AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTRES IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Describes the responses from 48 resource managers as well as 183 students from selected schools in the Colombo District, Sri Lanka. As case studies, the researchers also gather information about the collection composition from five selected schools to ascertain the currency and strength of collections in Sri Lankan school resource centres. The results indicate that the majority of school resource centres did not follow any collection development guidelines. The school resource collection is still book-centred and very few possess electronic resources. More than ninety percent of resources are obtained and selected by personnel at the Ministry of Education. The school personnel in the survey did not accept this practice as they prefer to see more empowering of material selection by Special Book Selection Committee or cooperative selection by school teachers and resource managers. The results indicate that both students and teachers do not perceive the current resource collections as adequate for learning and teaching. The collections at the five resource centres indicate that the age of the books are generally less than 10 years and more than fifty percent are published between 1990-2000. This current collection however, does not ensure what has been acquired are relevant to students' and teachers' needs. The study proposes that a proper collection policy be drawn up to ascertain that the collection in Sri Lankan resource centers reach at least the minimum universally accepted standard.

Keywords: Collection development policy; Resource centres; Sri Lanka; Colombo; Library acquisition; School libraries.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

A successful school resource centre establishes a relationship between its resources of staff and materials. Consciously, building collections as well as services and binding this to students' needs, help to achieve a planned and systematic acquisition of materials. Evans (1979) describes collection development as the process of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of library collections in terms of patron's current and changing needs. In the school library context, the acquisition of resources aims to meet the informational and personal needs of the school community.

The school community uses the collection for many reasons. Administrators require information for in-service training programmes and the promotion of services. Teachers need professional information, which includes up-to-date ideas about teaching methods, tools, subject content, ethical and psychological issues concerning young adults learning. The students use the collection to find information for assignments, general information and leisure. A collection development policy aims to meet all these needs and therefore involves both the information professional and the community the library serves. Evans (2000) suggests that collection development should (a) identify user needs and be responsive to the total community needs (not just the active users); (b) incorporate cooperative acquisition and resource sharing at local, regional and national levels; (c) consider the inclusion of all types of information; (d) be subjective and unbiased; and (e) allow learning through practice, taking risks and making mistakes. This philosophy is echoed by Loetscher (2000) who also suggests that the collection of the school resource centre must be appropriate for the community it serves and therefore emphasizes that it should be curricular-oriented with accompanying policies, staff expertise and realistic budget allocations.

The collection development policy provides the necessary guidelines for selecting library resources. The policy should include general principles for the collection as a whole and also specifies collection levels by subject and form. Van Orden (1995) suggests that the collection development policy should consider such factors as: (a) the clientele it serves; (b) the general subject boundaries; (c) the programmes to support user needs (informational, instructional, recreational); (d) general priorities and limitations governing the selection and these include the sources of funds designated for the collection, forms of materials to be collected; language and geographical areas to be included or excluded; circumstances under which duplication should be practiced; participation in resource-sharing plans such as inter-library loans, cooperative acquisition programmes; and (e) other policies related to the general management and maintenance of the collection. The forms of material should include both print and electronic resources.

Within the context of such policy, the school resource manager assumes the role of acquiring a comprehensive as well as relevant learning and teaching resources; organizing the materials appropriately to facilitate their location, access and use; maintaining and promoting the use of the collection through activities such as exhibitions, book talks and training sessions (Kinnel, 1992).

OBJECTIVES

The Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka has recognized the importance of providing a high standard of collection for the school libraries to support a learning environment (Yapa, 1998; Gunaratne Banda, 2000). In order to achieve this aim, it is necessary to understand the current state of the collections in school resource centers

in Sri Lanka. This paper reports on the findings from an exploratory study carried out with the following objectives: (a) to understand the state of collections in school resource centres in Sri Lanka; (b) to ascertain the collection development process used in schools; and (c) to find out the opinions of selected school community about the management, contents and usefulness of the school resource centre collections currently available. The study aims to answer the following questions:

(a) What is the current state of the collections in Sri Lankan school resource centres?
(b) How are the collections obtained?
(c) What are the perceptions of school resource managers with regards to their role in building up the school resource collection; the ideal collection; and possible involvement of teachers in resource selection? and
(d) How current are the book collection in the school resource centres?

