

WEEDING PRACTICES EXISTING IN SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

I.M.NAWARATHNE¹

B.A. (Hons.)(Kelaniya), MLS (Colombo)

A.R.M.M.RATHNAYAKE²

B.Sc. (Hons.)(Peradeniya), MLS (Colombo)

Abstract

Weeding is one of the important tasks in managing library collections. The process is a common routine practice in developed countries irrespective of the type of the library. This study was conducted to examine the present situation of book withdrawal procedure in university libraries in Sri Lanka and future development requirements of the same.

Chief librarians of all the national universities of the country were consulted for the study and the data were gathered from 15 universities through a self administered questionnaire. No special statistical technique was employed as the whole population was consulted for the study. Except two universities, all the others responded to the questionnaire.

^{1,2} Senior Assistant Librarians, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (Emails: nawa@sab.ac.lk, and mano@sab.ac.lk respectively).

The results disclosed that weeding practice in university libraries are with severe discrepancies and need urgent attention. This issue has to be addressed at national level to build up a national de-selection framework with room to address individual institutional requirements.

Keywords: Weeding, De-acquisition, De-selection, University libraries, Collection management.

1. Introduction

The practice of discarding or transferring (to a storage) superfluous copies and rarely used books and material no longer of use is called weeding (Parmar and Bhuta 1992).

Weeding which is also called deselecting, de-acquisition or book withdrawal is one of the most important tasks in collection management. In a well organized library, weeding is a compulsory routine to which the librarian pays greater attention and should have the expertise to fulfill the requirement. When a library is not paying much attention to weeding, its collection becomes more obsolete and unglamorous (Slote 1997).

The library materials that are in poor physical condition discourage users and detract them from the general appearance of the collection. Further, outdated materials can obstruct and frustrate the users who are in search of information. Having nothing on a subject is considered better than having materials that are misleading, inaccurate and out of date (Dilevkeo and Gottlieb 2003). The practice of weeding provides shelf space for new arrivals - and the users are facilitated for easy access to the required material in the library.

Weeding or de-acquisition comes under collection development policy of an institute. A well documented weeding policy is a must in a library to maintain its collection at its optimum level. The practice of weeding is a time consuming and laborious activity which needs expertise in every single item weeded. Though

the weeding process is a difficult task, it is encouraged due to the tremendous benefits and advantages to the collection. Because accumulation of new materials to a library collection will not take much longer time and in return the collection becomes out of date in equal rapidity (Ranganathan 1989). Weeding is a must at any library, and when it comes to the university level, it is more important as the library users are always in need of accurate and up-to-date information.

There was no detailed study conducted to observe the situation in Sri Lanka, but Gunasekara's (2001) study on collection development policies has a briefing on weeding practices of the country.

This research was focused to study the weeding practices existing in Sri Lankan Universities. Availability of documented weeding policies and processes were examined. Further, reasons for not practicing weeding and the librarians' attitudes towards this practice were also examined.

2. Objectives of the study

1. To investigate whether the Sri Lankan university libraries are practicing weeding.
2. To examine whether the university libraries are practicing weeding based on a documented policy.
3. To evaluate the reasons behind, if weeding is not practiced.
4. To extract the problems and weaknesses of existing weeding practices.
5. To disclose the discouraging factors of weeding practices.
6. To find out whether further developments are required for weeding practices in the Sri Lankan university libraries.

3. Methodology

Survey method was used for this study as the main research tool. The total population of the study comprises 15 national universities of the country. Data were gathered from the librarians through a self administered questionnaire. Since the total number of main libraries in universities is fifteen, data collection was done by a census study. As whole population was consulted for the study no special statistical techniques was applied. Though the weeding is applicable for all the library materials, the focus of this was only on printed books. This limitation was applied deliberately to bring the study to a manageable level.

4. Results and Discussion

Among the 15 chief librarians consulted, only 13 (87%) responded to the questionnaire. Among the respondents, 69% practiced weeding using various ways in their respective university libraries, whereas 31% found to be non-practicers of weeding. The 4 universities that are not practicing weeding too are well established institutes. The figure 01 depicts the results at a glance.

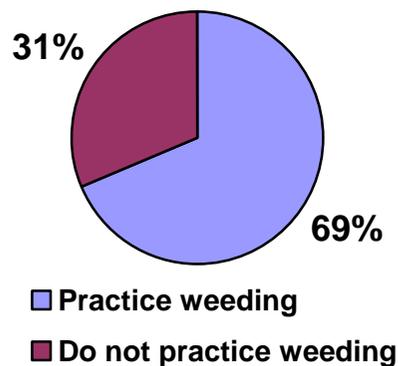


Fig 1. Situation of weeding practice in Universities

The results show that a significant number of institutes (31%) are not practicing weeding at any level, which is found to be unsatisfactory.

The reasons for not practicing weeding in the four universities noted are listed below.

1. Lack of trained staff
2. Unavailability of a documented weeding policy
3. A new collection
4. Time constraints

From those who practice weeding, 3 Universities do so based on a documented policy to support the procedure. All the other 6 Universities are practicing weeding on ad-hoc decisions according to the requirement. Any weeding activity must have a weeding policy to guide what has to be done and it is beneficial in two ways:

1. It gives clear guidelines to follow when weeding is practicing.
2. It protects the librarians in future questioning of any sort (Johnson, 2004).

