

The Impact of Current Collection Selection Mechanisms on Collection Quality and Reflections (Post-print)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study conducts an in-depth analysis of the formation causes of the current book selection mechanism and its impact on collection quality, proposing a three-level control solution based on the existing book selection mechanism to improve library collection quality. [Method/Process] By analyzing the current state of book publishing and the sources of available bibliographies, this paper explores the underlying reasons why the selection mechanism affects collection quality. It proposes that document selection should not only adhere to certain principles and employ professional methods, but also ensure selection quality through accumulated experience to meet the needs of library service recipients. A mature selection model requires the improvement of relevant systems and accumulation of experience, with quality control exercised from both content and quality perspectives of books. [Results/Conclusion] Under the current book selection mechanism, collection selection quality can be controlled through a three-level control system of “librarian selection and verification—expert review—director approval,” wherein librarians and experts are primarily responsible for controlling the content quality of collections, while the director is mainly responsible for controlling and improving the structural quality of library holdings.

Full Text

The Influence and Implications of Current Collection Selection Mechanisms on Collection Quality

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper provides an in-depth analysis of how current collection selection mechanisms have emerged and their impact on collection quality, proposing a three-level control solution based on existing mechanisms to enhance library collection quality. **[Method/Process]** The study examines current book publishing conditions and available catalog sources to explore the underlying reasons why selection mechanisms affect collection quality. It argues that document selection must follow established principles and professional methods while ensuring quality through accumulated experience to meet user needs. A mature selection model requires both institutional refinement and experiential accumulation, with quality control exercised from both content and structural perspectives. **[Result/Conclusion]** Under current collection selection mechanisms, quality can be controlled through a three-tier system of “librarian selection—expert review—director approval.” Librarians and experts primarily oversee content quality, while the director manages structural quality control and improvement.

Keywords: collection quality; collection development; collection selection mechanism; book acquisition

Collection quality manifests in two dimensions: content quality and structural quality. A strong collection is built through long-term selection work that withstands historical scrutiny, aligning with library development needs while possessing academic or documentary value. Selection quality directly determines collection quality. For libraries, numerous factors influence selection effectiveness: selectors’ professional competence, initiative, and stability; whether selection philosophies align with collection development requirements; and whether robust selection mechanisms have been established based on publishing and selection characteristics. Such mechanisms play an increasingly critical role and significantly impact collection quality.

Despite the rise of electronic resources, printed books remain vital. Statistics from 45 Shanghai university libraries show paper resources still command substantial budget allocations. The 2017 Shanghai Citizen Reading Survey Report indicates that paper books remain preferred for deep reading, with nearly 60% of respondents favoring their reading experience. However, massive publishing volumes and questionable quality present challenges. The collection selection mechanism—encompassing the systems and measures built around bibliographic identification, title selection, and book 验收—has become crucial in addressing these challenges.

2. Factors Through Which Collection Selection Mechanisms Affect Quality

2.1 Current Book Publishing Landscape

Since the 21st century, China's paper book publishing has grown rapidly. According to the National Press and Publication Administration's annual reports, total annual book publications increased from over 220,000 titles in 2005 to over 510,000 in 2017—a 2.3-fold increase. New titles also rose from over 120,000 to over 250,000, though their proportion declined from 57.49% in 2005 to 49.75% in 2017. This trend suggests insufficient scientific innovation capacity and reflects persistent problems: republication dominance, structural imbalance, low-level repetitive publishing, and homogenization.

National strategy shifts and market economy development have altered disciplinary publishing structures. Economics, management, law, politics, literature, and computer science publications have surged, while traditional humanities and history have contracted. In 2017, humanities and social sciences accounted for 72.07% of new titles, with economics/management (8.7%), law/politics (5.7%), and literature (12.04%) representing over one-third of this category. Science and technology comprised 26.86%, with computer technology alone reaching 10.67%

Homogenization is severe. According to Wuhan Juanzang Information Co., Ltd., 822 varieties of “College Computer Fundamentals” exist from 78 publishers, while “Sherlock Holmes Collection” has 260 varieties from 98 publishers. C language books are essentially identical, while C++ books show similar malignant homogenization trends [3]. Profit-driven cooperative publishers have also released numerous high-priced, low-discount books and expensive multi-volume sets.

2.2 Available Catalog Sources

Catalog quality critically affects collection selection. Libraries have transitioned from “Xinhua Book Catalog” to “vendor catalogs.” Before 2000, the *Xinhua Book Catalog* served as the core selection tool, featuring quality new titles recommended by publishers (over 5,000 titles monthly, 50,000+ annually). While slightly limited in comprehensiveness, it ensured collection quality.

