

*Review*

# Challenges faced in establishing university libraries in Kenya

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The purpose of this article is to discuss and clearly bring out the major challenges faced in establishing University Libraries in Kenya. The paper first discusses the development of academic institutions and University Libraries in Kenya; it brings out the trend of both the private and public Universities and the major reason for the expansion of Universities in Kenya. The article later discusses the problems that are faced by university libraries in their establishment; it concludes by giving suggestions and recommendations to the problems. Universities in Kenya have gone through an era of renaissance in the field of education during the last two decades. In that period, the country experienced a phenomenal growth in the area of higher education when the number of public and private universities increased from four to over twenty. The country also encountered financial constraints due to poor economic performance which was characterized by rapid population growth and rising needs for basic services like primary education, food, health and shelter. Universities are therefore challenged to justify their existence. In turn, it is the university libraries that have been directly affected. The situation has made university libraries operate in an environment of tightened financial constraints. This is set against a background of continuous inflation in cost of information, especially in this age of ICT, changing technologies, few professional library staff without relevant skills to man the various library operations. Annual inflation rate of cost of information materials which is in excess of the library budget allocation, lack of cooperation among libraries, ignorance of university administrations on the importance of libraries, staff shortage e.t.c. The implication of this paper is that the role of university libraries and university librarians is likely to be looked down upon, if amicable solutions to the existing challenges are not addressed, libraries are important organs in Universities; they are the centre stage through which academic activities evolve therefore they should be treated as special entities. In order for effective service delivery, librarians are supposed to be kept abreast of the changing user information needs and the emerging technologies, which at the moment is proving to be a challenge. This paper highlights the major challenges faced by most University Libraries in Kenya; it brings out the impediments that hinder their establishment and development. It further concludes by suggesting the recommendations that ought to be considered.

**Key words:** Paraprofessional, information resources, information communication technology, academic library.

## INTRODUCTION

The quest for Kenyan higher education has seen tremendous growth over the last decade. The growth has both affected the public and private Universities. Private university education for instance being relatively new, not just in Kenya, but also in the African continent has

experienced massive expansion in the last decade. Even by 1980, when public university systems in the continent were rapidly expanding, the private universities were only 20, compared to the 143 public institutions today. In the last 30 years, the number of private universities in Kenya has grown from only two in 1980 to 27 currently, accounting for more than 30 percent of Africa's private universities. By 2009 the continent had about 100 private institutions and 400 publicly funded Universities. On the

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other hand, Kenya has also seen the expansion of public Universities. This has been through the upgrading of Technical Colleges into University Colleges; among the ones that have been adversely affected are the National Polytechnics. Currently, Kenya has close to fifteen University Colleges that have been established recently (Appendix 1).

With the growth and expansion of the Universities within a short period of time the country has experienced a phenomenal growth in the area of higher education, it is also important to note that during this same period, Kenya also encountered financial constraints due to poor economic performance which has been characterized by rapid population growth and rising needs for basic services like primary education, food, health and shelter. Subsequently, university education faced severe competition from these other sources for the limited government funds. Hence, universities are challenged to justify their existence by claiming massive public funds. In turn, it is the university libraries that have, likewise been affected directly. This situation has made university libraries to operate in an environment of tightened financial constraints. This is set against a background of continuous inflation in cost of information, especially in this age of ICT, changing technologies, few professional library staff without relevant skills to man the various library operations. The annual inflation rate of the cost of information materials is far in excess of the library budget allocation to universities.

Unfortunately, this gloomy situation has not changed and it is very likely to remain the same for a long time to come. Something must therefore be done if university librarians are to remain relevant in their business. In an attempt to touch base with needs of today's university library users, university librarians must constantly ask themselves: "what is the future for university libraries?"

Unlike the public universities which heavily rely on government funds, private universities never receive funds from the government, they rely on their own funds, well wishers and donation, further more they are subjected to heavy scrutiny by the commission of higher education before being granted a university charter document, as a result, most private universities are well equipped with better facilities, infrastructure, personnel and programs.

