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Moi University Library's bibliographic instruction programme

A proposal for change

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Introduction

Background

Moi University is one of Kenya's four state universities. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1984, and started operating in 1985. The institution is situated about 350km from Nairobi City in the Rift Valley Province in Eldoret town, a rural farming community in western Kenya.

Currently, Moi University has an enrolment of about 6,000 students on its three campuses (main campus, Chepkoilel campus and the faculty of health sciences campus). Students are enrolled on various degree courses in 11 faculties:

- (1) agriculture;
- (2) education;
- (3) forest, tourism, fisheries and wildlife management;
- (4) graduate school;
- (5) health sciences;
- (6) information sciences;
- (7) institute of human resources and development;
- (8) school of environmental studies;
- (9) school of social cultural and development studies;
- (10) sciences; and
- (11) technology and engineering.

The university also has a constituent college, Maseno University College campus, with an enrolment of 2,400 students taking various degree courses.

As an institution of higher learning, the university's mission is to: prepare and impart knowledge to young qualified Kenyans for lifelong learning, making them independent and competent adults for the future of the country; acquire, organize and preserve information materials on Kenyan heritage; conduct and disseminate research findings to the Kenyan community;

participate in the discovery, transmission and preservation of knowledge; and to stimulate the intellectual life, as well as the economic and cultural development of Kenya[1].

A proposal for
change

The university has a medium-sized academic library whose chief mission is to support the curricula of the 11 faculties listed earlier. This is achieved by the university library providing services related to reference; searching for information; an interlibrary loan system with other state universities and research libraries; and bibliographic instruction for students and faculty members among others.

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Moi University has been referred to as a university with a difference. It is different from the other three state universities in that it is a science and technological institution whose aim is to produce practice-oriented graduates. Its library is temporarily housed in a three-wing floor in the main administration building, where it has several service points. The library has a stock of about 80,000 volumes, 300 current periodical subscriptions, a few audio-visual materials and four computers. There are 136 full-time library personnel: among these are 13 professionals, 14 para-professionals, as well as library assistants and other support staff. Information technology (IT) developments require better qualified and more sophisticated librarians to provide effective services to library users. Reflecting this new professionalism is the emphasis on a bibliographic instruction programme in library and information skills: librarians at Moi University Library are required to take an active role in facilitating the teaching of students and faculty members in the use of the University Library's resources.

Objectives for bibliographic instruction (BI) programme changes

As Moi University continues to participate in the discovery, transmission and preservation of information and to stimulate the intellectual life and the economic and cultural development of Kenya, the library's bibliographic instruction programme must be restructured so that it is able to serve the changing needs of the university community. The BI programme at Moi University must therefore undergo changes with the following aims and objectives in mind:

- To arouse in students and faculty members a lasting interest in the use of books and an appreciation of the university's library as a prime resource in the search for knowledge.
- To lay the groundwork for intelligent use of university library through the systematic delivery of BI to all incoming undergraduate students at Moi University.
- To increase and intensify students' and faculty members' knowledge of the university library's resources.
- To help students understand the rationale behind selecting either print or online versions of information sources for any particular search (e.g. CD-ROM).

- To stimulate students and faculty members to read for general knowledge (independent study), thereby appreciating that education is for life.

Rationale for changes to the current programme

Moi University Library as an integral part of the whole university system is charged with the responsibility of offering a BI programme to students and faculty members as stated in the university's mission. A recent evaluation has indicated that this programme no longer meets its goals and objectives. Therefore it is proposed in this article that the programme undergo a full change in order to prepare students for lifelong learning and self-reliance, making them competent Kenyan citizens.

A prominent approach to organization theory is the idea that change originates in the environment. Therefore, Moi University Library, as an academic library, must be viewed as an open system in constant interaction with its clientele, transforming inputs into outputs as a means of creating the conditions which are necessary for the needs of the future Kenyan community. Changes to its current BI programme are called for because the programme should be viewed as a challenge to which the university community must respond positively. Once restructured, the BI programme will increase and intensify students' knowledge of library resources' use in relation to current changes in IT.

Although a BI programme – sometimes referred to as user education, library instruction, library use instruction or, nowadays, “information literacy” – has previously been offered at Moi University, a recent evaluation, as will be discussed in the review of related literature, has discovered that the majority of freshmen do not know how to use university library resources, especially when searching for information. They depend only on references provided by guides to popular magazines and periodicals. Such students cannot be classified as good library users or as information literate. This has resulted in under-use of the university library by students, which is one of the broached problems with the BI course currently being taught.

