CHAPTER – 8

EVALUATING THE COLLECTION - ACTUAL UTILIZATION AND WEEDING

8.1 INTRODUCTION:

The identification of strengths and weaknesses of a library’s collection is a part of collection evaluation, where the qualitative measure of collection is observed in perspective of the library’s own goal and mission. Therefore, it is a sub-system of collection development where other concepts like acquisition, selection, deselection - all are involved.

Evaluation is an English term – originating from French word ‘evaluer’ to determine the value of something. In case of collection development, it shows the quality of collection as per the academic needs of teaching and research.

During 1990s, this concept grew and developed. “Collection evaluation is a part of collection development in which existing collections are measured, analyzed and judged according to present criteria for size, relevance, quality, and use”¹. It is important to have a collection evaluation process in each and every library & information centre because it usually helps study a realistic acquisition process according to subject areas in a right manner and also to make the library professionals acquainted with the collection to get an overview of the growth of the collection.

Connie Van Fleet elaborates the measuring guide of collection evaluation as follows ²:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>What is measured</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Counts, ratios, formulas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Ratios</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

224
Here size of the collection (total number), collection budget allocation even in case of electronic resources, number of serials in relation to number of students and faculty, level of study, conspectus for cooperative collection development as per their subject area, quality of collection based on authority, scope, currency—all are effective enough to measure strength and weakness of collection.

According to ALA’s *Guide to the Evaluation of Library Collections*³, evaluation is of two kinds to be followed:

❖ **Collection-centered**

- *Checking lists* (checking holdings by standard bibliographies by which gap or weakness of collection can be identified—sometimes seems vague in reality because of lack of any proposed standard list in library).

- *Expert opinion* (mostly the expertise of other librarian or professionals’ committee, subject specialists are needed for looking out evaluative measure, though very often their own views cannot be so sufficient to measure).

- *Comparative use statistics* (comparison in-between different libraries, though very limited in manner).

❖ **User-centered**

- Circulation study (mainly related to use study of users—faculty and students).
• Users' view (users' personal opinions concerning quantity and quality of collection).

• Interlibrary loan (ILL) statistics (a study of other library's use and reason behind it).

• Citation analysis (Identification of the works cited and analysis of how many works are in the library's collection).

Evaluation of print materials is usually a regular process, traditionally accepted one. This aspect can equally be applicable to our new content — electronic information. Here usage, users' opinion — are useful for identification of qualitative as well as quantitative measure. Additionally, efficiency, effectiveness, currency, usefulness — are elements of evaluation. To what extent a user can access such information is a real measure to have a total picture of usage, though it is a part of aggregators. In this context, the following are of prime importance to evaluate the aggregated information such as, electronic journals: search engines, durability, hardware and software facilities, price, consortial discount, archival facility. Even the regular in-house use of electronic information shows the qualitative measure of service provided within the library. Automation has performed a big role in collection of data for evaluation in an easier way.

Another unique method for evaluation applicable in different academic and research libraries to cope up with resource sharing is the Conspectus Method developed by Research Libraries Group. As we have discussed earlier, it analyses collecting levels ranging from almost nothing to exhaustive collection based on format and languages by using Library of Congress Classification numbers, it is an excellent performance showing evaluative measure. The greatest outcome of it is that different libraries can easily and conveniently compare their own collection.

Evaluation is also greatly dependent on the staff's familiarity with the library materials where some of these surveys are effective for right information about the strength and weakness of collection.
In our Indian perspective too, no one can avoid the effectiveness of evaluation for print and online information. General surveys of university libraries in West Bengal, especially the Calcutta University Library System shows that mostly the staff is engaging in implementation of rules and norms, helps users giving proper service in different areas within the library, but much attention cannot be given to this evaluation area mainly for vast collection. Though different statistics (eg. Circulation) are taken for some time, it is not possible to keep these in a consolidated and formal manner from time to time in a regular manner. Not only that, use study of reference collection and non-circulating serials cannot be always recorded properly. In fact, evaluation is itself a complex matter to be kept in an ongoing manner for university library like Calcutta University with so many campuses and departmental libraries. Not only that, any one particular evaluative measure is not sufficient enough to get an idea of strength and weakness of collection here.

The most important guiding manual for evaluation is useful even for our university library which is developed by Blaine Hall⁴:

❖ Prepare individual criteria for getting record of quality
❖ Shelf list sample (random sample survey of collection)
❖ ILL requests wherefrom wanted titles can be found
❖ Obsolete materials especially in Science department (at least more than 15 years)
❖ Relate all these in perspective of library's own mission.

Same is the case of digital environment - a kind of hybrid collection is found in the libraries of today. Whatever be the type of collection, use-centred evaluation is a necessary one that can be best followed. The assessment is best measured using this type of evaluation system. It involves the measurement of the following:

❖ Importance of any document by its repeated use
❖ Future use of documents depends often on their use in the past.
Both reading and reference use of documents comply with their use through circulation which is also another important step to judge the importance of documents.

