

# COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT A HYPOTHETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**This paper focuses on the development of library collections in developing countries such as ours. The main theme dwells on Books Selectivity Philosophy which is examined hypothetically. The selection environment and practical acquisitions problems are analysed. The conclusion affirms the importance of user needs by technological advancement in the library world.**

Firstly, this paper is an attempt to discuss the background to library collection development, taking a historical and developmental approach. Secondly, I shall attempt an appraisal of the theory from the perspective of book selectivity. Thirdly, I shall endeavour to state and appraise the current practice of collection development with typical examples from our experience and elsewhere where necessary. Fourthly, I shall highlight the problems associated with collection development in general and in our own peculiar circumstances. In conclusion, I would attempt a reconceptualization of collection development in Ghana.

Literature search on this topic was very illuminating. A computer search from the British Library, Reference Division yielded 8 author references for one distinguished author; and 152 entries in LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts). The point I want to illustrate here is that although the term collection development seems to be applied to a facet of books acquisitions, it is at the same time used interchangeably with selection, collection and acquisitions. The pity of the situation is that all the Ghanaian Library resources combined could produce only about 10% of these sources. This is a clear indication of the inadequacy or imbalance in our collection development in Librarianship as a discipline.

## Background

From the historical and developmental stand-point, collection development practices in Europe and the United States have remained with us. Essentially, the British tradition is fostered in Ghanaian Library practices with the active encouragement of the British Council in apprising us with the up-to-date information on advances made in British Library and information practices. The innovations made in the United States have cut across the western world as a result of her dynamism in tilting the pendulum of technology to their side of the Atlantic. The domineering stature and prestige of the collections of the Library of Congress cannot be over-stressed.

In West Africa, especially Ghana and Nigeria, collection development coincided with the establishment of government institutions and universities fostered by the British Colonial Government, spear-headed by the cultural wing, the British Council. Collection development in its modest sense started with the interest shown by expatriate staff working in government departments, and with the literary clubs that were established in Accra and Lagos by the so-called early elites in society. Government departments such as Agriculture, Geology, and the Supreme Courts had useful collections that support-

ed research in their relevant areas.

The story of how the British Council developed Bishop Aglionby's parish library into a public one in Accra is well known. This beginning we can imagine was very modest considering the theories and policies that modern collection development would have to satisfy.

On the academic scene, the establishment of University College of the Gold Coast which inherited the nucleus of Achimota College collection was the starting point. In the Universities, however, the librarians were so professional that both John Dean<sup>1</sup> and John Harris<sup>2</sup> remarked that most of the collections inherited were unsuitable for undergraduate work. The Book Selectivity philosophy, therefore, prevailed. They appreciated though, the valuable collections of Furley to Balme and those of Henry Carr, Dyke, and Herbert Macauley to Ibadan. The rich and special collections at both Balme and Ibadan are the results of careful selection of materials based on theoretical and applied processes in modern collection development.

## Selection

Libraries that cater for institutions such as universities, colleges, and special libraries are greatly influenced in their objectives by the institutional goals. Public libraries, on the other hand, do not

serve clearly the objectives of any particular institution and as a result face many dilemmas in developing a viable theory. The background to selection theory in public libraries makes interesting reading which is of relevance to book selection theory as a whole. In fact this background gives the philosophical reasoning which stretches the librarian's mental faculties to the full. Spiller, writing on "Book Selection" affirms that 'book selection is a difficult science and its application involves weighing up various background factors involved in a particular area'.<sup>3</sup> Order and Philip also agree with the assertion that "selection of materials in collection development is based upon a foundation of beliefs and attitudes as well as a sense of purpose by the Librarian".<sup>4</sup> This premise implies a philosophical as well as sociological reasoning. It is against this background that collection development derives a code of principles, guidelines, check lists, etc. to be followed.

What then is the philosophy of Book Selection? Essentially the philosophy of Book Selection is derived from the ethics of the public library movement in the 19th Century. Wellard writing on the social theory of Book Selection, sees 'the social theory of Book Selection as a reflection of four trends that characterized the public library movement; namely, reformatory,

education, recreational and democratic.<sup>5</sup> In reformation the library was seen as an institution where its collections would provide information that would expose and educate people on varied ideas different from existing ones. In its educational role, the library is seen as a compliment of the formal process of education. It is in this spirit that Collections of most public libraries were selected from modern classics, literature and standard Reference works that have stood the test of time. At a later stage when the urgency for reformatory trend died and there was the realization that the library could be part of the formal education process, the emphasis gradually shifted elsewhere. This was the trend that readily gave way to the novelties of the recreational role of libraries, where thrillers like detective stories and books with popular appeal were selected for recreational purposes.