Fifty six percent of the respondents are practicing weeding without a specific time frame or frequency. Thirty three percent of the universities are practicing weeding annually and only one library (8%) was practicing it once in five years. This result expresses that there is a concern for the de-selection process when compared to the Gunasekara's (2001) study on weeding practice. In that study, it was revealed that only 28% of the national universities practice weeding at any scale. Systematic weeding or reverse selection is well scheduled in many instances as it is a routine practice in well organized libraries (Mathews and Tyckoson 1990).

4.1 Reasons for weeding

Table1. Reasons for weeding

Reasons for weeding	No. of respondents (and %) according to the priority						
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th
1 Update the collection	6 (67%)	-	-	1 (11%)	-	-	-
2 To make the collection more attractive	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	-	-	-	-
3 To make room for new materials	-	5 (56%)	2 (22%)	-	-	-	-
4 To discard damaged and defaced items	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	1 (11%)	-	-	-
5 To remove rarely used books	-	-	-	3	-	1 (11%)	-
6 To remove multiple copies	-	-	1 (11%)	-	2 (22%)	-	-
7 Availability of superseded materials	-	-	-	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)
8 To gain more knowledge of library collection	-	-	-	-	-	1 (11%)	-

Six respondents ranked “updating their collection” as the first priority of weeding and five respondents agreed that (as the second most important reason) that weeding was “to make room for new materials”. The least important reason for weeding was found to be “to gain more knowledge of the library collection”. It is obvious that the majority of respondents mention that weeding facilitate updation of the collection. These results were more or less similar to the finding of Dilevko and Gottlieb’s (2003) research findings on reasons for weeding.

4.2 Factors that discourage weeding

Table. 2 Factors discouraging weeding

Factors that discourage factors	No. of respondents (and %) according to the priority						
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th
1 Administrative restrict	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	-	-	-	-	-
2 Lack of documented weeding policy	3 (33%)	-	-	-	-	1 (11%)	-
3 Lack of trained staff	-	2 22%	-	-	1 (11%)	-	-
4 Lack of library usage data	-	-	1 (11%)	-	-	-	-
5 User's objections	-	-	-	2 (22%)	-	-	-
6 Time restrictions	2 (22%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
7 Attitude of the administration	1 (11%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
8 Attitude of the library staff	-	-	1 (11%)	-	-	-	-
9 Fear of the audit queries	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	-	-	-	-
10 Fear on assumption of future needs	-	1 (11%)	-	-	1 (11%)	-	1 (11%)
11 High demands items	-	-	-	-	-	1 (11%)	-
12 Annual budgetary limitations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The results also revealed that the discouraging factors of weeding varied according to the institutions. This indicates that there is no common reason to discourage the practice of weeding for all the consulted libraries.

Lack of a documented weeding policy was the most emphasized factor that discouraged weeding. Forty four percent (44%) of the respondents quoted it as the first obstacle for this practice. Fear of audit queries and time restrictions are also major discouraging factors for the deselection procedures whereas two respondents voted for the first and the other two for the next.

The results show that there are various factors discouraging weeding practice within the institutions. Therefore it is important to address the discouraging factors to obtain the best results from the practice (Slote 1997).

Ninety two percent (92%) of the librarians emphasized that weeding has to be carried out as a continuous practice. Furthermore they agreed to have a national level weeding policy for the university libraries in Sri Lanka.

4.3 Decision upon weeding

The decision upon weeding is a crucial factor and the decision made for this procedure was examined. In most of the cases the librarian, the library committee, or an expert panel was found to be the vital decision maker for weeding. Following figure depicts the results.

