Assessing the capacity building programs pursued by university libraries in Meru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Changing user demands require libraries to develop unique capabilities for supporting the delivery of quality teaching, learning, and research. This shift further requires librarians to develop competencies in handling emergent technologies, dissemination of information, scholarly communication, and strategy formulation. Nevertheless, there has been overreliance on conventional ways that have stifled innovation and creativity in most libraries raising questions on continuous training programs for information professionals. The purpose of the study was to assess capacity-building programs pursued by university libraries in Meru County. The study used a qualitative approach and employed a case study research design. The Technology Organization Environment Model guided the study. The unit of analysis was KeMU and MUST university libraries, unit of observation was 15 university library staff, specifically, 2 university library heads and 13 heads of library sections who were selected through the purposive sampling method. The study interviewed university librarians and conducted Focus Group Discussions [FGDs] with library heads of sections. The two FGDs comprised 5 and 7 participants in KeMU and MUST respectively. Validity of the instruments was ensured through conducting a pretest at Chuka University Library to appraise the dependability of interview and FGDs questions. One librarian and 2 library section heads participated. Data was analyzed using content analysis and thematic categorization. The study identified several capacity-building initiatives undertaken by libraries which included leadership training, customer care training, information retrieval skills development and training on reference management systems. This led to a conclusion that library staff were prepared to deliver quality services through a combination of skill enhancement. Notably, the study highlighted opportunities for library personnel to engage in ongoing professional development. It urges library management to organize seminars and workshops periodically to help its staff to keep abreast with latest developments and innovations in the field of library science.

*(**Key words**: capacity building programs; university libraries; competencies; information professionals; professional development.)*

I. INTRODUCTION

Capacity building in university libraries is the ability to combine human resource development, manpower capabilities, and professional and staff personal development for continuous improvement, promotion of lifelong learning, growth, and forecast in the changing modern era of libraries (Oguche et al., 2017). It entails having a mechanism for training to increase librarians' knowledge and capacity to use modern tools and technologies, the know-how in providing structures to offer support, and knowledge in implementing procedures and processes required to enrich the learning environment (Chakraborty et al., 2018). A study by Oguche et al. (2017) discusses training in two forms; the training done while work is in progress and training done outside the workplace. New library professionals

determine the quality of manpower development in the long run.

According to Ahmad et al. (2015), capacity building enlightens librarians to achieve competency in fulfilling the vision and mission of university libraries. These sentiments were backed up by adding that quality output in the workforce and performance of library staff is compounded by attitude, continuous pursuit of education, knowledge, skills, and ability to give logical ideas. Training being at the center point of capacity building, promotes mastery of technology and work processes. According to Musangi (2019), attending training conferences either in person or online builds one intellectual capacity and even further promotes networking. Moreover, Edewor (2020) emphasizes that building capacity for librarians begins immediately when

an individual enrolls in a librarianship course. Universities around the world have made major strides to enhance capacity-building programs of their learners

American universities are considered centres of excellence due to their ability to use information technologies to create and avail timely, accurate, reliable, and relevant information (Dali et al., 2020). In German university libraries have developed anticipative policies to ensure skills trained to librarians are in synch with the dynamic economic and sociocultural needs of users (Nagpal & Radhakrishnan, 2022). Further on, African countries are reinforcing their libraries through programs such as New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in their attempt to build knowledge-based economies through shared catalogues, information exchange, and alliances for implementing new technologies (Nesta, 2019). In East Africa, libraries in Tanzania are rapidly adopting new trends and technical changes by employing librarians who are highly trained and have the willpower to undergo additional training through career advancements. Over time, the capabilities and literacy levels of librarians have increased enabling them to respond to the rapidly changing user demands in the Tanzanian context (Mwinyimbegu, 2019).

An analysis of Kenyan universities by Kwanya (2017) indicates there has been an effort towards the progressive implementation of technology tools that enhance knowledge acquisition among users. Nevertheless, libraries are still facing challenges that include budgetary constraints and policy frameworks that disallow librarians to respond to capacity needs adequately.

Statement of the problem

University libraries have over the years evolved from traditional to hybrid information centers and this has not only forced librarians to adapt responsive strategies to the changing environment but has also necessitated parent institutions to allocate more funds for continuous improvement of service delivery. The changing user demands require libraries to develop unique capabilities for supporting the delivery of quality teaching, learning, and research (Duncan, 2022). This shift further requires librarians to develop competencies in handling emergent technologies, dissemination of information, scholarly communication, and strategy formulation.

