

## ACCESS AND PRESERVATION

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### Abstract

The article traces the main functions of libraries and librarians whilst at the same time discussing the problems faced by not only librarians but library users in fulfilling contemporary needs and challenges. An historical analysis on changes in libraries and how technological developments have changed expectations in terms of library service, collection development and acquisition, among others; are elaborated. The whole article is based and centred along the core areas of preservation and access in libraries.

### Abstrak

*Artikel ini meneliti dengan mendalam fungsi Perpustakaan dan peranan Pustakawan serta membincang masalah yang dihadapi bukan sahaja oleh Pustakawan bahkan pengguna Perpustakaan dalam mengatasi keperluan dan perkembangan maklumat semasa. Analisis kronologi perubahan di Perpustakaan dan caramana perkembangan teknologi telah memperbaharui dan menukar ekspatasi dari segi perkhidmatan Perpustakaan, pembangunan koleksi dan perolehan, diantara lain, telah dibentangkan. Keseluruhan artikel berasaskan dan berkitar disekeliling konsep utama rencana ini, iaitu pemuliharaan/pemeliharaan dan akses di Perpustakaan.*

### Introduction

Access and preservation is a subject that is receiving great attention in the library world especially in the United States and United Kingdom. In this paper, the title "Access and Preservation" is preferred instead of 'Access versus Preservation'. The word 'versus' indicates competition. In a competition there is a winner and a loser which is not the case here. Unlimited access is detrimental to preservation. Over zealous preservation limits access and causes great hardship to library users.

#### 1.0 ACCESS

When one ponders on what it is that librarians do, the words "access and preservation" seem to describe the profession. Everything that librarians do is related to these two functions. The word "access" is used to encompass all the activities, beginning with the establishment of libraries, acquisition and collection development policies and practices, the organization of collections through cataloguing and classification, the provision of circulation and reference services, the management of stacks and library security.

#### 1.1 Establishment

The decision to establish a library is the first step on the ladder of access. The type of library will determine the sort of access it will provide. After a library has been established and its collection development policies and practices are implemented, almost every aspect of the work after that falls within the ambit of either access or preservation. As librarians in a research university library, the role is to support

the teaching, learning and research in the many academic disciplines at the university. The librarian's mandate is to acquire books and other materials required by the campus community for teaching, learning and research. The library's clients know of the library's existence and that it is the librarian's duty to provide for their scholarly needs. From the list of courses offered by the university, the library users have an idea on the range of information sources they have access to when they step into the library. They also know what they may not find, although it is likely that they may find a little on the subject in the library even though the subject may not be a course of study or research at the university.

#### 1.2 Collection development

The materials for study and research have to be acquired. The library's acquisition, and collection development policies and practices are further steps on the ladder of access. The Quantity and quality of the collections will be determined by the library's period of existence, the financial resources at its disposal and how successful the librarians are in their acquisition work. Much as the librarians desire to be comprehensive and provide every possible item that may be required, they have to bear in mind that there will be titles that they are not able to acquire for one reason or other. What they are unable to provide will most certainly not be in the librarian's favour on the scale of access. For the enterprising librarian, a situation such as this calls for the exercise of ingenuity to get the material. Interlibrary loans, borrowing from the lecturers' personal collections, and even persuading the lecturer concerned to change the title are possible approaches to better the score.

### 1.3 Cataloging

Another step on the ladder of access is bibliographic access through cataloguing, classification and indexing. Over the years, librarians have fine tuned the cataloguing and indexing procedures and practices. They are able to provide bibliographic access to a document through several bibliographic features: author, editor, title, series, subject and now keywords. All these help to trace a document and thus accelerate access.

Junior librarians are only familiar with OPAC (Open Public-Access Catalog) and how simple and easy it is for users to have bibliographic access to the collections in a library by typing on a computer keyboard in the library or from their offices, residential colleges and even homes. They are able to know whether the books are in the library or on loan and when they are due. They are also able to reserve the books in their names without having to step into the library. Senior librarians will remember the days of the stripdex catalogue, card catalogue, COM (Catalog On Microform) catalogue, manual loan systems and how messy they were to create, maintain and use.

### 1.4 Services

The next step on the ladder of access is what librarians refer to as circulation and reference services or in corporate language, client services. The range of tasks and services are aimed at providing access to the user: opening hours, open and closed stacks, reference shelves, home loans, restricted loans, entitlements, length of loan periods, renewal of loans, reservations, interlibrary loans, search services, etc., are procedures and mechanisms that enable users to make efficient use of library materials. Any breach of the procedures would affect access. If readers do not return books on time, others waiting for them are denied access. If a book cannot be located on the shelf, the reader who needs it has no access to it. If a reader reports that he has lost a book, the whole campus community has lost access to the book until a replacement copy of the book arrives. If it is out of print, librarians may never be able to replace the lost item.