At present, contemporary theories on selection have not differed significantly from the original idea although presented as value and demand theories. The value theory sees the library as an institution that should provide books of inspiration, information and recreation. In a sense, the collection should reflect those concepts that would help the individual in his development and enrichment of life. Given further dimension, library's collec-

tion should support every individual in his personal advancement in learning and promote science and technology as the vehicles of the development of industrialization.

The demand theory, on the other hand, is again derived from the democratic principle that seeks to foster equal opportunities for all where education is regarded as having a scarce value of strategic importance to the individual as well as society. By democratic action an effort was made to distribute educational materials more evenly throughout the population. The credit therefore is attributed to societies that invested large sums of money in education of its people especially the youth.

### **Collection Development in Developing Countries**

Generally, apart from the handicap of access to the book trade caused by the comparative isolation of developing countries from metropolitan areas, collection development is subject to committee policies, sources of selection, staff competence and overall budget for acquisitions. Normally most universities and special libraries have acquisition or book selection policies. The examples mentioned already of John Harris and John Deans clearly demonstrate the importance of such policies. The adoption of selection policies in

public libraries may be difficult. Their position can be explained by their inability to draw up a clear-cut policy to satisfy a wide and diversified clientele. Though this is a general phenomenon, there is no rationale for not adopting one or departing from it. The non-existence of such policies accounts for the poor and unbalanced collections we have in public libraries both in Ghana and Nigeria. At least, the Cape Coast public library, although unrepresentative of public library collections, is a typical example of a collection lacking in guidance and responding to the needs of only neoliterates and examination students. Of course, the fact that our educational system has no room for those without paper qualifications is used as justification for this. However, it is important for the public libraries to have a well-defined policy since the benefits of such a policy outweigh the decision not to have one. For one thing, libraries that do not have one are assumed to depend on their past collections to select current materials. This could be a dangerous and unsatisfactory practice considering the shortcomings and varying situations in library management.

### **Source for Selection**

To a large extent, West African libraries have used systematic bibliographies and book trade sources published outside as book selection

guides. There is a dependence on national bibliographies and locally published book trade catalogues but these represent only a small portion of the world's published literature. Libraries that command adequate financial resources have been able to acquire basic bibliographic tools such as the B.N.B., NUC, CBI, Bowkers Books in print and Ulrich's International Periodical Directory. The BNB is particularly very popular among the public libraries as its subject headings and Dewey class numbers are easily adopted by them. The universities are also deriving the same benefit from the Library of Congress National Union catalogues with supplements of additions and changes. There is, however, a problem of getting access to current publications and rare materials, because the libraries have failed to subscribe to current book trade journals like the Book Seller, Publishers Weekly, Choice, African Book Publishing Record and a host of other book trade bibliographies. The problem is that the time lag in the arrival of these journals makes them outdated by the time they are received and the normal attractive discounts and package deals are lost to the libraries.

Locally, the current awareness of publications in print is practically achieved by scanning current issues of the National Bibliographies,

Library accessions' list and book reviews that appear in local newspapers and journals. Sometimes it is possible to get informed about new publications through the mass media like the radio and television. The snag is that such publications are normally cram-books or school textbooks which may not be valuable additions to a library's collection.

Sources for selecting research or primary materials may be obscure and difficult to trace, but these can be found from publications emanating from research centres, researches in progress, various academic and research centres such as the (CDS) Centre for Development Studies in Cape Coast (I.S.S.E.R.) Institute for Statistics, Social and Economic Research, (RIPS) Regional Institute for Population Studies, Legon, (C.S.I.R.) Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, (GIMPA) Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, etc. This implies that acquisitions librarians must be quick to find out what has been published and what is forthcoming. International Conferences, symposia, workshops and seminar papers also provide materials of research value. These apart, there are very important bibliographical sources derived from published catalogues of specialized metropolitan libraries that

have built very strong collections on developing countries. These include: International African Bibliography (London) 1974; Joint Acquisition List of Africana (JALA); Everton 1962 Bi-monthly; Current Bibliography on Africa Affairs; African Studies Bulletin (Santa Cruz) 1968 — Bi-monthly; Foreign Acquisitions Newsletter (Washington, 1970). There are also catalogues of specialized library suppliers like B. H. Blackwells of Oxford and African Imprint Library Services of New York. The importance of using these sources is that a library would be sure to acquire a material once it has been listed in their catalogues. In the University of Cape Coast, for example judicious use was made of published catalogues of older universities elsewhere. The American Association of Research Libraries Books for Colleges was adopted as the basic selection source during the formative years, 1962-1970.

