

- University Libraries | Public Library | School Libraries | Special Libraries
• This is a much more specialized process than in any other library setting.

• The reason is that a number of individuals are involved in selection as full time collection development officers.

  • This arises because of the peculiar nature of university system where faculty members are responsible for selection in their subject area.
• Staff of libraries take responsibility of general bibliography, reference materials, serials and retrospective buying.

• It is actually advisable to let faculty members do their own selection because they are experts in their field and know what is best in their faculty.
Problems that may arise when faculty members are allowed to do their selection (1)

- There are delays in the submission of selected list to the librarian.
  - Delays arise as a result of lack of interest in the selection process.
- Co-ordination or lack of coordination in large university libraries.
- Unintentional duplication.
- Missing important items - as the number of persons involved in selection increases, the scope of each person’s responsibility decreases. As a result, important items are likely to be missing.
How to curb the problems (1)

Such a situation can be curbed through:

• Written **collection development policy**
  • This is because the policy will ensure continuity and consistency in the selection process.

• All selection teams to work together by sending one another acknowledgement and checking in on selection decisions.
How to curb the problems (2)

• University libraries currently employ subject specialists for collection development work in order to solve all these problems.
  • Subject specialists are people with one or more degrees in some subjects and a graduate degree in library science.
  • They combine their knowledge in particular subjects with professional knowledge in library and information science to select materials.
  • Unfortunately subject specialist are not easy to come by in areas like science, technology, law and medicine.
Selection for a public library is a much more complex procedure than other library systems. This arises out of the diverse nature of public library clientele.
• Users of public libraries include adults and children, literates, semi-literate, disadvantaged people, people in confinement, especially those in hospitals, prisons and people with diverse religious and political persuasions.

• Responsibility for selection normally rests with professional librarians in the acquisition department.
• Public libraries have a network of libraries spread over wider areas, therefore **branch librarians** may also be involved in the selection.

• This is because they are the people on the spot and know the needs of their communities.
Selection of materials may also involve **patrons**, i.e. patron selection though not on the large scale.

- Patron selection involve putting their items or list in suggestion boxes.

- Patrons’ selection tends to concern more on current materials.
• For some public libraries, selection responsibility is given to a selection committee.

• Such a committee is made up of a professional librarian and prominent members of the community.

• In such instance, group interest are represented on the committee, example; representatives of religious groups.
Selection in public libraries has to be carefully managed because of lack of adequate funding and in order to avoid waste of scarce funds. Publishers strongly rely on a strong public library market.

The librarian must be careful in order not to select not so useful material dumped on him.
In order to avoid these problems there are principles or guidelines to help the selection. Some of the principles are:

- All materials selected must be based on or relevant to the needs of the library the community serves.

- Only materials that have been favourably reviewed in at least two review sources must be selected.

- Materials that have received negative reviews must be avoided.

- Librarians should try to provide both or all views on controversial subjects.

(Alemna, 2009)
• Items of sensational, violent or inflammatory nature must be avoided.
• Librarians should select only items of lasting literary or social value.
• Materials should be provided for all people who live in the community but not for only people who are registered as borrowers of the library. Thus, it is important to select every member of the community.
• If there are foreigners in the community their needs should be catered for through a few foreign language materials.

(Alemna, 2009)
• Materials for public libraries should also consider the moral and spiritual development of the clientele in addition to their mental development. As such, pornographic materials should be avoided.

• Preference should be given to an inferior book that would read instead of a superior book that would not be read.

(Alemna, 2009)
Guidelines/Principles For Selection In Pub. Lib.  Cont’d.

• Instead of buying books of many different types, it is better to only duplicate the better books. As such, it is suggested that a librarian should buy ten extra copies of popular books rather than ten titles of unpopular books.

• Selection or collection development goes hand in hand with weeding. The librarian should remove from the shelf or the collection any material which is no more useful for the purposes of the library.

(Alemna, 2009)
Like academic libraries, school libraries also have the responsibility of catering for students, and teaching staff.

Selection therefore should relate to school curricular.

Selection in school libraries tend to have greater patron participation alongside the school.

In order words, apart from the school librarians, teachers and students form part of the selection process.

(Alemna, 2009)
Usually there is a committee headed by the head teacher and it comprises the librarian, some teachers and a few students.

The committee meets periodically to decide on materials for the library.

In some schools, such committees exist but selection is done by few teachers who are interested in the library.
• Whatever selection procedure is adopted, the principles that govern selection in public libraries apply to school libraries.

• The only difference being that the materials for school libraries may be much more advanced from the children’s section of the public library.

• While a school library selects few copies of textbooks, public libraries as a rule, do not select the textbooks.
SPECIAL LIBRARIES

• These have the most restricted clientele and their collections are also very technical.

• Selection responsibility in a special library is best left to a committee made of the librarian and specialist in the field that the library serves.
  
  • A committee is very necessary, because the librarian may not have adequate knowledge of the special field in which the library operates.
    
    • Example; in the area of medicine, Law or Technology, thus the professional knowledge of the librarian and the specialist may be combined to select materials for the library.
• Selecting materials for the special library is often a difficult process. The difficulty arises in the fact that the types of materials required in the special library may not be found in the normal selection tool like bibliographies, reviews, abstracts, indexes, etc.

• Materials for a special library are only of interest to a small number of specialists. As a result, there is no real need for review services.
Special Libraries Cont’d.

• Special libraries place emphases on research reports, pamphlets, and government publication.
  • These cannot be found in reviews and bibliographies.

• The librarian in a special library therefore must be knowledgeable of what is going on in the special area.

• He/she will have to actively contact people and rely on recommendations of his clientele and decide what to buy.
• The librarian should always be abreast with current issues pertaining to his/her area by attending conferences, seminars, meetings, and congresses pertaining to his/her area.
  • Currency is a key element in special library collection because scientific information becomes outdated in a matter of day.
• Online databases access has now become part of “collection” for the special library.

• Special libraries turn to access numeric, bibliographic and full text databases online, unlike other libraries that tend to emphasis bibliographic materials.
  • A particular problem faced by special libraries is whether to join the database service, occasionally access information or whether to acquire hard copies of the same data.
• I hope by now you have a fair idea of what ‘selection’ is all about within the library environment?

• We have also discussed the selection responsibilities in the various types of libraries.
References


Images: courtesy http://remax-nanaimo-bc.com

Activity 5.1

• How would you compare the selection responsibilities in a public library with that of a special library and an academic library?