

INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF LIBRARY USERS IN A CHANGING LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE OF FACULTY OF LAW STAFF MEMBERS, UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the information-seeking behavior of academic members of staff of the Faculty of Law, University of Dar Es Salaam. The objective of the study was to find out how staff seek information in the light of the changes introduced in the library, particularly the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and re-organization of the library. Data collection methods were questionnaire and interview. The study revealed that 50% of the Faculty of Law staff use the manual catalogue in searching information instead of computerized catalogue. In addition, 36.4% were not aware that they could search library catalogue while at their offices. The study found that Law Reports and legislation are the most consulted type of materials and that the staff have other formal and informal sources of information apart from the University library. The study recommends increased sensitization of library users on the range of new services offered by the library and intensification of user training, including outreach programs.

INTRODUCTION

When users come to the library, they portray different behavioral patterns in seeking information. Some consult the catalogue while others simply browse through the shelves. The kind of information sources preferred also varies from one user to the other. Some may prefer journal articles while others consult books, research reports or electronic sources. This is especially true of academic members of staff and researchers, who are, unlike students, not instructed by anyone to consult a particular document. It is this kind of

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behavioral pattern that is referred to as “Information seeking behavior.”

The importance of understanding information-seeking behavior of library users can not be overemphasized. The users’ behavior has implications on library policies, rules and regulations. Whereas proper behavior facilitates access to information, improper ones can lead to misuse and abuse of the services.

The University of Dar Es Salaam library has been undertaking some changes. Among the major changes are computerization of the library services including online access to its basic services, and the reorganization of the library along subject lines. A brief description of the transformation is given below:

(i) Computerization of the Library

Computerization of the UDSM library started in the late 1980s when the library acquired a few computers for word processing and creation of a union list of periodicals. Later the library was involved in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) CD ROM pilot project for African universities. This enabled the University acquire more computers for CD ROM services. With time, the library managed to create its own local databases on environmental issues, educational research network (ERNETA) and biodiversity. Currently the library offers Internet services as well as E-mail facility to its users. It is also linked to a number of international databases such as EBSCO, British Library, Blackwells and many others, all of which provide its readers with up to-date information.

In 1998 the library started computerization of its in-house activities. Priority was accorded to catalogue and serials management. Today, most of library materials are accessible through Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). The circulation of materials is also computerized, where issuing, returning and reservation is done with the use of computers. In addition, library staff can get bibliographic information of new books online using the Library of Congress database for cataloguing purposes. Such technological advancement has an impact on the behavior of users in seeking information

(ii) Reorganization of the UDSM Library

The UDSM library was reorganized in mid 2000. The reorganization involved a massive movement of materials from one part of the library to the other. Some new departments were formed while others were merged or dismantled. The philosophy behind reorganization was the need to improve library services. The improvement was to be achieved through serving clients' time, bringing them closer to library staff, building library capacity in the development of ICT and proper utilization of space.

The factors that led to the reorganization of the library were, among others, increased student enrollment, the need to organize the library according to subject specialization instead of library functions, introduction of ICT, and completion of library extension (Msuya, 2000).

The significance of this study need to be seen in the context of the two major changes (computerization and reorganization) that have taken place in the library. These changes are expected to influence the behavior of users in seeking information. The broad intention of this study is to see the kind of behavior that is currently being portrayed in the light of those changes.

Objectives of the Study

This study had the following objectives:

- To establish the information seeking behavior of academic members of staff of the Faculty of Law, University of Dar es Salaam. The understanding of the pattern will ensure that the provision of library services is made with a consideration of the behavior of users. As pointed out by Heine (2000), knowledge about the order in which services are used is of fundamental value to the management. It can influence policies, rules and regulations of the library.
- To understand the reasons that led to that particular pattern in seeking information. This will lead to recommendations on ways in which the staff could be assisted in seeking information in better and proper ways.
- To appraise the library management on the level of acceptance, use or non-use of the computerized services introduced in the library such as OPAC, CD ROM and the

Internet, through observing staff behavior in the use of such facilities.

