TOWARDS EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN TANZANIA: SOME CRITICAL FACTORS

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Abstract

The paper looks at the role of libraries in universities and what type of management style can facilitate the effective achievement of that role. Some challenges in the management of libraries are identified including resource, fiscal and physical constraints. The paper argues that in general all types of resources are likely to continue dwindling and the best way of curbing this trend will depend on how proactive and forward looking the library management is in strategic planning.

Introduction

It is unquestionable that libraries are the lifeline in the educational role of academic institutions. In order to play this expected role appropriately, libraries have to be effectively managed and as much as possible meet expected standards of a modern academic library. The question of standards is more critical in the case of Tanzania now with liberalization of the higher education and the introduction of national registration and accreditation system. This paper examines the prerequisites for effective management of university libraries in Tanzania. Universities are higher learning institutions that offer degrees and professional awards in certain disciplines. Effective management of libraries is important in ensuring the delivery of quality academic services including training, research and consultancy. Academic services rely on quality and up to date information, the concept on which this paper is based.

This paper has five sections. Section one is an introduction, followed by a discussion on the roles of an academic library in meeting the various needs of its clientele through a simple conceptual framework. Section three examines the managerial requirements of making libraries meet effectively such roles. Section four examines some of the managerial challenges facing libraries in universities in Tanzania and how they can be surmounted. Section five is conclusion and some recommendations.

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Role of a Library

As pointed out by Cornish (2000:4) "It is on publishers, booksellers and libraries that the responsibility for making publications available falls. Improved availability depends upon the ability to operate effectively." The publisher is responsible for the quality and quantity of works that are published and for publicising, marketing and disseminating them. Booksellers act as intermediaries between the publishers and the purchasers, whether individual or institutional. The availability of publications, both current and retrospective, can be assured mainly through libraries. The prime role of university libraries is therefore to act as reservoirs of information resources for the university. Information collection is geared towards providing materials to support the teaching, learning and research activities of the university.