### **University libraries in Kenya**

University libraries are generally categorized under academic libraries. University libraries play a central role in the university. Their primary responsibility is to assist their users in the process of transforming information to knowledge. The librarian in the university coordinates the evaluation and selection of information resources required for the various programs, organizes and maintains the collection of these resources. Equally important is the

responsibility of providing information literacy skills. The history of academic libraries in Kenya dates back to the time when the first academic institution was established in Kenya.

Otiye (2004) asserts that the development of University Libraries in Kenya can be traced to the colonial era, though it was not well marked as that of special and public libraries; the main reason being that there were very few academic institutions at that time. Enormous expansion of academic library was seen during the post independence period when there was massive growth in higher education. Universities and university librarians for quite some time have experienced a great challenge in their profession, a challenge that has nearly rendered them obsolete. One of the major issues that are putting libraries at stake is lack of a firm librarians' body that is meant to address librarians issues. Lack of unity among libraries and librarians, for instance, with the growth and expansion of institutions of higher learning, many universities are now offering Library and Information studies degree programmes.

However, there is no library body, association or board that is in place to clearly regulate the quality of programmes being offered. All institutions run and function independently; as a result, some of the programmes offered in the institutions may be questioned.

### **Development of academic libraries**

Developing academic libraries encompass a lot of professionalism, proper management, right resources, personnel, equipment and facilities. Proper development and establishment of academic libraries cannot be achieved if librarians are not involved right from the initial stage.

Development and establishment of academic library in this information age is not easy, unlike some decades ago where library services were focused on a systematic approach, that is, to help patrons retrieve materials from the information system, in the present decade it is all about being a user centred approach that is fulfilling the patron's "information need," or helping them out of a "problematic situation". Books are also not the only source of information in this decade and librarians have to go a notch higher to assist users access and make use of the libraries.

The current development stages and practice in University Libraries in Kenya vary and range from automation, electronic resource services, digitization of information, capacity building, staffing issues, among others. It is therefore the role of the libraries to justify the importance of a library in an institution, otherwise, the library and the librarian roles may not be valued. The development and establishment of academic libraries has to involve, the staff, the building, information resources

and in this information age, information technology. However, most of these critical areas are exposed to various challenges.

### **Library staff**

Staffing is concerned with effective recruitment, selection, placement, appraisal and development of people to occupy positions in the organization. Library staffs are the engine that control the running of all the activities performed in the library. Hence, library staffs are the pivot around whom the users, information materials, equipment, tools and all the other facilities revolve. Arising out of this, it can be appreciated that the professional staff is perhaps the most important resource of the university library.

A well trained body of people tends to imbue each other with confidence, they need to tackle the jobs demanded of them. It is through this that the library users and the information materials interact, as a result of the quality service given by the library staff. Consequently, a sufficient number of qualified librarians are prerequisite to a satisfactory provision of service, supported by an equally sufficient number of non-professional staff. Their duties should, however, be distinctive enough to avoid role displacement. Therefore, shortage of staff denies professional librarians the chance to perform professional duties and research assignments which are essential for academic and professional development. As a result of this, staff may lack motivation which in turn, leads to frustration and job displacement. On the other hand, a library which is sufficiently staffed should be able to satisfy the needs of its end-users because duties are distinctively allocated and delegated where possible. In this way, all various jobs in the library are handled by qualified staff, that perform them in each specialized field. With this in mind therefore, staff would provide a balanced service in order to ensure useful and cost effective work to the management.

