



Building an Academic Library Collection in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

The University of Namibia was established in 1992 and started as a one-campus institution with fewer than 2,500 students to a university with twelve (12) campuses and nine (9) centers and more than 25,000 students. This study examines the profiles of the UNAM Library collections and the historical dynamics that have impacted it. New programs, schools, and campuses were introduced at a rapid pace and the library could only attempt to keep track with all new developments surrounding it. The role of collection assessment, collection development policy, and e-books were investigated within this scenario.

KEYWORDS

Academic libraries; collection assessment; collection development; developing countries

Introduction

Purpose statement

This study aims to outline steps on how to develop a collection in a developing country. Using the University of Namibia as an example and the challenges the Library faced during the last 25 years since inauguration, the study will identify steps for collection building in other less developed countries including how to deal with “inherited collections” and how to find funding sources. The importance of weeding, collection development policies, and collection evaluation are highlighted as well as textbook and e-book collections.

Background of the University of Namibia

The University of Namibia (UNAM) was established by an Act of Parliament on August 31, 1992 shortly after Namibia’s independence in 1990. When UNAM was inaugurated in 1992, it started with 2,367 students and a limited number of undergraduate programs. This progressed into a multi-branch university that offers 36 undergraduate degrees, 19 masters, and 12 doctoral degrees in the areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Economics and Management Science; Education, Humanities and Social Sciences; Law; Science; and Health Sciences, including

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Nursing, Public Health, and Medicine. To meet the educational needs of a diverse nation, UNAM has 12 campuses and 9 regional centers country-wide.

UNAM's library collections have developed in a haphazard way because it was difficult to plan ahead. New programs, new schools, and even new campuses were introduced at a rapid pace and often approved at management level toward the end of an academic year without making any provision for either supplementary funding for library books or time for the library to order prescribed and/or recommended books to be shelf ready prior to running a course. E-books seemed to be able to solve some of the problems especially looking at a multi-campus university. So an up to date collection development policy would give guidance in a more satisfactory planning of collection expansion and improvement.

Research questions

The main focus of this article is to help other developing libraries plan the steps needed to build a good collection so that they can avoid certain mistakes the UNAM library made. Because UNAM concentrated on building the book collection, this study concentrates on book collections rather than electronic databases or e-journals. Other libraries can learn from UNAM's past experiences to develop into a service provider that fulfills its mandate to "deliver client-focused innovative information products, services, and programs of the highest quality that are integrated with, and central to, the University's teaching, learning, research, and community service activities" (UNAM Library 2017).

The following questions serve as an outline of this article:

- (1) What was the identity and profile of the UNAM library collections and how did the collections change in recent years?
- (2) What criteria played a role in building this new collection? (funding, weeding, user input, textbook collection.)
- (3) Can e-books be a solution? Have they influenced the identity of the UNAM library collections?
- (4) What were the dilemmas faced by the UNAM Library in planning its future collection development strategy?

Literature review and theoretical framework

Since UNAM began developing the collection only 25 years ago, the librarians needed to first understand collection building's long history and found that Osterman (2014) provided a good summary of the historical changes in collection assessment with different emphasis on specific themes. She summed it up as follows:

- Up until around the 1930s, collection assessment was largely concerned with answering the question of how many books each subject occupied within the collection.
- From the 1930s up to the 1950s, the question was whether a collection had a certain book. List checking was thus the important approach.

