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COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A LITERATURE-BASED ANALYSIS (2017–2025)

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ABSTRACT
Collection development policies (CDPs) guide how academic libraries select, acquire, and preserve resources (Johnson, 2018), yet little is known about how well Nigerian CDPs accommodate lifelong learning the continuous, non-curriculum-bound learning that adult learners, distance learners, and community users increasingly expect from higher education institutions (UNESCO, 2021; Tight, 2021). This study asks how closely documented CDPs in Nigerian academic libraries align with lifelong learning priorities. An integrative literature review (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) of nine peer-reviewed empirical studies (2015–2025) on collection development in Nigerian academic libraries was conducted, drawing on Google Scholar, African Journals Online, ResearchGate, and the Library Philosophy and Practice repository, data were synthesized using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). CDP development across the reviewed institutions is uneven and rarely reviewed; funding constraints dominate policy discourse; explicit lifelong-learning provisions are almost entirely absent; digital and open-access integration remains weak; and policy-practice gaps persist. Nigerian CDPs remain largely curriculum-centered rather than learner-centered. The study proposes a four-dimensional model (Scope and Diversity, Access and Equity, Adaptability and Currency, Institutional Alignment) to guide CDP revision toward inclusive, lifelong-learning-oriented practice. This is among the first studies to synthesize Nigerian CDP literature specifically through a lifelong-learning lens, offering both a diagnostic account and a reform framework for practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: collection development policies, lifelong learning, academic libraries, Nigerian universities, information access, open educational resources

Introduction

Academic libraries play a significant role in supporting teaching, learning, research, and knowledge dissemination within higher education institutions. Their effectiveness largely depends on the quality and relevance of the resources they provide. To ensure consistency and accountability in resource management, libraries rely on collection development policies (CDPs), which define the principles guiding the selection, acquisition, evaluation, and maintenance of information resources (Johnson, 2018).

In recent years, lifelong learning has become an increasingly central priority in higher education systems globally. UNESCO's (2021) social-contract report calls for education systems that extend opportunity to learners of all ages and circumstances, while Tight (2021) traces how postschool education has shifted from a bounded, credential-driven phase of life toward a continuous process spanning careers and communities. Lifelong learning, in this sense, refers to the continuous acquisition of knowledge and skills throughout an individual's life for personal, professional, and social development, extending beyond formal classroom instruction.

Academic libraries are strategically positioned to support lifelong learning because they provide access to information resources, digital materials, and learning spaces that enable independent and self-directed learning (UNESCO, 2021). Whether Nigerian academic libraries are equipped to do so, however, depends heavily on the collection development policies that shape what they hold and whom they serve.

Despite this, existing empirical research on Nigerian academic library collection development has concentrated overwhelmingly on internal, operational concerns rather than on the populations a CDP is meant to serve. Yakubu et al. (2022) examined librarians' awareness of CDP importance in Northwestern Nigerian universities but did not extend the analysis to non-traditional user categories. Umoh et al. (2021) and Obiano (2021) similarly framed CDP challenges around budgetary and resource-management constraints, without reference to distance learners, adult learners, or community users. Yakubu (2023) and Adeyemi et al. (2025) likewise treat collection development primarily as a funding and infrastructure problem. This concentration of attention on library administration, rather than on whom the collection ultimately serves, leaves the relationship between CDP design and lifelong learning largely unexamined in the Nigerian context, a gap made harder to close by the fact that most Nigerian academic libraries do not make their CDP documents publicly accessible for independent scrutiny (Jimoh, 2015; Okogwu & Ekere, 2018).

Closing this gap matters for two reasons. First, if Nigerian CDPs are written and implemented without lifelong learning in view, then the libraries applying them will systematically underserve adult, distance, and community learners regardless of how well those policies perform on their own stated terms. Second, a synthesis of what the existing literature does and does not say about lifelong learning provides a diagnostic baseline against which future policy revision and future primary research using actual CDP documents can be measured. This study contributes that synthesis.

This study therefore examines collection development policies in Nigerian academic libraries through a literature-based policy analysis, asking specifically: (1) how are CDPs developed and implemented across Nigerian academic libraries; (2) to what extent do these policies address lifelong learning as a user category and institutional objective; (3) what structural and resource challenges most affect CDP implementation; and (4) what changes to CDP design and governance would improve alignment with lifelong learning goals. The findings are reported

separately for three audiences, practicing librarians, institutional administrators, and national policymakers, reflecting the different levers each group controls over CDP reform.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the nature and implementation of collection development policies in Nigerian academic libraries.
2. Investigate the extent to which these policies support lifelong learning.
3. Identify the major challenges affecting the implementation of collection development policies.
4. Provide recommendations for improving CDPs to better support inclusive and continuous learning.

