

Twenty Years of The Open University of Tanzania in the Development of Education in the Country: The Role of OUT in Improving Peoples' Welfare

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The Open University of Tanzania

***Abstract:** This article examines twenty years of The Open University of Tanzania in the development of the country. The Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992 to provide training, research and consultancy services. Training and teaching are the main activities of OUT. The Open University of Tanzania is an academic institution offering certificates, diploma and degree courses through distance learning systems. The University offers three categories of programmes namely: non-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The first graduation ceremony took place in 1999 where 159 students graduated. Since the year 2001 the number of graduates has increased annually. Since OUT commenced its operations in 1994, the cumulative number of graduates from 1999 to 2010 has reached 8,830. Students graduating from OUT are engaged in different activities for personal and national socio-economic development. The information presented in this article was collected from documents obtained from OUT main library. This information was backed up with informal interviews conducted on OUT beneficiaries. Other information was obtained through questionnaires sent to respondents by email. The findings show that OUT graduates have benefited in different ways; thus, employees got salary increases, promotion, and some obtained employment at OUT, in private and public institutions. In this article, it is recommended that training should be provided to all new enrolled students on how to use internet in searching study materials. Students should also be provided with study materials on CDs as well as hard copies. Moreover, students should be encouraged to have a computer to enable them to get material from the internet and read from the CD provided by the University while at home or any other places.*

Keywords: The Open University of Tanzania, twenty years, research, consultancy and training.

INTRODUCTION

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was the third Government owned university to be established in Tanzania (OUT, 2010). The general mission of the University is to enhance adults' access to university education (Mhehe, 2003). There are various education delivery approaches which enable all citizens to benefit from this public good (Komba, 2007). The major and competing delivery approaches are three, the conventional, distance learning and open learning and blended learning. The Open University of Tanzania offers higher education through

the open and distance mode (ODL). This mode is normally known as distance education or distance mode. Distance education is a type of education given to students whereby one does not see and meet the tutor as is the case for conventional universities (Mahenge, 2002). In this mode of delivering education there is no direct contact between the tutor and students. However, distance education is a mode that has a high potential for transcending barriers that are caused by distance, time and age; thus facilitating life-long learning (Komba, 2007). A good distance education program makes full use of information and communication technology through the application of a wide range of media: print, audio-visual, CD-ROM, computers and the Internet. Through distance education the learner enjoys a high degree of autonomy in deciding what, when and how to learn (Komba, 2007).

The Open University of Tanzania came into existence in 1990s with a mandate to provide access to education to a large number of people by taking education to the door-steps of Tanzanians. The Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 on the 4th December 1992, to provide opportunities for higher education to a broad segment of the Tanzanian population through distance learning, initially, with the print as the main interactive medium of instruction. The University became operational on 1st March 1993 by publication of Government Notice No. 55 in the Official Gazette of 26th February, 1993 (OUT, 2009). The first Chancellor was officially installed in a full ceremony on 19th January 1994 (OUT, 2008). Currently, OUT is the major provider of distance education at university level in Tanzania. However, OUT is relatively young University at the age of twenty years now. Although it is very young, it remains to be one of the largest higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The University has attracted students from both within and outside the country.

Currently, OUT offers distance education using a single mode of delivery via print and audio media. In future computer network linking the regional centres will facilitate the delivery. Student support is provided through face-to-face sessions once every year. Students are assessed by means of Main Timed Tests (MTTs) and Annual Examinations (AEs). The Open University of Tanzania offers various courses leading to awards of certificates, diplomas and various undergraduate and postgraduate degrees through distance learning mode. ODL system includes various means of communication such as broadcasting, telecasting, correspondence courses, seminars, contact programmes or a combination of any two or more of such means (OUT 2008).

At the moment The Open University of Tanzania consists of five faculties, two institutes and two directorates, namely: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS); Faculty of Education (FED); Faculty of Law (FLW); Faculty of Business Management (FBM); Faculty of Science, Technology and Environmental Studies (FSTES); Institute of Continuing Education (ICE); Institute of Educational Technology (IET); Directorate of Regional Services, and the Directorate of Research, Postgraduate Studies and Consultancy (OUT, 2011). More faculties and institutes may be established according to procedures indicated in the new Open University of Tanzania Charter which guide its operations (OUT, 2011). The Open

University of Tanzania Charter was signed by H. E. the President of the United Republic of Tanzania on 28th March, 2007.

