Decolonising library collections: contemporary issues, practical solutions and examples from LSE

Author Biography

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Introduction

This chapter examines the impact of decolonisation upon collection development, both in theory and practice. It starts with a brief definition of collection development, how this has more recently evolved due to multiple influences and pressures and how it can be affected by bias. After, we reflect upon our analysis of LSE's collections from a geographical perspective, assessing where our collections derive from. The relationship between collections and reading lists is then observed, particularly in terms of how library collections influence how reading lists are developed and how collections contribute to equity, diversity and inclusion issues. Finally, this chapter recommends some practical collection development steps that academic libraries can take, both individually and collectively, to make their collections more diverse, but also to support wider decolonisation initiatives within their parent institutions.

Collection Development: An Introduction

Library collections have historically been considered the heart of academic libraries, much as libraries have been said to be the heart of the university (Posner, 2019). Collection development is the work undertaken to build these collections and the decisions that are taken to determine how they evolve. Collection development includes many different activities, such as the selection and deselection of material, the acquisition of material and the evaluation of different access options (IFLA, 2020). Collection development is designed with the specific purpose to provide libraries with resources that meet the appropriate needs of their client populations (Gessesse, 2000) in a timely and economical manner (Evans, 1999).

The concept that collection development should 'advance scholarship and research' arguably refers back to Charles Coffin Jewett's tenure as the first full-time professional librarian in the United States, at Brown University in the mid-nineteenth century (Desjarlais-Lueth, 1990). Over a century and a half later, this remains the consensus view (Jensen, 1977; Gonzalez-Kirby, 1991; Linden, Tudesco, and Dollar, 2018; Scherlen and McAllister, 2019). Later, we will discuss the biases and inequities within curricula that have encouraged calls for greater change and levels of diversity. Therefore, we may question whether the

role of collection development is solely to support teaching, learning and research and whether it should also be proactive in trying to influence it as well.

Collection development has been recently affected by technology and the promise of making processes more efficient, as well as more local pressures on time, staffing and finances. This has included centralising collection development and using approval plans rather than manual selection (Barstow, Macaulay, and Tharp, 2016; Day and Novak, 2019) and using demand-driven acquisition (DDA) to allow users to actively participate in selection (Blume, 2019; Day and Novak, 2019; England and Anderson, 2019). Where it was formerly the preserve of librarians (with some academic staff input), collection development has become more complex, with multiple stakeholders now involved. Librarians, however, retain a critical function in ensuring quality and maintaining the integrity of the collection (Levine-Clark 2019).

The strategic direction for collection development is often defined by formal collection development policies. Having guidelines to follow and criteria to apply has many benefits for libraries (van Zijl, 1998). They demonstrate the direction of a library's collection building (Munro and Philps, 2008) and support and facilitate library decision-making (Sanchez Vignau and Meneses, 2005). The absence of a collection development policy can lead to haphazard and inconsistent practice (Chaputula and Kanyundo, 2014). In contrast, it has been questioned whether collection development policies are 'the right weapon for this future battle' (Torrence, Powers, and Sheffield, 2012) as they may not describe all the collection development strategies and criteria used (Papadakos et al., 2014) and changes in practice are not always reflected in policies (Hunt, 2017). Where policies diverge from practice, they can become the 'occupant of the last folder in the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet' (Snow, 1996), which indicates that successful collection development policies should be dynamic and adaptable that change when the strategies and curricula of parent institutions change.

Bias in Collection Development

Libraries are increasingly reflecting on their collection development strategies and determining whether they are compatible with addressing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) concerns. This is part of a broader debate over EDI in libraries that also includes providing equal access to library resources and services for all regardless of background or characteristics (ALA, 2019) and diversity in the workplace, including staff recruitment and career progression (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019; Schonfield and Sweeney, 2017).

A useful starting point for collection development librarians would be to consider some reflections about the nature of our libraries and our collections in terms of their significance and the values they possess and uphold. Libraries have never been neutral repositories of knowledge (Sadler and Bourg, 2015). They reflect the values and structures of their parent institution and library collections have often developed according to those values. We often believe our collections have developed to be fair and balanced, but in reality, every collection is biased in one way or another. The idea of the value-neutral decision is a myth (Quinn, 2012). These ideas may challenge some of our preconceptions about collections and collection development, but we should not shy away from confronting them.

Central to the debate about bias in collection development is concern about the decision-making process and whether it is possible for this to be truly objective and representative, despite the intentions of collection development librarians. The decisions made are inevitably biased (Morales, Knowles, and Bourg, 2014) as they are based on the individual judgements and interests of librarians and libraries, although these would not necessarily be rectified by initiatives such as patron-driven decision-making as the systems that enable these have their own inherent biases, which are seldom understood.