Theoretical Framework

Lifelong Learning Theory

This study is anchored on lifelong learning theory as developed by Knapper and Cropley (2000) and Jarvis (2007). Knapper and Cropley (2000) argue that higher education institutions must be restructured around the premise that learning does not end at graduation, proposing that curricula, teaching methods, and organizational structures should actively prepare students and remain open to non-students for continuous, self-directed learning across the lifespan. Jarvis (2007) extends this view sociologically, arguing that globalization has made lifelong learning a structural feature of contemporary societies rather than an optional add-on to formal schooling, and that institutions failing to accommodate this shift risk becoming irrelevant to large segments of the population they could otherwise serve.

Applied to academic libraries, this theoretical pairing suggests that collection development policies should not focus only on current students and academic staff. Instead, following Knapper and Cropley's institutional-restructuring argument and Jarvis's account of learning as a lifelong, globalized process, CDPs should be designed to support wider categories of users, including part-time learners, distance learners, returning adults, and members of the community seeking access to information.

Information Access and Knowledge Society Framework

The study also draws on the knowledge-society framework set out by UNESCO (2005) and on Webster's (2014) sociological analysis of information-society theory. UNESCO (2005) distinguishes a knowledge society, built on pluralism, equitable access, and quality education, from a narrower information society defined mainly by technological infrastructure, and argues that access to information is a precondition for social and educational development rather than a byproduct of it. Webster (2014) complements this by examining how competing theoretical traditions, from Bell's post-industrial society to Castells's network society, have each treated information access as a marker of social stratification, a framing that clarifies why unequal library access has development consequences rather than being a purely administrative concern.

Within this framework, collection development policies are understood as governance tools that determine what information is available, who can access it, and how knowledge resources are distributed. Read alongside UNESCO's (2005) knowledge-society criteria, the framework highlights the importance of inclusiveness, digital access, and equitable resource distribution in modern academic libraries.

An Integrated Conceptual Model for CDP–Lifelong Learning Alignment

Combining these two theoretical strands, this study proposes a four-dimensional conceptual model for evaluating and revising CDPs against lifelong learning goals. The four

dimensions are defined as follows, and are used throughout the Discussion and Implications sections to organize the study's findings:

Scope and Diversity: the extent to which a CDP formally names lifelong learners (adult learners, distance learners, alumni, and community users) as a recognized user category, derived directly from Knapper and Cropley's (2000) argument that institutions must be restructured around continuous, non-traditional learners.

Access and Equity: the degree to which a CDP guarantees equitable, affordable access to information resources regardless of a user's formal enrollment status, drawn from UNESCO's (2005) knowledge-society criterion of equitable access.

Adaptability and Currency: the presence of formal review cycles and mechanisms for updating the CDP as user needs and information technologies change, reflecting Jarvis's (2007) account of lifelong learning as a continuously evolving process rather than a fixed policy target.

Institutional Alignment: the coherence between a CDP and the parent institution's broader strategic commitments to lifelong learning, community engagement, and open access, reflecting Webster's (2014) view that information governance is embedded in wider institutional and social structures rather than isolated within the library.

This model is not itself an empirical finding; it is the analytical lens the study applies to the literature synthesized in the Results and Discussion sections, and it is returned to directly in the Implications section below.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design using an integrative literature review (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). An integrative review was selected over Bowen's (2009) document-analysis method because the primary data available for this study were published empirical studies about Nigerian CDPs rather than the CDP documents themselves, most of which are not made publicly available by the institutions concerned (Jimoh, 2015; Okogwu & Ekere, 2018); Bowen's (2009) method remains relevant, however, to how several of the underlying primary studies analyzed the policy documents they were able to obtain, and is cited on that basis.

Search strategy: Records were sought through Google Scholar, ResearchGate, African Journals Online, and the Library Philosophy and Practice repository, using combinations of the terms "collection development policy," "academic libraries," "Nigeria," and "lifelong learning," restricted to 2015–2025 to capture both the empirical base and its most recent developments. Studies were included if they (a) focused on Nigerian academic libraries, (b) empirically examined collection development policies or practices, (c) reported findings in enough detail for thematic extraction, and (d) were peer-reviewed journal articles, peer-reviewed conference outputs, or examined postgraduate theses. Studies were excluded if they addressed collection development in non-academic library settings, or discussed CDPs only in passing without original data.

