

Challenges Faced by University Librarians in Creating Awareness of Library Services among Students: A Case of Moi University Margaret Thatcher Library

Sang Lucy Jelagat
P.O. BOX 673 - 30100, Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract

Library users today are faced with many challenges in finding necessary information for their various needs and assignments. This is because today new technology makes information to be available in different formats, mainly in electronic formats and most of the library users are not conversant with the retrieval of information using these electronic formats. For this electronic information to be accessed and used properly, library users are required to be information literate. However, nowhere is change more evident than in the librarian profession. There are major challenges that every librarian will face and these challenges are overcome will determine whether one becomes a 21st Century librarian, and ultimately whether they, the library and their profession survive. This paper, sought to establish the challenges faced by Moi university library staff in creating awareness of library services and their solutions. The study was conducted through case study design. From a target population of 32 library staff and 10,470 students, a sample of 457 respondents was selected which comprised of 425 students and 32 library staff using probability and non-probability sampling. A mixed method approach was used with questionnaires and interviews being preferred for data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed by use of descriptive statistics and presented in form of tables while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Indiscipline among library users, low number of library staff and lack of cooperation among the students and the staff are among others some of the challenges that were identified. The paper recommends the need to increase the number of library staff so that they can efficiently meet the needs of library users.

Keywords: Library users, information technology, librarianship challenges.

1. Introduction

Librarianship in the new economic era is not just a collection of documents but in the words of Maurice (1996) it is 'managing information resources for the people' and also practically implementing Ranganathan's Five Laws (1999) of librarianship. Libraries are urgently attempting to reinvent themselves and fully embrace the challenge of meeting the needs of their users in a climate of rapid change where information seekers have many different types of information and communication technology.

1.1 Challenges Faced by University Library in Creating Awareness of Library Services

New tools of information technology have absolutely changed the role & responsibilities of librarians. A number of studies have been conducted to explore the problems faced by librarians. Various studies have been conducted at International level in general and particularly in developing countries to investigate the problems confronted by the librarians.

Ademodi and Adepoju (2009) investigated the computer skill among librarians in academic libraries on Ondo and Ekiti State in Nigeria. It was found the shortage of computers and computer skills among professionals. The study recommended that more attention and funds should be provided for training and procurement of ICT infrastructure in Nigerian University libraries. For computerization purpose, library administration should solicit funds and assistance from foreign agencies and foundations who are interested for the cause.

Trushina (2004) discussed the issues related to the internet as well as the correlation of professional codes and their implementation in library practice. He stated that libraries depend on ethical principles more than any other institution because library services are essentially human-oriented. He stressed that librarians must follow the intellectual freedom principle and they have a moral responsibility to the patrons.

In India Jestin & Parameswari (2002) explored the challenges for library professionals in the new millennium. It found that library professionals in India were subjected to various challenges. The introduction of computers and new technology was a challenge to all librarians. It was concluded that librarians should be ready to participate in the process of generating and distributing information and knowledge for quality of life and education for all. Librarians must unite to withstand the revolutions that will occur in the information and communication fields. Similarly, Dasgupta (2009) searched out that in India there is non-existence of norms and standards for the education of librarians. Problems for Indian librarians discovered in his study were emergence of new LIS schools, insufficient faculty strength, lack of accreditation bodies, lack of proper library facilities, inadequate physical facilities, little attention for selection criteria, and lack of apprenticeship programs. Study suggested that the Government of India should play a leading role in promoting LIS education in India, by

creating more job opportunities for LIS professionals and removing disparity in pay scales among LIS professionals.

Ali & Bakshi (n.d) explored that LIS profession is facing many challenges such as lack of finance, inadequate infrastructure, lack of knowledge and training, lack of high quality teaching staff, lack of permanent faculty for distant programs, lack of admission policy and evaluation, absence of accreditation body and supporting policy at national level, lack of global perspective and lack of library visits. It was suggested that admission test should be conducted before admission in LIS and practical hours should be increased. Attendance should be made compulsory and syllabus should be up-dated. Availability of high caliber staff should be ensured. Mobile based learning programmes should be adopted for distance learning. For the purpose of imparting practical training, there should be complete infrastructure. It was concluded that to support learning and teaching ICT should be used because e-learning would be the future of education.

Institutional libraries in Kenya, which are the largest group of libraries in the country, have also been facing the problem of poor services, outdated collection of reading materials, financial constraints and inadequate professional staff.

One of the biggest challenges faced in awareness of library services is to inform library users to see librarians as professionals because they perceive that librarians are there to arrange books hence have negative perception of them. Librarians also need to work as professionals so that users may see them as trained and skilled; users may consider them more competent and more knowledgeable than library staff and decide not to ask for help. Therefore, the librarians need to show that they have got both qualifications and a variety of skills (Ajileye-laogun, 2004).