SURVEY

The study uses the self-administered questionnaire to gather information from selected respondents in schools in the Colombo District, Sri Lanka. The population chosen are people directly involved in the field of school librarianship and comprises the school resource managers, who are directly involved in the collection development for their school resource centers, and students. The school resource managers come from various academic backgrounds and had several years of working experience as teachers. The students are selected based on their knowledge, age, are attending the advance level classes and are following courses in bioscience, mathematics, commerce and the arts in the selected schools. Two types of questionnaires are devised: the first are distributed to 50 school resource managers and the second are given to 200 students in 20 schools. The results are analysed based on usable returns from 48 school resource managers and 182 students. As case studies, the collections from five schools resource centres are studied to estimate the average holdings as well as the distribution of resources in accordance to the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme. This is carried out to ascertain firstly, the representation of the collection in the various disciplines, and secondly, the currency of the volumes stocked.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(a) The State of the Collection in School Resource Centres
To ascertain the collection development emphasis in the school resource centres, the resource managers are asked to indicate the main emphasis of their collection which they consider important. The results indicate that they collect mainly books (94%). However, the majority of the managers (over 90%) also consider newspapers, periodicals, video-cassettes, audio-visuals, CD-ROMs and computer software packages

as equally important. This indicate that the managers are aware of the various kind of resources that the resource centre should be collecting.

The findings reveal that the majority of the school resource centres (87.5%) do not follow collection development policy guidelines. A written collection development policy would help articulate a clear direction for building quality and relevant materials. A proper policy would subscribe the philosophy, long-range plan, and help focus the selection and evaluation procedures to be followed (Adams, 1996). Bump (1990) points out that a written policy would make the difference between an unwillingness to take risk, be innovative with a progressive collection to support the information needs of today's young people.

A closer study of the collections from the five selected schools confirmed that books form the major component of resources collected, followed by periodicals and small number of audio-visual materials. None of the five selected resource centres collect electronic materials. The collections of the resource centres are classified according to the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme.

The detail analysis of the collection from the five resource centres reveal that the majority of books acquired is in the category of arts and social sciences. Books on science and especially technology comprise a very low percentage of the total collection. This is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Total Volumes by Broad DDC Scheme in Five School Resource Centres

DDC Class Numbers	Volumes	%
800 - Literature	10967	17.0
000-200 – Generalia, Philosophy, Religion	10502	16.2
700 - Arts	9115	14.0
900 - Geography	8985	14.0
300 – Social Sciences	8498	13.1
400 - Languages	7557	11.7
500 – Science and Mathematics	6621	10.2
600 - Technology	2454	3.8
Total	64699	100

The results indicate that the resource centre collection does not provide a balanced distribution of materials in the various disciplines. Doll (1997) proposes the appropriate number of volumes in an elementary school should be 10,000 volumes per 250 students or 20 volumes per student, 50 magazine titles, 3-6 newspapers, 500 hundred film strips, three thousand records or tapes. The school resource centres in Sri Lanka should aim to at least meet these minimum requirements.

(b) The Use of the School Resource Centre

The results indicate that the majority of students are frequent users (daily) and the girls use the collection more than boys. This is indicated in Table 2. Bard and Leide (1995) also found that the girls in their sample borrow more books than the boys do. Further investigation is needed to ascertain why this is so, in order to obtain answers to questions such as; why are the boys not borrowing?, what are the type of books borrowed by the boys?, and how does the resource collection perform in providing materials in the subject areas the boys are interested in? Such investigations would help the school resource manager plan to develop the collection in accordance to user needs, especially by analyzing their user borrowing pattern, analyzing which subject areas are heavily used and which is not (Bertland, 1991).