Nine empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025 met these criteria and were purposively selected for synthesis. The selected studies covered institutions across six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, including Northwestern Nigeria, South-South Nigeria, Imo State, Akwa Ibom State, Kwara State, Kaduna State, Rivers State, and Southeast Nigeria.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarization with each study's findings, generation of initial codes, searching for candidate themes, reviewing themes against the coded data, defining and naming themes, and producing the thematic synthesis reported below. Key findings from the selected studies were grouped into five themes relating to policy development, funding, digital resource

integration, lifelong learning provisions, and policy implementation, each of which is mapped explicitly to one of the study's four research objectives in the Results section.

Findings are reported in the Implications section under three audiences, practicing librarians, institutional administrators, and national policymakers because each group controls a different lever of CDP reform (day-to-day selection practice, institutional budgeting and governance, and national accreditation or funding policy, respectively); this reporting structure is introduced here so that its appearance later in the paper is not unannounced. Limitations of this literature-based approach are addressed in the Discussion.

Results and Findings

Analysis of the nine selected studies produced five themes, numbered below and mapped to the study's four objectives. Findings are reported descriptively in this section; their interpretation is reserved for the Discussion that follows.

Table 1: *Summary of Empirical Studies on Collection Development Policies in Nigerian Academic Libraries*

Study	Area/Institutions Covered	Design/ Method	Major Findings	Lifelong Learning Provision
Yakubu, Mohd Khalid, & Samsuddin (2022)	Northwestern Nigerian universities	Survey	High awareness of CDP importance; awareness did not reliably translate into comprehensive formal policy	Not explicitly addressed
Umoh, Effiom, & Igaja (2021)	UNICAL, CRUTECH, UNIUYO	Survey	Funding shortfalls and inflation constrain policy implementation	Absent from documented policies
Usoro (2023)	University of Uyo and AKSU	Survey	Budget allocation shapes resource selection; user surveys limited	Not explicitly addressed
Obiano (2021)	Universities in Imo State	Survey	CDPs guide selection and weeding in principle; digital integration weak	Implicit only
Yakubu (2023)	African university libraries (literature review)	Literature review	Declining budgets and high journal costs constrain collection development	Largely absent
Adeyemi et al. (2025)	Kwara State universities	Survey	ICT and environmental-sustainability concerns shape digital collection development	Not addressed
Jimoh (2015)	Kaduna State universities	Survey	Written policies exist in 3 of 7 libraries studied; not regularly reviewed	Not explicitly addressed
Emasealu (2021)	University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University	Survey	CDP awareness uneven; utilization of resources constrained by funding	Not explicitly addressed
Okogwu & Ekere (2018)	University libraries in Southeast Nigeria	Survey	Electronic-resource CDPs exist but selection tools and evaluation criteria are inconsistently applied	Not addressed

Note. CDP = collection development policy. Design/Method reflects the data-collection approach reported in the original study, not the method used in the present integrative review.

The table shows that although collection development policies exist in some Nigerian academic libraries, major challenges such as inadequate funding, weak digital infrastructure, and poor

implementation continue to affect their effectiveness. It also shows that lifelong learning is rarely named as an explicit policy objective across the nine studies reviewed.

Theme 1 (Objective 1): Limited Development and Uneven Implementation of CDPs

Across the nine studies, a consistent finding emerges: while formal written CDPs exist in some Nigerian academic libraries, their development is uneven, their content is often incomplete, and their implementation is frequently inconsistent. Yakubu et al. (2022), studying Northwestern Nigerian universities, found that academic librarians demonstrated high awareness of CDP importance in principle, but that this awareness did not reliably translate into comprehensive formal policies at the institutional level. Jimoh (2015) similarly found that only three of seven academic libraries surveyed in Kaduna State possessed a written information resource development policy, and that the policies which did exist covered most of the standard content sub-headings identified in the literature but were reviewed only irregularly. Okogwu and Ekere (2018) reported a comparable pattern for electronic-resource CDPs in Southeast Nigerian university libraries, where selection tools and evaluation criteria varied considerably across institutions even where written policies existed.

Obiano (2021) reports that CDPs in Imo State university libraries guide selection, weeding, and preservation activities in principle, and Emasealu (2021) reports comparable unevenness in CDP-guided resource utilization across three Rivers State university libraries.

Theme 2 (Objective 3): Funding and Budgetary Challenges

Inadequate funding emerged as one of the most serious challenges affecting collection development in Nigerian academic libraries (Umoh et al., 2021; Yakubu, 2023; Emasealu, 2021). The reviewed studies consistently reported insufficient acquisition budgets, inflation, rising subscription costs, and foreign exchange challenges. These financial limitations affect the acquisition of both print and digital resources, and the studies show that limited financial resources also constrain ICT infrastructure development, internet access, database subscriptions, and digital library services (Adeyemi et al., 2025).

