User Participation in Collection Building in a Special Library :
A Case Study

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Explains the background of the study, document selection procedure at ISRO Satellite Centre (ISAC) Library, analyses about 750 suggestions/indents for documents received during 1982 in the Library from about 200 users, examines the extent of user participation in collection building, enumerates probable reasons for low participation of users in collection development and finally concludes by suggesting some methods for improving user participation in collection building.

0. Introduction

Collection development in anticipation of demand is a rule rather than an exception for any special library. On the other hand, every document acquired by a special library should have some relevance to the potential needs of its users. Developing relevant collection in anticipation depends heavily on active participation of users in terms of timely, adequate and useful suggestions for documents. But direct and overt participation of users in collection building is often limited to a few handful of users.

1. Scope and limitations

This study tries to present the extent of user participation in collection development at ISAC Library based on the analysis of speci-fic suggestions/indents of users for books, reports and periodicals made during 1982. Such suggestions which are ultimately disapproved by Library Committee represent about 5% of total suggestions and the same are excluded from the study for want of complete and correct data. Similarly, suggestions from Library Committee members are not covered because data regarding such suggestions could not be separated from total documents screened and approved by the Library Committee. However, suggestions from users include those based on regular display of books received on approval basis from suppliers and occasional book exhibitions. In case of periodicals, suggestions received earlier to 1982 (mostly dated back upto 1978) are also included as they are one time suggestions. It may be noted

here that in addition, the Library has many standing orders for procurement of documents and the same are excluded from the study.

2. Document selection procedure

New documents of potential interest to ISAC Library users are normally identified from the following sources :

(i) Announcements and catalogs from publishers and suppliers of documents.

(ii) Document reviews and announcements in primary periodicals.

(iii) Secondary periodicals including bibliographies and current awareness bulletins.

(iv) Book exhibitions and books received on approval basis.

(v) Specific document suggestions/indents from users.

Announcements and catalogs, copies of document reviews and relevant parts of secondary periodicals are regularly collected, screened and routed to concerned specialists in the Library Committee. Apart from displaying all such material in the Library, they are brought to the notice of concerned users whenever need arises. In addition, members of Library Committee peruse books received on approval basis and displayed in the Library and also those displayed in book exhibition for according approval for purchase. Finally, all the suggestions received from users are also examined by the Library Committee for according approval. Thus, indirectly every document undergoes a test for relevance and potential utility (unfortunately, most of the times based on title or abstract or short review of the documents) in the hands of concerned specialist in the Library Committee. Hence, in a broader sense, as the Library Committee itself is a user representative body,

there is a hundred percent indirect user participation in collection development.

3. Frequency distribution of suggestion data

Table I depicts the frequency distribution of suggestions for books, reports and periodicals over users. The data regarding suggestions for books when plotted on graph results in a very rough asymptotric curve. Reports and periodicals data are too inadequate to plot a smooth graph. It can be seen from the table that, maximum number of suggestions for books is 18 per user whereas it is 14 and 9 for reports and periodicals respectively. However, frequency of number of suggestions for reports and periodicals are uniform only upto 10 and 9 suggestions per user respectively. The fact that generally more books are suggested by users than reports and periodicals can be explained with the following reasons : (a) Opportunity to know about new books through book exhibitions, display of books received on approval, catalogs and announcements from publishers and suppliers of books and book reviews appearing in periodicals is comparatively more ; (b) Suggestions for periodicals are mostly one time suggestions ; (c) Browsing report announcement bulletins such as STAR, GRA, BRTT, etc, is generally done by limited number of users ; (d) reports themselves being highly specialised in nature, any particular report attracts a very small set of users.

Again from Table I, we can see that about 40 to 51% of users suggested only one item per year. Similarly, 16 to 23% suggested two and 10 to 11% suggested three items. Interestingly, about 25% (i. e., 41 users) have suggested 64% (i. e. 317) books during 1982. Pooling all the suggestions for books, reports and periodicals, only 198 users directly participated in the collection building process. Library had about 800 technical staff as regis-

Table-I : Frequency distribution of suggestions over users

No. of Suggestions	Books		Reports		Periodicals	
	No. of users	Total suggestions	No. of users	Total suggestions	No. of users	Total suggestions
1	80 (49%)	80	18 (40%)	18	24 (51%)	24
2	27 (16%)	54	9 (20%)	18	11 (23%)	22
3	16 (10%)	48	5 (11%)	15	5 (11%)	13
4	8	32	1	4	2	8
5	8	40	3	15	2	10
6	5	30	2	12	0	0
7	6	42	3	21	2	14
8	1	8	0	0	0	0
9	2	18	1	9	1	9
10	3	30	2	20	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	2	24	0	0	0	0
13	1	13	0	0	0	0
14	1	14	1	14	0	0
15	1	15	0	0	0	0
16	1	16	0	0	0	0
17	1	17	0	0	0	0
18	1	18	0	0	0	0
Total	164	499	45	146	47	102

tered members and more than 1,200 total users during 1982. Thus, the direct and active participation in collection building is made only by less than 25% of users.

