Acquisition Of Electronic Resources In Academic Libraries: Challenges And Opportunities

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Abstract: Today Libraries are facing a drastic change in their functioning and collections. A paradigm shift from print resources to electronic resources in the recent years has greatly impacted both libraries and the users. Library professionals are facing myriad of challenges in managing these electronic resources such as e-books, e-journals and other continuously changing electronic formats of the collection. Many of the academic libraries follow the steps of electronic resource management such as selection, acquisition, access, evaluation and renewal using in-house ILMS (Integrated Library Management Software). Most of the libraries does not possess any proper ERMS software for the management of the acquired e-resources. This research paper focuses on the acquisition management of e-resources in the libraries and various challenges faced by the library professionals during acquisition of e-resources. It also highlights the opportunities and various trends in the acquisition process.

Keywords: Electronic resources, ICT , acquisition management, ERMS, pricing,

Introduction:

Electronic resource management involves the efficient organization, access and utilization of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals and online databases. Many Universities implement dedicated electronic Resource Management Systems (ERMS) to manage the electronic resources and ensuring access to these resources. The workflow of ERM includes acquisition management, license management, access management, evaluation, monitoring usage statistics, its renewal and cancellation.

With the advancements in the Information and communication technology(ICT) and a shift of print resources to electronic resources has brought a great change in the holdings and working of the libraries. They are no more storehouse of print collection, the changing needs and demands of the users and varied formats of the resources has given rise to digital libraries.

Libraries are acquiring huge number of electronic resources. Despite of budget constraints, staffing reductions, new formats of e-resources and changing workflows acquisition management becomes crucial for any library.

Acquisition Management:

It refers to the process of adding digital resources to a library's collection. The workflow of acquisition varies depending on the library's budget, policies and procurement procedures. Acquiring electronic resources involves a systematic approach. It is first step of any electronic resource management lifecycle. Here are the key steps involved in acquisition:

1. **Need assessment and budget allocation**: This is to identify the academic and research needs of users to determine the type of e-resources required. Before acquiring any resources librarian must ask questions such as what library is going to purchase, is it a single item or bundled?

   The library allocates funds for the acquisition of e-resources based on the institutions budget and the cost of the e-resources o be purchased.

2. **Selection of E-resources**: After identifying the need of the electronic resources the selection process is carried out. For selecting an electronic resource there should be a collection development policy, that provide a framework for making decision whether to select the resource or not. The process of election includes three steps identification, evaluation and finally the decision to select the electronic resource **(Joshipura, 2008).**

   Identification of e-resources includes recommendation from the users, faculties, research scholars, trial offers, demonstration from vendors, discussion lists, publisher catalogue, etc. In trial access the library may obtain access to the e-resources for specific period (for a week or couple of months) to determine its suitability for purchase. On the basis of trial access the librarian and selection committee, some of the selected users evaluate the e-resources in terms of consistency, uniformity, functionality and the feedback from the users.

   Other major factors involved during the evaluation of e-resources are the content coverage of the e-resources (whether full text, bibliographic citations, indexing and abstracting , archival access is available or not), updation frequency , the e-resources should be authoritative depending on its impact factor and should give access to the users, provide technical support for the products as and when required. Cost factor is another criteria as increasing costs of e-resources and decreasing budgets of the library, here conscious decision should be taken whether the it meets the institutes vision.

3. **Vendor Identification and Pricing:** Identifying reputable vendors or publishers that provide relevant electronic resources is another important step. As the negotiation contracts and license agreements need to be carefully reviewed to know the usage rights, access limitations and renewal terms. The vendor offer, more saving and discounts with other access facilities to the users, the cost is finalized. The next step is pricing, negotiating prices for electronic resources during acquisition involves understanding various pricing models used by vendors. Some of the pricing models are are as follows:

a) **Subscription based pricing:** Users pay fees for access to the e-resources for a specific duration often annually. e.g. Science Direct, Elsevier.

b) **Perpetual access pricing:** Institutions make one-time payment to access e-resources that is even after subscription period is over the vendor provides the access to the e-resources.

c) **Usage -based pricing:** Institutions are charged based on the actual usage, such as number of downloads or views. e.g. Pay-per-view to a specific article.

d) **Consortium Pricing:** Multiple organizations/institutions collaborate to negotiate bulk pricing for electronic resources, reducing individual costs. E.g. E-Shodh Sindhu consortium for university libraries.

e) **Tiered Pricing:** Pricings are structured in tiers based on factors like institution size or user enrolment.

During negotiations, factors such as specific needs of the institution, potential consortium agreements, long term value of the electronic resources should be prioritized. Communication with the vendors, gathering knowledge about market prices of the e-resources, competitive bids may provide leverage in achieving favourable pricing terms.

4) License Agreement: one of the most critical issues of acquisition of e-resources is dealing with license agreements. The agreement defines key terms used throughout the document such as "licensee" (the library) and the "licensor" (the vendor/publisher) and the "Licensed content" (the specific electronic resources being licensed).

