

## SERIALS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES THE KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY LIBRARY IN FOCUS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper reviews the organization and management of Serials in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology library. The Serial section of the KNUST Library has over the years, experienced problems of unsustainable subscriptions, resulting in gaps in the collection. It has in the past relied on assistance from various donors and sponsors to boost the journal collection. The current situation of journal holdings is described and recommendations made for sustainable subscription to some core print journals complemented by subscription to selected electronic journal databases.*

**Keywords:** *Serials, management practices,  
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### INTRODUCTION

#### Definition of Serials

The term serials, periodicals and journals are used interchangeably in library terms to describe a class of publications that do not qualify to be classified as monographs or books. An attempt at defining the terms here will serve to illustrate the point. There have been various definitions by writers like Osborn (1973) Davison (1969) and Graham (1990), but a universally acceptable definition in 1975 by International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO 3297) in (Szilvassy, 1996) states that a "serial is a publication in any media, issued in successive parts, usually having numerical or chronological designations and intended to be continued with no predetermined ending". It continues to add that serials include "periodicals, journals, newspapers, memoirs, transactions and proceedings and so on, of societies in printed form, on microform and electronic format".

The above descriptions categorize clearly what publications could be referred to as serials, that is, any publication which continues on a series basis either regularly or irregularly.

However, the intention of being published on a continuous basis is not very clear as the first issue appears, in spite of the fact that it might be numbered one, presupposing a continuation. It may

be suspended for a long time or may appear at irregular intervals. It can be merged with one or more publications or even separated from or absorbed by other serials. It is accepted then that a serial should be published on a continuous basis, be it regularly or irregularly.

Even though the definition of a serial may be clear, there is an inconsistent use of the term serials, periodicals and journals even among librarians and publishers. In Szilvassy (1996), a journal is the term used particularly for "more learned periodicals." It provides a subject focus, whereas a periodical is described as "a type of a serial, published at regular intervals, more frequently than annually and less frequently than bi-weekly, in which the issues are generally characterised by the variety of contents and contributors both within the issue and from one issue to another".

Most libraries, including the KNUST library acquire all the categories of serials mentioned above. Therefore in this essay, the terms would be used interchangeably, however the same meaning is implied.

#### Importance of serials

Periodical literature, whether in print, CD-ROM or online, constitutes a major source of current information, more especially for academic institutions.

They serve as tools for the provision of current and up to date information on topical issues, scholarly subjects, exchange of ideas, experiences and also as a medium for the discussion of current scientific research in particular. Because they are regularly published, the information they contain is more up to date than that in book form. Serials make it possible for the development and subsequent discussion of ideas which may not be capable of being developed into a full book. Some of the new discoveries reported first in serials are never published elsewhere again in any other form. Serials are published at relative speed and they communicate information at the same relative speed. Other advantages include wide varieties of format of publication available - floppy, CD-Rom, paper and electronic. Libraries therefore have a variety of choices to make. They can choose what is convenient and affordable. Many publishers are now going in for electronic journals to catch up with the information technology age. Another advantage is that soft cover printed copies are small and convenient to carry and use.

Electronic versions of serials also have some advantages. Multiple users can access electronic versions at any time provided there are many computers in the section. They are easier to access if there are no connection problems. Electronic collections are often stored somewhere else, therefore the journals are intact and free from damage. Such storage frees up space for other uses. It is important for academic libraries, especially, to acquire and organise serial literature for use by their patrons. Let it be noted, though, that not all articles in serials are of lasting significance.

#### **Some disadvantages and problems of Serials**

Serials are difficult to handle physically because of their shape and size, and because of their shape and size, a lot of space is also required to store and display them. In addition to the huge cost of acquiring them, there is still the need to have them bound at extra cost and work. It is difficult tracing missing copies or copies not supplied, as the Librarian may have to write to the suppliers, the ensuing correspondence to and fro may be time consuming. However failure on the part of the Librarian to claim the missing copies would result in incomplete sets of volumes in the library. Libraries usually purchase only one copy of a

particular issue of a journal. If that copy gets lost or damaged the user suffers a temporary or permanent inconvenience to his academic work. The main disadvantage of the electronic version is that the library does not own any copies since it is in electronic form.

#### **SERIALS MANAGEMENT**

Serials management is a major professional responsibility involving the selection and de-selection of serial titles; developing and maintaining an adequate and relevant collection and organising the collection to serve the purposes for which it is meant. The professional librarian, in conjunction with faculty, would be able to match the academic requirements of the various departments with the appropriate serial titles required by them.

Serials management also includes clerical routine services like the day-to-day checking in, records keeping, processing, shelving current titles and distributing and retrieving journals for patrons. Thus, trained staff is an important component of serials management. They are required to provide the technical services demanded like indexing and abstracting, and recording of journals received. They also guide and assist users in the retrieval of the appropriate information for their academic work. This activity on the part of staff is important in managing the collection effectively.

