

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT IN ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENTS: THE WAY FORWARD FOR LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The paper examines the environment and ways in which information centers and libraries in Tanzania and other developing countries may be affected by undertaking collection development within the changing e-publishing dimension. Currently, the philosophy of collection development itself is changing to accommodate these changes. As such, new methods and procedures of effecting collection development are required.

Introduction

The role of information provision is to improve the availability of information needed for different types of decision-making. Collection is therefore the heart of the library, and collection development and management according to the needs of the users is the most important function in the library. A systematic development of the collections is needed both for the acquisition of printed material to the libraries' own collection or to make information in electronic forms accessible through several networks. Analysis and organization of the material is also important so that both information professionals and users can orient themselves in the growing amount of different information resources available.

Traditionally, collection development has all along been conceptualized as procedures and processes of identification, selection, acquisition and evaluation of a collection of library resources based on the identified information needs of given users. But currently the philosophy is changing as a result of technological advancement specifically the increase of electronic devices and the Internet. These have had profound implications for collection development. For example, electronic publishing has come up with new formats and sources of information such as, e-books, e-journals, On-line information resources (the Internet) and also off-line electronic sources like the CD-ROM, magnet tapes, etc. These have affected, not only the traditional collection development procedures and processes of identification, selection, acquisition and evaluation of a collection of library resources, but also the rise of new methods of accessing information of which collection development has to consider.

Thus currently two major issues are dominating the discussion on collection development. One is the shift in the library philosophy from *ownership* of locally stored resources to provision or *access* to electronically stored resources; and the need for the rethinking of collection development policy, both to support the new philosophy and to better deal with new types of resources on a day-to-day basis. Electronic technologies and collection development seem to be two of the top concerns of most libraries today.

However, a general and all encompassing definition of collection development, which may probably cater even for electronic sources of information, can be stated as the intentional and systematic building of the set of information resources to which the library provides access. Of course, the principles of collection development, which were developed in the world of print media, have not changed radically with the coming of new electronic formats (sources) of information. However, methods of decision-making and specific selection guidelines have to be adjusted significantly in the collection development policies of various libraries to incorporate the new electronic formats. It should be understood that the unique characteristics of the electronic documents include, among others, the following:

- Many media in one – text, film, video, visual images etc.
- Large volumes – demanding technical equipment;
- Physical control and integrity of information;
- No difference between originals and copies;
- Links (e.g. hypertext) – problem: responsibility for the information and economic aspects on the co-ordination;
- Elusiveness –of the technology;
- Availability/ownership; and
- Complicated copyright laws and procedures that govern both acquisition and use.

All these are unique features of most digital sources of information that make collection development even more complex for most libraries.

Status Quo of Collection Development in Tanzania

At the outset, collection development in most of public, research and academic libraries in Tanzania is currently done at a minimal level given the inadequate funding affecting most libraries. Many of the libraries, specifically those in the public library system and some academic and research libraries, have for quite some time been dependent on external assistance for acquiring most of their documents. External assistance in this case has been mostly that of Book Aid International (BAI). Manda

(2002) and Matovelo (2002) provide a clear representational picture on how all academic libraries in Tanzania have been dependent of external sources specifically in the development and acquisition of information technology, on-and off-line information resources, books, journals, etc. For example Manda (2002) concludes that:

Donor funding at the University of Dar-es-Salaam Library and other libraries in the country has been central in meeting the information needs of its users and is basically what has sustained UDSM Library development programmes (1992 to 2002). [Without donor support] it would not have been possible to achieve financing of the local databases (i.e. The Environmental and Biodiversity); subscriptions to the PERI project that has enabled all Universities in Tanzania to have access to online databases and journal and to some full-text journal articles; Staff training at PhD level; preservation of East Africana Collection and the financing of the Student Textbook Centre, library physical facilities, local content development and new technology.

This observation implies that very few aspects of collection development were being undertaken by most of our libraries. Several factors that have contributed to this are:

- Very few libraries have collection development policies in place specifically on the acquisition of e-resources and the balancing of acquisition between electronic and print media.
- Severity of inadequate stock budgets allocated to libraries
- Poor conception by some library management of what collection development should really entail when it comes to electronic media. A case in point here is in those libraries that are managed by officers with poor or without the required professional qualifications and adequate exposure to electronic resources. Our training of library personnel at undergraduate level in this country seems to have avoided teaching collection development as a critical aspect in the development of any library.