Table 2: Frequency of Using the School Resource Centre (n=182)

Frequency	Gender					
	Boys		Girls		Both	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Daily	36	19.8	53	29.1	89	48.9
Once a week	36	19.7	32	17.5	68	37.3
Once in two weeks	14	7.6	10	5.4	24	13.1
Once a month	1	0.5	-	-	1	0.5

A higher percentage of the girls compared to the boys indicate using the school library for study, reference, leisure reading, borrow to read, and for doing their homework. A higher percentage of boys indicate using the library and they were brought to the library by their teachers (Table 3).

Table 3: Students Types of Use of the Resource Centres

Types of Library use	Gender					
	Boys		Girls		Both	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Study	32	17.5	72	39.5	104	57.1
For reference	48	26.3	53	29.1	101	55.4
Leisure reading	19	10.4	36	19.7	55	30.1
Borrow to read	20	10.9	25	13.7	45	24.7
To do homework	6	3.2	10	5.4	16	8.7
Brought by teachers	5	2.7	3	1.6	8	4.3

The students also indicate that they use other sources to obtain their information. Friends (89, 49%) were the main source, followed by the public library (77, 43%), home library (52, 29%) and from teachers (20, 11%). A number of students use a combination of the above sources.

(c) The Sources of Materials for the School Resource Centres

Most schools in Sri Lanka depend on government funding. Figure 1 shows that more than 90% of resource centre collections are obtained from the Ministry of Education. An equally large amount of funds are obtained through gifts, organizations and purchase through the school development fund. Most respondents (resource managers) indicate using more than one sources listed.

Figure 1: The Sources of Materials Obtained by the School Resource Centres

ME=Ministry of Education   NL=National Library   PA=Parents   ST=Students
TE=Teachers   OR=Organisations   GI=Gifts   SDF=School Development Fund
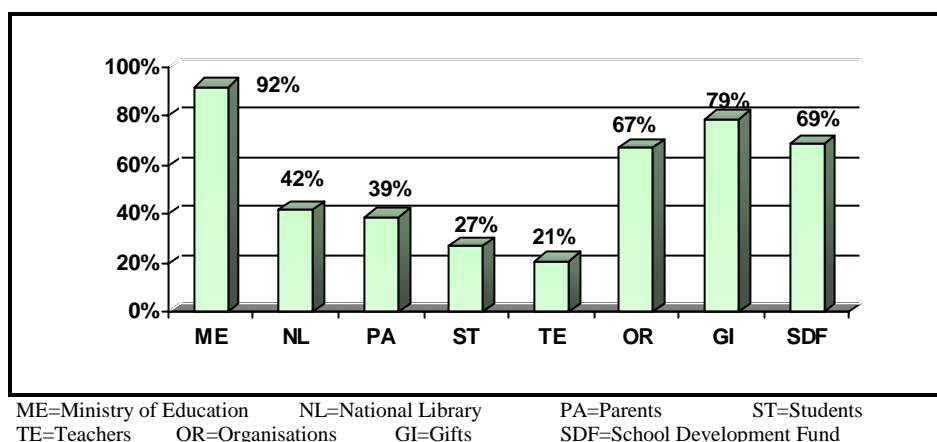
Table 3 indicates the persons involved in the selection of materials listed by the frequency counts given by respondents. Similarly, respondents may indicate more than one type of persons or institutions involved in the resource selection process. The results indicate that, personnel from the Ministry of Education select most of the resources centrally. When the resource managers makes the selection, the majority (43.7%) use the publisher's catalogues and booklists supplied by bookshops (41.6%) as their selection tools. Other selection tools used are journal reviews (20.8%) and lists obtained from the Ministry of Education (25.0%).