Research Methods

(i) Data Collection methods

Questionnaire was the main method of data collection. One set of questionnaire comprising both structured and unstructured questions was administered to Faculty of Law staff.

There was also an interview where a few members of staff of the Faculty of Law were involved. The interview was intended to provide a clarification of some issues raised in the questionnaire. The interviewees were purposively selected for reasons of convenience.

(ii) Population and Sample

In this study, the population comprised all academic members of staff in the Faculty of Law. The Faculty has a total of 28 academic members of staff (University of Dar es Salaam Prospectus 2000/01: 248 – 250). Given the relatively small population, it was decided that the sample should constitute all 28 members of staff.

However, only 22 members of staff were at the university during data collection stage. The other six were either on study leave or on leave of absence. Out of the 22 that were given the questionnaire, 16 completed it constituting 72.7 percent response rate.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

(i) Characteristics of the Respondents

(a) Gender

About 94 percent of the respondents were males.

(b) Age Composition

Age wise, the respondents ranged from 32 to 63 years. The mean age is 45.4 and the median is 48. Given that the compulsory retirement age in Tanzania is 60 years, one notes that the Faculty has an aging staff. The University stopped recruiting new staff in the early 1990s because of the government decision to cut down

costs. Since then, no new staff joined the Faculty. It is only in 1999 that the decision was reversed and the faculties started to earmark best undergraduate finalists who were awarded scholarships for Masters degree with the intention to joining the faculties after completion of their programs.

(c) Academic and Professional Qualifications

Eighty eight percent (88%) of the respondents have Ph. D or Juris Doctor qualifications. Only 12.5% have Masters degree and none with LLB degree. In terms of professional qualifications, there was one Full Professor, three Associate Professors, six Senior Lecturers, five Lecturers and one Assistant Lecturer.

(d) Duration of Library use

The respondents in this survey have been using the library as members of staff in the Faculty of Law for periods ranging from 7 to 34 years. This is a long duration which indicates that they know the collection very well.

(ii) Staff behavior in the use of Catalogue

(a) Methods used in searching library materials

In the light of computerized catalogue, the researcher wanted to know the extent to which the Faculty of Law staff use Online Public Access Catalogue in searching information. When asked to indicate the type of catalogue preferred in searching library materials, the response was as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Methods used in searching library materials.

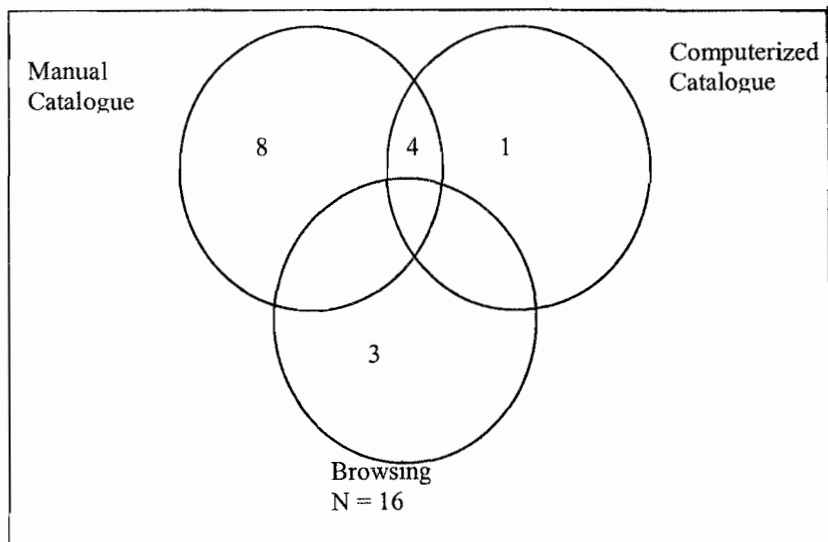


Figure 1 shows that a total of 13 (81.2 percent) academic staff in the Faculty of Law use catalogues (be it manual or computerized) in searching information. Eight (50 %) of them use only manual catalogue only, while 1 (6.2 %) use computerized catalogue only. There are also 4 (25 %) who use both manual and computerized catalogues.