As Figure 1 below indicates, there are two main intertwined professional services normally offered by universities, namely training (long and short courses), and research (by staff and students). With the increasing need for attaining financial sustainability, consultancy is picking up as an important third activity in institutions of higher learning. The relative weight attached to each service depends on the value base of an institution, its degree of development and therefore, institutional capacity. More often, however, well-developed universities will give (and are expected to give) strong emphasis on teaching and research for both faculty and students. More professionally oriented university institutions tend to also attach weight in consultancy in order to enrich the professional orientation of the faculty through exposure to real world situations. Whatever the case, it is important that services provided by the library should reflect the purpose of the university in question.
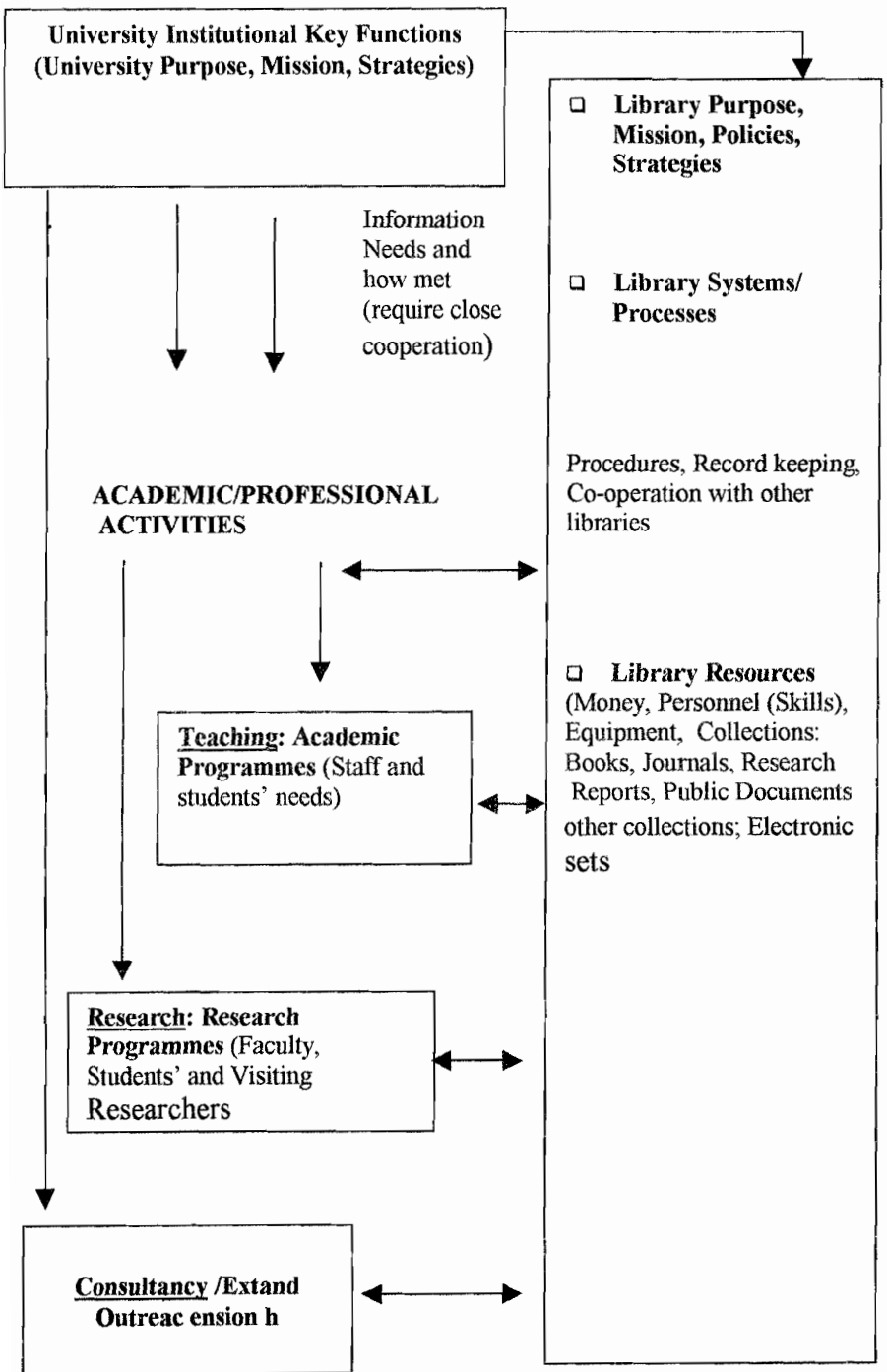
Figure 1: Schematic Presentation of the Link between the Library and University Institutional Roles (Source: Author)

In general, the role of the library is to gather and record relevant information and facilitate effective and efficient access of such recorded information by clients of the library. The clientele include faculty members (as teachers, researchers and consultants), students (as trainees and researchers) and other researchers. A library has to play a pivotal role in contributing to the overall mission of academic institutions, more often geared towards attaining academic excellence. This entails that the library understands and incorporates both the current and future needs of its clients in its plans and develops an approach to provide them. To do this a system that ensures a close contact between the system itself and its clients has to be in place. Also continuous feedback has to be collected from the clients on the performance of the library in terms of service delivery, which in turn may be used to improve library performance. This is the essence of customer focus.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) requires that libraries play their role of information gathering and dissemination according to certain standards. In particular, the maintenance and use of information collected should be consistent and in conformity with recognized standards of cataloguing and classifications for the purpose of having good information organization system within the library and easy retrieval of that information by the library user. In order to achieve the above purposes of the university institutions, the library should have adequate and appropriate staff, financial resources, physical facilities, collections and services.

In aiding the teaching function the library is expected to reflect the curricular that a particular institution is offering. Thus for example in the case of Mzumbe University (MU) in Tanzania, the library is expected to hold an acceptable quantity and quality of collection of media that support the faculty and students needs in the programmes that the University is conducting. Currently, the programmes cover Masters Degree programmes in - Business Administration, Public Administration (General), and Public Administration (Health), and Bachelor Degrees in Public Administration, Economics, Accountancy, Information and Communication Technology, Management and Law. Included also are: Certificate programmes in Accountancy, Law, Human Resource Management and Business Management.

The same applies to the research function. To support research, the library services should reflect and be supportive of the research programmes being conducted by the university. Currently at Mzumbe University these hinge on four clusters namely: entrepreneurship and business development, local government, gender, and Information and Communication Technology.