- In the 1960, the emphasis was on how many books were actually used, so the relevance to the population and usage emerged.
- Broader connections were made across collections in the 1970s when qualitative methods became important. Osterman puts the question as “What books does a library have and should mine have the same ones?” (Osterman 2014: slide 6)
- With the development of Integrated Library Systems (ILS) and information technology in the 1980s new possibilities of data gathering emerged, and the wish was to not only to get samples but all data possible.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, the Conspectus model was introduced which used quantitative as well as qualitative data.
- With the growth of e-resources in the 1990s and 2000s both the collections as well as different means of data gathering for collection assessment developed.
- LibQUAL+ emerged as a survey model of user perception in the 2000s asking the question of how users perceived the collection and if it met their expectations.
- Data mining materialized in the 2010s which was able to tell us about hidden patterns in our data and forms the next step in assessment (Osterman 2014: slide 6)

Avafia (in Wise 1985) wrote that most African university libraries were established post 1945 with a huge growth in student population in the 1960s. Avafia claims that after that universities became a national symbol with high profile status (Wise 1985, 2). Kaungamno (in Wise 1985, 265) supports this view in saying that the first introduction of university libraries were transfers from colonial powers during the 19th century. One of the most remarkable facts was that nearly all library material was purchased outside the country/continent. This is still the case according to a study done in 2010 (Warwire and Messah 2010, 151) even though most university libraries in Africa are also mandated to acquire all possible material of national interest (Avafia in Wise 1985, 8, 10).

Many other articles have been written on the state of academic libraries in developing countries, which basically list the same challenges, namely, limited book budgets, poor book trade infrastructure, delays in delivery of ordered books as they are mostly purchased from outside the continent, lack of technological skills, lack of cooperation between libraries, and the absence of acquisition and/or collection development policies (Adesanya 2015; Andrade and Vergueiro 1996; Fombad and Mutula 2003; Gelfand 1971; Havard-Williams and Jengo 1987; Ifidon 1990; Nyamboga and Kemparaju 2003; Wawire and Messah 2010).

During the last decade the advent of electronic books had a massive impact in most academic libraries. For developing countries, e-books offer the possibilities of building a virtual library without shipping costs and shelving the books. The multitude of advantages of e-books over printed versions, of course, are major appeals: being accessible at all times, the ability to link to referred documents, the possibility of being accessed by more than one person at the same time, and the ability to search within the text. However, in developing countries there are additional

challenges beyond the normal challenges of different purchasing models, copyright, and digital rights management restrictions, and licensing agreements (Mammo and Ngulube 2014, 12). Developing countries face limiting factors like internet connectivity and availability, power cuts, user unawareness of its existence, and difficulty in accessing of the information. Because of these limitations, e-books usage is still relatively low in developing countries, and as Aduhika (2011, 84) writes, “E-books have supplemented rather than supplanted the printed book.”

Findings and discussion

Profile of the UNAM Library collections

The data used for this study were a mix of historical data from the statistical module of the ILS (Sierra) as well as pre-ILS data (pre 2005) from UNAM Library annual reports. The evidence based data was assembled to show trends and developments within the UNAM Library. Most libraries boast long histories and changes might have come gradually. At UNAM during the last 10 years the student population grew by 184% from 8,868 in 2006 to 25,142 in 2016, and the library collection grew 72% from 166,715 volumes in 2006 to 287,184 in 2016. Figure 1 below shows the student enrollment, collection size as well as book budget allocated per year. Despite the steady growth in the book collections, the amount of books per student dropped from 18.7 books per student in 2006 to 11.4 books per student in 2016. The book budget show some variations over the years which was mainly due to a lack of

