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Problems Associated with Newspaper Management in a Ghanaian University Library

Abstract

The paper examined the collection, storage, preservation and other management practices of newspapers at the Serials Department of the KNUST Library. The study was based on the subscription statistics from April 2000 to April 2012, a period of thirteen years available at the Department. Observation was also made to augment data gathered from the newspaper statistics and analyzed descriptively. It was revealed by the statistics that newspapers are subscribed, received and collected on a daily basis (i.e. six days a week) thus creating a huge collection. It was further revealed that the newspapers are bound annually which makes it bulky and therefore not easy to handle. The study also reveals cost, preservation and space challenges as a result of the annual mounting volumes. Some of the recommendations made were that electronic means such as scanning, microfilming and digitizing should be the target and means for maintaining the collection in the near future.

Keywords: Serials; Newspapers; Indexing; Database microfilming; Preservation

Introduction

A newspaper is a regularly scheduled publication containing news, information, and advertising, usually printed on relatively inexpensive, low-grade paper such as newsprint. (Wikipedia, 2010).

This definition was elaborated and expanded by Khan (1996). According to him a “newspaper is a serial publication issued at stated and frequent intervals, usually daily, weekly or semi-weekly and which reports events and discusses topics of general current interest”.

According to Sollinge (2003) “the essence of the newspaper is regularly to deliver news on matters of general interest to the public, but the exact definition varies with time”. The modern newspaper is in principle universal, i.e. it describes all manners of events and affairs in the whole world. It comments on these matters, print letters to the editor, weather forecasts, advertisements etc, etc, and it appears everyday or at least 5 days a week.

Sollinge (2003) further mentioned that “to be a newspaper it suffices that a publication is periodical, reproduced technically in identical series, distributed to anyone ready to pay for it and that the contents report recent events of general interest”.

Rankin (1986) asserts that newspapers “provide the facts and analysis that allow informed citizens to make effective and responsible decisions, not only in coping with the complexities of modern living, but also in protecting the rights and liberties of a free society”. He adds that “each day more than 100 million people rely on newspaper

professionals to provide accurate, timely, and useful information to help them plan their daily lives; to advise, instruct, educate, challenge and entertain”.

Walsh (2002) intimated that “newspaper articles, including news, editorial and opinion columns, cartoons and letters to the editor, obituaries, marriage and birth announcements, features such as advice columns, recipes, farming tips, as well as advertising, provide a wealth of material for social, economic and political research”. From newspapers, researchers can gain a sense of the ebbs and flows of public opinion, including dissenting points of view (Walsh, 2000). According to Okorafor (1990) newspapers serve as “chief instrument of communication through which people debate their problems and speak their minds on public issues”.

The importance of newspapers is further advanced by Adeyemi (1987) who states that ‘information in newspapers is of value and benefit to industry, government, publishers, the media, banks, labour unions, political organizations, legislators, insurance companies, legal practitioners, researchers and the general citizenry’. Nwanfor (1988) commented on the importance of newspapers to Nigerians. He stated that ‘the importance of newspapers to Nigerian society is measured by the large backfiles of newspapers maintained by libraries, business and commercial organizations and even individuals’.

Stoker (1999) however believes that “newspapers were never intended by their producers to be a permanent means of storing textual information, and the recognition that they contain a mass of valuable information not available elsewhere, is only a comparatively a recent phenomenon”.

In an academic setting, like the KNUST, newspapers at the Serials Department provide the ready source of information for usage. This is attested by Okorafor (1987) who states that ‘newspapers are useful in teaching reading skills to students and to help them learn to distinguish between fact, opinions and propaganda’. The daily receipt of these newspapers creates a lot of volumes and the bulkiness makes it very difficult to handle. Besides, it creates huge space and storage problems. This study is therefore to assess the management of newspapers at the Serials Department of the University Library, identify the problems and to make recommendations to improve their management.

The KNUST Library System

Teye, Borteye and Asare-Kyire (2012) referring to Alemna and Cobblah (2004), recounted that the KNUST Library was established in 1951, with the collection of books which had formed the Library of the Teacher Training College at Achimota, Accra. The college was moved from Achimota to Kumasi and this Library formed the core of the present university library. With a total of 4000 volumes, the stocks were centred on education, fine arts and religion. After independence the government converted the then Kumasi College of Technology into a purely technological institution.

According to the KNUST Library Manual (2012), the library moved to its current premises in 1961 from a prefabricated structure. The library has six departments – Acquisitions, Cataloguing, Lending, Reference and Research, Electronic Information and Serials.

History of Newspaper Collection at the Serials Department

Newspaper collections at the Serials Department can be traced as far back as the early 1980s. The collections at the time were from both government-owned and privately-owned newspapers. Some of the government-owned newspapers were 'The Daily Graphic', 'The Ghanaian Times', and 'The Spectator'. The privately owned newspaper as at the time was 'The Pioneer'.

