THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION
LITERACY ON THE ACCESS AND USE OF
INFORMATION SERVICES IN SPECIAL CORPORATE
LIBRARIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence of information literacy on the access and use of information services in special corporate libraries in Kenya. A mixed research design was used to carry out the study at the Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) which runs a special library. The study sampled 96 respondents using a stratified sampling technique. The study used questionnaires and interview guides to collect primary data. The study established that information literacy influences the access to information services in special libraries and the use of information gathered to achieve personal and organizational goals. The study recommends training of librarians and entire organizational staff on information management, awareness creation on services provided in the special libraries and design of special libraries to suit information needs of persons with visual and hearing impairments.

Introduction

Employees in both private and public sectors work in environments that require specific knowledge and skills in order to meet organizational objectives. Consequently, special libraries play an important role in ensuring that employees are equipped with appropriate knowledge required for efficient execution of their duties and responsibilities. The importance of special libraries in the public sector is further emphasized by the fact that most organization invest in research and developments activities. Special libraries provide information needed in the development of government policies and review of various strategies adopted in the provision of goods and services.

Many schools of thought and past scholars opine that special libraries furnish staffs with technical information that help them accomplish assignments that require specialized knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, libraries services are hampered by a myriad of challenges that include: low levels or lack of information literacy, shortage of telecommunication equipment and insufficiency of funds set aside for the development of libraries, low levels of computer literacy and internet connectivity.

For instance, developing countries in Africa and the world at large lag behind in terms of adoption of modern information communication technologies in the delivery of library services (Halliso, 2011). The access and use of information services in African libraries is hampered by inadequate funding which result to inability to upgrade ICT infrastructure, stock new sources of information and to upgrade physical
infrastructure. Besides, access and use of information services in African libraries are hindered by low interests for consumption of library services by the public occasioned by low levels of awareness creation and lack effective customer services (Opadeji and Haliso, 2012). There has been a reduction in the number of special libraries and some institutions have shut down their libraries creating a need for more innovative ways to managing special libraries (Semertzaki, 2012). Therefore, more studies should uncover the factors that influence effectiveness of services provided in special libraries.

There are limited empirical studies on special libraries in Kenya focusing on areas such as the efficiency of information provided via electronic platforms (Kang'aru, 2014), the effects of public relations in improving special library services (Nguyu, 2009) and the adoption of integrated information management systems (Ondoro, 2015). The previous research by scholars in Kenya has not targeted the special libraries and in order to bridge this research gap, this article examines the nexus between information literacy and use of information services at the special library in the Kenya Power and Lighting Company.

Kenya Power and Lighting Company has a special library at Electricity House in Nairobi. KPLC also provides online learning services to its staff. The company operates an electronic platform where staff can access training opportunities that fulfill their information needs. KPLC avails online learning materials and virtual learning to the staff (Kenya Power, 2016). The access to and use of the special library at KPLC has not been evaluated and this study has chosen KPLC as a case study to represent special libraries in Kenya.

**Literature Review**

According to Semertzaki (2011), the libraries which neither belong to academic institutions nor used for scholarly purposes and the ones that are not public are referred to as special libraries. Special libraries are also referred to as center for knowledge management, corporate libraries, research libraries or company libraries. The emergence and spread of special libraries rose from the fact that progress of organizations was aided by information in various disciplines such as law, statistics, technology, business and science. According to Ajibero (2001), special libraries are categorized as professional associations, international organizations, governmental or and private educational institutions.

The main goal of special libraries is to provide information to particular groups of professionals in various specialties such as statistics, law, economics, science, trade, medicine, entrepreneurship, engineering, business management and they contain information on special and specific subjects (Asghar and Shafique, 2012). The reading materials found in special libraries is made up of technical reports, e-books, proceedings, consumer surveys patent, journals, government publications, data on market research, bulletin, manuals, project and annual report, output statistics, directories and equipment design (Bilawar, 2013).