With exploding publishing volumes and vendor emergence, libraries now primarily rely on vendor catalogs, with Xinhua as supplementary. Since the 2015 Government Procurement Law Implementation Regulations, most libraries determine vendors through government bidding, then select from vendor-provided catalogs, making these the primary selection channel.

This shift creates significant problems. First, low-price bidding predominates. Vendors may compromise catalog quality, delivery rates, and MARC data quality. For instance, a major Beijing vendor's 2016 average discount was 68.13%,

yet publisher discounts generally exceed 63% with 10.5% operating costs, requiring 73.5% to profit. Vendors may intermix low-quality, low-discount books into regular catalogs while excluding higher-discount titles from authoritative publishers.

Second, major publishers only authorize large vendors requiring credit management or asset collateral. Low-bidding vendors cannot meet these requirements, limiting access to quality books. Third, specialized academic books with small print runs and low margins are rarely recommended. Many are cooperatively published or author-subsidized, falling outside regular channels and conventional catalogs.

Before bidding, librarians could purchase from diverse publishers and specialty bookstores. Now restricted to vendors, selection channels have narrowed. In 2017, while new titles exceeded 260,000, four major vendors only provided 110,000-140,000 titles—approximately half of all publications. With over 78% overlap among vendors, collections risk homogenization, creating a “if others have it, we have it; if others don’t, we don’t” situation that undermines specialization and distinctiveness.

2.3 Underlying Mechanism Issues

Collection selection has evolved from bookstore visits to vendor catalog selection, and from multi-channel to single-channel acquisition. Previously, librarians applied Zheng Qiao’s “Eight Methods of Book Seeking” from the Southern Song Dynasty, actively searching diverse sources. Current dependence on vendors reduces autonomy and professionalism.

Document selection requires principles, professional methods, and experiential accumulation. A mature model needs institutional refinement and quality control from both content and structural perspectives. This necessitates a three-level control system.

3. Strategies for Improving Collection Quality

3.1 Librarian Selection Control

Resource acquisition is highly professional, requiring institutional and experiential guarantees. Librarians must enhance three aspects:

3.1.1 Strengthening Source Control Quality catalogs are fundamental. Librarians should establish multi-dimensional recommendation channels rather than relying solely on vendors. No vendor achieves 100% coverage, especially for academic books. Libraries should: (1) study vendor characteristics and select multiple suppliers for complementary catalog systems; (2) continue using *Xinhua Book Catalog* as reference; (3) reserve autonomous procurement funds for on-site purchasing, online buying, reader recommendations, and faculty participation; (4) develop “searching” capabilities through recommendation

systems, surveys, and bestseller lists; (5) maintain relationships with specialty small bookstores; and (6) use second-hand book websites for out-of-print titles.

3.1.2 Optimizing Selection Processes With increasingly similar vendor catalogs, libraries risk collection homogenization. Librarians should: (1) align selections with institutional disciplinary structures; (2) prioritize key disciplines and characteristic specialties; (3) analyze Chinese-foreign book ratios and adjust imbalances; (4) apply professional methods like bibliography checking, data statistics, and citation analysis to understand publishing landscapes; and (5) use empirical research to ensure long-term quality.

3.1.3 Acceptance Control Acceptance complements procurement by verifying delivered books match orders, rejecting unrequested or low-quality titles, monitoring vendor integrity, and serving as the final quality defense.

3.2 Expert Review Control

Discipline development requires expertise beyond individual librarians. Subject librarians and expert committees can ensure quality. Subject librarians, originally focused on collection development, understand faculty research and can identify core users to review preliminary selections.

Foreign collection development committees include faculty, students, administrators, and library experts who approve proposals and develop plans based on academic standards [9]. Domestic committees primarily consist of faculty teams assisting with discipline resource construction. For example, Peking University Library's expert team participates in selection decisions for foreign books, journals, special collections, and databases [10].

Expanding these committees to include dedicated scholar teams for reviewing librarian selections can overcome professional limitations and prevent low-quality, homogenized books from entering collections.

3.3 Director Approval Control

As chief decision-maker, the director must oversee collection construction by controlling structural quality.

3.3.1 Establishing Evaluation Systems Director involvement significantly impacts collection building. Directors should establish indicator systems based on resource development policies to regularly evaluate order placement, disciplinary ratios, expensive book appropriateness, and utilization benefits. Through scientific evaluation mechanisms, directors should analyze collection and procurement data to track collection structure changes and discipline matching.

3.3.2 Improving Monitoring Mechanisms Directors should understand user satisfaction through forums and surveys, adjust procurement strategies for expensive books, monitor procurement projects from planning perspectives,

and arrange for professional librarians to update arrangements according to environmental changes.

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