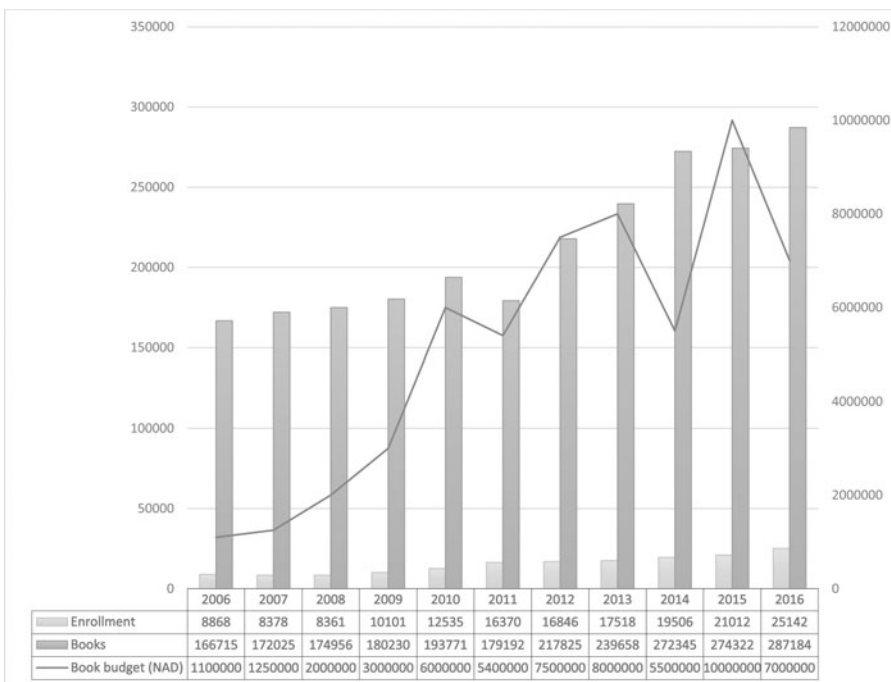


Figure 1. Student enrollment, book budget, and number of books (2006–2016).

external funding, e.g., from the government to support the School of Medicine or donor funding for the Engineering faculty.

Criteria for building a new collection

Taking the UNAM library collection as an example, there are few steps that are of importance when starting a new collection or inheriting an unsolicited start-up collection.

Funding

The first step is to determine what the book budget is and follow this up with grants or requests to increase it. UNAM Library financing improved significantly when the Executive Committee of the University allocated a fair percentage of the institutional budget to the library in 1992. The library budget was previously 4% of the institutions budget; this changed to 10% in 1992. At UNAM the collection was also increased substantially with the help of generous donations from organizations such as the British Overseas Development Agency (ODA) and the Belgian government. COMLIB, a project sponsored by the government of Belgium, donated US\$ 400,000 over a 3 year period for buying books and a further US\$ 600,000 for infrastructure and information technology (UNAM annual report 1995). The ODA donation materialized in 1993 and 1994 with the cooperation of the British High Commission and the British Council in Namibia. It consisted of a book donation of over 2,000 volumes as well as GBP 200,000 ear-marked for equipment as well as book orders.

It is challenging to find an organization that is willing to provide funding to a library in a developing country. However, there are agencies that provide book donations; these are a bit easier to find. A few examples are Book Aid (<http://www.bookaid.org>), BetterWorldBooks (<https://www.betterworldbooks.com>), Books for All (<http://www.booksforall.org.uk>), and African Library Project (<https://www.africanlibraryproject.org>). The UNAM Library had help from Book Aid for a few years with very positive results. In total the Library received 5,702 books over a time span of 8 years. A pre-developed profile helped them choose books in relevant subject areas. Book Aids' aim is to provide new and up-to-date books but their emphasis is currently less on public/higher education libraries than on school and out-of-school pupils and healthcare providers. In 2015, UNAM received about 300 boxes (about 4,500 books) of donations of used books from Books for Africa. A lot of these books were outdated, damaged, and often full of duplicate copies which we distributed for free to students or interested other libraries.

Before deciding to request any donations first ascertain what type of material the funding agency is assembling. Many of these donor agencies concentrate more on literacy programs and children's books than academic material (Curry, Thiessen, and Kelley 2002, 10). An even better option is if the library can pick and choose from a title list. Libraries in the developing countries must also be very aware of book dumping of irrelevant, outdated, and damaged material. The ALA says it perfectly

when they remark “Books that are outdated, damaged, and worthless are going to be just as useless abroad” (ALA 2017a, 2017b). Shipping costs can also be an obstacle; make sure that shipping is free.