Language is another problem that may bring a challenge when providing library services to users hinder (Patton, 2002). Some users have to depend on friends rather than librarians for information or instruction. All professional librarians have got to communicate with users about their services because exchanging information from one person to another may distort information posing even a greater challenge (Rowley, 1998).

Curry and Copeman (2005) argued that for librarians to provide good quality service there must be a good relationship between the library user and the librarian within the library. The librarian should be willing to assist the user by being able to identify users' needs and preferences. To satisfy library users it is necessary to establish dialogue with them and find out their expectations.

Library staff needs to ensure that the library is a welcoming environment; they should be patient when serving users, and build confidence. When librarians are friendly, courteous, welcoming and helpful, users are encouraged to use the library services, whereas, in a library where the librarians are unfriendly, impatient and lazy, users shy away. Information librarians need to learn ways of communication with the users. Different people with different cultures use some words which mean different things (DuPraw, 2002). Language and culture diversity thus poses a major challenge in the process of creating awareness among the library users.

Librarians like all the professionals in the academic sector, are faced with changes in organizational mission within the university, and the changing role of information within society. Inter alia, they have to be accountable inside and outside the university and are in competition for resource allocation and funding.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Moi University, Eldoret Kenya. The study was concerned with identifying the challenges faced by Library staff in creating awareness in information literacy among university students who in this case are the library users. The study targeted library staff and students (postgraduate and undergraduate) drawn from Moi University Margaret Thatcher Library. The target population for the study was 10, 502 comprising 32 library staff and 10,470 students from six faculties who sought library services from the university library (Moi university admission register, 2014). This population was included in the study because it was directly involved in the information literacy provisions of library services. A sample size of 425 students as suggested by Yount (2006) that is less than 10% sample of a total population of over 10,000 was obtained. Stratified sampling technique was used to classify the population into 6 strata's (faculties) school of information sciences, school of education, school of business and economics, school of arts and social sciences, school of engineering and school of human resource; out of which simple random sampling method was used to select 34 students from 850 students in school of information sciences.

This technique was the most appropriate for this study as it selected a random representative sample from the accessible population without bias. It was preferred for this study because it ensured that each member of the accessible population had an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample (Kothari, 2007). On the other hand, Purposive sampling was used in selection of library staffs, one (1) university librarian, two (2) deputy librarians and fourteen (14) senior library assistants and fifteen (15) library assistants. Purposive sampling was preferred by the researcher as it provided reliable and in-depth information on a research topic under study. Hence, the total sample size was 457.

Data collection was done using a questionnaire and interview schedule. A questionnaire was preferred

in collecting data from the students because it permitted collection of data from a large population (Ogula, 2010). Interview was used in collecting data from the library staff to get an in-depth analysis (Mugenda and Mugenda 2003). The selection of these tools had been guided by the nature of data to be collected and time available as well as the objectives of the study. The students especially those in years one, two, three, four, five (school of engineering) and postgraduate provided information on the methods and channels used by Moi University in creating awareness of library services.

A closed ended questionnaire was used for quantitative data collection from four hundred and twenty five students. Interview was used in collecting qualitative in-depth data from the thirty two library staff. This information included the different information literacy methods and channels that library staff used to ensure that their users were aware of their services. For validity of the data, methodological triangulation was done (use of interview schedule and a questionnaire). Reliability on the other hand was ensured through a pilot study in another library; in Kisii University similar to the study area but not involved in the study. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of statistical package for social sciences (S.P.S.S) computer software program and tabulated by use of descriptive statistics means, frequencies and percentages and presented in form of tables, while qualitative data was thematically presented.

3. Results and Discussion

As depicted in the literature review; it is visible that the institutional library facilities in key research and education sectors are not very impressive. No widespread usage of digitization is visible either in those libraries. This de facto indicates a lack of knowledge at policy level. At present time, without the introduction of digital libraries it is not possible for the country to meet the challenge of Millennium Developmental Goals at the education sector. Although most libraries have staff that are trained in generalized skills, such as the use of electronic resources in the library, that can be made responsive to the needs of the users' community, the majority of libraries do not have a staff person who have received training in serving the needs of the users who request for library information. In addition, financial challenges have deterred public libraries where government pays little or no attention to the running of such libraries. Thus, they lack adequate information resources and services that would properly address library issues.

The challenges faced by Moi university library staff are presented in table 1. on the issue of lack funds, the results were such that 37.4% (136) of the respondents strongly agreed that they lacked finances, 50.8% (185) agreed while 10.2% (37) were undecided. These gave a mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.728.