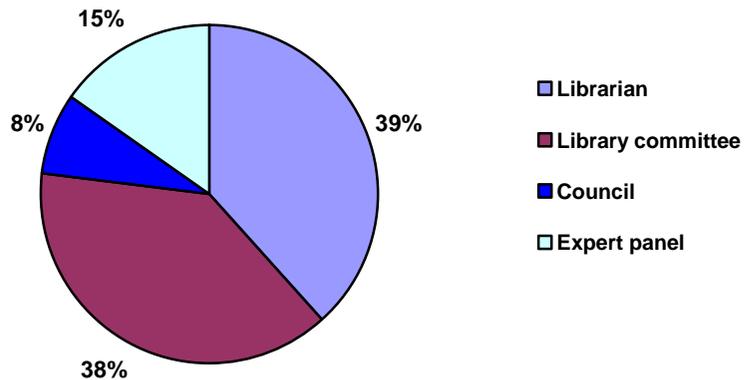


Fig 2. Decision upon weeding

4.4 Approval for weeding

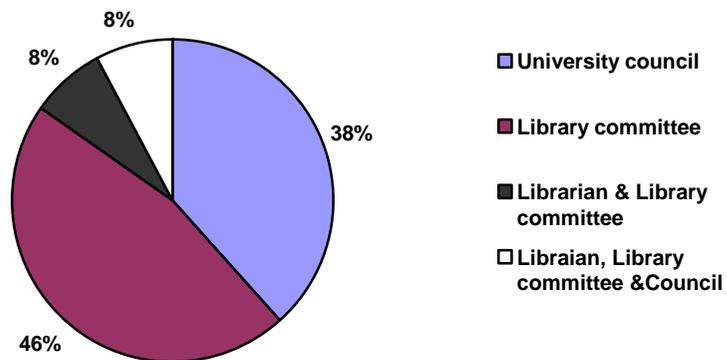


Fig 3. Approval for weeding

Forty six percent (46%) of the librarians have quoted that final approval for weeding should come from the library committee and none of the respondents agreed to give the responsibility to the librarians alone. Thirty eight percent (38%) of them were in the stand of giving the responsibility to the university council. A few respondents (8%) agreed that the decision should be a collaborative effort of the Librarian, Library committee and the University

Council. As the governing body of the university, it is much better to obtain the approval of university council.

4.5 Valuation of the weeded items

Valuation of the weeded items is a tedious process especially when records are not properly maintained. The study revealed that only two universities value the weeded items whereas six did not pay any attention on it.

4.6 Future of the weeded items

Weeded items should be removed from the library and it is another task to be performed in weeding practice. The respondents were asked how they deal with the weeded items. Majority of the of the universities dispose the weeded items (56%). Selling and donating comes next with equal response rates (22%). Figure 4 expresses the results.

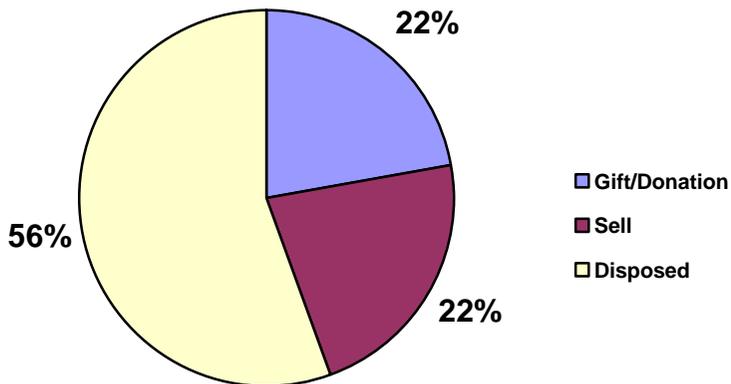


Fig 4. Action on weeded items

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

The results indicate that the weeding is not a common practice in Sri Lankan universities. Four universities are not practicing weeding at any level and the

universities who are practicing weeding also have severe discrepancies. Weeding is a must at any library and it has tremendous benefits to the collection. De-acquisition should be a routine practice and should be practiced according to the institute's requirements.

The books come under the capital assets of a university and any decision upon it should have followed proper guidelines. It is pathetic to know that only very few universities have documented weeding policy to support the procedure. A documented weeding policy will maintain the uniformity of the activity and safeguard the librarians from any future questioning on weeding activities (Johnson 2004). To overcome this failure, it is very important to have a national level policy on de-selection. However, it is clear that the reasons for weeding vary with the university. As such there should be provisions for university to formulate their own policies with a stipulated broader framework. A kind of flexibility should also be there to cater to specific requirements of individual institutes.

As this is the ground level requirement for weeding practice, it is a must to formulate a policy framework that can cater to the requirements of rapidly changing digital formats too. All the librarians consulted have unanimously agreed for a national level weeding policy.

It is interesting to note that many librarians recognized that updating the collection is the most important benefit from weeding.

Valuation of the weeded items is a must but majority of the respondents who practice weeding do not follow this. It is better to value each and every item weeded for accountability and for recording purposes. The basis of valuation is an important consideration when preparing weeding policy guidelines. Weeded materials are still equipped with some financial value. Therefore possibilities of donating and or reselling books should also be considered.

The study observed many discouraging factors for weeding and those have to be studied carefully. The discouraging factors have no major difference with the

global situation (Slote 1997). According to the expressions many discouraging factors could be overcome without any difficulty if the libraries formulate documented weeding policies (Dubiki 2008). Books on certain subjects especially with the arts stream will hardly outdate with time, therefore user obligations should have to be considered carefully (Johnson 2004). Staff and time constraints may be a barrier for the practice, but the librarians have to take weeding as an opportunity to make the system more effective and efficient, as in long run, they can save a lot of time wasted on dealing with unwanted materials.

Librarians' attitude upon the weeding practice is extremely satisfactory as none of them disagreed with the practice.

The basis for making the decision to weed a book should be very clear and precious (Carol 1990). It may be circulation data, the condition of the book or something else.

A University is governed by a council and its administrative structure is different from many public sector institutes. In that scenario, it is essential to contact the university council for the final approval of weeding as the process is dealing with capital assets of the university. The decision upon weeding should not come on the shoulders of the librarian as it is compulsory to contact the experts in the relevant subject area. The best way is to appoint an expert panel to select the items to be weeded out. A list of such books could be distributed among the members of the panel.

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