Taking from the preceding point, library staff should only be those working in professional positions, sub-professionals such as holders of the undergraduate diploma in Library and Archives Studies, bachelors degree in Library and Information Sciences, as well as those holders of Bachelor degree in disciplines other than Library and Information Sciences, as well as high school leavers who have acceptable university entry qualifications and who have been employed on training and development basis. These are designated library staff for purposes of budgeting. All the other categories of staff working in the library such as secretaries, security, cleaners, messengers, for purposes of staff establishment and preparation of annual estimates should not be counted, as part of the Library staff, since they do not perform the actual library duties but assist in the smooth running of the library. With financial limits being experienced especially in public universities, most

universities do not appreciate the role of professional librarians. University libraries are never given the first privilege when it comes to adequate recruitment of professional staff. Most institutions prefer recruiting either sub-professional or library assistants during its inception, awaiting the growth of the institution before a qualified professional librarian is recruited; as a result, libraries experience poor management, due to lack of proper policy developments, negative perception of the library and librarians by library patrons and the university management, due to poor services being issued. According to the Commission of Higher Education (2007) "the composition of library staff shall be: Librarians shall constitute 35% and para-professional, technical and clerical staff shall constitute, 65% of all staff." This standard is yet to be observed by many Universities in Kenya.

University library staff should therefore be the professional staff, library staff may therefore be categorized as: University Librarian, Deputy University Librarians, Senior Librarians, Librarians, Senior Library Assistants and Library Assistants.

### **Library building and facilities**

A library building is quite an important structure in a university; a university building should always be given proper attention and consideration, there should always be a consultation between the university librarians and the university management before a university library is constructed. When it comes to the establishment of University Libraries in Kenya it has been established that most Universities are reluctant to develop a purposeful library at its inception, while some institutions construct purposefully designed library buildings, majority of libraries occupy buildings which were meant for purposes other than library services. In such cases, librarians face the task of internal redesigning of the buildings to meet the needs of the library. It should be noted that the positioning of a university library is of great importance to library users, a strategic positioning is mandatory.

Generally speaking, modern libraries pay more attention to the study of the behavior of library users and plan accordingly to meet the obvious and less obvious demands, rather than create a too formal organization which forces library users to conform to a pattern of library activities probably of a very restrictive nature. A thorough examination of activities of library users is of priority. This is necessary because it will enable the creation of a well designed building which will encourage the desired use and discourage misuse. Galvin (1959) recommends that a new university library building should provide space enough for at least twenty five years. In other words, the new university library should be planned to mature at the age of twenty to twenty five years. This is the recommended period when new extensions and other

changes should be made on the original library building.

When constructing a university library, it is therefore important to have a Library planning committee to advise the management on the nitty gritty of library space, site, capacity and other major functions of the library which will include sections of the library. However, this is not the scenario in Kenyan Libraries, most university libraries are established without the consent of a librarian, as a result, there always arises very many complications when the Librarians are appointed to run and manage the libraries. Some of the complications experienced include lack of expansion space, lack of ventilation, natural light, lack of baggage and security section, multimedia/ audio visual section, processing section etc.

### **Information resources**

Library users mainly visit the university library in search of information materials to use for their respective needs. For that reason, a library is of no service to its users if it does not have suitable information materials. It follows therefore that for the university library to be able to support the mission of its parent organization and the university effectively, it is required to selectively acquire, on regular basis, current and relevant information materials in sufficient quantities.

According to Nwalo (2009), information is at present believed to be a fifth factor of production, which is by no means inferior to land, labor, capital and the entrepreneur. It should always be remembered that a university library has been established to support learning, teaching and research activities of the university. Consequently:

1. The library collection must support every curriculum and research activities,
2. The collection must be organized in a manner that facilitates easy access to their contents,
3. Users should be informed about the library collections, services available and be empowered with skills to use the resources,
4. The library building should be designed to meet the anticipated functions,
5. Competent library staff is required to give direction and vitality to the services provided.

This underlines the fact that the development of a university library collection is a multi-faceted and complex process that involves strategic planning, identification, acquisition and management of the information materials. Hence, the design and implementation of automated systems, building of efficient staff teams and the overall management of economic considerations, sustainable library and information service are the major concerns of the university librarian.

However, despite the need for relevant information

materials in university libraries, most libraries experience a lot of difficulties in acquiring and updating their information materials. The Commission of Higher Education (2007) clearly states that all universities ought to spend at least 10% of their budget on information materials; however, most universities are yet to adhere to this rule and regulation. Otike (1993) asserts that majority of the developing countries rely on donated materials which in many occasions are obsolete and not relevant in the African context and programmes.