The collections started in the old stack room of the Library currently being used as the photocopying unit. Initially cards were used to record and file the records of the newspapers, using the title of the newspaper, the article volume and serial numbers. Descriptors and keywords which were to help in the retrieval system were also used. After going through these processes, they were then filed and kept for searches and retrieval.

With passage of time handling, management and retrieval processes of newspaper records under the manual system became cumbersome. There was therefore the need to find more efficient ways to overcome these difficulties. In 1999, the services of two computer science students, then on national service at the University Library, were engaged to develop a software to manage the newspaper collections and also to assist in the retrieval of records from the database by users.

The first software that was used for the newspaper index was the Fortran 4. Due to the problem of staffing, the entries into the manual database ceased, creating a gap of about four years from 1990-1993. In 1999, the problem of staffing was dealt with when senior members were posted to man the place. Eventually in 1999, the entries

into the database started again. Since then, there have been regular and uninterrupted entries into the database.

Currently, there are over fifty thousand entries, covering politics, economics, social issues, health, technology etc, reflecting everyday events and occurrences. The current software being used was developed by the library's technical support officer in 2005. The software is called the J-Man. It creates fields for entries of the newspapers into the database. The fields include; the title of the newspaper, the title of the article, the date, price, volume, issue number, the frequency, the publisher, the place of publication, keywords or descriptors, and the ISSN found at the back of the particular newspaper.

Indexing of the newspapers is done by senior members in the Serials Department. The indexed information of the newspapers are entered into the database by junior library assistants. Indexing of the newspaper articles or information requires professional expertise of senior members because indexing is based on technical principles which transcend disciplines. Only items of academic importance are indexed. Indexing is also guided by whether the reported item in the newspaper has any national, economic, scientific, technological, socio-political or legal value. The professional staff also give keywords or descriptors to every article indexed, which makes it possible for users to retrieve information from the database.

To ensure authority control, all newspaper articles entered into the database are edited by the Serials Librarian. The indexing covers four newspapers that the Department subscribes to; being The Ghanaian Times, The Daily Graphic, The Mirror and The Spectator. In the maintenance and management of the database the software, J-Man, is

updated from time to time and whenever this is done the records are migrated unto the newer version.

Methodology

The study used newspaper collections available at the Serials Department of the KNUST Library. It focuses on newspapers received and bound at the Department, spanning a period of thirteen years – i.e. from 2000 to 2012.

Although the newspapers subscribed to by the Department are a lot, the study focuses on only those from the government publishing houses. The rationale is that, they are the ones which are manually indexed, imputed into a newspaper database and which are finally bound and kept for usage. The newspapers are ‘The Daily Graphic’, ‘The Ghanaian Times’, ‘The Mirror’, and ‘The Spectator’. In all 14,711 newspaper issues within the period under review were used for this study. Data gathered on the newspapers were supplemented by an observation of the storage environment and their condition. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the data. The data were presented in simple tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stock of Newspapers

Table 1: Quantity of Newspaper Collection from 2000-2012

Year	Newspapers				Annual Total
	Daily Graphic	The Mirror	Ghanaian Times	Weekly Spectator	
2000	534	80	326	71	1,011
2001	868	142	287	43	1,340
2002	786	121	235	40	1,182
2003	916	144	306	49	1,415
2004	899	155	280	43	1,377
2005	893	147	288	50	1,378
2006	848	135	282	50	1,315
2007	891	151	266	47	1,355
2008	857	141	278	51	1,327
2009	622	83	257	45	1,007
2010	297	62	265	47	671
2011	296	49	285	47	677
2012	295	41	270	50	656
Total	9,002	1,451	3,625	622	14,711

The table above represents the total volume of the four major state-owned newspapers received by the Serials Department between 2000 to 2012. The Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times are daily newspapers whilst The Mirror and Weekly Spectator are published weekly. The Library subscribes to a single copy of each newspaper and receives complimentary copies of The Mirror and The Daily Graphic. This explains why the figures for each year collection are not the same.

The bulk of the collection comes from the Daily Graphic (9,002 copies) because of the consistent receipt of complimentary copies of this newspaper by the Library. Weekly Spectator recorded the lowest collection with 622 copies. A total of 3,625 volumes were recorded by Ghanaian Times. The number declined from 326 in 2000 to 235 in 2002. It then appreciated to 306 in 2003 and then steadily reduced in volume

to 265 in 2010 and got to 270 in 2012. The trends of declining and rising of the yearly collections are similar to the rest of the newspapers.

What is more important to this study is the cumulative effect of the additional stock on the capacity of the Library to organize, manage, store and preserve these newspaper collections and to make them easily accessible to users. In all, as depicted by the table above, 14,711 volumes have been collected so far between 2000 and 2012 culminating in 542 bound volumes currently available on shelves and accessible to users. Again this also implies that for the period of thirteen years an average 1176 copies and 34 bound volumes of newspapers are added to the existing stock annually. The 34 bound volumes are derived from the quarterly stock of newspapers prepared for binding. In a year specifically the Library gets sixteen bound volumes each for The Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times and one each for the Spectator and the Mirror. The Library gets one each for the Spectator and the Mirror per annum because they are weekly newspapers (not daily like The Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times) and therefore the volumes are less. The implications of storage, space and cost that are brought to bear on the Library regarding these essential library materials cannot be overemphasized.

