The role of academic libraries in supporting distance education in Kenya

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to examine how teachers and other individuals are taking advantage of distance learning (DL) as a solution to the missed direct entry to universities by enrolling for distance education. While this concept is being encouraged by the government (Kamar, 2013) it is also being argued that quality and standards must not be compromised (Kinyanjui, 2007). With the popularity of distance learning however, it is widely being accepted that distance learning students including teachers are not getting adequate access like their on-campus or full time colleagues. This paper argues that without adequacy of this vital research infrastructure which is a pre-requisite of any higher learning institution the learning process of distance learners will be compromised resulting in possible academic discrimination especially because research has shown that some distance learning students can go through their courses without ever visiting the library! Lack of collaboration in pre-planning between information personnel/librarians and academic staff, scarce funding, lack of ICT infrastructure and cumbersome procurement procedures and other various factors leading to inadequacy and inefficiency in regard to provision of library services and e-resources are highlighted. As a conclusion, possible solutions and recommendations are offered.
SOME DEFINITION(S)

- **Distance Education**: a form of studies where learner and tutor are separated by geographical distance (Boadi, 2004).
- **Distance Learners**: students where instructors are at a distance from each other referred to interchangeably as off-campus. This study prefers to use students in conventional institutions who don’t live on campus (Maenzanise, 2002) also known as non-traditional students.
- **School Based Programmes**: these are also known as vocational programmes. Instruction takes place either partly or exclusively in educational institutions. They may also have on the job training component (OECD, 2002).
- **In-service Training**: is a process of staff development for the purpose of improving performance of an incumbent (Halim, 1988). It is training that is given during the course of employment (English Collins dictionary).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The Kenya government has made education its national agenda through vision 2030, Millennium Development Goals, and other sessional papers.
- Primary and secondary education is now considered a right and is offered all over the country.
- This has tremendously increased the number of those who qualify for university education.
- Many candidates pass and meet entry requirements but only a few get admitted to the universities.

Table 1: University Admission Trend (Source: Agalo, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>QUALIFIED</th>
<th>ADMITTED</th>
<th>MISSED ADMISSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>260,665</td>
<td>68,040 (26.1%)</td>
<td>10,000 (14.9%)</td>
<td>58,040 (85.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>243,453</td>
<td>62,926 (25.8%)</td>
<td>16,151 (25.7%)</td>
<td>46,795 (74.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>276,239</td>
<td>82,134 (29.7%)</td>
<td>20,000 (24.4%)</td>
<td>62,134 (75.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Background cont.....

- As result almost all universities have started distance learning programmes for this ready market and as an income generating activity.
- The Minister for Education (Kamar, 2013) is on record advising universities to start 24 hours programmes so that those who qualify can get an opportunity to obtain university education.
- Provision of library and information services are regarded a pre-requisite for any university learning and a lot of research has been done globally towards this.
- In Kenya the limited research available has confirmed that little has been done to provide these services and librarians are not involved in the pre-planning of these programmes.
- There are also concerns on the teaching and learning modes and the role of ICT in support of distance learning programmes.
- While teachers have fully taken advantage of this development, there are some concerns on the quality of these graduates.

### CHALLENGES

- Distance education has become very popular in Kenya not as a source of income but also because professionals see it as a way out of poverty.
- Many students qualify for university but no places are available.
- Others require DL for promotion or to strategically position themselves for new job opportunities.
- In the developed world strict guidelines and standards are an integral part and are strictly adhered to (Appleton, 1997).
- Kinyanjui (2007) observes that as we increase access to higher education, quality and standards must not be compromised.
- This is not happening in Kenya as confirmed by Wasike (2012) and Kavulya (2004).
- The Kenya government and others in Africa have encouraged universities to start income generating activities and distance learning is an obvious choice.
- This has impacted negatively not only on the quality of the programmes but also on the final products – half-baked graduates?
- It has been observed that a student could graduate without having used the library (Mweze, 2010).
- Some researchers have observed that this could lead to academic discrimination between on campus and off campus students.
- The thrust of this study therefore is to find out how distance learners access library and information services and how their information needs are met.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- This study should help fill gaps in knowledge on this topic and improve current distance learning systems.
- Benefit to and offer an insight to distance learning especially in curriculum development not only in Kenya but also in other parts of Africa.
- Highlight, barriers and obstacles which distance learners face.
- Provide solutions to ongoing distance learning programmes in regard to library and information services.
- Initiate e-learning and other Information Centres dedicated to distance learning.
- Answers obtained in this study will assist academic librarians to better understand distance learners' needs and problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- In the developed world distance education is taken very seriously: standards and guidance are in place, librarians are involved in the pre-planning (Lombardi, 2000; Unwin, 1997; Kember, 2007).
- Annual workshop and conferences discuss pertinent issues as a matter of procedure, and library associations are involved (ACRL, 2004).
- In Africa including Kenya very limited research is available but there has been some attempts. For example: Kavulya, 2004; Agalo, 2008; Wasike, 2012 and Elisha, 2010.
- Others from Africa who have done some research on this topic include Msuya and Maro 2002 in Tanzania; Oladokun and Aina, 2009 in Botswana; Mweze 2010 in Nigeria and Aina 2001 in Zimbabwe.
- Limited studies in library and information services linking them to distance learning especially in Kenya compared to the developed world.
- Lack of studies linking provision of library and information services to Kenya vision 2030 and Millennium Development Goals.
- Limited research on expected roles and actual performance of academic libraries.
- Their conclusions: 1) Librarians are not involved in the pre-planning of distance education 2) Distance learners have very limited or no access all together to information resources and 3) Distance learners are academically discriminated upon.
WHY SCHOOL BASED?

• School based concept:
  Most universities have embraced the school based concept where usually teachers attend these classes every time the schools are closed and the full time students are away on vacation.

• Information needs of school based learners:
  The information needs of school based learners/students are just the same as their other distance learners counterparts. They are quite unique in that they face similar challenges due to lack of access to library and information services due to a number of reasons.

CHALLENGES

• Non co-operation between academics and librarians
• Librarians should be involved in the pre-planning of any new academic programmes, including distance learning and school based
• Scarce funding vis-à-vis e-resources and subsequent subscriptions
• Lack of ICT infrastructure, low internet bandwidth and power outages
• Cumbersome procurement procedures
• Lack of structured user education programmes
• User attitude towards academic contents, resulting in more usage of social networks
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- Need for real co-operation between top management, Deans and Librarians, especially in the pre-planning of all academic programmes.
- Do away with the public procurement and oversight authority (PPOA) or restructure it.
- Initiate 24/7 access (remote) to libraries services which will open up e-resources
- Introduce well structured user education programmes mandatory to all new students.
- Introduce Resource Based Learning (RBL) models
- Public relation, good protocol and marketing skills should be a pre-requisite for all library staff.

Selected references

JUST A THOUGHT...

The best way to get a good idea
is to get a lot of ideas - Linus Pauling cited in (Dunleavy, 2003)

Thank you for listening to me!