Self-censorship can creep into collection development (Antell, Strothmann, and Downey, 2013), often inadvertently, so it is vital for collection development librarians to pause and reflect upon each selection decision, especially if it affects a marginalised group that is underrepresented in our collections. Multidisciplinary areas, such as LGBTQ, are usually underserved because they do not fit within a neat departmental structure and collection development budgets are usually allocated on a departmental basis (Graziano, 2016). Multidisciplinary areas also include race and gender and these may be underserved or disadvantaged in library collections (Howard and Knowlton, 2018). Collaborative collection development strategies, where a small team of selectors develop these collections, has been recommended (Graziano, 2016). If there are more eyes on the selection process, there could be a reduction in unconscious bias in collection development.

When a narrow range of perspectives are represented in library collections, this often leads to a bias towards a narrow range of publishers, since more marginalised subject matter is often printed by smaller, niche publishers. This results in a degree of corporate control on library collections (Dilevko and Grewal, 1997), which are dominated by titles from the major international publishers, who represent an oligopoly (Larivière, Haustein, and Mongeon, 2015) within the market. Within the United Kingdom, universities spent almost £1 billion on journal subscriptions between 2010-2019, with more than 90% of this spent with five companies (Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, Taylor & Francis and Sage) (Lawson 2020). The 'big deals' signed with those publishers provide libraries with complete sets of theirs titles, eliminating the need to subscribe to individual titles. However, this means that library collections are often guided by the publishing decisions made by these companies, which are inevitably biased towards prestigious, highly-cited journals from the highest ranked universities, usually in the UK and US. More diverse, regionally-specific research, authored by researchers from Global South universities will be edged out. Additionally, the financial implications of these deals often mean libraries have limited funds to purchase titles from smaller publishers, reinforcing these disparities.

Political bias can also be found in library collections to varying degrees, with some views more represented than others (Hupp, 1991), often depending on one's geographical location and local political preferences. Many academic libraries take a line of supporting intellectual freedom and opposing censorship, therefore (in theory at least) they aim to be politically balanced.

There has been little discussion about the cognitive biases (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, 1982) that might influence collection development decision-making. Some examples may include:

- A dependency on collection development policies and strictly following their criteria to select resources (anchoring bias)
- Using the strengths of a library's collection to further develop those collections rather than address weaknesses (status-quo bias)

- Using data-driven or patron-driven acquisitions models of selection because we believe systems will redress biases, even when we do not fully understand the algorithms underpinning those systems (automation bias)
- Becoming aware of a weakness in our collections, perhaps because it has been highlighted to us, which means we notice it more and give it greater magnitude (selection bias)

Some of these cognitive biases overlap and contradict each other. However, as collection development librarians, we should encourage ourselves to reflect upon how these biases will affect the selection we undertake. In our pursuit of developing what we perceive to be fair, neutral and balanced collections, our decision-making may just reinforce pre-existing inequalities. Instead, we may need to become more proactive and interventionist, to ensure that marginalised and underrepresented groups gain greater representation and prominence in our collections.

Evaluating Collections

If collection development librarians wish to understand their collections more and to discover the outcomes of their collection development decisions, they should consider evaluating their collections. This allows libraries to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their collections, to consider whether collection development goals are being achieved and to determine the future direction of collection development (Agee, 2005). Evaluating collections allows libraries to discover whether their collections are fit for purpose and whether they meet user needs, provide value for money, or support library and institutional strategies (Schmidt, 2016). They also allow libraries to demonstrate how they support the education and research missions of universities (Henry, Longstaff, and Van Kampen, 2008; Hunt, 2017).

Collection evaluations can be labour-intensive (Guise and Feinmark, 2003), time-consuming and expensive, but worth the investment (Henry, Longstaff, and Van Kampen, 2008). Libraries have adopted different approaches to evaluate their collections; often using quantitative tools such as WorldCat Collection Analysis (Henry, Longstaff, and Van Kampen, 2008; Ciszek and Young, 2010), even though some believe the adequacy of library collections cannot be stated in purely numerical terms (Clapp and Jordan, 1989). Qualitative measures, such as the subject expertise of library staff (Agee, 2005; Ciszek and Young, 2010), or information on student numbers, academic departments and curriculum (Clapp and Jordan, 1989) can complement quantitative data. Successful and comprehensive collection evaluations should adopt a mixed-methods approach and include as much relevant information as can be obtained.

LSE Collections

LSE Library collections are internationally recognised and a source of inspiration and pride for LSE (LSE Library, 2020a) and provide a resource of national and international importance for researchers working in the social sciences (LSE Library, 2020b). Camfield's (2016b) history of LSE Library's collections illustrates their development since the Library's foundation in 1896, identifying historical strengths in Economics, Political Science, History, Law and Statistics, reflecting the earliest curricula at the school. Different collection strengths have emerged over the decades, including Russian social sciences collections from the 1920s onwards (Camfield, 2016a) and Latin American from the 1960s onwards

(Camfield, 2016b). In a recent (unpublished) collection evaluation project, we identified our flagship collections (those with national significance in relation to their subject, quality and research value) as British economic and political history from the end of the 19th century onwards. Although we identified where collections are strong, we were less able to demonstrate where gaps and areas for future development existed.

