# ACQUISITION FOR MAXIMUM BENEFITS IN LIBRARIES: ISSUES & CHALLENGES

BY

# ESSIEN, ONYEKACHI. N. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA

#### Abstract

The paper examines the basic procedures for acquisition and processing of library materials. It discusses problems that militate against acquisition for maximum benefits in libraries and proffers some recommendations.

#### Introduction

Acquisition is the procurement of library materials either by Purchase, gfts and exchange or Legal Deposit into the Library (Adedibu, 1989). Acquisition concerns all the processes involved in building up the collection of a library. It involves selection, ordering, purchase, soliciting for gifts or exchanges. The principles of acquisition are similar to that of selection except in terms of coverage. Acquisition is a laid down principle stating what, who, how and where materials can be acquired for the Library (Adedibu, 1989)

Acquisition is a very important aspect of Librarianship since the quality and strength of a library's collection solely depends on the materials acquired. The Acquisition Librarians therefore have a tremendous role to play in maintaining a good collection since the Library is a reservoir of research materials that would be useful to academic staff, students and the general populace.

If a library acquires good and relevant materials, the benefits are enormous to both the library and the users. The library will have credibility and authority, while the users will always find answers to their queries.

#### Acquisition Methods

The collection of a library develops through some methods that are predetermined by the management of the Library looking at the objectives of the owner institution (Agbaje, 2001). Every Library adopts acquisition methods that are most suitable to the parent organization. The acquisition methods used by most Libraries are enumerated below:

#### Purchase

Purchase (buying) is the major method by which Libraries acquire materials. Purchase gives a Library the opportunity to choose good materials

since it involves the library spending a part of its vote. Purchase can be made directly or through an agent or dealer.

#### Gifts

These are materials donated by individuals or organizations. Some organizations specialize in giving out book gifts to libraries all over the world. Examples are Education Trust Fund (ETF), World Bank, UNESCO, some individual donors, Brothers and Brothers Foundation, etc.

### Legal Deposit

This is a very efficient way of building up a library's collection. Legal Deposit is a mandatory obligation given to publishers to keep certain copies of their publications with their national libraries. The concept of Legal Deposit started in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century where it was a practice of monarchs to grant royal privilege to important libraries to receive copies of publications free of charge (Shuaibu 2006). The Legal Deposit Law in Nigeria dates back to 1955 and 1964 when all regional governments enacted their individual laws. In 1970, the 'Legal Deposit Decree' was promulgated where publishers, private, states and the federal government are mandated to deposit to the National Library of Nigeria three (3) copies, ten (10) copies and twenty-five (25) copies respectively. If the Legal deposit obligation is adhered to, the Library stock will grow exponentially.

# Cooperative Acquisition

Libraries can acquire materials through cooperation. No library can have all that it needs or acquire all the needed materials for satisfying the users' needs, hence the importance of cooperative acquisition. Even if the fund is available, some materials may be out of print and copyright Laws may also be a hindrance (Olanlokun & Olajire, 1998)

Cooperative acquisition is an agreement between libraries in respect of acquisition of necessary materials. If two or more Libraries are into cooperative acquisition, decisions are made as to what each Library should stock and how to access the holdings of the other libraries. Thus, within the scheme, each participating library stocks materials on a different field from other cooperating libraries. Cooperation enables libraries to share their resources with one another and ensure that Library users have access to resources in their environment and beyond.

## Exchange

Exchange means receiving one thing in replacement of the other. It is termed "interchange" when one thing is received as an equivalent of another. Exchange agreements are usually arranged by writing to other

libraries and each partner outlines its profile and what it can offer. The agreement is made in a way that a balance is reached. An exchange agreement may read as follows: -

A. <u>Title for title</u>: This means that you give whoever gives a title another

title.

b. Journal for Journal: Giving out a Journal on receipt of a Journal.

c. Cost for Cost: You cost whatever you receive and return materials worth the same cash equivalent.

#### Internal Generation

Written works by individuals within a community or an organization can be given to their libraries to add to the library stock. Some libraries have it as a policy that staff must deposit certain number of copies of their publications to their parent organizations over a certain period of time.

The Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) expects its staff to produce at least one research report in a year and such a work is normally sponsored. In every year the library can always project the number of NISER Publications that will come into the Library (Agbaje, 2001).

Acquisition Policies

Acquisition being a technical service is aimed at developing and updating the library's collection with books and periodicals. The policies act as a guide for the acquisition of the library materials to be added to the collection. The acquisition policy of any given Library solely depends on the aims and objectives of the library. There are materials, which are absolutely indispensable in a given library situation, which would be inconceivable to do without. For instance, what collection of chemical periodicals would be complete without **Chemistry in Britain** or Economics collection complete without the **Economic Journals**? (Darinson, 1969). This goes a long way to show that acquisition of materials in a particular Library depends on the objectives of that Library.

An Acquisition policy is intended as a tool to enable libraries to provide a good/relevant Library collection, tailor-made to the needs, interests and dream of the community the libraries serve (Merritt 1970). No matter what the acquisition policy of any library is, there are general criteria taken into

consideration before acquisitions are made.

# Criteria for Acquisition of Library Materials

1. Purpose of Library/Library Clientele:

Each type of Library has its aims and objectives. This determines the type of materials the Library should acquire. The type of materials so acquired also suggests the clientele that the Library is meant to serve. The content of

a material has to be considered in terms of its education, information, cultural and recreational values. A medical library is not expected to acquire materials on Journalism and vise versa. This is the most important aspect of acquisition, knowing the type and usefulness of a material to the client before acquisitions are made.

2. Credibility of Author:

The author's credentials should be established as much as possible. If he is not a recognized expert in the subject, his qualifications for writing the book should be closely scrutinized (Spiller 1980). Acquisition Librarians with subject knowledge may gain some understanding of the material from the table of contents and so determine the credibility of the material. It should be certain if the author clearly indicates which statements are assumptions and which are based on experimental results, if any conclusion he draws follow from the evidence presented, if the factual information are reliable and if the data are accurate.

# 3. Existing Library Collection:

Any acquisition bid has to take into consideration what the library has in its collection so that titles will not be duplicated. Any new collection must have something specific to add to what is available in the collection.

# 4. Readability:

The acquisition librarian should assess the complexity of the language used and this relates to the linguistic experience of his various reader groups. Works, which are written with flair, in a simple style and with the latest language for ease of reading, is a prime priority. There are some formulas which may be used to determine the readability of some texts, e.g. "Gunning Fog Index". This is a formula in which the sentence length and word complexity are taken into account to rate the simplicity of the language used (Spiller 1980).

# 5. Physical Qualities:

The physical appearance of a book may in some instances influence its acquisition. According to Spiller (1980), "The design and appearance of a book matter to a limited extent because printing is only a form of communication and rarely an end in itself". A book should be readable and clean. The design should not obtrude to the extent that it distracts the reader from the author's thought.

The appearance of a material gives a better idea about the book and the features which are likely to disqualify it for purchase. Such features come principally into one of two groups: those which limit the life span or the use

of a material and those, which limit the materials' effectiveness as a vehicle of communication.

The following are some physical qualities to be considered in the acquisition of a material:-

- A. Format: Oversized books suffer the serious disadvantage of being more easily ignored by users. Pamphlets are unsuitable for open shelf stock and heavy use. Pocket-sized books are more likely to be stolen.
- B. Binding: Materials that are tightly bound should be avoided because they only stay open when held open and tend to be so heavy that the binding tears.
- C. <u>Illustrations</u>: Good photography can enhance the quality of a book but are rarely a crucial factor. Also, it makes it easier to understand the texts.
- D. <u>Currency of title</u>: Attention should be paid to dates of publication. This is because newer materials are likely to have more recent research findings, serve as update to the older materials, and are more authentic. In some policies, books that are more than three years are not acquired except for some professional subjets such as Medical Science materials.
- E. <u>Controversial titles</u>: Efforts should be made not to acquire controversial materials which some quarters might find offensive. The library clientele should be studied and their interests protected. Materials that have acquisition restriction should not be acquired.
- F. Index: The absence of an index limits a book's scope and rules out its use as a reference tool (Spiller 1980). Therefore, releasing a book without an index should be an indictable offence. The quality of the index should be closely examined before acquisitions are made. The existence of an index in a book may be ascertained from its entry in the National Bibliography of Nigeria, but the quality of these is best judged from examination of the book itself.
- **G.** Fund: The fund allocated to acquisition should be considered before embarking on procurement so that priorities will be set right. Individual price of materials should also be considered.
- H. Space: The library space should also be considered. There will be no point acquiring materials without space for shelving or display.