Preservation Conditions

The longevity of library materials are only ensured when they are preserved under controlled environmental conditions. In their work captioned “The British Library Newspaper Collection: Long Term Storage, Preservation and Access”, Fleming and Spence, 2008, observe that “newspapers need to be stored in a temperature and humidity controlled environment to ensure long-term preservation”. They recommend among others that, newspapers are best preserved under special environmental

conditions, including low oxygen, regulated 16°C temperature and 52% humidity. The British Newspaper Library, however, according to the research, fails to reach these minimum archival conditions set by British Standards (BS5454: 2000)

In the KNUST Library, the prevailing environmental conditions under which newspapers are kept come nowhere near attainment of the criteria recommended by Fleming and Spence.

The shelves for storing newspapers are situated in an open space where air conditioners had been dysfunctional for some years now. Windows are always open to allow in air with the view of improving ventilation. For a typical tropical environment like Kumasi, the town in which the Library is located, the annual average temperature is 25.6°C and could be as high as 33°C in February. Mean relative humidity for an average year is recorded as 83.2% and on a monthly basis ranges from 75% in February to 87% in June, July, August, September & October (climatemps.com). Under these conditions it is obvious that the newspapers are not safe since they are exposed to such serious threatening environmental conditions.

Transparent louver blades allow sun rays into the Library and this may have destructive effects on the newspapers. According Asamoah-Hassan (1997) ultra-violet rays of the sun destroy paper by bleaching it.

Biological and chemical agents combine favourably with carbon aerosols, nitric. light oxides, oxygen, heat and moisture to damage the newspapers.

Deterioration

In the face of the uncontrollably high environmental temperatures, high humidity and penetration of light, newspapers in the KNUST Library are liable to deterioration at a

faster rate than expected. Observation of these materials indicates that the very older publications have already started showing signs of reduced quality and strength. Indeed some of the papers have become moulded, brown-stained, bleached, brittle, weak and tender.

Besides, the detection of rodents, insects and birds - namely mice, cockroaches, ants - in the area where newspapers are stored gives much concern since these creatures are potential destroyers of paper materials. Attempts to rid the storage area of these creatures through fumigation have proved unsuccessful. They appear to migrate to other places and come back months after when the effect of fumigants is waned.

Frequent photocopies made from the newspapers contribute to further deterioration of the materials due to handling by both staff and users to and fro the Serials Department and Photocopy Section of the Library. Another agent of newspaper deterioration currently is the use of digital cameras by researchers to capture information from the newspapers. These expose the newspapers to excessive light and thus contribute to their destruction.

Insufficient shelf space for newspapers

The bound newspapers are shelved in a designated space within the Serials Department. Currently the newspapers compete over space with other library materials such as journals and other serial materials. Considering the yearly additions of bound newspaper collections to the existing stock, the available space is likely to be fully exhausted in the next five years.

Cost implications

It costs the Library 25 Ghana cedis (about \$12.50) to bind one volume of a newspaper, so in a year the Library spends 850 Ghana cedis (about \$425.00) to bind

sixteen volumes of The Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times and one each for The Spectator and The Mirror. This means that every year the Library adds 34 bound volumes of newspapers to the existing stock at the cost of 850 Ghana cedis. The money spent for binding these newspapers every year could be channeled into other important aspect of the library's operation, for example acquisition of books, if digitization is seriously pursued.

CONCLUSION

The study was carried out in the Serials Department of the KNUST Library and it sought to find out the management of newspaper collections in the department.

The study revealed that among the newspapers used for this study, the Daily Graphic alone had 9,002 volumes followed by the Ghanaian Times with 3,625. The Mirror had 1,451 with the Weekly Spectator recording the least of 622. Cumulatively though the total volumes for these newspapers is 14,711. There is the need to look for a way to store them in their current form and also to strategize for the future since the collections used for this study are just for thirteen years. The major problems identified are inadequate space, poor preservation practices, and binding cost.

The following recommendations are therefore being made in the light of the above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Firstly, the Serials Department should obtain born-digital newspapers from the publishers. This will go a long way to solve the space problem facing the Department.

- Secondly, full scale digitization programme by the Library will contribute a great deal in solving the space challenges of the Library. The process will require the Library acquiring scanners to scan all the newspapers and then transferring them into a database and stored on stand-alone server where it can be used by the clients of the Library.
- Thirdly, the Department can look for a much bigger and spacious place to store the newspapers if going digital will be an expensive venture for the Department.
- Fourthly, there should be a functional archive attached to the library or a whole university archive to keep the back issues so as to create space in the serials Department for current publications.
- There should be collaboration between libraries in newspaper collection management in order to save cost and space. This can be done through shared responsibility in which the collaborating libraries will each agree to keep a collection of a particular newspaper so that the others can rely on when in need and vice versa.

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