For most libraries in the developing world, under-funding, especially for new courses/programs/subject areas, is a reality. Possible donors could be identified that would sponsor material in certain subject areas to supplement the annual book budget. The good news is that it is easier for a library in a developing country to find book donors than it is for a library in a first world country. In the case of a college library in Lagos, established in 2014, the ratio of book acquisitions was 52.2% by book donations versus 47.8% by purchase (Adesanya 2015, 42). Libraries must just be aware of what they agree to accept and ensure that the donated books really support the intended collection outcomes.

Weeding

The UNAM library collection started with about 37,000 volumes in 1992 that were inherited from the university’s predecessor, the Academy of Tertiary Education. Many of these titles focused on the field of education, and many of them were written in Afrikaans¹.

“Getting rid of books can feel uncomfortable and look bad to community members, but careful weeding is key to the health of a collection” (Chant 2015, 1). A start-up collection can often be unbalanced because of inheritance of book collections and/or “book dumping” by well-intended-donors, and although the books fill some shelves, they often have little or no value for users. Weeding should have been done at UNAM as a start-up library, but this was something that was neglected, partly because weeding or de-selection was rejected by fellow librarians, especially as the collection was very limited in size. It was not until 1996, when drawing up its first collection development policy (CDP) that a paragraph on de-selection was added (see [Appendices A and B](#)).

A good quality library collection that is small is worth more than a big collection that does not support the vision and mission of your institution. Start-up libraries are often reluctant to weed for fear of creating empty spaces within their library—especially when they do not have the funds for replacements (Konlan and Thompson 2015, 121). A room full of empty shelves is felt as an embarrassment but a collection that does not speak to your clientele is even worse. Collection evaluations should be done on a regular basis to measure its growth, age, and usage, and depending on the mission and type of the library it is not unreasonable to consider weeding and withdrawing material that has not been used within the last 10 years.

User input

We recommend, after a few years of existence, that you measure user satisfaction, because it can provide valuable feedback useful to focus your collection funds. The UNAM Library measured user satisfaction with two rounds of LibQual² (the first

in 2012 and the second in 2014) and adjusted the library policies and procedures as a consequence of user suggestions. The survey measures user perceptions of service quality in three dimensions:

- Effect of Service (Staff behavior),
- Information Control (Library collections),
- Library as Place.

The online survey with pre-defined questions was made available as a link on the UNAM Library website as well as the student portal. Service points were created where library staff could help users. Prizes like memory sticks and iPads were offered as incentives.

The main complaints were:

- Inadequacy of text books
- Lack of access to journals
- Lack of relevant e-resources
- Outdated collections

The major adjustments or changes that the library made were:

- Changed loan periods for reserves/short loan
- Promoted the reservation system
- Prioritized journal subscriptions
- Intensified marketing and training of e-resources
- Implemented a current awareness service
- Proactively engaged faculty in collection building
- Finalized the updated Collection Development Policy
- Conduct collection evaluation studies
- Improve information literacy training

Building the core collection

When the University was first founded, the initial responsibility of the library staff was to build a core collection of relevant books related to the subjects taught at the university. To do this at the UNAM Library, subject librarians relied mostly on faculty members for title suggestions. Academic titles for undergraduate readership, often with an African connotation, were prioritized. As subject librarians became more experienced and knowledgeable on the existing collections, they selectively added relevant titles as well. Another, less successful method to build the collection was to use existing lists of subject core titles. However, our experience was that these are usually assembled by overseas publishers and vendors and often emphasize their own geographical areas or are often biased toward their own countries publishers.