The Open University of Tanzania has obtained course materials from other distance teaching institutions. Among the institutions in which the University acquired course materials include the University of Nairobi, the Indira Gandhi National Open University, the University of Abuja and the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The Open University of Tanzania offers three categories of programmes namely: non-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate (OUT, 2008). The University commenced with three faculties: FASS, BCOM and FED. It admitted its first students in 1994 when it enrolled 766 students, among them 699 being males and 67 females (Facts and Figures, 2010; 2011). The number of enrollment has kept on increasing every year (Facts and Figures, 2010; 2011). The first programmes to be offered at OUT were B.A. (General), B.A. (Ed.) and B.Com (Gen. and Ed.) (Facts and Figures, 2010). Twenty years later in 2012 OUT has more than 18 undergraduate programmes (Facts and Figures, 2010) and more than 20 postgraduate programmes. The university operates through Regional Centres and Study Centres spread throughout the United Republic of Tanzania and beyond (OUT, 2011). Currently there are 25 Regional Centres and 69 Study Centres which fall under the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Regional Services and Learning Technologies) (*ibid*). There is also one coordination centre in Nairobi, at the Egerton University Centre, for students based in Kenya. The centers are known as regional centers. These centers are used to coordinate all the University activities. Directors of these centers report to the DVC (Regional Services and Learning Technologies). The Open University of Tanzania Headquarters is situated in Dar es Salaam along Kawawa Road in Kinondoni Municipality, adjacent to Biafra grounds.

Advancement in communication technology has created opportunities for universities to expand residential education beyond the traditional institutional walls. As a result, universities world-wide have or are in a process of embracing distance education (Mushi, 2001). The general objective of this paper was to examine the 20 years of The Open University of Tanzania in the provision of education in the country. The University has contributed a lot to the development of national education since its establishment in 1992. A large number of student with different specializations have graduated from OUT. The university has produced students with different qualifications, from none-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Academic staff and some administrative staff at OUT are engaged in teaching, research and in consultancy work. The staff and graduates have contributed and are contributing in various ways to the national socio-economic development. Despite all these benefits, no evaluation has been made to ascertain the contribution of OUT to the national education development. This article is meant to ascertain the contributions OUT has made for the past 20 years since it was established in 1992.

This paper is guided by objectives. The overall objective of this paper was to examine the contribution of the 20 years of the OUT in the development of

education in the country. Specifically, the study aimed to document the success of OUT since 1990s; to evaluate challenges facing the University community and finally to draw up recommendations for the improvement of open and distance education delivery in Tanzania.

METHODOLOGY

Secondary data were obtained from the University main library, where the researcher had access to literature, statistics and research reports; dissertations and independent research reports. The University Prospectus, Facts and Figures were also used in this article. Due to problem of time and funding the questionnaires were emailed to 100 respondents. The response was not good, only 51 answered and returned the questionnaires. With this background the researcher found it practical to base the study on primary and secondary data.

The first task of this paper was to collect as many documents as possible with focus on OUT and its contribution to education in the nation. Then followed the task of reviewing the documents with special attention on the objectives, methods used, results and to decide which documents should be studied more seriously and intensively. These documents included published articles as well as unpublished reports.

THE ROLE OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

The Open University of Tanzania has made a lot of contribution to the national social, political and economic development. The crucial role of higher education in socio-economic development of any country is universally acknowledged (Bhalalusesa, 1999). Higher education directly develops human talents and potentialities as well as preparing the high level human resources needed for the public and private sectors (Bhalalusesa, 1999). Universities including OUT have a role to play in supporting knowledge-driven economic growth strategies and the construction of democratic and socially cohesive societies. University education assists the improvement of the institutional regime through the training of competent and responsible professionals needed for sound macro-economic and public development and management.