In order to play this role there has to be very close co-operation between the academic departments, the faculty, and the library personnel. Such co-

operation has not been very strong in the universities in Tanzania. If we take Mzumbe University as an example, while appreciating the importance of the faculty's role in making the library play its role effectively, the faculty has however not been as aggressive in seeking the services of the library. This has led the library personnel to use its own past experience in collecting information that has not necessarily met the needs of the clientele. How the library involves its clientele in determining information needs is a managerial challenge.

The most critical role of the university library is the kind of programmes that it has for its clientele and to what extent the clientele is involved in these programmes. The programmes available will probably be influenced by the quality of the library staff, but also the resources that are available to the library. Such programmes may include periodic training of students (particularly new students) on the use of the library and its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in case these are available, training of faculty on similar aspects, and promotion of academic publications through the library web page (where this exists). Academic community's involvement in library programmes is also a managerial issue and is reflective of the link that exists between the academic programmes and the library.

Effective and Efficient Management of an Academic Library
Management gurus (Appley, 1974); (Dale, 1978); (Drucker, 1982); and (Hodgetts and Luthans, 1991); have given many definitions of management and it is not the intention of this paper to review them. But the key issue to most of these definitions is that management is accomplishing a set of intertwined defined activities that are undertaken to accomplish certain prescribed objectives. To undertake the activities in which human and non-human resources are used. Management therefore, involves the administration of human and non-human activities to meet specified objectives. These operate within a prescribed administrative organization. Key issues in management thus include planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, budgeting and evaluating.

For the use of resources to be effectively co-ordinated to accomplish prescribed objectives, the organizational structure and administrative processes of the organization (and its departments) should be well defined and understood. This applies to all University libraries as a departments within the governance structure of higher learning institutions. The responsibilities and authority of the library administration and the management should be defined. Defining these responsibilities alone will not be sufficient to make a library perform. It is how the people in the library actually apply themselves, guided by the laid down administrative processes and procedures and set of responsibilities that will influence performance.

In today's world of complexities effective managers at all levels have to think and operate strategically in order to ensure value for money for the services that are offered. Managers are people who make things happen. Three strategic features seem to be important for effective management of any organization or its units:

1. Mission, policies

The first and foremost is what might be termed as the distinguishing characteristics of the organization/department in terms of its purpose, mission and policies. Just as an institution of higher learning would have its purpose and mission which guide the institution's activities, the library also should have a clearly defined mission statement which is reflective of the University's mission. According to Hakes (1999: 100), this mission has to be understood by the whole library workforce. The mission of the library should guide the design of library's major policies and action plans. The library should change with changes made on the University's mission. The need for the library mission statement is congruent with the university library standards for developing countries. Indeed libraries in most public higher learning institutions in Tanzania, including Mzumbe University, have mission statements. It is not certain however, whether mission statements are really understood and internalised by the workforce. This could be a result of a non-participatory process in developing the mission statements and key policies requiring referencing of such policies. Another factor that could cause this is lack of an effective communication system within the library or institution where such information could be shared and internalised. The third reason could be lack of seminars for the university employees about those mission statements.

2. Strategic Planning

Hodgetts and Luthans (1991: 85) define *strategic planning* as:

> *"The process of determining an organization's basic mission and long-term objectives, and then implementing a plan of action for attaining these goals."*

To ensure that the mission of the library is well carried out, and to facilitate effective management of the University library, there is need for *strategic planning*.

Parent *(1988:343)* stated that:

> *"A formal strategic planning effort is one of the tools that can supplement other association actions, and when properly*

managed, enhance the effectiveness of all other actions".

This is also true in the context of the University library for it realising the importance of effective management through strategic planning which gears towards attainment of desired end results.

. One of the purposes of strategic planning is to identify clearly the most desirable end results, and to give librarians' work a clear direction. This requires concrete specification of desirable objectives. These objectives have to be defined with respect to clients satisfaction in terms of quality and quantity of services delivered.

In order to have an effective management, the library is encouraged to use strategic planning to increase its effectiveness and efficiency in its daily activities.

The librarians as professionals are urged to have the following in mind as regards effective planning:

> Strategic Planning as a management tool, can be used by librarians in related activities such as budgeting, selecting qualified and experienced staff, technology, and equipment. Planning does not take responsibility for making these choices from decision-makers, but it helps them by providing the information that is needed to make effective decisions.