The license agreement signed between library and vendor outlines specific rights being granted to the library, including right to access, use, and provide licensed content to the authorized users (using IP authentication or proxy server). It also mentions the usage restrictions, copyright and intellectual property rights related to the license content, payment terms license fees, any additional costs such as annual maintenance fees, technical support and maintenance, updates troubleshooting as and when required. Other parts of the license involves usage statistics and reporting where usage report is provided by the vendor to the library, confidentiality and data security related to user data, any dispute resolution and renewal guidelines are mentioned.

 The libraries should go through the license agreements carefully and review and negotiate these terms as per their needs and requirements.

5) Facilitating access and discovery: It involves implementing strategies to ensure that users can easily find access, and get the relevant information. It includes

User authentication and access management, to ensure that only authorized users are able to access the content, the publisher will need to verify or authenticate users for on and off campus. Standard authentication methods are username and password, IP address, and proxy server **(Conger, 2004).** Traditionally, the library catalogue has been the primary gateway to library resources. More recently, libraries have been purchasing resource discovery services or software that enable patrons to search and retrieve content in all formats across

multiple interfaces, such as library catalogues, article databases and institutional repositories (**Pan, Denis 2012**). To improve discoverability, accurate metadata helps users understand the content and relevance of the resources. The electronic resources should be accessible from various devices and remote locations

6) Ordering and Payment for the E-resources:

After the process of selection and finalization of negotiation terms and license agreement the purchase order is placed and payment procedure is carried out. The libraries provide IP address and ask for user ID and password to the content provider. Content provider provides stable URL through which the resources can be accessed, then the library notify the other section of the library regarding addition of new resource. After library confirms the access of the resources the vendor sends an invoice for payment. And the payment is made as per the institutions procurement rules to the vendor.

Challenges in Acquisition of E-resources:

1. Budget constraints: Limited budgets restricts the libraries to acquire electronic resources due to which it reduces the access to essential scholarly materials.
2. Changing Licensing Models: Complex and continuously evolving licensing models for electronic resource is a great challenge for negotiation process and cost-effectiveness. Thus, increases the difficulty in managing budgets.
3. Ensuring accessibility: Ensuring that electronic resources are accessible to users with diverse needs poses challenges.
4. User training and support: Providing adequate training and support for users to navigate and utilize electronic resources effectively. As sometimes user may not be aware of the resources subscribed so such resources may remain underutilized.
5. Changing content format: As the formats of the e-resources are continuously changing that require different acquisition and access strategies.

Opportunities in Acquisition of E-resources:

1. Open access initiatives: Libraries can embrace open access initiatives and promote the use of Open educational resources to enhance accessibility and affordability. It will increase the availability of scholarly content for users and will reduce the cost of subscription.
2. Collaborative Acquisition Models: Libraries can participate in consortia and collaborative agreements to negotiate better terms, bargaining and access to broader range of e-resources. Increased access to resources at potentially lower costs.
3. Data driven decision making: Leveraging data analytics for decision making in resource acquisition can enhance the libraries collection based on user needs and preferences.
4. Technological advancements: Adapting to advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyse usage patterns, can help to predict user needs and enhance the overall user experience. Thus will lead to efficient resource management and improved user satisfaction.

5. Customization and flexibility: Seeking platforms that offer customization options ad flexibility in licensing agreements can align electronic resources more closely with the unique needs of the institutional goals.

Acquisition Method of e-resources in Academic Libraries

The digital revolution brought by ICTs has significantly changed the ways in which libraries acquire information resources, they are now be transmitted from producer to publisher and to end user electronically. Benny, (2015) in his study said that, E-resources can be acquired either through purchase, subscription or consortia, he further stated that, subscription to e-resource is the commonly used method by a large number of libraries for acquiring e-resources. Similarly, the most effective way to provide access to electronic books/journals in university libraries according to Okogwu and Achebe (2018) is through subscription to online databases which can be accessed remotely through the internet. In an attempt to acquire e-resources, some libraries are able to purchase most of their electronic resources through consortia because of the discounts that are available. There are four methods of acquiring electronic resources in academic libraries according to Creibaum and Holloway (2017) these are: Subscription, Purchase, Consortium and Open Access.

Electronic resources should always be available at any time in either online or offline in order to meet the needs of the users. These resources are increasingly being accepted for use in academic environment especially the universities globally.

Conclusion: The academic libraries are coping with the challenge of managing the electronic resources. Acquisition of e-resources is the one of the biggest challenge for the library professional as the libraries doesn't have any electronic resource management software. They still using Integrated library management software for the management of e-resources. The libraries are in dwindling position for acquiring e-resources, there are no such standards for acquisition, it also depends on the budgets of the institution and user needs. The library professionals are not that proficient to negotiate and handle license agreements, they lacks in training and finds it difficult to handle the varied formats of the e-resources. It is the need of the day that library professionals should acquire new techniques and adapt to the changes.

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