### **Staff**

In Cape Coast again, the acquisitions librarian keeps profiles of subject interests of the responsible academics in the various departments and routes relevant booklists or subject catalogues to aid them in their selection. It has, however, been observed that this kind of co-operation from the academic departments may be unreliable. The late Amedekey noted that this kind

of approach affects consistence in the collection development where changes in the composition of faculty results in shifting of scholarly interests.<sup>6</sup>

For example, when one professor succeeds another, the research emphasis inevitably changes. Besides because some departments are lukewarm in the selection process, there grows an uneven balance in the collection development. A recent survey among Nigeria Universities revealed that this practice is rather on the decrease and the faculties are shedding off this responsibility. The faculties were responsible for 37.13% of titles recommended for libraries whilst the library staff accounted for the remaining 62.87% titles selected.<sup>7</sup> It follows therefore that librarians are taking greater responsibility for their collection development although the appointment of subject specialists comparable to those in the advanced countries is negligible. Generally, there is a predominance of the humanities and social science graduates among the University Library staff. Science graduates are yet to make an impact on the library profession.

In the case of the public libraries, the staff dominate in the selection practice. Usually, there is a library staff committee comprising the reference librarian who would bring to bear his knowledge of user needs gained through hand-

ing users questions. The acquisitions librarian also will advise on past policies and availability of materials. Other members of staff may also advise on different areas that have not been covered while the chief librarian takes the final decision. User suggestions coming directly from the public are also considered.

In the special libraries, because their materials normally emanate from various and obscure sources and the clientele are themselves specialists, who know their subject literature better, the selection is invariably done by the specialists and the librarian.

### **Problems Associated with Collection Development**

**Finance:** The question of budget prevades all collection development policies. For every good collection is an expression of adequate and sound financial backing and no collection development can achieve this objective if it is financially handicapped. In Ghana the acquisitional capacity of libraries are unpredictable owing to the fact that 90% of the collection has to be upon the availability of the foreign ordered from abroad. This depends exchange facility that the Bank of Ghana has to provide for the importation of books. The unit costs of books are expensive since they are published abroad where stan-

dards of living are generally high. The high cost of these books reflect the relative high standard of living which are non-existent in the developing countries like ours. But unfortunately, the government authorities do not seem to appreciate this handicap and library budgets are sliced down. In Nigeria for example, a financial survey by Radcliffe on the adequacy of library budget in the older universities revealed that there was an average of less than 5% allocation to the libraries from the total university budget.<sup>8</sup> This percentage, in fact, coincides roughly with the National Universities Commission recommendation which is 5% and also that of SCAULWA (Standing Conference of African University Librarians Western Area) made at its 8th Biennial Conference held in Lome, Togo in April, 1986.<sup>9</sup>

In Ghana, statistical data on library budgets are difficult to determine. The librarians prepare their budgets with justifications in the most concise and precise form required by their professional training, but the funds are hard to come-by. A library might end the fiscal year not spending even 5% of its annual estimates.<sup>10</sup> Because of this unpredictability, current library funding depends on the needs of a library at a particular time. If a library is able to present a pro-forma invoice supported by the

Ministry of Economic Planning, then it is likely to get the foreign exchange cover to import the books.

### **Foreign Assistance**

Increasingly, the inadequacy of financial resources reflecting on libraries' collection development has been a permanent problem. As usual, most foreign embassies are benefactors with the result that large collections of books, whatever their merit, have found their way into our libraries. However, as professionals our principle of book selectivity must prevail. I am aware that in the university libraries such unwanted books have often been passed on to others who may find them useful. The most audacious and pragmatic help is the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) Presentation Programme administered by the British Council. Its intentions are clear and laudable and we in Cape Coast have it on record that for eight successive years, 10% of our annual additions to stock have been made possible through the ODA Programme. All other major libraries, notably the universities and Ghana Library Board have also benefited from the ODA Programme. It caters for collection development of libraries for developmental subject fields only. Other embassies like the Royal Netherlands and West Germany have literature programmes which

supplement collection development in the country. The Kumasi University has benefited immensely from the West German Literature Programme.