Textbook collection

Every library in a developing country will need to decide whether to collect sufficient numbers of textbooks to provide fair access for student. While most large U.S. academic libraries do not provide this service, it is common in other libraries

around the world. When UNAM Library was established, the main concern was to have at least a core collection for the seven available subjects. Background reading material was of greater importance than the prescribed or assigned textbooks that the university felt were the responsibility of the students themselves. However, feedback from the LibQual survey highlighted the need for more prescribed textbooks. Consequently, 3 years ago a substantial effort was made to buy multi-copies of textbooks. Placing two copies of a prescribed book into Short loan/Reserve area proved to be unsuccessful as books were repeatedly only returned once the deadline for an assignment ended. So multiple copies of prescribed books were purchased and housed in the Short loan/Reserve area and the loan period was extended to 1 day if enough copies of a title were available. The latest version of the Collection Development policy states: To ensure that students have access to critical learning resources the Library undertakes to acquire a minimal number of prescribed textbooks as well as at least two copies of a recommended work in its collection. Purchase of multiple copies of prescribed books is determined in terms of the 1:20 ration of student textbook ratio guideline, meaning one book for every 20 students. Funds allowing, more copies will be ordered.

Libraries have different policies and views on buying multiple copies of textbooks. Non-supporters of textbook collections argue that library funds are limited, and that they would rather prioritize buying books that supplement and enhance coursework and research. This was UNAM's thinking as well, but surveys and practice have shown that in an African environment the importance of multiple copies of prescribed books is often a strong user demand.

Journal collection

Like with the book collection, a few print journals were inherited when the UNAM Library started. It was only in 1994 that the annual budget shows a separated budget line for serials with a ratio of 4:1 (i.e., four times more money was allocated to books than to periodicals). This changed gradually and starting in 2002 the periodicals budget surmounted the book budget slightly. That was also the year that the Library subscribed to certain databases on the EBSCOhost platform. These were (and still are) *Academic Search Complete*, *Business Source Complete*, *ERIC (index only)*, *Health Sources/Nursing/ Academic*, *Health Sources – Consumer Edition*, *Library Information Sciences & Technology Abstracts*, *MasterFile Premier*, *Medline (index only)*, *Newspaper Source*, and *Teacher Reference Center*. EBSCOhost databases were the only electronic subscriptions for the next 4 years. Internet was only introduced in the Library in 1996 and neither staff nor users were exposed to electronic journals before. UNAM is currently subscribing to 14 journal packages and databases. These are *Science Direct*, *Emerald*, *EBSCO*, *SA e-publications*, *Sage*, *Springerlink*, *Taylor & Francis*, *Oxford Journals*, *Juta Law Reports*, *Hein Online*, *IEEE*, *Business Monitor*, *Hague Collected Course online*, and *Cambridge International Law Reports*. While the number of electronic titles in 2002 was about 5,700, the library currently subscribes to about 24,000 titles.

The UNAM Library still subscribes to 85 print journal titles. These titles are either African related titles, requested in print format by faculty, or those subscribed to by some of the branch libraries that have an unreliable Internet connection. Print titles are all supplied via EBSCO Information Services.

E-book collection

While students and lecturers at UNAM accepted the use of e-journals quickly and preferred this by far to the print version, dealing with e-books is another issue. For the first time a budget fund for the acquisition of e-books was created in 2012 to the amount of NAD 225,000 (or just under US\$1,000) which represents about 5% of the books budget). Ten e-reference titles were bought, and in addition over 3,500 open access books were added. These are accessible via the Library catalogue (OPAC) as well via an e-book link on the Library webpage. In the following year, 6% of the budget was allocated and 42 additional titles were added. By 2016, the titles grew to 3,805 but this number is still very low compared to the print collection.

After the initial excitement about this new media that promised to be the perfect solution for (a) multiple copies of prescribed texts and (b) access without duplication of books at all the branch libraries and (c) seamless access for the new generation of library users, e-books proved to be more complicated than expected. The following are some of the challenges of using e-books and not just in developing countries:

- Bandwidth is limited, which makes it a struggle to get a book downloaded
- There are too many steps until book can be downloaded
- Adobe Digital software has to be downloaded on computer first
- Digital Rights Management (DRM) restrictions, e.g., limited printing allowed, restricted access
- Only a few students were reached for training on e-book usage
- Complications with User licenses, etc.
- Limited knowledge and lack of searching skills
- A lot of first year students that are not computer literate
- Only a few books in the e-book collection are actual textbooks.