Document delivery measure is another way of assessing the need of documents in the library. Actually the timely access to the right materials thought to be needed most is its special feature.

8.2 THE CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SYSTEM:

It is working with some of the aforesaid programmes, and in spite of its vastness it seems to keep track of all in a timely manner.

It is firstly observed that the regular budget amount as per each financial year shows the pattern of increasing materials in most of the different subject areas (especially new and emerging areas) under the Calcutta University Library system. It is shown in Appendix 2. So analysis of the library budget is a need for the library professionals.

8.2.1 THE ASSESSMENT OF CIRCULATION STATISTICS IS OBSERVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAY:

Book cards along with due date slips attached to the books in different campus libraries and some departments are examined. But the problem faced is that very often book cards / slips are filled up very frequently and withdrawn from the documents and as such no previous slips are kept in regular manner. As a result exact information regarding circulation statistics of heavily used books cannot be recorded conveniently. Very often the new (latest) slips pasted in the documents show few entries of issues of users and this gives incomplete information. So the process of getting circulation statistics is in the following way: all the recorded dates in the latest available book cards / slips are taken for calculating the average number of issues per month / year. It is found that maximum of documents have at least twelve months' issue records in that slip.
Random sampling method without replacement was used to collect samples for analysis of usage of books. It was decided to have a sample size of 30 (to reach a large sample size) while selecting samples of books in different campus and departmental libraries. The total number of books in the departmental library's collection was ascertained from the Acquisition Register. 30 random numbers (between 1 and the total number of books) were generated without replacement by a Statistician using a computer. The books that corresponded to these random numbers in the Acquisition Register were taken in the sample. This procedure was repeated for different departments. – [See Appendix 7: Study of Circulation for Evaluative Measure]

But it should be kept in mind and also be written in policy guidelines to keep the previous book cards or mention the continuing number of the present book card of any document, so that an average use of books starting from the accession date can be ascertained.

This circulation statistics is also helpful in getting a picturesque view that maximum text books are used by the students, whereas faculty and research scholars use reference and research-oriented documents. The whole process can give a thorough assessment about non-use of books, obsolete books, books of old editions, – now almost unused by the users. It also in turn, helps determine the weeding process or back-storage system in the library. It gives an idea of core and non-core collection from existing library materials. It really deserved the principal aspect of Ranganathan's first law of library science- "Books are for use”.

An average use of books through circulation of departmental /campus libraries are here displayed:
This graphical representation gives us an idea about the average annual use of library materials in different departments.

8.2.2. USE STUDY:

In fact, use study is very closely related to evaluation. Even *in-house statistics* of the library system for both print (for books and journals) and online information is an evaluative task to get knowledge of percentage of use of resources. Survey of this area shows the decreasing rate of using reference books (15-20 *users/day on an average*) and increasing rate of using web-based information (75-80 *users / day on an average*). This evaluative measure shows the trend towards the increasing use of web information day by day in comparison to print form. A sample is observed through the year 2007- a comparative use of print versus online journals (monthly total) in the following manner:

![Average annual use](image-url)
Table 8.1: Use of print versus online journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Print Journal users (monthly total)</th>
<th>Online Journal users (monthly total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>1198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>2112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>3098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>4121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>4391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>3978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>4159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>3999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>2167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>3906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>4234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.2: Use of print versus online journals

This graphical representation is an excellent example of showing the growing trend of accepting an emerging information resource – online journals.

8.2.3 INTER LIBRARY LOAN (ILL):

The record of Inter Library Loan (ILL) facility in this library system shows that very few titles are borrowed from various departments within the Calcutta
University and used like interlibrary loan system among the departmental libraries, within campus libraries and also few books are borrowed mainly from the National Library, Kolkata, Asiatic Society, Kolkata. From analysis of this record, one can find out the most wanted titles and take necessary steps. Data for this have been collected and given in Appendix 4: Interlibrary Loan Facility.

The books which are more than 50 years old are not being issued and these can be used within the library. These are preserved as old books.

8.2.4 THE METHOD OF EVALUATING STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF LIBRARY COLLECTION HELPS GET AN EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE OVER THE TERM – WEEDING.

It is closely related to selection– an important section of collection development. It helps identify the worn-out and unused material as well as it saves user’s precious time to select the right document. This weeding policy helps the library prepare a compact collection so that the use of collection can be increased. If this important aspect of collection development policy can be included in the written policy the problem of space associated with the growth of collection can be solved. Not only that, collection development depends on the method of preparing a well-balanced, user-oriented quality collection. It is also one of the criteria to fulfill the curricular and research needs of the users in the university libraries. To fulfill the current users’ needs, weeding method is very much necessary to be adopted. The University of the State of New York’s Library Extension Division published a pamphlet of 18 pages in 1937 named “Weeding the Library: Suggestions for the Guidance of Librarians of Small Libraries”\(^5\), where recommendation for weeding out materials covering more than forty years has been depicted. Even Stanley Slote has given an updated idea of weeding as “removing the noncore collection from the primary collection area [open stack area]”\(^6\).
Weeding is generally needed for the following reasons:

- For ease of access
- For library economy
- For saving space
- For addition of new documents

Many university libraries abroad and also few in India have successfully implemented the weeding process. As for example, in West Bengal, the Rabindra Bharati University library has already weeded out the documents of 1970s for saving space and deleting unused documents and is now thinking of another weeding of documents for the next phase.