### **Reconceptualization of Collection Development**

Elsewhere, the term "Collection development" has been considered as a recent innovation.<sup>11</sup> The use of the term may not be important but the fundamental issues involved have been an age-long practice in the Library profession that had evolved into today's application of the concept. In fact, one cannot agree more with Charles Osburn whose exposition defines collection development as "a process of decision-making to determine the desirability of acquiring or retaining library materials."<sup>12</sup> This definition is not at variance with our analysis of the concept of selectivity which is the focus of this paper, the hypothesis of which, though developmental, reflects some of the views raised by Osburn.

From the background analysis, my perception for today's collection development is towards user needs. Presently user needs are not confined to the monograph alone. It is a combination of the elements that constitute the book, microforms, pamphlets, government publications, government policy statements, proceedings of con-

ferences and symposia, journals and print-outs that information brokers use in disseminating information to their clientele. What we are witnessing today is the evolution from a book centred service to journal-centred service and to technology-centred services, reflecting the advances that have been made in the library profession. In fact, Osburn talks of a paperless collection development concept and he rightly hits the nail on the head by affirming that the key environmental factor for collection development is a high level of public expectation, which reinforces the importance of the user needs as mentioned above.

The question of periodical subscription brings to mind the prohibitive cost of periodicals. Presently no university library in Ghana can develop adequate collection of periodicals to support teaching and research. For example, the cost of a title such as 'Chemical Abstracts' is so colossal that no acquisitions librarian would dare include this journal without consultation with the university librarian. It is therefore imperative that there should be re-appraisal of periodical subscriptions in the face of drastic cuts in library budgets. I can envisage the application of bibliometrics in the selection process. The science of bibliometrics which is on the ascendancy seeks to appraise the range and frequency of periodicals

published within a given geographical area to ascertain the real needs of the user. This reduces and eliminates duplication which again helps in identifying the user needs or the public expectation as the most dominant factor. Increasingly, the use of citation index has been another method of evaluating periodical literature and indeed all primary sources. So long as we recognize the invaluable contribution that primary sources bring to bear on research and data-gathering for serious library users, collection development of primary sources becomes mandatory for every library worth its salt. In Nigeria, Sam Ifidom affirms that a survey of citations and bibliographies for graduate theses and dissertation shows a high percentage use of local primary sources, which supports the view that graduate works are best done locally, given adequate library resources and other facilities.<sup>13</sup> Hitherto, most doctoral students researching in overseas universities have to travel back home to gather data, although all that they require can be gotten from local sources.

The realization of this potential should prick our conscience and encourage us to start developing local collections of research value. In Ghana, I am aware of the efforts being made in the universities and research centres to develop viable

collections reflecting the needs of the user. But the emphasis has been on the Humanities and the Social Sciences rather than the Science and Technology. I can envisage the idea establishing the National Science Library Documentation Centre mooted about two decades ago by J. A. Villars and Opare-Sam of the C.S.I.R. flourishing. I can also envisage the implementation of the concept of paperless collection development in a National Information Network along the lines of UNISIST and INTS systems. When this is given a local boost, we can then apportion area specialization either geographically or along subject fields as a basis for harnessing our resources. I am aware that this policy has been on the drawing board. But for how long do we sit down and fold our arms in despair, incapacitated by the no-money syndrome? **A concerted effort must be made now. The Union Catalogues, however tedious their compilation might be, should be started especially now that we are agreed on the adoption of AACR II as our standard for all bibliographic entries.**

To conclude, mention must be made of the establishment of commercial and industrial libraries like the Export Promotion, Ghana Investment Centre, Registrar-General Patents Library, etc. which call for a concerted acquisitions policy of

sharing resources. The call for documentation of patents and technological transfer of information is long overdue. A national collection development policy should be formulated to harness our resources. Our goal therefore should be to evolve a collection development policy that will embrace the whole country based on key factors like selectivity, evaluation, user needs and, above all, the library budget. When these factors are seriously considered, our expectations and those of the public would be satisfied and we as professionals will find a challenge in such efforts to help develop an effective library and information network in developing countries. The year 2000 A.D. should see library collections of developing nations reflecting balanced collections selected locally and elsewhere.

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