Through using the analytics available via their Library Management Systems (LMS), libraries can obtain rich insights into the composition of their collections by a range of criteria, such as age, classification, geography, etc. At LSE, we obtained data obtained from our LMS (Ex-Libris's Alma), to look at the geographical division of our collections – specifically, which countries these titles were published in. Although this method would not tell us the backgrounds of their authors – this data would not be held in catalogue records (and therefore would need to be collected manually from, for example, staff profile pages) – we were able to rapidly find out whether our library collections reinforced publishing disparities.

We observed the division between titles published in the Global North and the Global South. However, we accept that this terminology is contentious, and definitions have often been debated and challenged (Caison and Vormann, 2014; Mahler, 2018; Horner, 2020). Such binary definitions are often unhelpful and hint at simplistic causes rather than more complex issues. Furthermore, there is no single division of Global North and Global South countries. The Brand Report (Brandt, 1981), published during a particularly precarious period during the Cold War provided an early distinction, with the 'North' represented by the Northern hemisphere and Australia and New Zealand, and the 'South' comprising most of Latin America, Africa and South Asia. These 'North' and 'South' boundaries have continued to evolve and the criteria previously used to determine the border between the 'rich' North and 'poor' South are no longer accurate and have thus become obsolete (Solarz, 2012), especially as there is clear evidence of shifting economic power in the 'South' (Lees, 2020), as seen in high GDP growth rates in some 'Global South' countries.

We used the Wikimedia classifications in our work to make some observations about the composition of our collections. However, this is not an endorsement of these definitions, nor a suggestion by us that these are the most 'correct' definitions. However, the Wikimedia classifications are relatively contemporary (developed between 2010-2015). According to this categorization, the Global North comprises 65 countries (53 from Europe, 8 from the Asia and Pacific region and 4 from North America). The Global South comprises 182 (60 from the Asia and Pacific region, 50 from South and Latin America, 47 from Africa, 21 from the Arab States and 4 from Europe).

We assessed the three main print collections at LSE Library and ranked each collection by the number of titles published by country.

- Course Collection books (short loan titles that are primarily used for teaching and are included on reading lists)
- Main Collection books (broader social sciences titles, often wider reading on reading lists)
- Main Collection journals (often print only, often ceased titles)

Course Collection

Country	No. of Course Collection Items	% of Course Collection (n=31628)
United Kingdom	23007	72.74
United States	6627	20.95
Netherlands	407	1.20
India	285	0.90
Germany	231	0.73
Canada	121	0.38
Australia	110	0.35
France	107	0.34
Switzerland	93	0.29
Singapore	61	0.19
Spain	54	0.17
South Africa	52	0.16
Belgium	52	0.16
China	42	0.13
Sweden	39	0.12
Ireland	39	0.12
Japan	33	0.10
Denmark	30	0.09
Philippines	26	0.08
Italy	22	0.07

Table x.1 label…

We discovered that our Course Collection is comprehensively dominated by titles published in the Global North (98.44%). 29634 titles (93.7%) of Course Collection titles are published in just two countries; the United Kingdom (72.74%) and the United States (20.95%).

Other Global North countries are represented to a much lesser extent. The Netherlands is placed third because some major academic publishers are Dutch-based. Other English language countries such as Canada and Australia, also feature in the top ten ranked countries, alongside other Western European countries such as Germany and France. Asian and Pacific countries feature even less frequently, with only Singapore and Japan appearing in the top twenty places of publication.

India is significantly the most common place of publication amongst other Global South countries for Course Collection titles. 57.69% of all Global South published titles (n=494) are from India, which is the fourth highest country for Course Collection titles (behind UK, US and Netherlands). The next Global South countries on the list are comparatively much, much smaller, with South Africa (10.53%) and China (8.5%) placed second and third. There are very small numbers of African and Asian & Pacific published titles, but many Global South countries are not represented at all in the Course Collection, with just 34 of the 182 Global South countries represented. Overall, there are 63 Course Collection titles published in the Global North for every title published in the Global South.

Main Collection

Country	No of Main Collection Items	% of Main Collection (n=499800)
United Kingdom	191730	38.36
United States	68398	13.69
Germany	51495	10.30
France	34164	6.84
Italy	18217	3.64
Netherlands	11216	2.24
Canada	10956	2.19
India	8801	1.76
Switzerland	8512	1.70
Spain	7984	1.60
Poland	4804	0.96
Australia	4752	0.95
Belgium	3747	0.75
Sweden	3594	0.72
Argentina	3332	0.67
Mexico	3327	0.67
Austria	3313	0.66
South Africa	2025	0.41
Ireland	1788	0.36
Brazil	1783	0.36

Table x.2 Label

Generally, the Global South is better represented in our Main Collection than in the Course Collection, which reflects its purpose as a wider research-related collection, as well as LSE Library's evolving collection development policies and practices since 1896. 92.76% of Main Collection titles are published in the Global North, whereas only 7.24% of titles are published in the Global South.