Table 3: Persons Involved in the Selection of Library Materials

Persons/Institutions	Count	%
Ministry of Education	35	72.9
School Resource Managers	35	72.9
School Principals	34	70.8
Special Book Selection Committee	13	27.0
Teachers	06	12,5
Students	04	8.3

(d) Persons Who should be Involved in the Selection of Materials
Respondents are asked to give their ratings on the persons resource managers think should be involved in selecting materials for the resource centres. Table 4 shows the results of the ratings. In general, respondents clearly indicate their belief that the Special Book Selection Committee should be empowered to make selection decisions. The respondents also wanted more teacher-school resource manager cooperation in the selection process. The persons respondents feel should be less involved in the selection process are students, personnel from the Ministry of Education and school principals.

Table 4: Ratings on Who Should be Involved in Selecting Materials

Those Who should be Involved	Strongly Agree & Agree		Disagree & Strongly Disagree	
	Count	%	Count	%
Special Book Selection Committee	43	89.6	5	10.4
Teachers & School Resource Managers	40	83.3	8	16.6
School Resource Manager Alone	39	77.3	9	18.7
Teachers Alone	28	58.3	20	41.6
School Principals	18	37.5	23	47.9
Ministry of Education Personnel	12	25.0	26	54.2
Students	9	18.7	33	68.8

(e) Perception on the Current Collection and the Role of the Resource Manager
Table 5 shows the perception of the resource managers on various aspects of their school resource centre.

Table 5: Perception of the Resource Managers Towards their Resource Collection

Summary of Attitude statements	Fairly Agree, Agree & Strongly Agree		Disagree & Strongly Disagree	
	Count	%	Count	%
Collection is balance to meet school needs	14	29	34	71
Collection is current	18	37	30	63
Collection meet students & teachers needs/interests	23	48	25	52
Use collection in classroom instructions	24	50	24	50
Collection is in good condition	29	60	19	40
Collection includes basic books required for teaching	27	56	21	44

More than 60% of respondents feel that their resource collection are not current and do not meet the needs of both students and teachers. The respondents are also aware that their collections are not balanced to meet their school needs. In summary, the resource managers' opinions about their collection are as follows: (a) the collection

is perceived as not balanced to meet their user's needs; (b) the materials are not current; (c) the collection fairly meets the interests of both students and teachers; (d) the collection is generally in good condition; (e) teachers generally use the collection in classroom instructions; and (f) the collection does provide basic books required for teaching.

The resource managers also indicate their opinion about the planning and management of the school resource collection (Table 6 summarises the findings).

Table 6: Planning and Management of School Resource Collection

Statements concerning the planning and managing the school resource centres	Fairly Agree, Agree & Strongly Agree		Disagree & Strongly Disagree	
	Count	%	Count	%
Need appropriate standard as a development guide	48	100	-	-
Need to cooperate with teachers in collection selection	46	96	2	4
Need to formulate criteria for accepting or rejecting gifts	45	94	3	6
Need to design, plan, produce resources for instructional use	48	100	-	-
Need to formulate policy on weeding and maintenance	47	98	1	2

The resource managers evidently accept that there is a need for a proper collection management standard, policy and planning. The school resource managers strongly feel that the school resource management should: (a) follow an appropriate standard to guide and evaluate resource collection so that it achieves balance in subject distribution, currency and relevance; (b) design, plan and produce specific resources for instructional purposes; (c) cooperate with teachers in evaluating and developing resources; and (d) formulate policies regarding the promotion and maintenance of the collection. The need to cooperate when developing collections is also pointed out by Smithson (1997). Smithson found that the strong influence teachers exert on the selection process helps to promote good resource collection. Smithson finds a correlation between good rating for social studies, English and science collection when the teachers who are teaching these subjects are involved in selecting resources and using the resources as instructional materials.