The Open University of Tanzania has three main roles to play as academic institution, which include conducting research, consultancies and teaching/training. The University recognizes its functions of teaching and learning, research and community services, and therefore undertakes consultancy activities through its staff (OUT, 2007). By doing all these, then it enhances its link and closeness to communities, its employees, business, industry and government departments plus international agencies. With consultancy services, OUT is contributing to the betterment of the lives of people (OUT, 2007). By this practice Tanzanian and communities have benefited from The Open University of Tanzania.

Consultancy is one of the responsibilities of The Open University of Tanzania. The University established OCB, the unit where workers at OUT have acquired and being involved in consultancies. Staff are involved in consultancies in collaboration with other universities within and outside the country. Through effective

participation in consultancies, OUT as an institution and its employees benefit. It enhances the income generation by its staff thereby increasing the University capacity to finance its own activities. It also rekindles its staff expertise in research and professional skills. Above all, consultancies demonstrate special advantage over other Tanzanian higher education institutions. The University also contributes to the declared national goal of creating higher life standards for its people.

Teaching and training is the major responsibility of OUT. The Open University of Tanzania is an open and distance learning institution offering teaching on distance mode. In this system there is no direct contact between tutor and students. Students meet their tutor occasionally during the face to face sessions. During face to face sessions it is the time students can raise questions and get them answered by their lecturers.

Research is the third core function of OUT. Research is mentioned in the Act that established The Open University of Tanzania as an important component of its core function, namely, to preserve, enhance and transmit knowledge by teaching and conducting research through various means. Research here involves staff doing research with aims of publishing and students doing research for writing their thesis for postgraduate studies. Several academicians have acquired funds through Small Grant Fund and have conducted research. Other OUT staff were involved in joint research with other institutions like UDSM and Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA).

CHANGING EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

This section examined three broad activities of tertiary education institutions that assist the construction of democratic and knowledge-driven societies. One, supporting innovation by generating new knowledge; accessing global stores of knowledge and adapting knowledge for local use. Two, contributing to human capital formation by training a qualified and adaptable labour force, including high-level scientists, professionals, technicians, basic and secondary education teachers, and future government, civil service and business leaders. The third activity is to provide the foundation for democracy, nation building and social cohesion. The Open University of Tanzania has contributed to changes in education in Tanzania as some people were not able to continue with studies due to nature of activities they were doing. With the launching of OUT many people have managed to study while continuing with their job/work.

Various documents have shown the need to give more attention to open and distance education as an alternative delivery mode of teaching. Such documents include the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2000), the Tanzania Vision 2025 and the National ICT Policy (2003). Education is an important tool for socio-economic development and a key factor in strengthening human capabilities and reducing poverty in an increasingly globalized world. There is a need to improve education quality, access and affordability, equity and efficiency. There is a shortage of qualified and competent experts at various levels of the social and economic system. With the development of ICT OUT was able to reach all people including urban and people living in remote villages. For example, OUT encouraged its students to buy

computers and the University is in the process of burning CDs and DVDs to be given to students.

Achievements of The Open University of Tanzania Since its Establishment in 1992

Tertiary education or universities assist the improvement of the institutional regime through the training of competent and responsible professionals needed for sound macro-economic and public sector management. Its academic and research activities provide crucial support for the national innovative systems. Achievements and significance presented here are obtained from the documents obtained from the OUT library and in some offices at OUT headquarters.

Employment

As of the year 2012, the university had employed about 643 permanent employees; with 308 academic staff, 296 administrative staff 296 and 39 technical staff 39 (Facts and Figures, 2011). The employees includes Professors, Doctors or PhD holders, Masters Holders, first degree holders to certificates holders.

Academic Staff

Academic staff employed by OUT from 2002 to 2009 by gender is as presented in Table 1. The number of academic staff in 2002 to 2004 was 76, the number changed abruptly in 2004 from 109 to 266 in 2009. However, out of the 266 academic staff 183 were males and 83 are females. In 2010 academic staff at OUT reached 308 staff where males were 204 and female 106. Apart from permanent employees, OUT provides employment to part-time staff where these staff assists in marking exams, setting exams, supervising postgraduate students writing their thesis and teaching.