#### Who Should Acquire:

Special subject acquisition librarians should solely handle acquisition. This is to ensure that the most suitable materials are acquired in each field. There will be no use acquiring materials that will not answer the users' questions and fulfill their research needs.

#### How to Acquire:

Acquisition of materials should be made directly by the librarians of the organization. Direct purchase should be used while the use of book vendors should be avoided as much as possible. This is because most times vendors exploit the libraries by adding extra money to the original cost of the materials. Price lists should also be consulted to get an idea of the prices of materials.

### Effective Acquisition Strategy:

#### 1. Clientele Opinion:

Information seeking behavior of library users should be put into consideration. Information need assessment is quite difficult to establish partly because the demand for knowledge is derived demand, i.e. the supply of information alone may not satisfy a human need because information is required as a means to an end. However, the problem can be partly over-come through the use of both diagnostic techniques and direct questioning of respondents.

When the clientele's opinion has been considered, acquisitions can then be made based on their demands. There is also the need to anticipate and make requirement for future demands. Demand is the governing factor and there are cultural, political, and social demands which libraries have to cater for. Therefore, libraries need to identify patrons' demands in order to be able to provide or satisfy them.

#### Survey:

The clientele needs to be served with the right materials because the quality of a library service depends on the people's needs. Survey can be carried out in two ways: General survey and actual survey

#### General Survey:

This shows the characteristics of the community e.g. (sex, age, education etc). This is necessary so that the library will not only base its survey on actual users but also potential users with the aim of making them habitual users.

#### Actual SUR VEY:

This survey concentrates on the actual users of the library and shows not only the general characteristics of the users but also their reading interest. It also shows the problem they encounter in the library. With this study, libraries can understand how to meet the needs of their clients.

# 2. Paying Attention to the Quality of Materials

Librarians have often been faced with problems of balancing demand with quality. There have been arguments supporting demand while the other group favour quality of materials. The two views are however found to complement each other as we find that a book in high demand is seen to be a book of good quality.

## 3. Funds Management:

Given the diminishing funding of libraries, it is advocated that the limited acquisition budget should be used judiciously. No library anywhere can aim at comprehensiveness. Also, the reader may not have alternative means of satisfying his information needs if he is unable to find a particular book on the shelf. Therefore, a library's meager acquisition budget should be used to procure multiple copies of essential books rather than single copies of all books.

# 4. Automated Acquisition:

In this era of information technology, acquisition librarians in Nigerian Libraries are still battling with the problem of computer illiteracy. Even when they are computer literate, the library environment does not encourage maximum acquisition using the computer. Most times, there is power outage and when the system breaks down, spare parts for replacement may not be easily available (Otubelu, 2005). The lack of funds affects the acquisition of both the hardware and software and also the updating of installation and maintenance of computer equipment (Otubelu, 2005).

Nevertheless, computerization of acquisition functions offers many advantages. For instance, the various records can be kept using the computer, and other records such as performance analysis of the various book vendors in the case of books acquired through purchase can equally benefit. Automation can help in fund control as well as generation and dissemination of reports (Olanlokun, 1993). List of items required and accession list can be printed.

Challenges of Library Acquisition:

Inadequate Funding:

Financial provision for libraries is the sole responsibility of government (Federal or State) that do not fully understand the library's mission (Ochai, 2001). The lack of understanding is manifested in the dwindling allocations to libraries. The government compares investment in libraries whose dividends are invisible with the industrial establishments whose investments yield measurable dividends. The general lack of understanding of the role of libraries in national development has prevented various governments from giving adequate consideration to the library's plight when decisions are made, be it on foreign exchange, pre-shipment inspection, import prohibition etc.