(f) The Average Age of Collection in the School Resource Centres
The results of studying in detail the collection of resource centres from five schools, helps to verify some of the opinions expounded by the respondents. The analysis revealed that the collections are comparatively current (not more than 10 years). To ascertain the average age of the collection, a total of 64699 books are analysed. The copyright dates are used to ascertain the age of the books. The results reveal that the majority of the books are published between 1990 and 2000. The majority of these books are in the generalia category, the humanities and arts (Table 7). Only about 14% of the books acquired are in the sciences and technology. The pattern of books

holding in the five resource centres support the perception indicated by resource managers (Table 5). The sampled resource managers are aware that the collection in their resource centres are not balanced in their representation of the various subject disciplines, with heavy orientation towards the arts, humanities and the social sciences and poor representation in the sciences and technology. This may be the reason why respondents indicate that their resource centres are not meeting their instructional and personal needs.

Table 7: Total Number of Books in Four Subject Categories and by Year Bands

Year Bands	A	B	C	D	Total	%
>2000	960	570	2444	1005	4979	8
1995-1999	3075	1900	9153	2689	16817	26
1990-1994	2482	1795	7002	2200	13479	21
1985-1989	715	630	2920	541	4806	7
1980-1984	785	560	3380	646	5371	8
1975-1979	835	830	3655	646	5966	9
1970-1974	790	938	3285	722	5735	9
1960s	860	1275	4785	626	7546	12
Total	10502	8498	36624	9075	64699	100
%	16	13	57	14	100	

A=General, Philosophy, Religion   B=Social Sciences (Economics, Social Science, Sociology, Political Science
C= Humanities and the Arts (Humanities, Languages, Art, Literature, Geography & History
D= Science and Technology

The age of the collection in the present study corresponds with those by Segal (1980) who found that the collection he studied is between five or ten years old. Periodically analyzing the age of the collection helps to ascertain the obsolescence rate of a collection and thereby strive to maintain a current collection. Segal points out however, that the obsolescence study is not suitable for fiction titles.

CONCLUSION

The school resource collections in Sri Lanka comprise mainly printed materials and should include more electronic-based resources, which are available and accessible through the Internet or on CD-ROMS. Planning for the school resource collection should be based on certain standards. Most collection standards are based on the number of student population such as the one proposed by the Massachusetts School Library Media Association (1997). This standard advocates that the number and type of resources is dependent on the student population. For books, the recommendations are as follows: for student population of within 400 the target should be 20 books per student; 401-800 students – 22 books per student; and 800 or more students – 24 books per student. The association recommended that seventy percent of the entire book collection should not be more than ten year from the year of analysis. For periodicals (both hard copies and electronic), the recommended volumes

are: 400 students or less should have access to 50 full text titles; 401-800 students – 75 full-text titles and 800 or more student – 100 full-text titles. The Association also recommended that non-print resources should be equal to one percent of total print collection and facilities should be acquired to enable their use. This include connection to local and wide area networks; computer workstations of 8 for 400 or less student population, and 16-20 workstations for more than 400 students. The recommendation also spells out criteria for technical training for both resource managers and teachers. The school resource centres in Sri Lanka should at least aim to provide the minimum number of volumes recommended. Figure 2 indicates the proposed ideal environment that supports quality collection development in school resource centres.