The last mentioned point is actually the main challenge when it comes to usage of e-books. This was also the sentiment of focus group discussions done in 2016 targeting UNAM students. They felt that “there is no relation between e-book contents and UNAM curriculum” (Leonard 2017, 82). To confirm this we asked the e-book team from EBSCO in South Africa. They estimated that only about 1%–2% of their e-books are currently textbooks, largely because publishers of these textbooks are not allowing aggregators to sell their content. Even if students indicated in Leonard’s study (2017) that they would prefer e-books before print books, we are unable to purchase them.

The e-book concept is more than likely here to stay, so libraries in developing countries need to find ways to overcome the current obstacles. New vendors that do not have strict digital rights management restrictions should be identified. Information literacy courses should include sessions not only on electronic databases

but on the use of e-books as well. The demand-driven-acquisition model should be applied more frequently to safe-guard not paying for unwanted books especially within packages.

Collection development policy

In early 1996, professional librarians at the UNAM Library acknowledged the need for a collection development policy (CDP). This was by no means an easy task as it was being done for the first time. In 2003, the collection development policy was revised for the first time in order to incorporate electronic resources, which had not been mentioned in the earlier policy. By 2009, the library had not yet bought any electronic (e-) books to complement their collections (Buchholz 2011). The need for a substantial revision of the CDP grew again and an attempt was done in 2012. The draft is finally awaiting approval of the University Senate. The main changes that were incorporated include preferences of new formats especially for journals; additional criteria to consider when subscribing or purchasing e-resources; the addition of sections such as the institutional repository, open access material, stance about teaching aids and children's books in the library, and a new outlook on multiple copies when it comes to prescribed textbooks.

A collection development policy is an important tool to guide library staff, as well as users, on the library's philosophy behind its collection choices. A library Collection Development Policy is intended to guide the selection, evaluation, and de-selection of print and electronic materials for the collection, whether by purchase, gift, license, or subscription. CDP statements are thus necessary planning documents.

Dilemmas faced by the UNAM Library in planning its future collection development strategy

UNAM's library collections have developed in a haphazard way because new programs, new schools, and even new campuses were introduced at a rapid pace and often approved toward the end of an academic year without any provision for either supplementary funding for library books or time for the library to order prescribed and/or recommended books. E-books, which seemed to be able to solve some of the problems, presented addition problems due to technological needs.

New programs and disciplines with different demands are introduced at an incredible pace. The university feels responsible to meet all employment demands from stakeholders as it is the main tertiary institution in the country. This gives the impression that new courses are often agreed upon without assurance that all the backbone services like classrooms, lecturing staff, and also library collections are in place. With the shift to more and more postgraduate programs, the profile of academic staff and researchers has developed accordingly and requires specialized library material. The University is moving toward extended post-graduate programs

and research. This requires another level of information resources both in print and online.

The student numbers are growing at an enormous speed as well, which requires an increasing supply of textbooks. New courses usually benefit from a higher percentage in the book budget distribution but it is getting more and more difficult to satisfy the high demand with the budget available and the diminishing buying power because of a weak currency. Although new curricula proposal usually indicate a budget for library books, it is not really taken into account when it comes to distributing the overall university budget. Another problem is that the University does not have mechanisms to enforce lecturers to submit prescribed textbooks to the Library and Subject librarians often struggle to get that information to act upon book purchases on a timely basis.