Libraries receive many unsolicited periodicals like religious and political material, trade brochures and annual reports produced by major banks and companies. Some of these free publications also pose a lot of management problems. Some may be useful and be kept, but those found to be less useful may be sorted out by staff, displayed for a short period and then discarded to make the collection more manageable.

Having established the fact that the serials collection is an important aspect of the academic library, subscription to titles or acquisition through other means must be sustainable so that patrons do not lose trend or are deprived of the continuity of their scholarly interests.

## FUNDING THE LIBRARY AND SERIALS SUBSCRIPTIONS

Tertiary institutions in Ghana receive the bulk of their operating funds from government. Requests for funds are usually made through annual estimates prepared by the institutions. They may have other minor sources of income in addition to government grants (URC final Report Draft, Ministry of Education 1988).

The University Rationalization Committee (URC) Report recommends that 10% of all funds released to the universities should be allocated to libraries for books and periodicals, and salaries and wages. Before this recommendation in 1988, the universities spent not more than 3% of their financial resources on the library (Table I). The committee took a serious view of this lopsided allocation and said that the libraries should be well funded to support academic activities in the universities. It considered it "inconceivable to think of universities without good libraries." (URC Report p.271) The URC Report provides statistics on the percentages of the total subvention of KNUST, that was allocated to the library. The lowest was in 1982 when the library received 0.94% of the University's vote. The highest figure was 2.89% in 1984, but by 1986, this had reduced again to 1.62%. This was the general state of funding the library before the URC's recommendations in 1988. The picture has not changed very much as at now. According to the KNUST 2002 Budget, the allocation made to the library was 3.16% of the university's vote. This is to cover recurrent expenditure involving purchase of books and journals and general administration.

### The effect of Low Funding on Journal Subscriptions

With the limited funds made available to the library over the years, it is not surprising that journal subscriptions suffered accordingly. Journals are quite expensive while subscription costs keep on escalating each time.

In order not to sacrifice high-level academic work on the altar of inadequate funds, and also to use the limited resources judiciously, only core journals were procured between 1992 and 1997 with the aid of the World Bank.

The decision to procure only core journals was a directive from the Ministry of Education to ensure that the University Libraries did not go without journals. The economic recession experienced in the country in the 1980's drastically reduced Government's funding of the Universities and this also greatly affected journal subscription during the period. Subscriptions reduced to almost nil by 1986. Help from the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986 which lasted for three years and the Educational Sector Adjustment Programme (EDSAC) in which the World Bank supplied equipment and core journals to educational institutions, rescued the situation.

During the period, the library subscribed to 750 core journal titles. The programme officially ended in 1997. Presently the library subscribes to twenty-five (25) journals. Of this number four (4) are in the humanities. The other titles cover such areas as ecology, science and technology, food and nutritional science, medicine and chemistry. The subscriptions to these are sponsored by INASP. The section has been relying on donations of back copies from organisations like the Book Aid International (BAI) and Campus Book Link. As subscription to printed journals came to a standstill, the next available opportunity lay with the electronic media.

### Role of Electronic Media and Technology in the Provision of Journals

In pursuit of maintaining currency in information provision, the application of modern technology in serials management achieves more and faster results. Library automation, whether on a small or large-scale, introduces dramatic change in handling serials. The electronic media consisting of the creation of a CD-ROM workstations, computer terminals linked to national and international networks, the INTERNET, allows libraries to become part of the national and international information network.

**UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
COST OF RESOURCES USED**

	1982		1983		1984		1985		1986	
	Cost	% of Total	Cost	% of Total	Cost	% of Total	Cost	% of Total	Cost	% of Total
<b>Current Cost</b>										
Administration	4,962,09	6.28	6,449,534	5.56	9,290,100	6.49	31,450,511	6.35	45,699,732	7.34
Academic	424,369,153	30.86	39,005,354	32.14	72,026,539	50.30	193,837,703	39.16	266,485,985	42.77
Library	737,760	0.94	2,428,799	2.03	4,151,263	2.89	10,524,187	2.13	10,122,825	1.62
Students Facilities and Amenities	15,591,460	19.75	12,838,457	10.68	6,869,694	4.80	38,970,840	7.88	56,361,825	9.05
General Educational Expenditure	16,252,977	20.58	29,456,771	24.50	4,705,016	3.28	127,065,000	25.67	95,165,267	15.27
Municipal Services	17,044,003	21.59	30,047,585	24.99	46,153,402	32.23	93,094,762	18.81	149,183,383	23.95
Miscellaneous Expenditure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub-Total Recurrent</b>	<b>78,957,447</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>20,226,500</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>343,196,014</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>494,943,000</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>622,919,021</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>										
Development Costs	5,135,442		488,554		3,478,459		1,760,215		12,551,704	
Furniture & Equip Costs	649,043		4,351,224		873,000		10,929,641		17,468,538	
Sub-Total - Capital Costs	5,784,485		4,839,778		4,351,459		12,689,856		30,920,242	
<b>Total (1) + (2)</b>	<b>84,741,932</b>		<b>125,066,278</b>		<b>147,547,473</b>		<b>507,632,859</b>		<b>652,939,263</b>	
Government Subvention	69,501,830		89,224,470		125,592,577		421,635,294		591,878,401	
Recurrent	2,496,818		88,612		1,201,019		-		135,664	
Capital	71,998,648		89,283,082		126,793,596		412,635,294		592,014,065	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1:14:1</b>		<b>1:35:1</b>		<b>1:14:1</b>		<b>1:19:1</b>		<b>1:05:1</b>	
Ratio Recurrent Expenditure to Recurrent Grant										