The Main Collection is much less dominated by the UK and US compared to the Course Collection. 52.04% of Main Collection titles are published solely in the UK and US. Subsequent Global North countries in the list are Western European, non-English speaking countries, such as Germany (10.3%), France (6.84%), and Italy (3.64%). Other English-language countries are lesser ranked (e.g.Canada is 7th (2.19%) and Australia is 11th (0.95%) on the list). LSE Library has a long collecting history of acquiring titles in the social sciences in Western European languages, which is reflected in their placings.

India is also the largest Global South country of publication for Main Collection items. Although this only comprises 1.76% of the total Main Collection items, India provides 27.2% of the Global South items. However, the Main Collection has more even distribution across Global South countries than the Course

Collection. A significantly greater number of Global South countries are represented in the Main Collection (148 of 182 countries) than they were in the Course Collection.

Africa is comparatively less well represented, with South Africa and Nigeria the best represented countries. Asia (besides India) is represented even less often, with China and Pakistan as the highest ranked non-Indian Asian countries. The lower representation of African and Asian titles in our collections may reflect LSE's historical relationships with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), where both libraries had informal reciprocal arrangements and have sought to maintain specialist social sciences collections from different areas of the world, and both libraries have attempted to avoid duplication and overlapping collections.

Three of the top twenty ranked countries are from the Latin and South American region, including Argentina (1.76%), Mexico (0.67%), and Brazil (0.36%). The presence of Latin and South American countries is no surprise. LSE Library historically had active collection development policies for this region and we have worked with specialist book suppliers for many decades to develop this collection. For context, we also looked at our collections on a regional level; the History of Asia (DS), the History of Africa (DT) and the History of South/Latin America, and we discovered that the latter had greater representation from titles published in that region. Whilst 86.33% of titles in the History of Asia and 82.28% of titles in the History of Africa were published in the Global North, this fell dramatically to 69.17% for the History of South/Latin America. This demonstrates some imbalance in our collections on a regional basis, therefore we need to make efforts to redress this, by identifying new publishers and suppliers to increase our Asian and African collections. Overall, there are 13 Main Collection titles published in the Global North for every Main Collection title published in the Global South.

Main Collection Journals

Country	No of Main Collection Journal Items	% of Main Collection Journals (n=13745)
United Kingdom	5157	37.52
United States	1120	8.15
France	972	7.07
Italy	456	3.32
Canada	266	1.94
Belgium	246	1.79
Germany	226	1.64
Australia	193	1.40
Netherlands	181	1.32
Poland	159	1.16
Spain	143	1.04
Austria	130	0.95
Sweden	121	0.88
Japan	107	0.78
Russian Federation	92	0.67

South Africa	88	0.64
Hungary	84	0.61
Switzerland	80	0.58
Finland	57	0.41
Israel	50	0.36

Table x.3 label

LSE Library's print journal collections comprise titles usually unavailable in online formats and are often historical, ceased titles. They are not usually used in teaching but are used in wider social sciences research. Main Collection journals are dominated by titles from the Global North, with 94% from this region, and just 6% from the Global South.

Around 37% of Global North periodicals were published in the UK and this dominance reflects that it has been easier to collect periodicals from UK rather than elsewhere. Whilst the United States is the second highest country, with just over 8%, other Western Europe countries (France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Netherlands) and other English language countries (Canada, Australia) feature highly amongst these collections. Their presence across all of our print collections reflects our dedication to specializing in these countries and regions, although it also identifies areas for future redress.

South Africa is the largest country for journals published in the Global South, comfortably ahead of India. Other African countries, often part of the Commonwealth also feature prominently, including Zimbabwe, Egypt and Nigeria. South and Latin American countries are much less represented, with a small number of journals collected from countries such as Guatemala, Peru, Costa Rica and Paraguay, although these are often banking reports and other financial accounts rather than more academic research-led journals. Overall, there are 17 print periodical titles published in Global North for every title published in the Global South.

Library Collections and Reading Lists

Reading lists reflect and represent the curriculum. They are an important influence upon student learning and their understanding of subjects. Reading lists that comprise a narrow range of authors and perspectives will render student learning both partial and incomplete.

There is often a slight contrast between academic staff and student perspectives of the purpose of reading lists. Academic staff believe they provide guidance and a sense of direction (Beard and Dale, 2008; Stokes and Martin, 2008; Brewerton, 2014; Cameron and Siddall, 2017), but they are concerned about student reliance on reading lists and that they should use them purely as 'starting points' before they embark on more independent reading (Siddall, 2016). Students agree on the sense of direction (Thompson, Mahon, and Thomas, 2004), but often find them overwhelming (Siddall and Rose, 2014) and then employ a means-end approach to managing the amount of reading they can achieve (Stokes and Martin, 2008). Students may rely on reading lists more than academic staff imagine and choose to prioritise reading the titles on these ahead of those they would find themselves from independent research. This means students are greatly influenced by, and dependent upon, the titles that academic

staff select and any lack of diversity amongst those titles will be reflected in how students learn about their subject.