4. Extent of user participation in collection building

While the overall participation of users in collection development is made by less than 25% of users, the extent of participation in relation to total number of items ordered during the year is presented in Table-II. As could be seen from the table, on this count also, the user participation in collection development is quite low. Hardly, 18 to 35 percent of the items ordered (other than standing orders, abstracting, indexing, free and ephemeral periodicals) by the Library are based on

direct suggestions from users. The balance quantity of items is ordered based on document selection work of library staff and Library Committee.

tance on the part of some users to suggest new documents of their potential interest. Inspite of specific announcements and requests, many users feel that suggesting/selecting and

Table—II :   Comparison of Suggestions with Total Items Ordered

Document type	Total no. ordered	Items suggested		Duplicate suggestion		Users participated		Average suggestion per user
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Books	1046*	366	34.99	133	36.34	164	20.50	3.04
Reports	513*	145	28.27	1	0.65	45	5 63	3.24
Periodicals	552@	102	18.48	0	0.00	47	5.48	2.17

* Excludes standing orders.
@ Excludes abstracting, indexing, free and ephemeral periodicals.

Though duplicate or repeated suggestions for reports and periodicals are almost nil, the suggestions for books had duplication to the extent of 36%. This is mainly due to display of books received on approval basis and book exhibitions attracting simultaneously more than one users for many books of common interest and for other reasons such as specific nature of reports, etc, explained earlier.

It may also be seen from Table II that, the actual percentage of users participated in collection building is little over 5 for reports and periodicals and 20.5 for books. Lastly, average suggestion per user per year is around 2 to 3 and this itself is an indication of low user participation in collection development.

5. Reasons for low participation of users

Although probing into reasons for low participation of users in collection development calls for a separate study, few possible reasons attributable for low participation from the point of view of Librarian, based on informal discussions with users are presented below. Firstly, there appears a sort of reluc-

acquiring new documents to Library is the responsibility of Library and Library Committee. Secondly, there is a need for regular induction of new users, to library procedures, especially those who have had no acquaintance with use of a special library. Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, the opportunity for users to know about new documents published is limited. The dealer library plan which regularly brings new books on approval is limited only to few books in the general fields and also to the choice of suppliers. On the other hand, many secondary periodicals and announcement bulletins subscribed by Library are not extensively used. However, the present system of changing the Library Committee almost every year has helped acquainting and involving more and more users about the document selection procedure as part of their duty in the Library Committee. Fourthly, the nature of work has some implication on use of library and participation of users in collection building. As most of the scientists and engineers are involved in time bound projects with irregular and occasional lean period it be-

comes difficult for such users to make regular suggestions. Also, when a user is involved in a tightly scheduled project any new information which leads to rescheduling or delay in reaching the target is not normally desired and often delayed information in such situation is kept aside. Predicting the requirement of such users in terms of specific titles is very difficult. Lastly, some users feel that the present system of procurement is quite slow and the same might discourage some of them to suggest more documents. Apart from delays on the part of Library to process orders, it is observed that hardly 50% of the items ordered are supplied within 4 to 6 months (a sizeable part of such items supplied are books received on approval basis) and more than 25% of the items will be pending for supply at the end of a year.

6. **Conclusion**

The study reveals a comparatively low participation of users in suggesting documents for collection building in the Library. Though some of the possible reasons attributable to such low participation of users have been identified through informal discussions with them it would be worthwhile to undertake a separate study to bring out clearly the reasons for such apathy, so as to evolve measures to motivate more and more users to involve themselves actively in the process of collection development that would reflect their potential interest. Some suggestions to improve user participation may include :

(i) intensifying current awareness services and disseminating information about new titles/documents to a large cross section of users ;

(ii) systematising literature searching and reference services to get regular feed back to acquisition system for procuring useful items ;

(iii) speeding up procurement of suggested documents to create a drive of achievement motivation in users.

(iv) involving actively the project team and the information personnel in identifying specific documentary requirements relevant to the new and on going projects/programmes.

It would be interesting to extend this study to find out how much time the library has taken to acquire the items suggested by users and how these documents are later used by the recommender and his fellow scientists and engineers. Lastly, it is highly desirable to compare the data with that of similar special libraries.

About the Author

Dr. M. S. Sridhar is a post graduate in mathematics and business management and a doctorate in library and information science. He is in the profession for last 35 years. Since 1978 he is heading the Library and Documentation Division of ISRO Satellite Centre, Bangalore. Earlier he has worked in the libraries of National Aeronautical Laboratory (Bangalore), Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) and University of Mysore. Dr. Sridhar has published four books ('User research: a review of information-behaviour studies in science and technology', 'Problems of collection development in special libraries', 'Information behaviour of scientists and engineers' and 'Use and user research with twenty case studies') and 74 research papers, written 19 course material for BLIS and MLIS, presented over 22 papers in conferences and seminars, and contributed 5 chapters to books. **E-mail:** sridharmirle@yahoo.com, mirlesridhar@gmail.com, sridhar@isac.gov.in ; **Phone:** 91-80-25084451; **Fax:** 91-80-25084475.