### 1.5 Stacks

Stack management which is next on the ladder of access is perhaps one of the most challenging aspect of work as librarians. Browsing in open stacks is by far the greatest form of access. Users are free to move around the stacks looking for the books that they need or that look interesting and likely to hold the information they are seeking. They may miss seeing the books that are not there at the

moment because of loans or the books may be used at the reading tables or may be left at the photocopying rooms or are waiting to be shelved. The access conscious librarian must continuously monitor to ensure that books are returned to the shelves as quickly as possible to ensure access is not temporarily denied. Stack reading should be done regularly in order to ensure books are where they should be. Any book that is out of place must be sent quickly to its proper shelf. Librarians must constantly bear in mind that someone is looking for the book. OPAC has two messages: 'checked out' or 'stacks'. Ideally this is what one expects. If the book is not out on loan, it must be on the shelf. Unfortunately librarians are unable to guarantee this most of the time.

### 1.6 Security

The collections that have been built painstakingly over the years need to be protected in order to assure users that they may access them at all times. Library security is aimed at ensuring the safety of library assets. But even libraries with very sophisticated library security systems report losses of valuable books and parts of books. Book thieves resort to very innovative ways to steal books from libraries. Vandalism too is rife everywhere. When books or parts of books are missing, the loss to the whole community is tremendous. Librarians have to be constantly vigilant at the stacks and library exits. Librarians' efforts at best can only be preventive. Thieves will not stop stealing. Vandals will not stop mutilating.

From the above discussion, one realizes how access conscious librarians are. All the efforts are aimed at providing access to the information resources that have been assembled. Librarians want to ensure library users find the material and get what they need. The more sophisticated the search tools and operations, the faster the users will be able to access the resources. Access ensures usage. Usage produces results. To ensure that the resources are always accessible, librarians have to plan and implement programs that will keep the resources in good physical condition for posterity. Librarians refer to this aspect of the work as preservation.

## 2.0 PRESERVATION

Library materials are delicate whatever their format is: paper, film, magnetic tape, compact disc. They are easily damaged through rough handling, improper use and even if untouched, they deteriorate over time. One expects library materials to last forever. Unless there is a policy to weed out books regularly and delete their catalogue records, what is on record should be available when needed.

Different kinds of material require different preservation programs. Generally, library preservation programs take into consideration factors such as the physical environment in which information resources are housed; disaster control; pest control; handling of the resources by library staff and users; access control; conservation; reformatting; routine maintenance; library security and reader education.

### 2.1 Environment

The library is a building built according to specifications that determine factors such as floor loading for book stacks; location of reading halls, work rooms, staircases, lifts, toilets; air conditioning system; lighting and other client specified requirements. A constant low temperature and an ideal level of humidity have to be maintained. Problems arise when the air conditioning is switched off when the library is closed at night, on weekends and during long holidays. Sensitive materials and special collections should be kept in rooms with 24-hour air conditioning. Floors, walls, shelves must be cleaned regularly to keep dust levels low.

### 2.2 Disasters

Floods and fires are the two most feared disasters. Books destroyed by floods may be salvaged at great costs. But fires reduce everything to ashes. Roof leaks, burst and damaged pipes, clogged drains, etc. need urgent attention. It is a common sight in many libraries where book stacks are covered in sheets of plastic because of overhead leaks.

Most fires in libraries are electrical fires. Strict rules must be adhered to when using electrical equipment to prevent overloading. It is common to add sockets and lights when necessary. But such additional wiring must be according to specifications and should be done by qualified and certified contractors. The library must keep the electrical drawings and update them when additional wiring is done. Fire fighting equipment should be easily accessible and library staff must be trained to handle them. Very precious library materials must be kept in fireproof vaults.

### 2.3 Pests

Rats, termites, cockroaches and silverfish thrive in a library. Professional pest control advice and services are recommended. Particular attention should be given to areas where books are stored compactly, for example in basements and close to outside walls. When books are returned after a prolonged period of loan, they

should be examined for silverfish and termites before they are sent to the stacks. Similarly, books received as gifts must be cleaned before they are added to stock. A fumigation chamber will be a useful thing to have. But fumigation must be done by trained personnel.

### 2.4 Abuses

The following abuses and misuse of library material are common knowledge:

\*Books are used as table tops to write on.

\*Books are marked with pencil, ink and coloured highlighters.

\*Books are read while eating and drinking.

\*Pages are folded and pressed to mark for photocopying.

\*Very excessive photocopying particularly at photocopying shops by attendants who do not know or care about the value of books.

\*On rainy days, books may serve as umbrellas.

\*Microfilms are scratched because of fast reeling and unreeling.