The services offered in special libraries target specific areas that are of interest to a company or an organization (Semertzaki, 2012). The information found in special libraries are aligned to the goals and values of the company that runs them. The scope of information in special libraries covers special and customized services and the subjects included are intended to empower the staff in execution of their duties. They avail the correct information to the targeted individuals at the opportune time and whenever interest is particular set of information through the use of a model referred to as the "only for-you" rather than the one known as "one-fits-all" used by public or academic libraries. Special libraries provide an interface that links various professionals via the knowledge shared on technical areas (Special Libraries Association, 2012).

According to Graham (2009), information literate persons are the ones who have the ability to identify the need for information and have the capability to locate, assess and utilize the information in an effective manner. Information literate persons are empowered to direct and guide themselves in the learning process (Graham, 2009). Information literacy is critical in the utilization of services offered in libraries.
Information literacy enable people to make valuable decisions and solve problems. Besides, information literacy enhances citizen participation in governance. Bruce (1999) points out that the skills and knowledge in computer applications are considered as important elements of information literacy.

Evidence shows that there are inadequate skills such as location of the sources of information in the library and use of the accessed information to fulfill the needs of library users (Mohamed and Shukoor, 2010). Library users are not aware of ethical issues surrounding use of information. Besides, low levels of information literacy are attributed to insufficient information communication equipment and software and the skills required to use them (Ademodi and Adepoju, 2009).

**Research Methodology**

A mixed research design was used in the study. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis enabled the study to gain in-depth comprehension of the nexus between information literacy and accessibility of information services at the Kenya Power and Lighting Company’s library. The study chose mixed research method because one data resource may not be enough and a second method (qualitative data from interviews) is needed to enhance a primary method (quantitative data from questionnaires).

The participants in the study were selected using stratified sampling technique. The strata were made up of different cadres of employees namely: - to managers, middle managers and junior staff members. A total of 78 respondents participated in the study. The study used questionnaire and interview guide to collect primary data. The questionnaire had open-ended questions and closed-ended questions rated on a scale of five units whereby 1 represented no extent, 2=little extent, 3=moderate extent, 4=great extent, and 5=very great extent. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the closed-ended questions. Besides, the association between information literacy and accessibility and use of information services was assessed using t-statistics in a regression analysis.

**Findings**

The study sought to establish the effect of information literacy skills on the access to and use of information services in special corporate library at the Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they were able to do the activities in Table 4.8 during their visits to the library. The response was rated on scale of five units whereby 1=No Extent (NE), 2=Little Extent (LE), 3=Moderate Extent (ME), 4=Great Extent GE), and 5=Very great extent (VGE). Table 1 shows the findings of the study.
### Table 1: Information Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>LE</td>
<td>ME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine the nature and extent of the information you need from the library</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access needed information effectively and efficiently using library information resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically evaluate information and information sources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of library subscriptions to otherwise password protected resources</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and access and use information ethically and legally</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the study findings in Table 1, majority of the respondents were to a great extent able to use the information from the library effectively to accomplish a specific purpose (m=3.5513, 0.87753). Majority of the respondents stated that to a moderate extent, they were able to determine the nature and extent of the information they need from the library (m=2.8333, 1.04963), access needed information effectively and efficiently using library information resources (m=3.2949, 0.92735), critically evaluate information and information sources (m=3.1923, 0.89816) and understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and access and use information ethically and legally (m=3.3462, 1.09101). Majority of the respondents were moderately aware of library subscriptions to otherwise password protected resources (m=3.1795, 1.13668). Table 2 shows the results of regression analysis.
Table 2: Regression Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-0.563</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td>-1.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information literacy</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Dependent Variable: the access to and use of information in special corporate library by staff at KPLC

From the results in Table 2, the study found out that the access to and use of information in special corporate library by staff at KPLC was significantly influenced by information literacy ($t=2.022$, $p=0.047$).

The study established that majority of the staff that used KPLC library were able to use the information from the library to effectively accomplish a specific purpose. Majority of the KPLC special library users could use the information at the library to fulfil their needs and to enrich their knowledge in the areas of interest. The staff using special library at KPLC were able to quantify the amount of information and the type of information they required, had the knowledge to access the required information and use the information gathered to carry out intended tasks. In addition, creation of awareness on the skills needed to use library services enhanced consumption of information services and expanded the knowledge of staff on matters such as current affairs, law, economics, ethical issues surrounding information services. However, the employees were not fully aware of library subscriptions to otherwise password protected resources.