It has been repeatedly said that Africans rarely publish this statement has been said time and again that it is likely to be true. A physical tour to any university library clearly proves this statement most Africans rarely write; hence, most books that are used in African Universities are authored and printed in developed countries. Odini (2002) clearly points out that there are few writers in Kenya and not many professionals write books in their disciplines, most books used in libraries have to be imported from developed countries. However, purchase from abroad has many problems, for example, the availability of foreign exchange and import taxes; taxes amount to 35% of the cost of each purchase.

The other major challenge facing most universities is the procurement process which has been necessitated by the procurement Act of Kenya 2005, that requires all purchases of materials including information materials in public offices to undergo the procurement procedure that requires three quotations of each item from three suppliers. According to Procurement Act 2005, it states that:

“the Act is meant to maximize economy and efficiency, promote competition and ensure that competitors are treated fairly, to promote the integrity and fairness of procedures, to increase transparency and accountability in these procedures and public confidence in those procedures and finally to facilitate the promotion of local industry and economic development.”

Despite the fact that the Act is meant to ensure equality and efficiency, it makes procurement of information a tedious and time consuming exercise. In this regard, information that is required urgently can never be acquired on time and when the institutions are ready to purchase the information, it may be unavailable either because the material is out of print or out of stock.

### **Information communication technology (ICT)**

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become ubiquitous with current and future social and organizational development. The role of these technologies in national development is undeniably significant. As the positive effects of ICT have continually been noted more obviously in developed countries, it has become

critically important for developing countries to embrace these technologies. The appearance of ICT on the global scene has caused a revolution in libraries and all service providing industries. ICT has changed the ways and patterns in which information and other services are dispensed. Nwachukwu (2005) supports this by observing that with all the changes in information and the processes of access, storage, transmission and reproduction, librarians and libraries must adapt to new roles and skills to cope with change.

The only way of satisfying user demand is to use ICT in information service delivery. Librarians and libraries must do this to remain relevant in the face of challenges and changes. Owoyemi (2001) contends that to ensure our relevance to a new generation of users, "we need to be where our users are, even if they are not inside our libraries." With the emergency of computers and computer related information materials, the traditionally custodial role of the librarian is changing. The use of computers for cataloguing, information retrieval and certain housekeeping procedures is commonplace, and the emphasis is increasingly on exploitation, not only of books and journals in the library but of information available elsewhere and in non-print form. With these changes librarians ought to keep and embrace the new changes least they start having nightmares that the technological age will make them redundant.

The university environment is changing; there is renewed recognition of the role that university libraries play as drivers of national development. Their transformation has included much investment in terms of electronic infrastructure and connectivity, as well as attention to e-learning and related approaches as key tools to enhance the quality of higher education and make it more accessible. University libraries are an important part of this transformation, with the potential to become leaders and standard-bearers of what can be done with the new ICT. It therefore poses a great challenge to library and Librarians, in this technological era libraries are faced with two major challenges, of automating their services and providing e-resources to their users. Most library users tend to prefer the internet sources for their studies and research work and shun away from the traditional libraries.

Audio-visual information materials are also considered relevant in university libraries unlike the books, they are often viewed as supplementary to the print resources. The rapidly changing technologies are however challenging the passive role of the sleeping giants (Libraries). Other than the traditional non-book materials, the audio-visual unit is finding in its custody data CDs and DVDs video CDs, diskettes and other electronic medium; this comes with new roles and challenges. The modern audiovisual librarian is not just a custodian but also an active participant in creation, repackaging and dissemination of knowledge through the media. E-books have also started to revolutionize library systems as

electronic publishing matures, research and academic libraries are beginning to supplement their print holdings with electronic publications. This transition began with scientific journals and is now advancing into academic and scholarly books, as well. In the past few years, corporate and government libraries have also begun acquiring e-Books along with print holdings.