A small number of respondents (3 or 18.7 %) mentioned browsing as their method of searching materials. It should be noted that browsing is an important method of searching library materials. The way materials are organized and arranged on shelves facilitates browsing. Law library users do not browse all over the collection. They know specific areas where once they browse they will get the type of information they want. During the interview for example, one respondent had this to say with regards to the use of browsing method:

You have made it difficult for us to get what we want by moving us from the upper to the ground floor. There (referring to the upper floor where the Law collection was placed before reorganization), you go straight to the shelf and

pick the Law Report that you want. Nowadays we are totally confused.

Even with the use of browsing method, catalogue remains a very important tool for searching library materials. This is emphasized by Boakye (1999) that a user is handicapped in the use of the library if he lacks the skills to use the catalogue. It was encouraging to note that 81.2 percent of the respondents use catalogues. Boakye (ibid, 205) continues to emphasize that without catalogue searching skills, a user becomes unaware of the books and journals which would have helped him greatly in search for information.

OPAC has many advantages over manual catalogue. The searching process is simple, it is accurate and fast, hence time saving. It also allows the searcher to combine search terms using Boolean logic. In addition, it provides the current status of the document (whether available or on loan). Despite these advantages, the study found out that only 31.2% use computerized catalogue.

The reasons given by those who prefer manual catalogue instead of Computerized Catalogue were as follows:

- That is what I am used to 5 (62.5%),
- It is simple to use than the computerized one 2 (25%),
- I am computer illiterate 1 (12.5).

Basically, the reasons stated for preferring manual catalogue have one thing in common; that users have not been adequately prepared for changes. This is the challenge that the library is facing, that is, how to effectively train library users in accessing ICT facilities.

(b) Use of Library catalogue from remote sites

A total of 31.3 percent of the staff have searched computerized library catalogue from their offices. The remaining 68.7 % pointed out that they have never searched library catalogue while at their offices or elsewhere outside the library. The reasons given for the latter were as follows:

- I am not aware that it is possible to search library catalogue from outside the library - 4 (36.4 %);
- I do not have a computer in my office – 4 (36.4 %);

- I prefer manual catalogue to automated one – 2 (18.2 %);
- My computer is not connected to the University Local Area Network – 1 (9.1 %);
- I am computer illiterate – 1 (9.1 %).

(Note: Some respondents mentioned more than one reason).

The reasons given above are centered on the issues of lack of awareness of the services available, training and problem of preparedness for changes.

In an interview with a few of the respondents, it was indicated that they were looking forward to accessing library catalogue from their offices. One of them had this to say:

I have just received my computer (pointing to the new PC). The kind of issues addressed in the questionnaire will now be a reality. Let me get settled and I will get in-touch with you. I want to search library materials right here!

(iii) Type of materials consulted most

The respondents were asked to rank the type of materials consulted in the library according to the frequency of use. The most frequently consulted type of material was ranked as number 1 and the least consulted as number 5. Table 2 below summarizes the results:

Table 2 Type of legal materials by frequency of consultation

Type of Materials	Rank in use of materials (tallies)					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Highly used materials		Moderately used		Lowly used	
Law Reports	//// /	//// /	/	/		16
Legislation	////	//// /	///			16
Journals	/	//	//// //	////	/	16
Books	//		////	//// ///	/	16
Research Reports				//	//// //// ////	16
Total	16	16	16	16	16	80

Table 2 shows that the kind of legal materials that are highly consulted by Faculty of Law staff are the law reports and legislation. These were ranked as “Highly used materials” by 14 and 13 tallies respectively. Journals and books are moderately used. They were ranked as number 3 and 4 with 12 and 13 tallies respectively. The consultation of research reports are the least consulted as indicated by 14 tallies that ranked it as number 5 (Lowly used) and 2 that ranked it as number 4 (Moderately used).

The findings indicate the need for selecting and giving priority to Law Reports and Legislation when acquiring legal materials. This however, does not in any way suggest that other types of materials should be ignored.

The data supports Panella (1990) and Clinch (1995) categorization of the legislation and law reports as primary sources of legal information. These are basic sources which are consulted by lawyers on a daily basis. It is therefore not surprising that the respondents classified them as heavily used resources. Secondary sources on the other hand comprise all other legal literature such as textbooks, treatises, periodicals and other similar materials.