Collection evaluation challenges encountered by the UNAM Library

A pilot collection evaluation project was started in 2016 with the aim to evaluate the Education programs collection at the Katima Mulilo campus library in the North-East of the country. The decision for this choice came as a follow-up from a LibQual survey conducted in 2014. With the Katima Mulilo Library survey, the methods that were used were quantitative benchmarking, list-checking, usage statistics, shelf scanning, and citation analysis. The following challenges were encountered:

Benchmarking:

- It proved to be difficult to benchmark as it was difficult to find peer institutions—either they have a lot more students and much more developed collections because of their years in existence.
- The Library does not have funds for subscription programs like Bowker Book Analysis System or OCLC Worldshare Evaluation.

Usage statistics:

- As Katima Mulilo campus does not have a static IP address, the usage of e-journals from that branch is difficult to determine.
- Interlending statistics show that the only transactions were made inter-branch as they do not have an interlending section that can deal with international requests.

Shelf scanning:

- A lot of material that would normally be weeded is still entered on the catalog.

Conclusion

When building a library collection in a developing country, there are no basic differences to building one in a first world country. Andrade and Verguero (1996, 23) used a well-known model from Evans (1987) in their library in Brazil and determined that it is just as useful in a developing country context. A well-defined collection development policy will assist with decisions on collection management in relation

to textbook and core collections and how to go about selecting and managing electronic and print books, as well as e-journals and databases.

Criterion that also plays an important role is funding. External funding possibilities are often more favorable toward start-up libraries in developing countries, but agreements must be carefully studied before accepting anything just to fill up shelves. This brings with it weeding or deselection of unwanted, outdated, unused, and damaged material. User input about services delivered and the usefulness of collections is of ultimate importance.

Despite all the challenges and sometimes hiding behind the “being a still developing country,” libraries must be pro-active and learn from failures and successes of libraries in the developed world. We cannot afford to stay behind as our students have to compete globally and have to be knowledgeable people to cope in an information savvy society.

Notes

1. Eleven (11) languages are indigenous to Namibia but English is the official language.
2. LibQual is a web-based survey tool that measures service quality of libraries (<https://www.libqual.org/home>).

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Appendix A. Weeding paragraph in CDP 1996

De-selection is an integral part of acquisition and maintenance. It is either disposal or relocation of duplicates, superseded editions, little used, irrelevant, and damaged library material.

This may mean that an item:

- Is transferred from one collection or section to another, e.g., between reference and loan section or between UNAM libraries or center collections;
- Is transferred to a secondary collection area, e.g., a storing place;
- Is withdrawn from the collection and disposed of.

Appendix B. Key emerging issues from LibQUAL survey

Key emerging issues from LibQUAL survey	Action(s) needed	Evidence for completion
Inadequacy of prescribed textbooks Non availability of prescribed textbooks	Conducting a full textbook audit. Use LibQUAL results to finalize the Collection Development Policy Extension of short loan period to support improved academic performance—target 2 days. Promotion of the reservation function on the library system to enable efficient use of library materials.	Textbook audit charts. Feedback from the students and faculties, e.g., positive feedback from the Law Faculty 2015–2016 LibQUAL 2016 satisfaction rating to collections Increase in the reservation statistics
Lack of access to some relevant professional and scientific journals Lack of relevant e-resources	Prioritize journal subscriptions and acquisitions to respond to critical needs of faculties Intensify marketing and training to create better awareness on current electronic journal subscriptions and other e-resources. Form the National Library Consortium to secure affordability of wide e-resources Improve and diversify information literacy instruction to ensure awareness and capacity to use e-resources within all UNAM communities Implement current awareness services for researchers	Usage statistics E-resource available on the library website.
Outdated / inadequate library collections in some disciplines	Collection evaluation studies. Proactive engagement with the faculty regarding the collections. Subject librarians keeping abreast with developments in subjects corresponding to Faculties / Campuses they serve	Positive feedback from the Namibia Veterinary Council on significant improvement of resources to support the Veterinary Science and Animal Health Programs. Collection evaluation pilot report Feedback from the faculties