Theme 3 (Objective 2): Absence of Explicit Lifelong Learning Provisions

A central finding of this study is the absence of explicit lifelong learning provisions in most documented collection development policies. Across all nine studies, library policies are described as focusing mainly on the information needs of undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and academic staff, with little attention given to non-traditional learners, adult learners, alumni, distance learners, or community users. As a result, many library collections remain curriculum-centered rather than learner-centered.

Theme 4 (Objective 2): Weak Digital and Open Educational Resource Integration

The transition from print to digital collections remains a major challenge for many Nigerian academic libraries. The reviewed studies reveal weak integration of digital resources and limited adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) (Adeyemi et al., 2025; Yakubu et al., 2022; Okogwu & Ekere, 2018). Challenges such as unstable electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and insufficient technical expertise continue to affect digital collection development, and the studies indicate that few libraries have formal frameworks for integrating OERs into their CDPs.

Theme 5 (Objective 3): Policy-Practice Gaps and Weak Review Mechanisms

A final theme cutting across the reviewed literature is the gap between documented policy provisions and actual collection development practice, compounded by the absence of formal mechanisms for policy review. Jimoh (2015) recommends that CDPs be reviewed at minimum every five years to accommodate changes in the information environment — a recommendation

implying that the Kaduna State policies studied lacked such review provisions. Yakubu et al. (2022) find that academic librarians' working experience does not significantly influence their awareness of CDP importance ($p = .100$) or knowledge ($p = .307$), suggesting that institutional learning and mentorship processes are not effectively transmitting CDP knowledge across professional generations.

Obiano (2021) notes that CDPs serve as in-service training tools for new library staff and as instruments of self-evaluation, functions that presuppose the existence of actively used policy documents rather than static administrative formalities.

Discussion

The findings suggest that collection development policies in many Nigerian academic libraries are still designed largely around traditional academic structures rather than broader lifelong learning objectives, a pattern consistent with Knapper and Cropley's (2000) warning that higher education institutions tend to retain student-centered structures even as they publicly endorse lifelong learning goals. Read against the Scope and Diversity dimension of the conceptual model introduced above, the near-total absence of named lifelong-learner categories across the nine studies reviewed indicates that this dimension is, at present, essentially unmet in the Nigerian context.

The persistence of funding constraints, and the corresponding weakness of OER integration, is worth comparing with the wider Nigerian OER literature. Nwaohiri (2021) and Ogunbodede and Cocodia (2023) both report that OER adoption in Nigerian universities remains concentrated at the policy-announcement level, driven by top-down initiatives from the National Universities Commission, while awareness and use among frontline librarians and faculty lag considerably behind. This is broadly consistent with the pattern found in the present synthesis: CDPs that do not incorporate explicit frameworks for leveraging free and open-access materials are poorly equipped to sustain collection development under the fiscal pressures characteristic of Nigerian higher education. Read against the Access and Equity dimension, this suggests that funding constraints are not simply a resourcing problem but a policy-design gap: CDPs rarely specify OER integration as a designed-in equity mechanism rather than an informal workaround.

The absence of formal review cycles, discussed under Theme 5, maps onto the Adaptability and Currency dimension of the conceptual model. Jarvis's (2007) claim that lifelong learning is a continuously evolving societal process implies that a CDP fixed at a single point in time cannot remain aligned with lifelong learning goals regardless of how well it was designed initially; the finding that Kaduna State policies were reviewed only once in nearly four decades (Jimoh, 2015) is a concrete illustration of that theoretical claim, not merely an administrative oversight.

Finally, the finding that CDPs are developed largely in isolation from institutional lifelong-learning commitments, where these exist reflects the Institutional Alignment dimension, and is consistent with Webster's (2014) broader argument that information governance arrangements tend to reproduce the structures of the institutions that create them rather than actively reshaping those structures toward stated policy goals. Where Nigerian universities articulate lifelong learning or widening participation as strategic priorities, the synthesis suggests these commitments are not yet consistently reflected in the CDP documents that would operationalize them.

Limitations

This study's conclusions rest on a synthesis of nine published empirical studies rather than on direct examination of primary CDP documents, most of which Nigerian institutions do not

make publicly available; the study's findings should therefore be read as an account of what has been reported about CDPs, not a comprehensive audit of CDP content nationally. The reviewed studies are also unevenly distributed geographically, with no empirical studies identified from several Nigerian geopolitical zones, and the underlying studies varied in sample size and methodological rigor, which limits the strength of comparisons across institutions. Finally, because this is a literature-based analysis, it cannot establish whether the absence of stated lifelong-learning provisions reflects a genuine policy gap or simply under-reporting in the studies available; only primary examination of CDP documents can resolve that distinction.