What is perhaps missing from the reading list debate is a discussion of their authority and power. They may be benignly designed as tools to support learning, to guide students through the vast terrain of academic literature and direct them towards the most relevant sources, but this cannot be a 'neutral' process. Much as we considered that cognitive bias may lead to collection development decisions that reinforce pre-existing inequalities that negatively impact the marginalised and underrepresented, the same could easily apply to reading lists. More understanding of the rationale behind the inclusion and exclusion of titles is required.

Academic staff may not believe there is anything intrinsically problematic with how they develop reading lists, but there is growing evidence of bias within reading lists, both at discipline-level, but also more widely across the academic spectrum. This is particularly acute in the Politics and International Relations discipline, where marginalisation occurs on reading lists according to both gender (Phull, Ciflikli, and Meibauer 2018) and race (Choat 2020), but also in African Studies, where a comparison of the reading lists of both African and non-African universities revealed startling differences regarding the frequency in which African scholars were included (Africa at LSE, 2019). Whereas 15% of items on reading lists from African universities were from African scholars, it was fewer than 2% in UK universities. This means that UK researchers, for example, are missing out on potentially significant regional research that may offer different perspectives to Western researchers. Another study that looked at both science and social science reading lists discovered empirical basis for concerns that university curricula are dominated by white, male and Eurocentric authors (Schucan Bird and Pitman, 2020).

Higher education is also becoming increasingly globalised. There is dynamic movement of people across the world for educational purposes, often from the Global South to Global North universities. Student populations in the Global North are more diverse than they have ever been. Just over one million or 5.5% of students in universities in the United States are classed as international students (Institute of International Education, 2020), whereas in the UK, this is just under half a million or 20.38% of students (HESA, 2019). This level of internationalisation has encouraged students and academic staff to ask questions about the curricula at their universities, particularly whether they are representative of their student populations, whether they reinforce inequalities and whether they disadvantage or alienate some students. If reading lists effectively represent the curricula, then the inequalities evident in the reading list may be evident in other aspects of the course. This will lead to a concern that students' understandings will only ever be partial or reductive, because they are missing insights and experiences through not including a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences in the curricula.

Reading lists and collection development have a symbiotic relationship. Both depend on each other. We understand that collection development is designed to support teaching and research, but equally, many academic staff design their curricula and develop their reading lists based on the resources available in their library's collections. Therefore, if the diversity of reading lists is questioned, then the same could apply to library collections because they may not provide academic staff with a sufficiently diverse range of collections. Libraries should reflect upon their own approaches and processes and consider how they can change these, so that they can best support greater diversity for reading lists. Libraries should be proactive and stay ahead of the curve, rather than being reactive. By doing this, we

give ourselves opportunities to collaborate with academic staff and to influence the shaping of curricula. We can use our knowledge and expertise to advise academic staff on appropriate resources and suggest that those selected should encompass a broader range of perspectives. This may take some perseverance since librarians are not typically active in reading list design. However, this can start small with a few good examples to develop momentum, before being scaled up, particularly if universities begin more institution-wide curricula reviews.

Practical Next Steps

Based on both the work we have undertaken at LSE and the work undertaken by libraries across different countries and continents, there are a range of collections-related activities that most academic libraries should be able to engage with if they are keen on decolonising their collections. Some will be quick and simple, whilst some may be more complex. Individual libraries should work within the scope that suits them, based on the time and resources they have.

1. Active commitments to equality and diversity

It may not be enough for librarians to commit to a 'neutral' approach to collection development. As we have discovered, sufficient subjective bias (whether intentional or not) influences selection to ensure that this neutrality is never truly achieved. Is 'neutrality', however we define it, an appropriate outcome? Does it just reinforce existing inequalities? Therefore, we may need to exceed this and be more assertive in addressing inequalities in our collections. Libraries do not necessarily need to devise their own commitments, but they could adopt or adapt existing commitments, such as those of the American Library Association (ALA) or the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). Librarians should also consult equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) colleagues in their institutions and discuss suitable approaches, and where possible, align with institutional strategies. In a more practical sense, collection development librarians should consider whether they should commit to actively and aggressively collect resources by and about underrepresented groups to ensure their collections reflect a commitment to diversity (Morales, Knowles, and Bourg, 2014). This may involve using existing reading lists designed to support and promote underrepresented groups and simply purchasing the titles not currently available in their libraries.

2. If you need to have a collections policy, make sure it is fit for purpose!

As we have discovered, collections policies provide strategic guidance and direction for collection development activity and allow libraries to communicate this with different stakeholders, but they can often be inflexible, unresponsive to changing teaching and research needs and perpetuate biases within collections. Where libraries wish to continue using collections policies, it is essential that they consider how they can be most effective. Most importantly, collections policies should be living and dynamic documents, which can adapt to the rapid change that libraries and universities are experiencing and reviewing them should not be an administrative task that librarians undertake periodically.