Library automation has also become a necessity in this information age, one of the major challenges faced in automating and establishing digitalized library projects in African Libraries, has been the readiness of the university libraries in terms of skills and knowledge to implement the digital and electronic library services. Rosenberg (2006) notes that skills in e-resources management, e-services development, full text digitization and teaching skills are lacking in African University Libraries. There are also many other challenges regarding funding, IT infrastructure, Internet connectivity, lack of commitment from staff and or/ management and the availability of African generated content to put into the digital collections and information resources. There is increased demand for librarians with skills to initiate, manage and participate in digital library projects (Jacso, 2002).

Technology is moving librarians into new roles some welcome, some uncomfortable, but nearly all of benefit to library patrons. In most cases, these new roles are an addition to, not a replacement for traditional duties. New services will continue to develop but many traditional library services will continue in some form for the foreseeable future.

Information professionals should be well informed on new inventions in ICT. The profession parades an array of people from diverse backgrounds such as engineering, communication, computer, electronics and other fields. Librarians can team up with other professionals to develop new technologies. More than ever before, librarians must make themselves more relevant in this digital age.

## Conclusion

This paper has brought to the fore several fundamental issues:

1. Development of Universities in the Country is on the rise, this development expansion and establishment of Universities in Kenya has led to the expansion of University Libraries. However, the libraries are faced with problems regarding their establishment and development.
2. Libraries and librarians are not keen to unite, very few libraries exercise library cooperation, there is no library association/body that evaluates library programmes that are being introduced in various universities, hence most institutions offer programmes that might not be meeting the changing information trend and needs.
3. Librarians have failed to raise their voice and be heard by university management; as a result, their value is

diminishing. Librarians have allowed university management to advise them and not vice versa, as a result, they are losing their role and relevance, the scenario if not addressed quickly may affect librarians' profession in future.

4. Most librarians are adamant to the changing needs of users, there is resistance to change from the traditional librarian to the present user centered services librarian; however, this is normally experienced mainly by the elderly /older librarians who are IT illiterate, furthermore they have the feeling that change will necessitate early retrenchment or retirement.

5. African scholars are yet to appreciate the importance of writing books, very few Africans write, as a result books and information materials have to be purchased from United Kingdom, United States and majority are purchased from India which are relatively cheaper because most of their books are printed on cheap paper. (Odini, 2002)

From the above descriptions, it is evident that a lot needs to be done to fight the impending challenges that are faced by University Libraries in Kenya. Librarians should all unite and put strict measures on their services, on the other hand, the Commission of Education should also stretch their services to public universities which are the greatest violators of library guidelines and standards. It would also be important for all library programmes being offered by various universities to be vetted by a library board or association to establish a minimum standard otherwise, Kenya might end up having very many librarians who are not feet for the market.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1. Public and private universities in Kenya.

<b>Public university</b>	<b>University constituent colleges</b>	<b>Private universities</b>
1. University of Nairobi	1. Kimathi University College of Technology	1. Presbyterian University of East Africa
2. Kenyatta University	2. Kenya Polytechnic University College	2. Pioneer International University
3. Moi University	3. Kisii University College	3. Africa Nazarene University
4. Egerton University	4. Mombasa Polytechnic University College	4. Inoorero University
5. Maseno University	5. Multimedia University College of Kenya	5. Aga Khan University
6. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	6. Pwani University College	6. Catholic University of Eastern Africa
7. Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology	7. Narok University College	7. Daystar University
	8. South Eastern University College	8. East Africa School of Theology
	9. Meru University College of Science and Technology	9. Great Lakes University of Kisumu
	10. Bondo University College	10. Reformed Institute for Theological Training
	11. Kabianga University College	11. Gretsia University
	12. Chuka University College	12. Kabarak University
	13. Laikipia University College	13. KCA University
		14. Kenya Highlands Bible College
		15. Kenya Methodist University
		16. Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology
		17. Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology
		18. Nairobi International School of Theology
		19. Pan Africa Christian University
		20. Scott Theological College
		21. St. Paul's University
		22. Strathmore University
		23. United States International University
		24. United States International University (School of Business)
		25. University of Eastern Africa, Baraton
		26. Mt Kenya University
		27. Migori University of Guidance and Counseling