SOURCE: Data provided by U.S.T.

At KNUST library, the CD-ROM Workstation, which was started in 1995 to serve as a supplement to the inadequate collection of serials, ceased functioning after the initial period when donor funding provided by National Agricultural Research Programme (NARP) and American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) dried up. It became virtually impossible to buy any new CDs because of high subscription costs, thus the service could not be sustained. Currently the library has some CD-ROMs and online subscription to EBSCO and AJOL sponsored again by INASP.

Online searches in themselves create problems concerning cost issues, space and equipment needed, access costs, subscription, and processing and maintenance. Even for the developed countries, the balance between online and hard copy would depend largely on financial circumstances. It is prudent that online services and the hard copy would need to co-exist. Here, an interesting observation could be made of reading habits of users. Most users are used to the hard copy, which can be borrowed for home reading. This habit could be gradually influenced and clients oriented toward new technologies like online searching but the affordability of the service needs serious thought. Can readers at KNUST afford to pay for online searches or should the searches be subsidised with the scarce resources of the library? It may not be practicable here to have a complete substitution of the hard copy for the electronic media.

The Joint Academic Network, (JANET) of the UK is another example of the role of technology in serials management. It is an important link among academic institutions in the U.K. because it affords them easy and cheap access to information transfer using computer networks. It also enables them to send electronic mail through the system and to access remote library catalogues. The question to ask here is whether it will be affordable for university libraries in Ghana to be joined in a network and share resources. It is far easier to take advantage of the global INTERNET.

Another form of online provision of journal literature is the electronic library. The e-library is "an anywhere, anytime information gateway to selected INTERNET resources, hundreds of full-text magazines, newspapers and over 10,000 electronic books. (of course not all of these may be relevant for academic purposes). "It is not a search engine, in fact, it is in partnership with top publications to

provide current information and years of archives in one convenient location. The e-library aggregates hundreds and hundreds of full-text periodicals. Archives of back copies may be kept at a particular site. Favourite topics and articles could be saved for quick access" ([www.e-library.com](http://www.e-library.com) 4/10/2002).

Despite these advantages of disc and online information provision, that facilitate serials management practices, KNUST Library, may find it difficult to sustain online subscription to journals. Fortunately, assistance provided by the IFLA/DANIDA Interlibrary loan and Document Delivery programme, boosted the journal resources of the KNUST Library, from 1997 – 2002.

Under this project, the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) Section on Document Delivery and Interlending sought sponsorship from Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) to help solve the interlending problems in developing countries. Its goals were "to establish electronic network links with a regional and global approach so as to improve universal availability of publications; improve the competence of library staff in handling interlibrary loans and document delivery systems and to support negotiations with main document centres/libraries to obtain favourable treaties" some Danish Libraries co-operated to deliver documents on request to six (6) libraries in Ghana including KNUST library.

Others were University College of Education Library; University of Cape Coast Library; University for Development Studies Library; Balme Library (University of Ghana) and Institute of Scientific and Technological Information. Through this means global electronic links were established to provide publications and information readily through resource sharing.

Thus the KNUST Library could supply journal articles on request to its patrons. This support lasted from 1997 – 2002. As the above programme came to an end, another donor offered to sponsor some specific online databases for participating libraries. INASP (International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications) of the U.K is co-ordinating the PERI, (Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information), which

provides information through electronic means. The package provides over 7,000 full text journals online as well as some of the world's leading citation, bibliographic and reference databases e.g. EBSCO, AJOL and INGENTA. Some of the materials are available in CD-ROM format. The service is open to all academics and researchers, but orders can only be placed through participating libraries.

If well utilised by the university community it can be claimed that for the next five years from the year 2002 that the programme would run, the KNUST Library would have free subscription to over 7,000 journal titles in all subject fields of the university curricula.