The Challenges

The challenges of integrating electronic resources and technologies into the process of collection development are many, and many-faceted. Beyond task-oriented considerations, such as the selection process itself, there are large-scale management issues to consider such as optimal allocation of budget to different information formats. Issues of whether to purchase or subscribe to online information, policy issues such as deciding whether to

own or just access the document, negotiating licenses with the publishers on the use of online sources, availability of adequately trained personnel to manage the technology in use, and finally, the technology-related issues for example, its versatility and practicality in accessing online information. Of course, many of the big challenges, not surprisingly, come from simultaneous dwindling in funding and increases in operating costs. As Otero-Boisvert (1993) states, collection development budgets in most information systems specifically in Developing countries, are at special risk because they are not directly connected to the number and information needs of users (e.g. staff and students), level of user services e.g. online services, and the acquisition of related technologies that would facilitate access. Therefore problems of budget and budgeting which are sometimes done unrelated to the assessment of user needs, type of media whether electronic or print and inadequacies of such budgets are major challenges that our libraries may continue facing for a long time to come.

User Needs Assessment

Another important challenge is the need for information user needs assessment. In most of our libraries such assessment are rarely done. It should be understood that the electronic environment creates dichotomies of varied potential information needs. For example, determining which of the dichotomies should be given priority/ importance i.e. print versus electronic; ownership versus access; user versus institutional need; free versus fee; gatekeeper versus user selection etc.

However, in the collection development process, it is advised that it should not be a matter of either/or, but rather a matter of determining the proper mix in collection development that in-turn satisfies the information needs of users. Criterion such as relevancy and use, demand, quality, ease of use, relevant equipment and technology, and technical support in determining selection of either print or electronic media, in most cases, have not changed but have to be more vigorously considered and applied specifically in electronic formats.

Collection Development Policy Issues

The most radical change, that is extremely important in collection development in the electronic environments is related, not to technology, but to collection development policies among libraries. Smith and Johnson (1993:392) advise that libraries 'should reverse' the approach that they have followed throughout the print era: rather than buying as much as they possibly can to respond to any present satisfaction, with a goal of fast and effective delivery or access, and not ownership potential need, they should acquire only the most heavily and regularly used material for processing and retention". They suggest that nothing should be purchased on the basis of long-term planning. The single criterion should be the current user. In

other words, one may ask, what happens to future potential information needs of most information users in developing countries if the current collection development policies for our libraries do not take into consideration what may happen in future if our libraries concentrate on facilitating access to electronic sources without developing core digital collections for future use.

Level of Digital Technology Development in Libraries

Presently, libraries are evolving at different pace, some moving ahead with transforming their print collection while preserving their traditional collection, while others are merely waiting to see what happens before proceeding further. A similar situation may be taking place among libraries in Tanzania. The most immediate challenge is how these transitional years should be managed. Libraries should consider it important that electronic resources are integrated with their physical resources, instead of being developed in parallel with, and disconnected from the existing library. If this is not done in our libraries, we would end up developing incomprehensive and disjointed print and digital collections. Therefore policies to that effect are extremely critical for developing balanced library collections.

Modes of Collection development

Ownership and Access modes of collection development

Ownership-based mode emphasizes the use of traditional printed collections, which are stored locally and the value of the library lies in the size of the collection. There is an “if needed” attitude towards collection development based on physical acquisition of resources. On the other hand, the *access* mode emphasizes availability of resources in networks, electronically exploitable, and the value lies in the availability and fast delivery of information. In this mode there is a “when needed” attitude towards collection development, based on a high trust on electronic fast document delivery-just in time. The two modes for collection development of course present some challenges to our libraries in that they demand different strategies, working methods and collection management. For example, a recent study conducted in Tanzania in academic and research libraries argues that:

although selection criteria for electronic resources are the same as those in print, it is evident that electronic resources present special problems that call for new selection policy as regards user needs, essential technology, staff expertise; tools for storage, implementation and access, vendor reliability and cost (Elly, et.al.(2003).

The application of these two modes of collection development basically depends upon the level of technological development (ICT) of a given library. For example, most libraries in developing countries like Tanzania besides the level of ICT achieved, are likely to favour the ownership-based mode to ensure the future availability of the documents for users despite the fact that currently emphasis on *access rather than ownership*, and this is currently the trend affecting even the collection development. For example, Nyerembe (2001) laments on the inadequacy of *access* in favour of the ownership mode when he says:

Inadequate funding for the purchase of (printed) books and subscriptions to academic libraries in Tanzania is another major problem funds mobilized should therefore be used to purchase books, an area, which has been glossily neglected. *Print books are the best medium for sustained study and reading, for depth of thought and complexity of argument, and for archival purposes.* (Emphasis of the author).

To most of our libraries this is still a challenge in the sense that preservation of highly needed documents for future use will not be possible given the current emphasis on access rather than ownership. In other words, despite the fact that our libraries may be assured of access to digital sources, they continue to own nothing as “*core collections*’ in their libraries for future reference and this is terrible.

Another related problem is the nature of electronic sources themselves. Without paying for the publisher’s license, one is denied the right for access and hence failure to copy the document for preservation for future use. In addition, can our libraries keep pace with the changing technology to ensure that after say 30 years we will have the relevant technology to ensure that we access 30 to 40 year old electronic documents that (might be archived by publishers)? Issues of copyright, licensing, subscriptions to digital sources are still challenges that our libraries will have to grapple with for quite sometime.