Insensitivity to library financial problems may be seen in the light of efforts to preserve foreign exchange and the total amount of money expended in foreign exchange on library materials. While the exact figures are not available, estimates put the expenditure of Nigerian Universities at over N3 Million annually on journal subscription alone (Ochai, 2001). If we make a projection from this, it is clear that taken together, the total annual expenditure of all Nigerian Libraries of various types (Public, Academic, Special, National, and Research etc) on books, journal and other materials is in the order of tens of thousands. The bulk of this money has to be in foreign currency since the bulk of the materials needed by Nigerian libraries are published in Europe and America.

Rise in Cost of Library Materials:

Since our libraries depend to a large extent upon the American and European markets for over 80% of their acquisitions, an examination of the market situation in one of these areas may be relevant to our discussion. A study conducted on price indexes for 1983 U.S periodicals show an alarming annual increase of 18.9% with highest percentage increase in the sciences over the previous years (Ochai, 2001). This problem limits the number of volumes/copies to be acquired. This also affects the acquisition of choice materials because of their prices.

Second Hand Acquisition:

The book trade is unorganized and the book dealers are either inexperienced in the trade or lack the capital to establish a solid base. The result is the over dependence on overseas agents for books and journal subscriptions. Dealing with these overseas agents creates frustrations for the librarian and the local dealers who are now at the mercy of the overseas agents. These agents include both the cost of airfreight and that of shipping to the price of the books which most times make the prices too high.

# Lack Of Resource Personnel:

Most times libraries lack qualified subject acquisition librarians. There often has been a devastating effect on the quality and relevance of the materials acquired. In actual sense librarians should have subject librarians who have ideas about each field and how relevant such materials will be to the targeted audience. Acquisition librarians must be conversant with books and literature. They are supposed to know the authors as well as the best of work in the field (Eguavoen, 2002).

Using specialists will ensure that materials of high quality are acquired for the library. Subject specialization among acquisition librarians is an important response to library work /procedure because it makes for expert approach in solving acquisition problems. For a librarian to qualify as a subject specialist, he must have received relevant academic training usually at a graduate level in the discipline represented by the academic departments in his charge. This arms him well enough to become capable of acquiring suitable materials.

Subject specialization amongst librarians had triggered off much debate in the past as some people felt that it disrupted the normal process of library activities. But experience has shown that it rather enhances the librarians' work as they perform as experts in their fields.

## Recommendations:

Nigerian libraries need urgent review of their acquisition policies. This is necessary not only because a great many of them have been modeled after those of other countries whose library environments are completely different from ours, but because of the reality of electronic publishing. While the principles of collection development, which were developed in the world of print publication do not change radically with new publishing technologies, methods of decision making and specific selection guidelines must be adjusted significantly to incorporate new publishing formats. (Demas, 1994). Consequently, acquisition personnel should develop expertise in selecting resources regardless of format, and anticipating impacts on the user community.

There is also need for a standing committee (e.g. electronic Resources Committee) which will review electronic publications and assist the library in achieving access to electronic formats. It should be realized that the success of any acquisition department depends on the quality and commitment of the personnel to the employment of best practices, consistent provision of statistics for routine records, and the ability to analyze collections and to form cost projections.

Finally, due to limited financial provisions, libraries should make more judicious utilization of available funds. They should set their priorities right

ensuring that they pay particular attention to planning, resources' allocation, user survey, cooperative acquisition, evaluation, acquisition alternatives, and selection details. Libraries need to lay more emphasis to the provision of access to information as opposed to ownership of collections.

#### Conclusion:

The acquisition department of any library is the heart of it. Also, the building of a valuable library service solely depends on the quality of the acquisition policy and as such, proper care should be taken in formulating policies guiding acquisition and also in recruiting the caliber of staff that should be in the acquisitions department. To acquire for maximum benefits, there are some tips that should be considered. If there are policies that are not favourable, they should be reviewed to suit the aims/objectives of any given library. The resources available should also be used judiciously so that much is not spent on irrelevant materials.

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