Nevertheless, despite the well-structured policies for the adoption of new methods and procedures for running library operations, the overreliance on conventional ways and mechanisms usually stifles innovation and creativity, which to a greater extent lowers the level of responsiveness. The low state of responsiveness is evidenced by moderate use and utilization of technology

among users, diminished avenues of cooperation, inadequate or unsustainable capacity-building initiatives, and poor or weak resource-sharing initiatives (Dali et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study therefore is to assess capacity building programs pursued by university libraries in Meru County. Specifically, the study analyses the nature of capacity-building programs employed by university libraries in Meru County, assesses capacity-building programs and mentorship opportunities available for library personnel, and analyses challenges faced in providing capacity-building programs and mentorship for library personnel.

Approaches to Capacity Building of Librarians

Training is fundamental in enhancing librarians' capacity. In South Asia, a study was conducted to investigate the progress made in the National Library of Maldives in capacitating librarians with the right knowledge and skills through training (Jayasuriya, 2021). The findings of Jayasuriya (2021) study indicate that respondents received training mainly on new technologies. There was a need to acquire facilitative technologies that expose staff to learning technologies and increase their familiarity and comfort. In Africa, Edewor (2020) conducted a closely related study to investigate the success and impediments of conducting vibrant professional training for Nigeria's higher institutions. The study sampled a group of 453 respondents who had attended workshops between the years 2016 to 2018. The study revealed that lack of support and financial constraints discouraged librarians from attending and participating in professional training programs, symposiums, and seminars.

In Ghana, a closely related study was conducted to investigate the extent to which librarians valued the continuation of professional development through career enhancement (Dzandza & Akussah, 2018). The study was conducted in 25 private universities and sampled 61 library staff and 20 libraries through administering questionnaires and conducting interviews. According to the findings by Dzandza and Akussah (2018), librarians regarded career development as very helpful in equipping them with more updated knowledge and skills related to technology advances, and managerial and leadership skills. The majority (90%) of the respondents were willing to re-enroll in school and attain more education. However, financial resources limited them not to take up classes promptly. The recommendations from the study included the university library management to come up with other less costly measures to equip their library staff with knowledge and skills. Such measures include in-

house training and peer-to-peer education. The implication remains that a shortage of financial resources hampers the librarians' capacity building, In Kenya, Sang et al. (2022) pointed out that the level of trained professionals also determines their innovativeness. The study revealed that library professionals admitted that they needed more training on how to exercise communication skills, how to self-manage themselves, and how to revamp team spirit among themselves. The findings of the study were also consistent with those of Edewor (2020) who had carried out research to determine the relationship between trained staff and service delivery from various stakeholders of library and information science. The study revealed that there was a positive relationship between trained library staff and service delivery. The findings bring out the importance of training in promoting librarians' responsiveness to capacity-building programs.

The current study is guided by the Technology Organization Environment (TOE) model which was coined by Merton (1990) as cited by Mouakket and Aboelmaged (2021). The model indicates that when there is consistent development and implementation of technology, it leads to an increment in innovation when conducting business operations to attain the desired goals.

In this study, the Technology Organization Environment model therefore explains how capacity-building programs and training can enhance librarians' knowledge and capacity to use modern tools and technologies. Considerably, technical know-how is key in providing structures to offer support in implementing procedures and processes required to enrich the learning environment. Technology capabilities as a component of the TOE model describe the organization's current technical capabilities. The model argument aligns with the capacity building program concept that emphasizes the importance of capacity building through improving the capabilities of librarians. TOE model, therefore, underpins the capacity building program variable. The TOE model has, however, been criticized for its lack of predictive power and its reliance on a linear view of technology adoption (Majid, 2009). Additionally, the TOE does not account for the role of organizational culture in shaping technology adoption. Since the research cannot ignore these limitations, the theory therefore examined in library environments so that it can be effective

II. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative approach and employed a case study research design. The unit of analysis was Kenya Methodist University (KeMU) and Meru University of Science and Technology (MUST) libraries. The unit of observation consisted of 15 university library staff, specifically two university library heads and 13 library section heads, selected through the purposive sampling method. The study interviewed university librarians for the two universities and also conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with library heads of sections in each library under investigation. Two FGDs were conducted and they included 5 and 7 participants in KeMU and MUST respectively. Additionally, the study analysed documents from university library annual reports, policy frameworks, subscription details, calendar of events, university library procurement plan, and library strategic plan for all of the past 12 months. Validity of the instruments was ensured through conducting a pretest at Chuka University Library to appraise the dependability of interview and FGDs questions. One librarian and two library section heads were the respondents. Data was analyzed using content analysis and thematic categorization.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from section heads and university librarians on the nature of capacity-building programs pursued by university libraries. From the findings, the researcher identified key aspects like capacity building programs, opportunities for library personnel, mentorship programs for library personnel, and challenges of capacity building programs.

