STOCK EVALUATION AND USER NEEDS

The study shows how the selection of core journals could be made from the requests made by the users. It also gives in detail the mode of meeting the requirements of the staff and the students in the university under different conditions. Areas of low use of the library are indicated and further investigations in that area are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of 'who selects' the reading material for the library has given way to a more acute problem of 'what to select'. It is a well known fact that the number of journal titles, especially in the field of science, increase proportionately with knowledge. To keep the scientist abreast of new knowledge in a given field it is essential to acquire most of the publications in that field. This is constrained by factors like limitations in funds and foreign exchange. Therefore a librarian faces a number of problems in building a good collection in the library.

As a result of the current economic situation in Nigeria, the question of what constitutes the core journals has posed a serious problem to the Nigerian librarians, especially to those attached to the institutions of higher learning. The economic measures adopted by the Nigerian Government in 1982 made it unusually difficult for the librarians to acquire optimum number of relevant materials in the library. The acquisition of books and periodicals in the library was affected most by the foreign exchange problem in the country. The problem of acquisition of books could be solved to some extent because they were to be purchased locally from book sellers and did not involve any foreign exchange.

Onadiran and Onadiran [1] discovered that the bulk of the library material in the university libraries in Nigeria was acquired from foreign countries like United States, Britain and Western Europe and hence, required a big amount of foreign exchange. Various other reports on collection development have also revealed that not only the funds, but the lack of foreign exchange was also a big constraint in building up a collection of periodical literature. Obiagwu [2] also described how difficult it was to make foreign exchange available for purchase of books and periodicals. The only option left for the librarians in such cases is to discontinue the subscription of a number of journals.

The recent move of the Federal Government emphasizing on building up the stock of the libraries, offers help to the university libraries to acquire more number of books and journals. This aid from the federal government is available only for three years and if the acquisition of uncontrollable number of journals is started now, their continuation in due course, when the aid stops, may not be possible. In view of this a ranked list of journals according to their use was thought to be of immense help while discontinuing some of them. Such a list can be relied upon for selection of journals to be continued for subscription.

Therefore, a survey was carried out for the science journals in the science section of the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) library to evolve a list of most used journals.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to identify the most used science journals at the University of Port Harcourt library. This would be a list of core journals for the departments in the faculty of science. The study is also aimed to identify the depart-
ments which make comparatively less use of research material and the reasons for it.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Many people have written on collection development in libraries and compilation of lists of journals relevant to the interests of the users. Bolgiano et al [3] Guyatt [4 & 5], Guya and Mosher [6] studied the problems associated with selection of journals and made some observations on users co-operation in this process. It was established in the above studies that the library has to support research on a number of disciplines to a satisfactory level by its collection of monographs, periodicals, etc. Solutions were also proposed on how to arrive at a concrete and accurate information guide for making decision on continuation/discontinuation of subscription to some of the journals.

McElroy [7] and Sandison [8] had defined the adequate stock to fulfil the requirements. The former analysed the stock in the departments and its users and found that the stock was used more by the senior staff. While the later calculated “uses per-issue-per-day” by “dividing the total number of users by the total for all available issues of the number of days each had been on the shelf when the library was open and ranked the lists according to their number of uses”. To make such stock reliable it must have been arrived at after evaluation for several months. The use of questionnaire was also reported by Roger [9] and Van Styvendaele [10] for assessment of the requirements of scholars.

The method of survey employed in this study was based on the lists provided by students and the lecturers of various departments in the university. Guyatt [4] used lists of publications by researchers, while Dhawan et al, [11] listed the titles of journals from primary and secondary sources of literature and compared them with the journals available in the library. Bolgiano [3] used citations in theses for compilation of a working list for acquisition of periodicals in the library.

UNIPORT LIBRARY SCENARIO
As stated earlier, this study is based on the stock available at UNIPORT Library. The main library formerly held journals for all departments but now with the expectation of setting up faculty libraries at different places in due course, the holdings of the main library would be divided into the faculty libraries for the following subject groups:

- Pure and Applied Science comprising science, engineering and medicine.
- Human Science comprising humanities, social sciences and management science.
- Education.

There was a break in acquisition of books and journals as reported by Obiagwu [12] in the university library and a significant number of journals were discontinued. Now with the provision of a loan from the World Bank for stock building in the library, the acquisition of journals may be increased. Simultaneously, caution has to be taken regarding the number of journals to be subscribed because the loan is available only for three years and the subscription to some of the journals may have to be stopped at the end of three years. Therefore, an attempt is made to prepare a list of core periodicals which may help the librarian to decide whether to continue/discontinue a particular title.

METHODOLOGY

The disciplines that make up the faculty of science were assigned classmarks according to the Library of Congress Classification [13] Scheme. Publications in biochemistry are scattered under QH - biology, QD - chemistry and QP - physiology depending on the orientation and inclination of the contents. Therefore, a separate classmark for biochemistry is not used as shown in Table 1 which also gives the total number of journals in each subject.

The journal or the research section of the library has open access system for the lecturers who are allowed to enter the library at any time within its working hours. Therefore, it is not easy to calculate the frequency at which they used the library. To study the use of library materials by the lecturers, they were asked to send a list of journals they would like the library either to retain or to add to the existing collection. The lists submitted by them were compared with the journal titles, already available in the library and a masterlist was prepared. The master list generated from the requisitions from each department was circulated to the lecturers with a request to tick the titles they have consulted in the library.