Though it is really a needed one, the major reason for reluctance behind accepting the traditional idea of weeding (also in case of Calcutta university library system) is:

- Potential value of research for the scholars – as nobody knows when a worn-out or even an obsolete material may become important to a user. Actually no one can forget the third law of Dr. S.R. Ranganathan - "every book its reader".

- The Calcutta University Library system follows the idea of back storage. As the library system supports research it does not weed it completely keeping in mind the future demand of the users.

In this situation this university library system can have the back storage practice as its modified weeding policy under the guidance of collection development policy. Also it may be suggested that several university libraries may cooperatively build a repository of unused documents to act as a central back storage.
Different criteria can be of immense help for judging the weeding process:

❖ Unneeded duplicate titles
❖ Poor bound volumes- worn-out
❖ Multiple copies of textbooks – old editions and worn-out
❖ Sound recordings having scratch/damaged
❖ Worn-out audiotapes
❖ Books that are harmful for users
❖ Documents having incorrect information
❖ Unneeded complimentary copies
❖ Documents written in language not extensively used in the library
❖ Documents having more than 30 years
❖ Reference books (eg. Encyclopaedia, almanacs, facts on file etc.) having a five to ten years’ publication
❖ Books not circulated for last 5-10 years

If all these criteria are submitted to the Library committee for further consideration of the Syndicate, then their resolution would be helpful for getting their views on the weeding process.

Here some more suggestions for weeding process can be of great advantage to think again and again over this matter:

❖ In-house use of documents
❖ Circulation statistics – how many times a book-card has been stamped for circulation.
❖ Reference use – a record of all the subject wise reference documents – which subjects are used more and more
❖ Physical conditions of documents
❖ Ephemerals

Not only that, rapid diversification of subjects, information explosion, vast networking facility, increase in use of e-resources – all made the libraries think about weeding. Recent adoption of resource sharing methods (through
consortial agreement) helps control the growth of collection qualitatively in university library. It also reduces the unused documents in the library. Even electronic resources also need to be weeded or deselected. Here usage is an important factor in comparison with the expenditure for the e-resources.

Based on the above criteria, library professionals in this university library system can take the decision to deselect such kinds of materials and this may be a regular process that can be incorporated in collection development policy. Sorting out the high and low level of use can differentiate the total collection and thus facilitate accessing the right materials immediately. What is needed and what is unused is the decision-making formula which can be kept in a standardized collection development policy in Calcutta university library system. Then the policy would provide some basic guidelines for identifying the materials to be weeded.

Alternative suggestions for weeding materials can be optional by this university library system. Even some of them are maintained by the library:

- Back storage of unneeded materials within the library premises, as already developed by the university library in different collection.
- Preparing microfilms or computer databases of those unused books lists so that at a glance record of it can come out.
- Digitization of very old documents, so that all research value of documents can be retained.
- Display or exhibition of almost unused documents (much used in the past) to make the users aware of the documents preserved in the library.
- A central repository of unused documents can be planned by all the universities in the state which will help the individual libraries as well as the researchers at time of need.

Along with that everybody should rethink of library preservation method of this university library system. For a long period, such obsolete and worn-out and damaged conditions of documents make the librarian think of preservation policy actively. Actually to lengthen the life cycle of documents, preservation method, like other university libraries, has been undertaken by this university.
For conservation method, binding and repair program is usually maintained here in a regular way.

Special binding section of this university library system is highly appreciated. Back issues of journals are bound in-house also.

This university library is always active in preserving the documents in a right manner. Using pesticides in a regular way (fortnightly) in different campus libraries, departmental libraries and also the central library is organized to keep the documents in a proper manner.

Even good control over dusting and cleaning of every area of library system, now through outsourcing, is highly praiseworthy matter for preserving materials in good condition. Use of fumigation and vacuum cleaning is noteworthy one. Good lighting facility, air-conditioning system for different campuses and central libraries as well as departmental libraries make the conservation system effective.

Another most important task the university librarian has taken with great responsibility is digitization of the old/rare library materials (especially Calcutta Reviews, Calendar of the university, Minutes of the Syndicate) in order to preserve the heritage in a well-organized manner. The process is going on.

But all the statements should be assembled and formally embodied in a written policy. This would help in the enrichment of the library collection – to fulfill the library’s objectives. The written policy can easily become a framework for evaluation of collections- both print and online. The evaluation of present collection helps broaden the idea of selecting needed library materials depending on the allocation of funds. But a standardized written policy (incorporating different resolutions adopted by the Syndicate) may be maintained in the general collection development policy. The aforesaid suggestions are expected to be beneficial for this library system and can also be helpful for future generations.
REFERENCES:


6. Ibid., 15.