Table 1: Academic Staff by Gender and Year of Employment

Year of employment	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
2002	60	16	76
2003	65	11	76
2004	62	14	76
2005	91	18	109
2006	97	24	121
2007	131	41	172
2008	148	59	207
2009	183	83	266
2010	204	104	308

Source: Facts and Figures, June 2010 pg 33

Administrative and Technical Staff

Table 2 shows the administrative and technical staff working at OUT distributed by gender. The table shows that by June 2011 OUT had a total of 296 administrative staff of whom 168 were females and 128 were males. The University also has technical staff. Technical staffs are 39 in total with 29 males and 10 females. The

institution's aim was to reduce gender disparity, especially for the technical staff as there are more males (74%) than females.

Table 2: Administrative and Technical Staff by Gender as of 2012

	Male	Female	Total
Administrative staff	128	168	296
Technical staff	29	10	39
Total	157	178	335

Source: Facts and Figures, June 2011.

Enrolment of Students

The Open University of Tanzania attracts students from highly heterogeneous groups of applicants across the country and beyond (OUT, 2011). The enrolment of undergraduate students has witnessed a positive trend over the past 15 years (*ibid*). Between 1994 and 1996, students' enrolment rose by 43.7% after which it dropped drastically from 1,101 to 755 between 1996 and 1997, respectively. Moreover, from 1997 until the late 1990s, enrolment continued to fall gradually before rebounding slightly in the year 2000 (OUT, 2011:1). Number of students enrolled every year since 2001 kept on increasing. The OUT in 1994 enrolled 766 students while in 2011 admission reached 8,751 (OUT, 2011). The increase in the number of students joining OUT is due to high demand of education by Tanzanians and non-Tanzanians. However, people with low qualifications which prohibit them from joining or studying at OUT, are advised to study a foundation courses for one year. When students pass the foundation course, they are allowed to join the University for first degree programmes. The number of students joining postgraduate studies is also increasing. The University Facts and Figures shows that about 3,000 students join postgraduate programmes every year.

Students with Disabilities

The University has also enrolled students with disabilities. The Open University of Tanzania was probably the leading university in the country in enrolling a large number of students with disabilities. The Assistive Special Technology Unit (ASTU) is the unit responsible for supporting individuals with special needs and disabilities at OUT. The students with disabilities are studying at OUT through ODL. Data for students with disabilities are presented in Table 3. The number of students with disabilities registered with OUT since 1997 reached 140 where 32 were females and 108 males (OUT Annual Report, undated).

Table 3: Individuals with Disabilities Registered at OUT Since 1997

Disability type	Females	Males	Total
Visual impairment	15	64	79
Physical impairment	12	36	48
Albinism	1	2	3
Health impairment	3	3	6
Deaf	1	3	4
Total	32	108	140

Source: ASTU office

Table 3 reports the efforts and contribution made by OUT in providing education to people with disabilities. The number of females is low compared to number of males. There is a need to encourage females to join higher learning institutions. There is also a need for soliciting funds and other support to run the programmes for the disabled.

Students Graduating From The Open University Of Tanzania

Students graduating from OUT contribute differently to the development of the country. Some graduates get their salaries increased while others get promoted and end-up with good retirement packages.

The first graduation which took place in 1999 had 159 students; there were only 16 undergraduate students and 143 Foundation Course students (Facts and Figure, 2011). Facts and Figure (2011) shows that the situation changed since 2000 in which 46 out of 75 students graduated with Bachelor of Arts (Ed), B.Com (Gen) and BSc (Gen). Since the year 2001, OUT has recorded an annual increase in students awarded degrees (Facts and Figure, 2011). The number of graduates from OUT has increased since 1999. At the undergraduate level, BA (Ed) programme has produced more graduates (804) than any other programme; over the last 12 years (Facts and Figure, 2011); next to BA (Ed) is the LLB where 735 students graduated (Facts and Figure, 2011).

However, at the postgraduate level, Master of Science in Community Economic Development (MSc CED) has recorded more graduates than any other graduate programme at The Open University of Tanzania. MBA has so far produced 250 graduates up 2010. At the non-degree level, until the year 2010 the foundation course has produced more than 3,000 graduates (Facts and Figures, 2011).