Implications of the Study

The four-dimensional conceptual model set out above Scope and Diversity, Access and Equity, Adaptability and Currency, and Institutional Alignment offers a structured approach to CDP review and revision that can be applied across diverse institutional contexts. The implications below are organized around the three audiences named in the Methodology section, each of which controls a different lever of reform.

For Practicing Librarians

For practicing librarians, this study provides both a diagnostic framework and a reform agenda. Librarians undertaking CDP revisions should explicitly name lifelong learners as a recognized user category (addressing Scope and Diversity), develop specific provisions for OER and open-access resource integration (addressing Access and Equity), establish formal review cycles of no more than five years as recommended by Jimoh (2015) (addressing Adaptability and Currency), and articulate measurable criteria for evaluating whether collection decisions support diverse and non-traditional learners. The formation of inter-institutional working groups on CDP development, supported by professional associations such as the Nigerian Library Association, could facilitate the sharing of policy expertise and the development of context-sensitive model CDP templates.

For Institutional Administrators

For university administrators and governing bodies, this study highlights the importance of coherence between institutional strategic commitments to lifelong learning and the CDP instruments governing library operations (addressing Institutional Alignment). Where universities articulate lifelong learning, community engagement, or widening participation as strategic priorities, these commitments should be reflected in CDP mandates, library budget allocations, and collection development accountability structures. Administrators should consider establishing joint library-academic governance committees with specific responsibility for ensuring that CDP development reflects institutional educational priorities, including commitments emerging from adult education and continuing professional development programs.

For National Policymakers

At the national level, the findings point to the need for a national framework for academic library collection development that establishes minimum standards for CDP comprehensiveness, review frequency, digital resource integration, and alignment with lifelong learning objectives. The National Universities Commission could incorporate CDP quality standards into its accreditation frameworks, creating institutional incentives for policy development and review. The Federal Ministry of Education could develop OER policy guidelines for academic libraries, building on the OER initiatives already documented by Nwaohiri (2021) and Ogunbodede and Cocodia (2023), to establish a national digital resource-sharing infrastructure that reduces individual libraries' dependence on scarce foreign currency for database subscriptions.

Conclusion

This study has shown, through an integrative synthesis of nine peer-reviewed empirical studies, that collection development policies in Nigerian academic libraries are characterized by limited formal development, pervasive budgetary constraints, the near-total absence of explicit lifelong learning provisions, and weak digital and OER integration. These characteristics together constitute a policy gap with direct implications for the capacity of Nigerian academic libraries to serve as genuine lifelong learning institutions.

Diagnostically, the synthesis suggests that the gap between CDPs and lifelong learning in Nigerian academic libraries is not incidental: it is embedded in narrow user-base definitions, curriculum-centered acquisition practices, and infrequent policy review. Prescriptively, the study identifies specific reform priorities: OER integration, user-base redefinition, formal review cycles, and stronger national policy frameworks, priorities that could improve lifelong learning support without necessarily requiring substantial additional financial resources.

The study's theoretical contribution lies in applying lifelong learning theory (Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Jarvis, 2007) and the knowledge-society framework (UNESCO, 2005; Webster, 2014) as integrated lenses for CDP analysis in the Nigerian context, and in developing a four-dimensional conceptual model that serves as both an analytical tool for researchers and a practical guide for policy reformers.

Collection development policies are not merely administrative documents. They are governance instruments that determine whose learning the library is designed to support, whose knowledge needs are considered, and whose information access is prioritized. Reconceptualizing Nigerian academic library CDPs as instruments of lifelong learning governance is both an educational-equity imperative and a strategic opportunity for academic libraries seeking to make knowledge genuinely accessible to all who seek it, throughout their lives.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Beyond the methodological limitations already discussed, future studies should move beyond literature-based analysis to examine actual CDP documents from Nigerian academic libraries directly, to determine how institutional policies differ across federal, state, and private universities. Empirical research involving librarians, distance learners, and community users would help establish whether existing collections support diverse learning needs beyond formal academic programmes. Comparative work on OER and digital-repository adoption, building on Nwaohiri (2021) and Ogunbodede and Cocodia (2023), could clarify which institutional conditions allow OER commitments to translate into frontline use. Finally, longitudinal research tracking whether CDP revisions incorporating lifelong learning principles produce measurable changes in collection practice, alongside comparative studies of CDPs in other African countries, would strengthen the evidence base for the policy reforms proposed here.

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