> Strategic Planning as an opportunity can provide more effective leadership through development of operational policies that guide actions within the library profession.

> Lastly, librarians should know that strategic planning is a responsibility of every one. They should not term it as a waste of time and an impossible situation.

3. *Resources*

Probably of critical importance for effective management of the University library is resources. Resources cover *facilities* such as buildings, equipment, vehicles; *human resources* and their quality and quantity; *technology* and *finance*. These have to reflect the services and information collection standards that are expected of a University as a higher learning institution. In particular library resources have to be deployed effectively to meet the desired end results, "customer satisfaction". Some resources such as buildings and technology require long range planning, while others are recurrent. This in turn requires that adequate resources are allocated to the library, in accordance to its relative importance. Often however, budgetary constraints have led to inadequate resources allocated to University libraries

in which case processes to identify additional resources have to be initiated. This may include establishment of partnership with other similar institutions locally and, or at international level. Some international standards for university libraries have been stated and there is no need to repeat them. But a comment on three areas, - *staff, finance and technology* is worth making.

Staff

One area of assessing the effectiveness of library management is how it organizes, develops and maintains its collections, how it provides information to the clientele who are in need of different subject matter. No matter how much other resources are available, if the library does not have the right size of *personnel* with necessary qualifications, its performance may be limited. Many libraries in institutions of higher learning in Tanzania have limited numbers of staff with professional library qualifications. Of those who have library qualifications, even fewer are subject matter specialists in the areas in which they profile in their respective institutions. This severely affects the services they render, for example in developing collections, and in assisting researchers in different subject areas. This aspect is true for Mzumbe University library, which has a total of thirteen (13) semi professional library staff, i.e. library assistants, and three (3) professional librarians, one of whom is holding an administrative post of heading the library Directorate. This number of staff serves a population of more than 1,400 students and 141 faculty members. The need to recruit subject matter specialists and train them into professional librarians is an important managerial issue not just for the library but the University as a whole. Such interventions in human resource have to lead to value added increase in terms of improvement in service delivery.

Finance

A related critical factor which influences the effectiveness of library management at the university is *budgeting and finance*. Inadequate funding of a library in relation to the scope of the academic programmes, student and faculty population, and standards expected of the university will influence the effectiveness of a library and subsequently the effectiveness of the university as a whole in undertaking its functions. This may have repercussions on the valuation of the institution and also its formal registration and accreditation procedures. So far the development of libraries in many universities and other institutions of higher learning, in most of developing countries have been dependent on donor support. While in itself this is not a bad thing, there is need to ensure that local budgets reflect the priority that is attached to the library and its key roles. It is not a question of absolute budget, but relative budget. Library managers on the other hand are supposed to prepare realistic and performance based budgets reflecting the

programmes run by the university. But again this requires some supported efforts from the University management.

Technology
The third factor is *technology*. A big stride has been made on electronic information storage and retrieval. The development of the World Wide Web has created an additional alternative to information development and acquisition. It is now possible to access most recent information on a topic from your desk instantaneously. Even though a fair number of data sets are licensed, there is a lot of free academically useful data sets. Through some form of co-operation with institutions which have access to licensed data sets, it is possible to obtain some of the required information.

For example through the University of Dar-es-Salaam Library, some arrangements were made to run two Electronic Resources Library Management Workshops, in 2002. The two Workshops were externally funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Department for International Development (DFID, UK), and Swedish International Development Agency / Department of Research Cooperation (SIDA/SAREC) and managed by, the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). The Workshops aimed at:

> Introducing the range of electronic information resources that are now available within academic libraries.
> To examine these resources and their possible uses in the fields of teaching, learning and research to academic librarians in Africa.
> To introduce workshop participants to tools, tips and techniques that could allow them to effectively and efficiently use Electronic Journals and Scholarly Databases.

Availability of such technology to university libraries requires planning, both for the acquisition of the technology and information development to sustain the information needs of the library clientele. It also requires training of library staff who can help the clientele to access certain database sets through Internet connection. Addo (2001:143) argued that "People in developing countries can apply new technologies to a vast range of activities including education, finance, the environment and income generating programmes". This is true for university library users who can get a variety of information related to their educational needs through the Information and Communication Technology available at a particular University.