The study established that improvement of literacy in information services is important for both librarians and the consumers of information services. The staff of special libraries require high level of knowledge in information management and have the ability to handle the emerging trends in technologies used in communication and the changing information needs of special library users. Therefore, staff working in special libraries should continuously engage in research and training with a view to gain knowledge in modern trends in information management. The emergence of the internet extended the references available at the KPLC library. The need of digital reference services at the KPLC library was driven by the complexity and more time consumed when searching for traditional paper-based reference materials.

The study established that the types of information available to users of special libraries in Kenya in digital form have continued to grow. According to the chief librarian, most of the users of KPLC library were interested in areas such as electric and electronic engineering, business management and human resource management. The services available at the special library in KPLC included collection of reference books, access to electronic books and search for online sources of information. Bibliographies offered by special library at KPLC were of interest to the employees at the company because they offered guidance on the materials with information on subjects such as electric and electronic engineering and business management.
The study established that librarians play a major role in enhancing information literacy among library users and enabling users to effectively locate and use information at special libraries. The librarians at the KPLC library were helpful to the library users by offering guidance to various sources of information. The library staff at KPLC also guided library users on the application of computer appliances in search for information and helped the users to access various online sources of information. This information literacy among the staff working at the special library and the assistance accorded to the library users played a major role in the accessibility and consumption of information services.

Special libraries should have the capacity to meet the information demands of the employees. The areas that need emphasis in capacity building include identifying, selecting, acquiring, developing and sharing of information to users. The consumers of services at KPLC library need skill for the use of computer and other information technology tools properly. The agencies running special libraries in Kenya should have elaborate programs to train staff and improve the ability of librarians to undertake computer operations, use bar code readers, management of database, management of websites and use of internet-based sources information.

The paradigm shift in user preference of online resources over materials available on the physical shelves has made it necessary for special libraries to invest in equipping staff with necessary skills in use of modern technology for information management. The consumption of information services requires great analytical skills among clients and staff in special libraries. The capacity of staff at the special library extends to skills in team building and provision of customer care services.

**Conclusion**

The access to and use of information services in special corporate library depends on the level of literacy that both staff and library customers have in regard to management and consumption of information services. The ability of customers to use information services at the special libraries depend on how the organization has built the capacity of the staff to handle information services. Uptake of library services improves when an organization enhances the level of professional and personal competencies through training and awareness creation.

The advancement in technologies used in management of information services has opened up new frontiers that make continuous training of training of library personnel an important element in the accessibility of library services. Human resource management functions within an organization plays a critical role in the consumption of library services by ensuring that library staff hold high levels of information literacy. Similarly, the levels of literacy in information services among library users influences their ability to consume library services. Information literate library users are able to locate, gather and properly use information to achieve personal and organizational goals.

Special libraries extend beyond their physical location to online channels of information distribution, internet-based information management applications and networking technologies. Therefore, the staff at KPLC library and other special libraries in Kenya should be knowledgeable and skilled in the provision of information via digital and non-automated channels. Ensuring that special library staff and users are literate in information management not only enhances consumption of library services but also achievement or personal and organizational goals.
Recommendations

According to the authors following recommendations were found essential namely;

1. Formulation of a training program on information management aimed at enhancing the information literacy and capacity of employees to access and use information services in the special libraries for professional and personal development.

2. Embarking on programs to create awareness among their employees on information services provided in the special libraries. The awareness program should be devolved to the smallest organizational units to ensure that all employees are aware of special libraries and the benefits it offers for career development.

3. Information literacy and staff capacity at special libraries in Kenya be improved through provision of specialized library for persons with visual and hearing impairments, establishment of partnership with public libraries, set up of funds for development and rehabilitation of the libraries.

4. KPLC as a company through its information science professionals should come up with library policy and standards that govern and develop management of reference work and information service. This may serve as a model to other special libraries.

References


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