At LSE, we undertook a project to review our collections policy, which comprised a small project team of staff in different library roles, not just those in collection development. We worked with our equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) team and used an equality impact assessment framework (for assessing policies, processes and services) to review our current collections policy. We then identified the various areas in which the policy did not actively promote equality or could be perceived as discriminating against various groups. Having an established framework in place allowed us to conduct this activity objectively. When writing a new policy, we decided not to lean too much on the previous policy. It is tempting for librarians to reuse as much of an old policy as possible and just remove and replace sections as necessary. However, we wanted to start with much more of a clean slate. Our new policy starts with an introduction to our collections, identifying their strengths and then places specific importance on supporting EDI and decolonisation of the curriculum. The policy also covers every aspect of the collections lifecycle, from how we select material to how we manage it. We explained all processes involved with each aspect and outlined how our decision-making is made, so that our diverse stakeholders are fully informed but also that they are reassured that the Library is making decisions based on sound judgement.

3. Work with academic staff to diversify reading lists

Different institutions will take different approaches to how they decolonise or diversify their curricula. We should first note there is a distinction between these terms and they are not interchangeable. Diversification may often include an adjustment in content or diversifying of the curriculum, rather than a change in pedagogy or institutional cultures, practices or processes (Lemos, 2018). Diversification often leads to softer reforms than decolonisation requires (Makhubela, 2018). Some may take top-down approaches, with a mandate or direction for most or all departments to review their curricula, such as UCL's Inclusive Curriculum Healthcheck (UCL, 2018), whereas others will encourage a more bottom-up approach, where individual academic staff or departments will engage in this activity. At LSE, this has occurred at department level, on an optional basis, rather than being part of a university-wide strategy. Several departments have reviewed their reading lists, particularly looking at the authors represented on their reading lists and how broad this representation is. Our Academic Support Librarians have worked with departments in identifying areas for improvement where they have noted a lack of diversity of authors. Whichever approach an institution takes, librarians should consider how they can support this activity.

If your library manages an online reading list platform on behalf of your institution, you should think about how you can leverage this data to provide academic staff or departments with information about their reading lists. With Talis Aspire, for example, an all items report can provide the raw bibliographic information about all titles on reading lists, but this can be easily filtered by a specific course or department. Academic staff or departments evaluating their reading lists may be interested in finding out the gender and ethnicity of authors, where they are based, where their research is published, etc. Reading list data is unlikely to provide these answers. At LSE, we were able to use the Metadata Management System ID (MMSID) of reading list items, which are unique identifiers. These were then entered through our Library Management System (as Talis Aspire data does not provide the geographical data about titles), to discover where items on reading lists were published. However, the gender and ethnicity of individual authors can only be discovered by finding staff profiles from their

institutional websites. Therefore, from a data perspective, it is important to remember that what we can provide as librarians may be of limited use, but it can act as a starting point for further qualitative analysis.

The value of librarians may be more in terms of making connections. Through our liaison work, for example, we will be aware of pockets of decolonisation activity in departments, which may be undertaken in isolation, with academic staff unaware that colleagues in other departments may be performing similar work and they would value each other's support or feedback. We are also likely to have good relationships with colleagues in teaching and learning centres, who may be leading or advising on decolonisation. Connecting these dots across institutions may be more valuable than the data we may be able to provide from our systems.

4. Seek out and actively acquire from new publishers and suppliers

In the UK, various library purchasing consortia frameworks will determine supplier preference for books and e-books. The benefits for libraries include price discounts, agreed processing standards for print books and agreed accessibility and licence standards for e-books. These frameworks are based on various criteria. Currently, there are no specific diversity-related criteria that suppliers are assessed by (price and service support are amongst the highest ranked criteria). However, this is likely to be an area of change as librarians have raised these issues regularly in the last few years, and non-English language suppliers are likely to be brought into next versions of these frameworks. This means, for now at least, libraries may be limited in certain aspects of collection development as the titles that users can access depends on what the supplier provides. Libraries will have much freer rein on supplier choice for collections beyond the scope of these frameworks, for example, non-English language titles. However, due to potential complications in purchasing these titles (financial, metadata, etc.), incorporating them into these existing frameworks may be preferable for libraries.

At LSE, we have used approval plans and patron/demand driven acquisitions, but the titles available from these are dominated by a small number of large publishers. Smaller publishers providing titles on more niche topic areas may be absent or less visible. Major academic publishers in Africa, Latin America and Asia publishing important research in English or local languages may be present in some supplier platforms but not all. Maintaining the status quo may mean that libraries continue to neglect 'Global South' scholarship (Schmidt, 2020) and our collections continue to reflect the biases that exist in knowledge production more widely, where research published in the 'Global North' remains dominant and research published in the 'Global South' is marginalised (Collyer, 2018). Libraries wishing to obtain more diverse titles may need to reflect on their acquisitions and cataloguing practices and consider how they can absorb new suppliers that may pose additional challenges related to cost (as titles from small, specialist publishers could be more expensive), invoicing, delivery or catalogue records. Although we have spent recent years trying to simplify and automate processes as much as possible, we may need to accept that some more manual work may need to start taking place. It is advisable for libraries to start small first; perhaps purchase a small number of titles from a specific supplier first and assess how the acquisition and cataloguing experience was, before scaling up.