(iv) Use of other libraries

Members of staff in the Faculty of Law also make use of other libraries and documentation centres to get information, apart from

the University of Dar es Salaam Library. Some of the libraries that are frequently visited include:

- Faculty of Law Library (75 percent);
- High Court Library (62.5 percent);
- British Council Library (31.2 percent);
- Attorney General's Chambers Library (25 percent);
- USIS library (12.5 percent);
- Other libraries (31.2 percent).

Seeking information from other libraries is considered a positive move in fulfilling information needs. It supports the idea that there is no library in the world that can satisfy the needs of all its users all the time. This emphasizes the need for library cooperation and networking.

(v) Informal sources of information

Apart from the libraries, the academic staff also consult other sources of information. In this survey, the staff were requested to mention other sources of information that they consult for information apart from libraries. The sources that were mentioned are:

- Mass media (81.2 percent);
- Visits to government ministries/organizations (75 percent);
- Person to person consultation (62.5 percent);
- Other sources (Meetings, Internet cafes, Workshops (37.5).

Despite the extensive use of other sources, the staff indicated that informal sources are predominantly used for personal matters. In many cases they are used when seeking information for private use rather than for teaching or research purposes.

These findings are similar to those obtained by Hart (1997) in his survey on information gathering among the faculty members of the State University of New York (SUNY) at Fredonia. In his study, Hart found that "formal sources are clearly more important than informal sources" They are more heavily used than the informal sources.

(vi) Use of Information Technology (IT)

(a) CD ROM services

In a legal training institution, students are taught how to use law reports as primary sources of legal information in establishing precedents when making court judgements. The University of Dar es Salaam library has Tanzania Law Reports in both printed and CD ROM formats. A question on the use of law reports on CD ROM format produced very interesting responses. Only 31.3 percent of the respondents have used Tanzania Law Reports on CD ROM.

When those who have never used TLR on CD ROM (68.7%) were asked to state the reasons for not using, their responses are as summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Reasons why FOL staff never use TLR on CD ROM

Reasons given	Number of respondents	Percentage
I am more comfortable with printed version of the TLR than CD ROM	5	45.4
I am not aware of the availability of such services in the library	4	36.4
The printed version are sufficient. The need for CD ROM has never arisen	2	18.2
Total	11	100

N = 11

Table 3 above shows that 45.4 % of the respondents were more comfortable with printed version of Tanzania law reports than

the CD ROM one. Like in the use of catalogue, they liked the printed version of TLR than the one in electronic format. Another reason was lack of awareness about the availability of TLR on CD ROM. As indicated in Table 3, 36.4 % of the respondents said they were not aware that TLR is also available on CD ROM. Possible explanation may be that the staff do not frequently visit the library to be appraised of the developments taking place. It is also possible that the library has not marketed its services adequately. There were also a few (18.2%) who said that the need for using CD ROM has not arisen yet. To them, the printed versions of the publications were sufficient.

These findings are similar to those found by Dulle (2001) when investigating application of Information Technology for research in Tanzania. In his study, Dulle found that 38 (46.8 %) of the academic staff at Sokoine University of Agriculture were not aware of the availability of CD ROM services at their library.

(b) Internet Services

As for the use of Internet services offered at the UDSM library, the pattern is that the majority of staff do not use such services. Only 26.7 percent indicated that they have used the services. The remaining 73.3 percent said that they have never used the services. Table 4 summarizes the reasons given for the non use of Internet services in the library:

Table 4. Reasons for not using the Library's Internet facility

Reasons	Number of respondents	Percentage
I search Internet at the Faculty Computer lab/ in my office	6	54.5
I am not aware that such service is available	3	27.3
I am Computer illiterate	1	9.1
The need for Internet search has never arisen	1	9.1
Total	11	100

N =11

Table 4 shows that over half (54.5 percent) of those who have never used Library Internet services have access to Internet facility in the faculty computer lab or in their offices. This encouraging development is attributed to the University's ICT policy, that encourages all academic staff to have PCs in their offices.