Further, 59.3% (216) of the respondents strongly agreed that there is indiscipline among library users, 24.7% (90) of them agreed while 14.6% (53) strongly disagreed. A mean of 4.13 was obtained and a standard deviation of 1.392. Additionally 42.6% (155) of the respondents strongly agreed that there is low number of library staff, 35.4% (129) of them strongly agreed while 17% (62) of the respondents disagreed. The mean obtained was 4.01 with a standard deviation of 1.117.

Also, 30.5% (111) of the respondents strongly agreed that there is limited access to students and to the curricula, 37.1% (135) of them agreed, 20.9% (76) were undecided while 10.4% (38) of the respondents disagreed (mean = 3.85, SD = 1.006). In a related question of whether there is lack of cooperation between faculty staff and students. The results revealed that 26.1% (95) of the respondents strongly agreed, 31.9% (116) agreed, 16.2% (59) were undecided while 21.2% (77) disagreed (mean = 3.54, SD = 1.216).

In order to ascertain whether the library is limited to modules, the respondents were asked to state accordingly. The results were 13.7% (50) of the respondents strongly agreed, 49.5% (180) agreed, 11.8% (43) were undecided, while 20.6% (75) of the respondents disagreed to the issue. A 3.48 mean and 1.097 was recorded.

Finally, 25.8% (94) of the respondents strongly agreed that they still misunderstood information literacy as either something that is taught somewhere else and therefore not their concern or as focusing on the development of IT skills, 26.1% (95) of them agreed, 22.3% (81) were undecided and 21.4% (78) of them disagreed recording a mean of 3.48 and a 1.209 standard deviation.

In a nutshell, the library staff noted it would be important to have library facilitated reading groups for library users. Students need to be made aware of the library's role in the information society. Finally, they find it necessary to prepare a brochure explaining the concept of information literacy, goals and objectives for the information literacy.

Table1: Challenges faced by Moi University Library staff

		SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Students still misunderstood information literacy as either something that is taught somewhere else and therefore not their concern or as focusing on the development of IT skills	Freq.	16	78	81	95	94	3.48	1.209
	%	4.4	21.4	22.3	26.1	25.8		
Lack of cooperation between faculty staff and students	Freq.	17	77	59	116	95	3.54	1.216
	%	4.7	21.2	16.2	31.9	26.1		
Limited to modules	Freq.	16	75	43	180	50	3.48	1.097
	%	4.4	20.6	11.8	49.5	13.7		
Limited access to students and to the curricula	Freq.	4	38	76	135	111	3.85	1.006
	%	1.1	10.4	20.9	37.1	30.5		
Lack of funds	Freq.	3	3	37	185	136	4.23	0.728
	%	0.8	0.8	10.2	50.8	37.4		
Low number of library staff	Freq.	4	62	14	129	155	4.01	1.117
	%	1.1	17	3.8	35.4	42.6		
Indiscipline among library users	Freq.	53	4	1	90	216	4.13	1.392
	%	14.6	1.1	0.3	24.7	59.3		

The study established that the university library faces a number of challenges. For instance, there is lack of funds, indiscipline among library users i.e. receiving phone calls in the library, the management may decide not to employ enough library staff due to lack of funds which in turn leads to low number of library staff. The results have also shown that librarians are rarely consulted by students whenever they need information. This could be because of perceptual view of librarians as individuals that they lack the ability to comprehend and synthesize the required information. Also, some library users consider themselves more competent and knowledgeable than the library staff. The results closely tally with findings by Seamans (2002) indicating that students consulted their friends or classmates on the topic they were researching rather than the library staff. Similarly, Ajileye-laogun, (2004) echoes that for decade's people have thought of librarians as trained/skilled but not as professionals.

Library staff responded that despite the benefits that come with information literacy, there are challenges that have affected the awareness of library services. For instance, there is shortage of computers and computer skills among the professionals. There is also lower number of library staff and lack of cooperation between faculty staff and students. However, in order to overcome these challenges, the library administration needs to solicit funds from the university administration. Also, the library management should organize in-house computer training programmes for librarians and enough computers should be provided in this regard. In addition, the library needs to have sufficient numbers of computers for students and should come up with clear library rules that will enable users to be discipline when using library resources.

4. Conclusion

There are challenges that impede provision of library services. Notable challenges include indiscipline among library users, low number of library staff and lack of cooperation among the students and the staff. There is also lack of consultation between library users and librarians since library users consider themselves more knowledgeable. This point to a breakdown in communication between librarians and library users making it difficult for the librarians to demonstrate that they have got both qualifications and a variety of skills to fulfill their information needs.

5. Recommendation

In order to benefit the most from the library, librarians need to be friendly, welcoming and helpful in order to encourage users into the library. There is need to increase the number of library staff so that they can efficiently meet the needs of library users. Librarians also need to communicate with users about their services and demonstrate that they have got the qualifications and skills to comprehend and synthesize the required information.

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