The way forward

The following recommendations may be tried in view that each and every user of a given library in Tanzania and other developing countries access information whether digital or otherwise.

- There should be mechanisms for cooperation among libraries in Tanzania. This includes building collections cooperatively for example, acquiring various electronic information media, reciprocal borrowing privileges, and looking into the possibility of joint development of automated library systems. For Example, through cooperation, it is

possible to license electronic information jointly with other libraries so as to reduce the cost of electronic information acquisition. In addition, some of our academic, research and public libraries already have connections to the Internet through their web pages. This can be a good start in launching common online catalogues that may facilitate reciprocal use and borrowing of various information sources. A case in point here is the University of Dar es Salaam Main and its constituent college libraries. These share information resources through jointly purchased ADLIB library system. Other libraries such as those of: Economic and Social Research Foundation, Sokoine University of Agriculture, British Council, etc. have online catalogues, which could be cooperatively accessed.

- **Need for Collection Development Policies**

The collection development policy according to the Anglo-American Library Association guidelines (1996) should also be followed for electronic material, but additional guidelines are needed. Selecting electronic information resources needs policy because it is more complex than traditional print resources since they involve analyzing many other issues such as equipment, space, technical and vendor support and user-friendliness of the technology, etc. It is important that the criteria used for selection of electronic documents for the collection, are standardized and in some ways reflect user needs. This will also make users trust the evaluation of the electronic sources of the collection. The criteria may include many formats such as CD-ROM's, local area networks, computer equipment, online resources, the Internet, remote databases etc.

According to White (1997), such a policy has several benefits. It serves as a guide when acquiring information resources to support the missions and programs of the institution. It directs the use of limited resources for acquisitions, provides guidance to assist information professionals in choosing specific resources or selecting one format over another and it can also be used to justify the selection of certain resources.

- **Integration of ICT Expertise**

There is need for integrating the technological and information management expertise of computer specialists and other information professionals. This could result in the convergence of the knowledge and skills, which would become critical in the management and use of digital collections of our libraries. Currently, digital sources of information are turning into multimedia formats of large volume of information and with so many links (hypertexts). Convergence of

expertise in the use of the ICT is likely to facilitate effective access and hence exploitation of these sources by our libraries. So the issue of cooperation is needed not only among libraries but also with the outside world in terms of technical assistance.

- **Need for Local Content Development**

This is another area through which libraries in Tanzania and other developing countries may boost their collections. Despite the fact that it is likely to be a challenge because it is still new and only emerging, its implementation by libraries may provide another avenue through which collections could be improved. Content development refers to the identification, digitization of materials that may be directly related to either teaching or learning or those that may happen to satisfy the information needs of clients in a technologically enhanced teaching and learning environment.

According to Pinfield, (2001) libraries should be involved in digitization processes of materials as a way of preserving the original and adding value to the materials. This is one way of acquiring digital resources in our libraries. Currently, the University of Dar es Salaam library undertakes content development activities. This was after realizing that in the emerging e-learning (library) environment where universities were applying ICT in teaching, learning and dissemination of information, the need for content development was emerging as an important activity that needed to be recognized by both library managers and academic staff (Kiondo, 2002).

- **Need for ICT Training**

Effective collection development and hence use of digital resources presupposes the internalization of relevant ICT application skills. In most of our libraries this is still a challenge on how to train and retain staff in such skills. Related to this is the inadequacy of ICT gadgets. Not many libraries are endowed with this technology. This makes it even more difficult to facilitate effective digital collection development. Cooperation rather than competition among our libraries therefore has to be emphasized. The aspect of cooperation is also important in ICT Training. This will allow the rational use of ICT resources available in our libraries. A good start has been that of organizing training seminars and workshops at the University of Dar es Salaam on the use of ICT to access e-journals subscribed to through INASP. These have involved a good number of librarians from many institutions in Tanzania.

- **Positive Attitude on the Establishment of ICT-Based Resources**

Skepticism and indecisiveness have sometimes been responsible for the negative attitude found in some of our libraries towards the acquisition of e-based information resources. What is currently needed specifically by our library managements is to develop positive dispositions and attitudes towards the acquisition and use of e-resources. These sources of information are here to stay and should be considered important as print sources.

Conclusion

This paper has examined some of the challenges likely to affect libraries in Tanzania with regards to collection development of information resources specifically the digital resources. The general conclusion of the paper is that these challenges are not insurmountable. Some ways of resolving them can be found if we develop positive attitudes toward e-resources as being important as print materials. Cooperation through the formation of consortia may put our libraries in a stronger position in negotiating better prices, accessing more digital sources and increasing shared expertise in managing e-resources. Areas of recommendations have also been identified for our libraries to consider in the whole issue of digital collection development.

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