Another 27.3 percent of the respondents indicated that they were not aware that the library provides Internet services. One respondent (9.1 percent) admitted that he/she was computer illiterate while the remaining one said that the need for searching information on the Internet has never arisen. The kind of responses given again, raises the issues of marketing library services and training academic staff in computer literacy skills.

CONCLUSION

When changes are introduced at any place, not all people will accept them at once. According to Mkude (2000), the visionaries can see the benefit of the changes and have the courage to accept changes despite obstacles. The pragmatists will accept innovation,

but only after it has been proved to work by someone else. The conservatives will resist changes and are creative in inventing excuses for rejecting the new.

Similar patterns of adopting of Information Technology by users at the University of Dar es Salaam have been observed. There are those who have jumped into the technology and are using the new computerized catalogue, CD ROM facility and the Internet to access information. There are those who are a bit reluctant. These need more time to prove that automated library services are better than manual ones. A few others will always need their manual catalogue. It is therefore, the responsibility of the library to consider these groups individually as portrayed in their behavior of library use, and help them accordingly. The management of change has to be implemented with a consideration of all these groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made

(i) Sensitization of users on services that are available

One of the most important task which the UDSM library has undertake since computerization began is that of sensitization of the academic staff on the range of new services introduced in the library. As indicated in the findings of the study, there are members of staff who are not aware that they can search library materials while at their offices using computerized catalogue. Some are not aware that Tanzania Law Reports are available on CD ROM; and that Internet services are available at the library. In this regard, sensitization should be a continuous process.

The sensitization can be done in various ways. The library can continue with its organized workshops where the staff are sensitized on the developments taking place in the library. In addition, visits can be made to the faculties and offices to create such awareness among individuals. Staff - student seminars that are conducted regularly at the faculties can also provide a platform for sensitization.

(ii) Training

(a) Training academic staff on Computer literacy skills

The University of Dar es Salaam Information policy programme (Infopol) advocates the imparting of computer skills as human

resources capacity building. The University Computing Centre was assigned this task by Programme Management Unit (PMU). The idea is that this is a new technology for many people in the developing world. Appreciation and use of the technology can not be successful without proper training.

The changing nature of acquisition of information and the overall transformation of the UDSM necessitates all the staff to be computer literate. As such, all efforts should be made to train the staff on computer skills. The new techniques of searching information in the library will only be successful if the staff are computer literate

(b) Training users on how to access library materials online

In addition to the general training in computer literacy skills, there is also a need for intensifying training specifically on application of computers in retrieving online information. The library has conducted several user training workshops for the academic community of the university. In addition to the workshops, the library could also organize training programs to individual academic staff members at their convenient times in their respective offices. This is an outreach program. It is time consuming, slow and expensive. Yet, it is essential to complement the workshops and seminars.

(iii) Staff access to computers

The University of Dar es Salaam also need to ensure availability of computers to all its academic staff. Whereas the University is planning to have computers for students at a ratio of One computer to Ten students (1:10), each staff must have a PC in his/her office. The arrangement that has been introduced by the university to buy computers and give them to staff on loan basis is commended. Other universities in the sub Saharan countries where economic conditions are not very favorable can also consider this strategy.

(iv) Operation of two catalogues

In a situation where some library users still prefers to use manual catalogue, it is advisable that the library should continue to operate two catalogues, the manual and the computerized one

simultaneously. This should continue until such a time that there are no more reasons for maintaining the manual catalogue.

LESSONS FOR OTHER LIBRARIES

What lessons can other libraries undergoing transformation learn from the experience of the University of Dar es Salaam? One lesson is that it takes time for library innovations to be accepted. The introduction of On-line Catalogue, CD ROM and Internet facilities could not be accepted by all library users at once. As indicated in the findings of the study, some of them still preferred the manual systems that they were used to.

The transformation of the library has not been reflected in the behavior of all users at once. The rather slow pace in accepting changes should not be seen as a discouraging factor. This is how acceptance of innovation takes place. The behavior of users can not change immediately. Since no library user should be left behind by the technological wave, the innovation has to be backed with continuous sensitization, training and patience.

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