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Table 1

Subject Distribution of Journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Library of Congress Classmark</th>
<th>No. of Journals held under the Classmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botany</td>
<td>QK</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>QD</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>QE</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics/Statistics/Computer Sciences</td>
<td>QA</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td>QR</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>QC</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoology</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (General)</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiology</td>
<td>QP</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>QH</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astronomy</td>
<td>QB</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to lack of sufficient reading space and staff in the library, the student users from the faculty of science are allowed to use the library only on Mondays and Tuesdays. They are not given free access. They request for assistance at the service desk. Catalogue of the research materials is maintained in the rotatory index, card catalogue and compilations in booklets.

The users go through these sources and enter the details of the required document on a request slip and hand this slip over to the library assistant. A specimen of the slip is shown in Fig. 1.
When more than one document is required at a time, the user makes use of the back of the slip. The required material is retrieved, the user's identity card is attached to the request slip and kept for records. The identity card is returned when the material is returned. At the close of the day the slips are counted, recorded and stored.

The request slips formed the basis for study of use of the stock by the students. The request slips of the students in the faculty of science were first sorted out. From this was calculated the number of users and the number of titles consulted per month.

Further, these slips were sorted into various departments and a list of the titles requested by the students in each department was produced. Classmark was assigned to each item listed. Journals having a classmark that corresponds to the one assigned to any of the departments in Table 1 were counted. These were considered as requests from within the department. The request slips belonging to other classmarks were the requests from outside the department. The material not possessed by the library or entered wrongly by users with incorrect details were sorted out from the lists.

Students and lecturers from the departments that showed low use of the research library were interviewed personally to find out the reasons for poor use of the library by them.

Further, to confirm the validity of this computed list, the citation of these titles in the dissertations of earlier students was studied. Five theses/dissertation from each department were selected and crosschecked for citation of these titles.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

With reference to Table 1, out of the total stock of 611 journals, the science library has maximum stock in mathematics, statistics and computer science (99 titles) followed by biology (89 titles) and least in astronomy (6 titles). By physical examination of the journals, it was discovered that 16 titles in biochemistry were classified under QH - biology, QD - chemistry and QP - physiology according to the subject content.

It was easy to study the use of library stock by students because of the tangible records on slips provided. It was not easy to eliminate the element of bias appearing in the manner in which the lecturers ticked the journals they had used. The journals ticked by a lecturer were taken as core journals in that area. It is interest-
Fig. 2: NUMBER OF USERS AND NUMBER OF TITLES CONSULTED WITHIN THE SURVEY PERIOD Jan. 1989 - May 1990.

- No. of Users
- No. of Titles Consulted
Fig. 3: USEFUL PORTION OF THE STOCK COMPARED WITH THE TOTAL STOCK IN EACH SUBJECT.

- - Journals Held in the Subject

■■■■Usable No. in each Subject that Form the Core.
Fig 4: REQUEST SATISFIED WITH JOURNALS IN THE SUBJECT CLASSMARK AND THOSE FROM OTHER SUBJECT CLASSMARK.

- Requests Satisfied from Department Classmark
- Requests taken from other Department Classmark
ing to note that all titles on a field available in the library were not consulted by the lecturers in that field.

The design of the request slip made it easy to differentiate the slips used by the students from those used by the members of the faculty of science. Users could request for as many titles as they wished. Fig. 2 shows the number of users and the number of titles they consulted during the period January 1989 to May 1990. The highest number of users were recorded to use the library during August and October 1989. This is the period of long vacation and the long vacation students outnumber the regular students. Their demand is equally higher as shown by the number of titles they consulted. The regular students were in session during January to July 1989, November to December 1989 and January to May 1990. April 1989 was the period when the students were writing their term papers and dissertations. Within this period, they made regular use of the library. The demand during April to May 1990 witnessed a decline as compared to that of the previous year. This is because the students were on strike during this period in 1990 and the lecturers were suspended.

The total number of journals possessed by the library in each course is shown in Fig. 3 which also displays the number of journals that are found to be used by the staff and the students (the core journals). All the titles in biochemistry are found to be useful as core collection. The number of core journals are less than the total number of journals in each course. This confirms the findings that only a few titles serve the information needs of most of the users of the library in each course and falls, roughly, in line with Bradford’s Law. Within the survey period, no user requested for any title in astronomy.

The relative display of the requests met with by the journals in the same classmark and outside it is given in fig. 4. Microbiology has the highest number of requests satisfied by the journals from within the classmark. The use of outside stock by microbiology department is equally high. Mathematics and physics department made low use of the stock within their department’s classmark. This area of poor use of the library necessitated further research to discover why the demands of these departments were low. The result of the interview with the lecturers and students in mathematics department showed that there were no graduate students in the department, and the undergraduate students make more use of textbooks than journals. The graduate students in physics department also showed low use of research materials because of the facility of having the books and journals in their departmental book store (not a library). They were also found to make use of other sources like the stock of their lecturers. However, they found the library book collection useful in their seminars.

It is to be noted that Agriculture is not a teaching course in this institution. It is only for research. Also there is no department of astronomy, physiology, biology or pure science. The stock in these areas were heavily used by the students and lecturers in other departments in the faculty of science. For instance, number of requests on Agriculture classmark were made by users from other departments. Requests for the journals in fisheries were made from the department of Zoology and those for the journals in crop science were made from Botany department.

When the titles in the generated list were cross-checked with the references made by the students in the theses and dissertations at least ten titles available in the departments were found listed in them.

The final list which emanated from this study consisted of journals that were:

a) Recommended by the lecturers for acquisition/continuation;

b) Used by the lecturers;

c) Requested by the students;

d) Cited in theses/dissertations of former students.

CONCLUSION

The investigation enabled the compilation of the list of the most used as well as that of the least used journals. It can be used for making the decision about continuation or discontinuation of subscription. It also highlights the importance of the statistics maintained on user’s requests. The departments that make low use of the library have been identified. Further study could be carried out to find how best the science library can provide services to its users.
REFERENCES