5. More collaborative collection development

Perhaps the most effective means of reducing bias in collection development is to introduce a plurality and diversity of voices and experience in the selection process. This may, to some extent, contradict the efforts librarians have made in recent years to streamline collection development work; for example, technology and other time-saving methods are used often because of reduced time and staffing. Librarians have already encouraged users to participate in collection development through patron and demand-driven acquisitions, although libraries may not assess the difference that makes in reality. For example, is it just a small number of users who participate? Do they come from similar academic disciplines? Do they study at the same academic levels? What are the backgrounds of these users? We cannot treat our users as a homogenous entity and assume that by handing control over some aspects of collection development to them, this will automatically reduce bias. In fact, it might just replace one form of bias with another. Likewise, the algorithms underpinning patron-driven acquisitions may not be neutral themselves and may recommend certain titles over others (based on a user's keywords during searching), therefore undermining any sense of 'choice'.

Collections policies should also be written collaboratively. At LSE, we have consulted groups working on decolonisation to ascertain their feedback on how our policies would support more equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activity. By seeking these collaboration and engagement opportunities, we provide our different stakeholders with a sense of 'shared ownership' of library collections and reinforce that they are able to highly influence how they develop.

6. Improve discoverability and redress classification bias

Understanding how our library systems work is vital to learn whether any biases are present and reflected back to users. We use discovery layers so users can find our resources, whilst we also allow users to select books for purchase or rental on e-book platforms. What we may be less certain about is how or why users get the results they receive when they search for terms. There has been much recent research on gender and racial bias in search engines and online activity (Cohn, 2019; Kay, Matuszek, and Munson, 2015; Noble, 2018; Williams, Brooks, and Shmargad, 2018). Timnit Gebru, a Google researcher, was sacked in December 2020 for co-authoring a paper on the ethics of artificial intelligence and whether it reinforces gender bias and offensive language (Simonite, 2020). Bias against women, the LGBT community, Islam, race and mental illness have been highlighted in the algorithms used in library discovery systems (Reidsma 2016). In their broader analysis of the power relations between librarians and software vendors, Barron and Preater (2018) highlight how discovery layers promote content owned by their parent company instead of content provided by their competitors. Librarians should raise these issues with the vendors providing these services and ask for greater clarity on how results are indexed and ranked. In information literacy teaching, librarians often recommend students have greater confidence in results found through library discovery systems, rather than search engines. Whilst in broad terms this still applies – the vast majority of content libraries provide is intended for academic audiences and undergoes rigorous criteria such as peer review prior to publication – we still need to encourage students to reflect on the results provided by library systems, to understand that 'relevance' is a loaded term (and therefore to not just accept the first set of results for any search) and to think just as critically as before.

Librarians and their users are becoming increasingly aware of the bias in how collections are classified. The most recent and controversial example of this is the debate over the term 'illegal aliens', which was first cancelled by the Library of Congress (Library of Congress, 2016), then overturned by the House of Representatives (Congress, 2017). The documentary 'Changing the Subject' (Dartmouth College, 2019) outlines the campaign that Dartmouth College staff and students led to advance and promote 'the rights and dignity of undocumented peoples'. This is one of many subject headings that remain in classification schemes that remain offensive to many groups and reflect historical biases. Even where these have been identified, progress is often slow or there is resistance to change. The early work around updating Library of Congress subject headings was by Sanford Berman in the 1970s and only two-thirds of his recommendations were made either partially or in full or (Knowlton, 2005).

Libraries are increasingly taking matters into their own hands. Frustrated by the lack of change, they are looking at what they can do locally to make their catalogue records more modern and representative. Libraries face the challenge of the international use of these standards affecting what they can do, as local, manual changes might not be sustainable longer-term, particularly if deviations from existing subject headings are overridden by Library Management Systems. Many libraries are choosing to work together for collaborative solutions at international level, through initiatives such as Cataloguing Lab (The Cataloging Lab n.d.) and OCLC Metadata Managers groups (LSE contributes to both).

At LSE, we are documenting specific areas of concerns so colleagues can identify patterns and areas that may require attention. We may consider 'cultural sensitivity' messages on our library catalogue regarding the use of terminology, or we may look at options to maintain metadata in our Library Management System but hide it from display on our discovery layer, though this needs to be weighed against discoverability issues this loss of data may cause.

7. Ringfencing collections for retention

Academic libraries often make collection management and retentions decisions according to quantitative measures, such as how often they are borrowed or when they were last borrowed. Since academic libraries define their mission as supporting teaching and research, it is perhaps natural that they would prioritise the material that is in regular use or being used for a specific purpose. In addition, academic libraries will be making difficult decisions based on space concerns, since many would have lost shelf space over the previous decades to accommodate more study space or other facilities.