Data presented in the Facts and Figures (2011: 26) show that, the cumulative number of graduates from 1999 to 2010 was 8,830 whereby 3,300 (37%) were females. Out of 8,830 graduates, 3,080 students graduated in non-degree programmes out of whom 1,352 (44%) were females, 3,859 students graduated in undergraduate programmes out of whom 1,369 (35%) were females and 785 students graduated in the postgraduate programmes whereby 216 (28%) were females.

The University Facts and Figures, (2011) portray that, at PhD level, 11 male students and 4 female students successfully completed their PhD programmes, between 1999 and 2010. In the same period 4 and 1 males and female respectively received Honorary Degrees including the Former President of the Republic of South Africa Nelson Mandela and Ally Hassan Mwinyi the second president of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Benefits Accrued From Studying at The Open University of Tanzania

Figure 1 presents the benefits people obtained in studying at The Open University of Tanzania. The University enrolled students of different background; age, sex (male and female), youth and adults. There are those coming direct from school

(form four or six leavers) while others were workers and business people. Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents said that studying at OUT provided them with qualifications which promoted them from lower cadre to higher positions (Figure 1). About 24% of the other people interviewed got their salary increases after submitting certificates they acquired after completing studies at OUT.

Apart from the benefits mentioned in Figure 1 there are other benefits people acquired from studying at the OUT. Some of those benefits include opening of new income generating activities while others have been appointed to hold political positions.

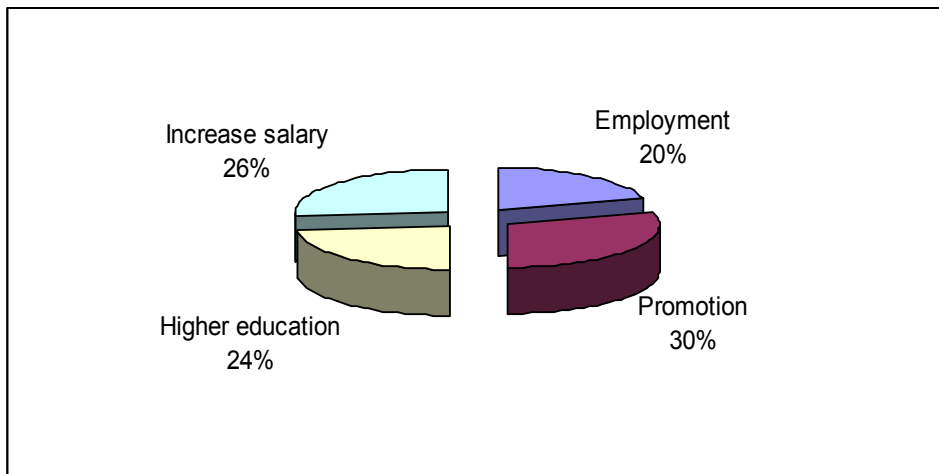


Figure 1: Benefits People Acquired From Studying or Working at OUT
Source: Mhache, 2012

Experience from Selected Case Studies

Different graduates from The Open University of Tanzania were interviewed. The graduates interviewed provided their experience and benefits they had acquired after completing studies at the university.

Nikombolwe

Nikombolwe is an employee of The Open University of Tanzania since 2011. He was stationed at Tabora Regional Center. Before Nikombolwe joined studies at The Open University of Tanzania, he was teaching at one of secondary schools in Dar es Salaam. He decided to apply and join undergraduate degree studies at OUT. It was difficult for him to take studies while working. He had at the same time to study and perform teaching at his school. Although it was difficulty to study and work, he tried and accomplished studies with flying colours. After graduating he applied for tutorial post at OUT. Because he did very well in his studies, he passed the job interview and he was recruited and employed by OUT as an academic staff.

Sifuni

Sifuni started as a primary school teacher. He joined OUT as a student and graduated in 2010, got promoted and became the Head Teacher, the position he has held to date. Now Sifuni is pursuing Master of Education (Med APPPS Evening) at

the same university. He has a plan to join PhD studies after graduating with Master's Degree in Education this year.