At the moment, the BI programme at Moi University is conducted in the form of orientation whereby guided tours of the university library are arranged for incoming students. They are given an introduction to the programme and then shown the general layout of the university library. Locations of the library's resources are shown, and how to retrieve them, along with an introduction to the use of general and particular popular reference materials, at a level which is quite elementary.

Thus one can easily deduce that students at Moi University not only have little understanding of the BI programme, but they are also faced with the problem of not knowing about the process that could provide them with access to information retrievable from the university library and resource centres.

Review of related literature

The British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and Kenya Government Library Project currently taking place at Moi University, reveal that there is a rapid change in terms of expansion at this institution. Once completed, the library building will house 600,000 volumes, expanding up to one million in the future. Under the same project, there is provision of £1 million to acquire books – primarily in science and technology – to boost the library's current stock.

With this change, it is important that the university community, especially the students, be information-literate if they are to benefit from the university library's resources' expansion. Line[1], for example, has urged strongly that a new academic library is, above all, concerned with the people it serves; as such, it is a customer-based library whose aim is to meet the information needs of the academic community. Moi University Library, as an academic library, falls into this category and so it must meet its community's information needs, especially by offering a BI programme for students and teaching faculty members.

The 1986, IFLA *Standards for University Libraries in Developing Countries*[2] which were applied to evaluate the Moi University BI programme, found that the programme differed from the standards across the board by as much as 50 per cent, not only in its content and coverage, but also where the evaluation found that Moi's BI was primarily a library-oriented programme.

Moran[3] in her research on academic libraries has observed that any organization must grow and develop in order to successfully accommodate a changing environment, and that academic libraries are no exception. If academic libraries are to succeed as active parties in the instructional and research programmes of universities, they must be sensitive to changing conditions both in their internal structure and in the external environment. Furthermore, the library must move towards a more assertive role in the community it serves, influencing university plans, programmes and priorities rather than simply coping with events as they occur.

Coughlin and Gertzog[4, p. 558], have stated *inter alia* that:

A library is of paramount importance to the educational programme and to the research of students and faculty. The types and variety of books and other materials depend on the nature of the institution; therefore collection development must relate realistically to the institution's educational mission, goals, curricula, size, complexity and degree levels, and the diversity of its teaching, learning and research requirements. The centrality of a library to the educational mission of an institution deserves more than rhetoric and must be supported by more than lip service. An active and continuous programme of bibliographic instruction is essential to realize this goal.

Methods and techniques for changing the BI programme

Since Moi University Library has fallen short of the level of achievement in handling its BI programme effectively, as expected earlier, it is proposed that the library makes appropriate changes in policies, procedures and methods of teaching the BI programme. In order to achieve this end the following are proposed:

- the size of the professional and support staff should be increased and trained so that the library BI programme can be carried out and conducted more successfully;
- the BI programme should be redesigned to encourage the students to plan search strategies and to correctly list and evaluate Moi University resources; and
- the BI programme should ensure that the techniques and library information sources' demonstrations are relevant directly to the subjects being studied by the students as spelt out in the university's mission.

In order to achieve these expectations, library staff need to produce a manual to be used by the students and faculty staff. The BI programme should be co-ordinated by a professionally qualified librarian with relevant expertise and wide knowledge of the university's curricular needs.

This can be achieved by the librarians, especially the reference librarians, who should work with small groups of students on the BI course learning how to locate and find information sources by means of guided sheets for each student based on his/her research paper or topic, etc. The librarians would also prepare for students a selected bibliography of reference books on how to search for information using catalogues and for articles using indexes, etc. This means that the BI programme must be restructured in order to provide students with a series of integrated programmes covering the skills needed to make effective use of both general and subject-specific library resources. This can be achieved through a combination of classroom instruction, one-to-one instruction and instructional materials including slide and tape presentations. For the BI programme to be successful, full-time user-education reference librarians will be required on the library establishment.

Summary

Research has shown that one of the main objectives of the newly-established universities is to have a well-designed bibliographic instruction programme capable of preparing students for life-long education by equipping them with the necessary skills in the use of university library resources so that they become information literate.

Moi University, as one of the newly-created state universities in Kenya, was established with BI as one of the objectives of the university library. But a recent evaluation of the BI programme in this institution has shown that the programme, as initially intended, has failed to fulfil its goals and objectives. This proposal, therefore, argues for a full overhaul of the BI course so that it may be able to suit and meet the information needs of the Kenyan academic community. It is anticipated that with the current Moi University Library expansion under the ODA/Kenyan Government Library Project, it is quite possible for the university library to restructure its BI programme to meet the university community's current needs and forthcoming challenges.

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