Staff involved in stack management must be taught proper handling of books when they shelve or retrieve them. It must be impressed upon them that they are doing an important job although some may consider their work menial. Their work must be supervised and commented when necessary.

### 2.5 Access

Open access and closed access are methods devised to control user access to the collections. While most library materials may be on open access and users are allowed to browse, special collections that are in great demand, expensive, rare, brittle, etc. should be in closed access. OPAC would show that these are in closed access and users have to request for them and sign for them. In some special libraries, the major collection would be in closed access with a small collection of general reference books in open access. Closed access requires more staff to service the collection.

### 2.6 Conservation

Most libraries have in-house binderies to bind journals. Binderies are also useful for rebinding books that are damaged but still intact. Should pages be missing, the library would have to get photocopies of the pages from another library and have them inserted in their right places before rebinding is done. A full-scale

conservation section with trained staff would be able to do advanced repair work that extends the shelf life of paper material in particular.

### **2.7 Reformatting**

The most popular form of reformatting is microfilming. Rare and precious materials should be microfilmed in order that their contents are safe should the originals deteriorate or are damaged and even lost. Digitization is the current trend and should be considered for heavily used materials to enable users to access the materials via the internet.

### **2.8 Routine maintenance**

A program of routine maintenance must be formulated and adopted. Temperature and humidity levels have to be monitored and action to be taken when the readings exceed the recommended settings or are below. Microfilms and audio tapes have to be run freely at regular intervals to ensure they are not stucked to each other, resulting in loss of text and sound. Signs of pests' presence should be reported for pest control action. This aspect of preservation must not be taken for granted and delegated to very junior staff. The more thorough the inspections, the better would be the efforts to preserve.

### **2.9 Security**

The greatest threats to library collections are thieves and vandals. Constant vigilance at the open stacks through CCTV, patrols, etc. would help to reduce this nuisance. Precious materials should not be put on open shelves. They must be kept in closed stacks.

### **2.10 Awareness**

Just as librarians go to great lengths to teach library users on how to access information resources, librarians should also think of programs that will educate users on the proper usage of library materials. Library users may be amused by this. Teaching users access is an intellectual exercise. But teaching users proper usage is more like an appeal to them to be civic conscious. Much of the librarians' efforts will fall upon deaf ears. But librarians must persevere. It will be great if librarians can get the academic staff to help by them advising their students to use library materials with care. Librarians should think of campaigns through posters, book marks with special messages and appeals, friends of the library clubs, exhibition of mutilated books, etc. The message must be clear: 'please care for the books'.

## **3.0 WHAT DO WE PRESERVE?**

Much as librarians desire to preserve everything, human and other resources will never be enough for this superhuman effort. Libraries need an agenda - an agenda that is related to the respective organizations. International and national organizations can have larger plans. Smaller institutions normally aim lower. What can librarians in a university library do? A university advances the frontiers of knowledge. This advancement is documented in unpublished theses and dissertations, official reports, working papers, etc., and in publications such as books or journal articles. The books and journals may be published within the university or outside the university.

Librarians are duty bound to preserve all the theses, dissertations, academic exercises, inaugural lectures, journals, newsletters, calendars, annual reports, convocation programs, faculty handbooks, student society publications and publications produced to mark special occasions. It would be ideal to have at least two copies of each publication. One copy is to be kept for permanent preservation. The other copy will be the working or circulating copy. If the working copy is damaged or lost, librarians can make copies from the originals.

## **4.0 WHY PRESERVE?**

What does one gets if library collections are well preserved and accessible?

\* Good collections will attract scholars who may come to the university to teach, for sabbatical or pursue higher degrees.

\*Good collections will attract requests for document supply.

\*Good collections will attract gifts from scholars and book collectors because of the confidence in the Library's preservation and access policies.

\*Good collections make librarians proud and happy that they have discharged their duties and responsibilities well.

Librarians must preserve for posterity. Preservation is a professional and management responsibility. There is no access without preservation. Libraries can only create and maintain bibliographic records for materials that are available. Catalogue records do not mean a thing if libraries cannot provide the materials they describe. Nothing can be more frustrating to the researcher than to spend time at the

catalogue noting call numbers but not being able to get the materials when they go looking at the stacks. They will vent their frustrations on library staff and there is nothing that library staff can do except to apologize and offer to search for the materials that they themselves fear are no longer in the library.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The libraries in the world, from the largest and oldest to the smallest and youngest hold millions of documents which are the records of mankind's achievements, discoveries, failures, hopes, leisure, entertainment and so forth. That these libraries and their precious holdings are in existence bring great comfort to those in pursuit of knowledge. They are assured that what they need (i.e. access) may be found in several of these libraries, or in some of them or in at least one of them (i.e. the preserved format).