The risk is that this turns retention purely into a numbers game or popularity contest, where the materials that academic libraries retain are those that are already held in many other libraries and are usually easy to obtain. Materials that are consulted less frequently may be of interest to a smaller number of potential researchers but is no less valuable and these will often be rare, possibly only held in that specific library. It is likely that material from a non-Anglocentric background will fall within this category. Therefore, academic libraries should consider a more nuanced approach to how retention decisions are made and not just rely on borrowing statistics alone. We do not necessarily need to develop a more complex set of criteria that makes decision-making difficult or just results in inertia, but during this process, we should ask ourselves what the impact would be of not retaining certain materials. Would we be depriving researchers of potentially vital material? Are we just encouraging homogeneity and reinforcing the national and regional biases in our collections? This may mean that

certain collections are just separated from the decision-making process and are retained come what may. Although theoretically we should suggest that every title should earn its place in the collection, a balance needs to be maintained in our collections to ensure they are as representative as possible.

8. Review and assess your collections

As we have seen, many academic libraries have already undertaken collection assessments and have found value in doing this, such as identifying collection strengths and determining whether their collection development approaches are succeeding. Whilst it is absolutely correct for libraries to discover which aspects of their collections are strong, it is equally important for libraries to also discover where the weaknesses and gaps in their collections are and address them accordingly. At LSE, we learned that our strengths were in 19th and 20th century British economic, political and social history, which is appropriate as our library also has a role as the British Library of Political and Economic Science. At the same time, we identified that our African, Asian and to a lesser extent, Latin American collections are comparatively weaker. Now that we know this, we can consider which approaches we can take to redress this, whilst still maintaining our collection strengths – with the intention of developing the most balanced and extensive social sciences collections possible.

Academic libraries need to consider what approach will work best, based on the resources available. Libraries should leverage the data that can be obtained from their Library Management System to develop knowledge about their collections. This may include assessing by classmark, language, place of publication or any other relevant bibliographic information, although it is likely that any assessment would include several criteria to obtain deeper insight. As Library Management Systems are likely to export this data as spreadsheet file types to be used in Excel or elsewhere, it is also important for librarians to be confident and skilled in managing, manipulating and visualising data. Based on what libraries discover, they can then consider their approach for how to take this forward. Although in some cases subjective decision-making may be necessary, this can be complemented with a data-driven approach.

9. Collaborate with other libraries

As much as academic libraries should develop relationships and bring expertise together within their own institutions, they should equally do so within their sector. Many UK libraries may be interested in decolonisation and are searching for inspiration for how to start. Many of us are undertaking or have undertaken projects and have shared our findings internally, but not externally. We have a responsibility to share our knowledge and experience with our peers and assist each other where we can. Fortunately, this has been an area that many libraries have been doing excellent work in, so there are many opportunities to share our findings. In the last few years in the UK, there have been a number of conferences that have allowed libraries to discuss their projects (De Montfort University, 2020; Goldsmiths, University of London, 2020)

A decolonisation Jiscmail list (2019) has allowed libraries to connect with each other and discuss issues. Some libraries have developed a Google Sheet ('Decolonisation Best Practice and Case Studies in HE Libraries', 2019) of decolonisation best practice and case studies, where libraries can outline the area of

practice they have worked on, and to summarise their projects and provide a link to where more information can be found. The intention was that libraries working on similar ideas could find inspiration and have a named contact to reach out to, if necessary. Libraries should look more widely than the UK and think about how they can collaborate with global peers where circumstances may differ from those in the UK.

Conclusion

Supporting wider institutional strategies of decolonisation and diversifying our library collections are rapidly emerging opportunities for collection development librarians and opportunities that should be seized with both hands. It requires librarians to reflect and take stock of their current approaches and consider whether they are truly supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in their work. Part of this is also reflecting on our own assumptions and beliefs about balance and fairness, and accepting that these shape the collection development decisions we make, which can lead to inadvertent bias affecting how we build collections. This can be a personal and difficult challenge for librarians, but a challenge we should tackle head-on.

In this chapter, we have also identified some practical solutions that collection development librarians should consider. By taking a data-driven approach and analysing our collections, we will learn more about whether our approaches have been successful and identify areas for improvement in collection development. By fostering strong and effective relationships with academic staff and other stakeholders, we can introduce a plurality of voices and experiences into the collection development process and also influence curricula design and reading lists to make this equally representative. Through working with publishers and vendors, we can lobby for greater access to more diverse resources, as well as understand how the systems we use to provide access to content influence how our users make use of that content. Underpinning all this activity should be a guiding principle that we commit to supporting equity, diversity and inclusion more broadly and this should become an integral part of all the collection development activity we undertake in future.

The tragic deaths of Breonna Taylor in Kentucky and George Floyd in Minnesota and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020 has encouraged many of us to reflect on systematic injustice and to consider the changes we can make to our personal and professional lives. This has led to a growing interest amongst librarians to review their services, policies and practices. Although the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has led many institutions to re-focus on core teaching and learning, this has not dissuaded those working in universities to continue to plan and implement larger strategic projects, such as reviewing and changing curricula. Librarians, too, continue to focus on initiatives such as collection reviews, forming partnerships across their institutions and reviewing suppliers and other acquisitions processes. Supporting decolonisation activities and delivering change remains an important priority for many librarians, even in difficult circumstances.

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