### **The Current Situation of Serials Management at KNUST Library**

The serials section of the KNUST Library has had a chequered history of development. It does not have a serial policy which sets out the criteria for selecting and deselecting serials. The section had earlier been subscribing to over 1,500 journals titles but it was not possible to pay subscriptions to essential journals by 1979. Through the assistance of the EDSAC programme, the library could receive 750 core journals by 1997. This brought back some life into the Serials Section of the library. The KNUST Library also benefited from a programme sponsored by IFLA/DANIDA, ILL/DD through which the library had access to materials by loan from some libraries in Denmark and U.K. Currently, the PERI programme, which provides access to over 7,000 journals online is running.

The various stages of development that the Serials Section had gone through bring along some management problems. These include unsustained subscription resulting in gaps in the collection; improper record keeping leading to difficulty in retrieval of documents, access to on-line journals, which elapse without the corresponding print copies.

However, there has been marked improvement in the circumstances of the serial resources of the library since the year 2000. There is an on-going project to provide an optic fibre backbone to network and hook the whole campus on the INTERNET. When the project is complete, it is assumed that faculty can access the PERI database

from their offices, as the Electronic Information Unit would have succeeded in training them and giving them such skills as are required. The only hindrance would be that there are few computers in some departments and one lecturer could take long periods doing searches thus depriving colleagues of access at particular times.

At present, the Electronic Information Section of the KNUST Library is going all out to coax faculty to make good use of these free databases. If faculty develops an appetite for the online searchers, which are free now, how does the library finance or sustain subscriptions after the PERI programme ends? Fortunately negotiations are far advanced between the sponsors (INASP) and the participating libraries so that the libraries can share costs with the sponsors to enable the programme to be sustained.

### **CONCLUSION**

A well resourced and organised academic library is a vital part of a university, as it supports teaching, learning and research. Serials librarianship is seen as a major area in library and information work as serials are a source of information that may never be obtained from monographs. Serials provide current information on topical issues and also serve as media for the discussion of current scientific research.

Total reliance on donations may make users wait unduly long for issues which may arrive too late for effective use. Despite financial difficulties in sustaining subscriptions academic libraries must acquire and organise the serials collection based on the principle of its relevance to the community it serves. The trend now may be to subscribe to both electronic and print journals.

### **Recommendations**

Subscription and sustenance to print journals have been plagued with several problems, therefore, creative solutions must be sought to overcome these problems permanently. By a stroke of good fortune, the KNUST Library has been provided with access to free database in the PERI Programme. This shift is supported by Harloe (1994) when he suggested that, "collectively librarians seem to have little choice but to initiate the transition to an access-based model of service based upon electronic networks that will provide bibliographic, numeric and full-text information to scholars and researchers."

Considering the present circumstances of the KNUST Library, one can agree with Kidd and Rees-Jones (2000) that "the current situation is, to run the print and electronic versions in parallel so that readers can use whichever version is more appropriate for a particular purpose. Such dual publication is likely to be required for some time to come." However, the poor working conditions e.g. few computers, power outages, searching costs, that exist here, do not augur well for the full development of electronic journals. It is suggested that when the Local Area Network of the library is complete, the Serials Section should be provided with more computers for the use by faculty. The Serials Librarian and other professional librarians should search various subject areas for journals or articles, bookmark relevant ones and inform faculty of what is available through current awareness services, i.e. Selective Dissemination of information, to reduce time spent searching. These PCs would be dedicated to only such searches and no other activity should be permitted on them.

The important aspect of this information delivery is its intellectual content. Harloe (1994) again says that, "collection managers should focus on the content of the scholarly information provided, regardless of the actual form in which the information arrives". If the service is well publicised the Section could even make some money from searching and printing charges.

It is also recommend that in the meantime, the library re-visits the subscription to only core journals to complement what is available in electronic form. A list of such core journals could be paid for by the University. The library budget should be increased to cover the amount required. In other words, the University should maintain a standing order for these core journals. The income generation activities of the Section could help to pay for the cost or go towards paying for the journals. It is unacceptable for the KNUST Library not to subscribe to any journals at all. Total dependence on the electronic media has a limitation in that when the license to the databases is not renewed or the institution ceases publication, there will be no access even to back copies. This is a major problem facing libraries which are totally dependent on electronic versions. A whole database can disappear overnight.

Mention was made earlier of trained staff being a necessary component of serials management. Though all library staff have been trained in the use of computers, the staff of the Serials Section would require more training, as readers will need assistance in finding and handling information.

It is not advisable to run our libraries on anticipated donor support. It is suggested that the library should make a strong recommendation and commit the University administration to subscribe to the services of the e-library and other online databases like in the PERI Programme. It is imperative to be abreast with the times because a time will come when some print journals may no longer be available on the market.

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