Some Challenges

This section poses some of the managerial challenges of university libraries that operate in dynamic world. Some of the challenges have already been reflected in the previous sections.

• Customer Needs

The customers (students, faculty and researchers) are the centre of the library services. The first challenge therefore is the continuous tracking of *customer needs*. This requires a close co-operation between the library and its users which will enable both current and future needs to be identified. However, once identified, the needs have to be met. An approach, including prioritization of needs and budgeting to meet the needs have to be developed and deployed.

• Resources

Another challenge to libraries is the availability of *financial resources*. Resources will always be insufficient. But these have to be allocated effectively and efficiently both at institutional level and within the departments. This calls for *strategic planning and performance budgeting*. Strategic planning will ensure that priorities are set to reflect the university's mission and vision. The plan should not only focus on short term issues, but as Cornish (2000: 12) pointed out, "In considering long-term planning, attention should also be given to the *likely impact of new technology*". Technological advances, though their extent and influence cannot be predicted precisely, will certainly alter present patterns of publishing, storing and supplying material and may radically affect the future availability of material in libraries.

Also attempt will be made to attain allocative efficiency in the budgeting process to reflect the set priorities. The discussion of the roles of the library in a university as an institution of higher learning and the prerequisite for effectively meeting the identified roles suggest that libraries will be given high priorities by the top Management of the University.

But once allocated with resources, library managers have to be accountable for their performance. This calls for output based performance indicators to be developed for the library based on the programmes that they plan to undertake each period and for which funds have been undertaken. Programmes and activities for which no funds are allocated will not be undertaken and managers cannot be held responsible.

• Resource Sharing

The third managerial challenge for effective library operation is *resource sharing*. As pointed above, resources have always been a constraint to library development in many African countries, Tanzania being one of them. If

libraries in Europe and United States of America (USA) that have a lot of resources do cooperate and share resources, is that need for co-operation not more obvious for university libraries in developing countries such as Tanzania, which has severe resource constraint? Tanzania Academic and Research Libraries Association (TARLA) has started, and the Consortium of Tanzania University Libraries (COTUL) is just about to start, what programmes are in place or in plan that suggest putting co-operation and resources in action? Such partnership and strategic alliance should not just be established, but also be well managed, focused and aimed at areas where joint actions are important for the success of libraries.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has discussed, albeit impressionistically, the role of library in a university setting. The main role has been demonstrated as being that of providing support to the three typical functions of teaching, research and consultancy. The prerequisites for effectively undertaking managerial task of a library depend on the policies, procedure and resources. Strategic planning combined with performance budgeting are likely to lead to more effective management of the library. Also library resource sharing between institutions with similar profiles could contribute more to effective management, and hence, build up a comprehensive library in terms of its collections, and related information needs of library users.

Based on the challenges raised above, a few recommendations on how to address them are provided:

> To address the issue of the customer needs, librarians have to be proactive and aggressive and make sure that they work closely with students, academic staff members, researchers, and consultants in identifying their information needs. Once these needs are identified, they have to be prioritized and budgeted for according to the library budget plan.
> Secondly, since libraries are sub-organizations within the Tanzania universities, the university management has to work hand in hand with the librarians to plan and approve policies that favour the provision of adequate fund resources, facilities and other infrastructures for the university. By so doing, the library managers will get an opportunity of prioritizing their needs as per laid down plans, and according to the allocated resources, and they will be enabled to prepare realistic and performance based budgets which reflect the programmes run by the university.
> Since resources have always been a constraint to library development in Tanzanian universities, there is need for library co-

operation through resource sharing which will lead to provision of better library services to patrons. This could be achieved through:

- A formal established library consortium by participating libraries, through which scarce library books and journal articles could be formerly exchanged or made available through inter library loan and document delivery arrangement, or electronically available through created local databases in the member university libraries within Tanzania or abroad where possible.
- Share and exchange of library expertise for the purpose of learning and emulating good library practices from another library.
- Exchange of union catalogue and accessions lists of books and periodicals to create awareness of what one library holds for the purpose of facilitating provision of inter library loan service.

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