Challenges Facing The Open University of Tanzania

Despite the contribution of the 20 years of OUT in delivering university education, the following were some of the challenges:

- Inadequate financial resources. The money given by the government to run the University is decreasing every year.
- There are few academic staff compared to the number of students.
- The University has started new programs which require new study materials. The challenge here is how to write all these study materials for the proposed new programs.
- Financial support for the staff to go for further studies is another challenge.
- Some students don't know how the University is working when they first join it. Some think there are normal classes like the conventional universities.
- OUT provide education through distance mode, student has to use internet and phone to consult the tutors. It is expensive for students to pay for the internet services. Internet in working hours is slow and sometimes inaccessible.
- Another challenge to students is know how in using internet. Some students don't know how to use internet. Even those who pretend to know internet, they don't know how to search information in the internet.
- Some students don't have computers. The students in remote areas don't have or plan to have computer because there is no electricity in their areas.

Discussion

The findings have shown that education attained from OUT has benefitted the graduates. Mbilinyi (1992) argues that today women in lower categories of employment in Tanzania cannot access resources for research and writing process, they remain unduly dependent on the good will of the middle class researchers. Appropriate education and training has empowered people to access resources and for many, this has been possible through education provided by OUT.

The establishment of The Open University of Tanzania has increased employment opportunities. On the other hand OUT has provided people a place to study and widen their knowledge while working. The qualifications people acquired from studying at OUT enabled them to get employment in different places, others got promotions while yet others got salary increases. Some graduates who have retired have obtained good retirement benefits as a result of qualifications they obtained from OUT.

This article analyzed the data and figures presented in OUT Facts and Figures booklets. These data were interpreted to suit the progress OUT has made in 20 years. The focus of this article was on employees, student enrollment and graduates. The secondary information and data analyzed in this paper are substantiated by field survey.

It was found that OUT has made a lot of contribution in the educational development in the country. It increased the number of students who wished to

study at the university but missed chances to study in the conventional universities due to limited space in those universities. With OUT student were able to learn while working.

The article has documented the contribution OUT has made to the country in the past 20 years of its existence. Based on the findings of this paper, it is recommended that:

- OUT should evaluate its performance by conducting research to identify what the graduates are doing after completing studies. With the result of this evaluation the University will restructure its teaching and courses to reflect the market needs.
- There is a need to train all students joining OUT to use the internet and how to search information in the internet.
- In every year students should be provided with CD with study material for the whole year. The students interviewed said that they are ready to buy those CDs. They said that they (students) were using a lot of money to photocopy handouts which are not fit for their studies.
- Having a computer should be one of the conditions for all students joining studies at OUT. This will enable students to use CDs and read while at home.
- Internet server down: students should use the internet and download materials when the internet is accessible, burn them in the CD and use them incase internet is not accessible. Students should be advised to buy and use modem.

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Accessibility of Open Educational Resources for Distance Education Learners: The Case of The Open University of Tanzania

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Abstract: *This paper investigated the accessibility of Open Educational Resources at The Open University of Tanzania. Specifically, the study looked at staff and students' level of awareness on the types of OER available at OUT Library, access and use trends of OER by academic staff and students, challenges faced in accessing OER and possible solutions. The study involved one hundred and twenty (120) students and eighty (80) academic staff who were randomly selected. Primary data for this study was collected through self-administered questionnaires. Secondary data was collected through document review. Key findings revealed that staff and students are aware of the OER available at OUT and that the major use of the information found in OER is for self-learning. The major constraint in the use OER was library users' dependency on librarian assistance in accessing the resources. In addition, other problems encountered by library users when accessing OER were low internet connectivity, unreliable power supply and inadequate number of computers. In view of the fast changing information and ICT environment the study recommends that OUT students and staff should be trained in computer and information literacy skills. Besides, awareness on OER should be created and the ICT bandwidth should be increased to improve access to OER available at The Open University of Tanzania.*

Key words: open educational resources (OER), access, utilization, e-learning, online learning, open and distance learning, distance education.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge generation in any field of study begins with clear, accepted or at least conventional definitions of terms (Farace, 2010:1). The two terms; open educational resources and access to information, are interrelated because it is the availability of information which promotes its accessibility. Basically, you can only access what is available and the value of information lies on its extent of accessibility and usage.

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008) the term access is defined as the right to use or look at something, the right or opportunity to use or benefit from something.