Figure 2: Ideal Collection Development Environment
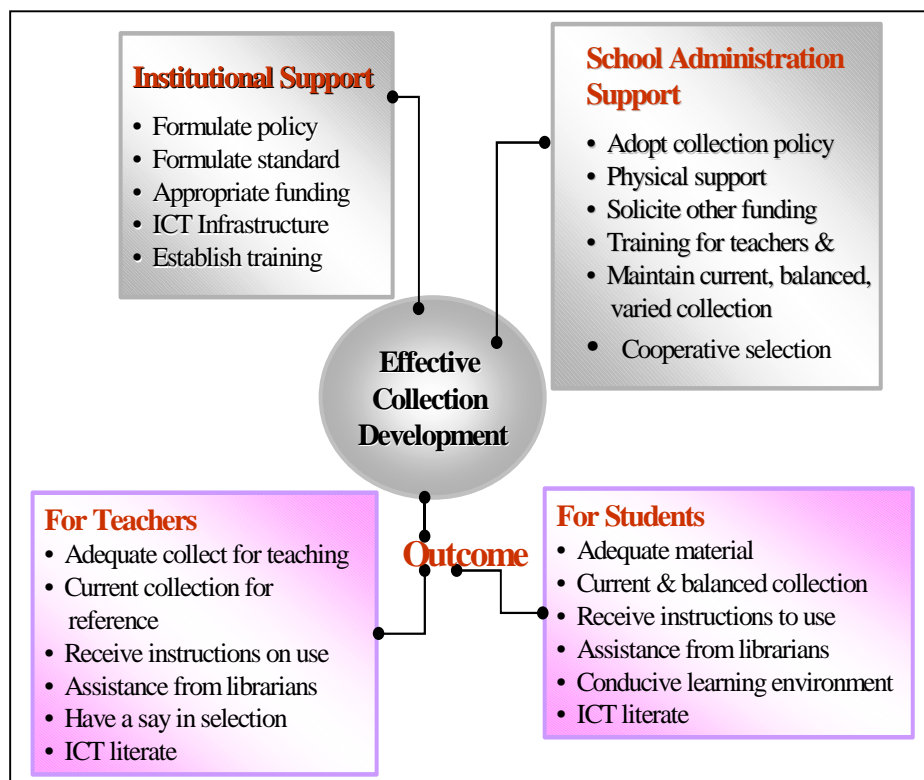
The results from the survey indicate that books are the main resource in Sri Lankan school resource centres. The collection in the five schools studied indicates a bias for the arts and literature. This imbalance should be corrected to include more current and curriculum related books in science and especially technology. It is recommended the collection be improved to include the following; a more varied fiction

collection that includes the various types of creative works; subscribing to newspapers and periodicals; and the inclusion of pamphlets, charts and government publications. There should be a move to allow the acquisition of electronic resources and the equipments necessary for their use.

Acquiring the necessary types and volumes of resources is possible, if the appropriate funding is available. Presently, the Ministry of Education disburses funds through the school library development programme funded by the World Bank. Through this fund, each resource centre should receive an annual allocation depending on the number of users. The resource managers are required to prepare an annual budget and estimate the requirements for books, other resources and equipments. Nevertheless, the resource centres are still expected to face inadequate funding. In most cases the resource centres in Sri Lanka exist in isolation. Perhaps a collaborative network should be established to enable resource centres share purchases and collections not only among schools resource centres but also with public and academic libraries.

Focus should also be given to training the human resources needed to manage the school resource centres. In a number of schools in Sri Lanka, students keep the books in bundles in a corner of the principal's room or in rooms not easily accessible. The books are neither classified nor arranged and no catalogues are provided to inform users of the availability of items. The existing resource managers should also be given in-service training on cataloguing, acquisition, user education and the management of source promotional programmes continuously.

One of the first steps towards the effectiveness of collection development programme is the formulation of a collection development policy. The policy could then be used to guide and shape the provision of the collections in schools as well as support the curriculum to meet the needs of the students and teachers. The collection development policy would be the master plan for building and maintaining collections. It helps to ensure consistency in the collection programme despite changes in staff and funding. The collection development policy should: (a) identify who would be responsible for the selection of library materials; and (b) draw up the guidelines for selecting and maintaining resources and this would be incorporated in the school library's regulations. The guidelines should specify the range and format of materials to be acquired in line with the general educational policy, and emphasise to support the curriculum, personal, instructional needs of both students and teachers, lay out the procedures for resource sharing, networking and collaboration, specify guidelines to re-evaluate or discard resources though inventory, weeding and repairs (Evans, 2000; Futas, 1995; Segal, 1980). The policy should lay-out the procedures to handle complaints and challenges (American Library Association Council, 1999).

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