Of the fifteen respondents identified as respondents for the study, fourteen (93%) individuals were available and participated in the study. The high response rate is attributed to the use of both in-person and online data collection methods. Two university librarians agreed to be interviewed, and 12 heads of sections took part in the focus group discussions. According to Creswell (2014), when a study combines more than one method of data collection in qualitative research, it leads to a higher chance of response rate.

Capacity building programs pursued by University Libraries

To capture the views of the University librarians on the nature of capacity-building programs pursued by university libraries, the university librarians were asked to state the capacity-building programs that the university library has implemented in the last year. According to the findings, libraries have implemented several capacity-building programs. These include training on leadership, customer care, information retrieval, and reference

management systems. In addition, library staff participate in training workshops and seminars.

The findings imply that university library management has made efforts to implement capacity-building programs. According to Rotich (2021), the aspect of ICT training for staff improves their skills and expertise towards automation, management of integrated library systems, software installation, and maintenance. Similarly, the findings support the results by Jayasuriya et al. (2022) that training on new technologies is fundamental in enhancing librarians' capacity.

The findings from document analysis revealed that university libraries had conducted several training programs for students, faculty members, and library staff. Information literacy training is one of the KeMU library's training programs. There have also been physical and online trainings on accessing and using e-resources for students. The students' training focused on: how to access the library portal, how to access and utilize e-books and e-journal databases relevant to the specific academic programs, how to access past papers online, and also training on citation and referencing. These findings are consistent with the work of Madge (2018) that library staff have trained researchers and faculty on the use of e-resource systems and platforms, including the use of search strategies and specific techniques for retrieving information. Madge's (2018) studies suggest a need for continuous training and updating for library staff and students to optimize library services.

The researcher determined that the Meru University library was not fully equipped with tools to carry out online training such as a dedicated laptop with a camera recorder to comfortably train users online. The library depended on the ICT department for laptops and cameras to conduct the training. These findings concur with Atiknson (2019) studies that posit that the need for library training is increasing, however, university libraries are not yet fully equipped to provide online training.

There is a need for capacity-building programs in libraries to ensure that library personnel can fully utilize their knowledge and skills. This will help them serve their patrons better and ensure organizational growth. This theme corroborates with Ahmad et al. (2017) that by providing training and education on different topics, library personnel will be able to acquire different skills to further improve their work and help their patrons. The findings by Kwanya (2017) posit that capacity-building programs can also help library personnel build

relationships with their patrons and co-workers to foster a more collaborative and productive environment.

The University librarians were asked to explain strategies used to ensure that library staff are equipped to deliver library services. The findings indicated sharpening staff skills is a key strategy that helps library staff deliver library services. Entrenchment in the performance contract such that if one has been trained in a certain area then this is included in their performance contract. There is also monitoring such that library staff are personally monitored and corrected when necessary. The findings are similar to those of Musangi et al. (2019) who observed that attending training conferences either in person or online builds one intellectual capacity and even further promotes networking.

Training opportunities available to librarians

The University librarians were asked to state opportunities they provide for library personnel to participate in professional development activities. According to the findings, library personnel are invited whenever there is a professional meeting like workshops or seminars. There is also in-house and outside training. Library staff are also free to be members of professional associations. The findings concur with the results of Ahmad et al. (2015) that capacity building enlightens librarians to achieve competency in fulfilling the vision and mission of university libraries.

The University librarians were asked whether they have incorporated new library technologies into their capacity-building programs initiatives. The respondents noted that whenever there is a new technology, staff are trained. There is also continuous sharpening of staff skills related to systems application. There is also the adoption of virtual training. One librarian opined,

Whenever there's a new system feature, we always make sure that our staff are trained, and we build the capacity on them for the new version release (Librarian 1)

The University librarians were asked to specify methods used to measure the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives. According to the findings, there is the use of appraisal that pushes library staff to meet expectations. Library staff are also expected to perform as the training received.

Therefore, consistent development and implementation of technology especially in information retrieval and reference management systems, led to an increment in innovation when conducting business operations to attain

the desired goals. Further, strategies used to ensure that library staff are equipped to deliver library services include sharpening staff skills, entrenchment in the performance contract, and monitoring. To ensure opportunities are available to library personnel, library staff participate in training workshops and seminars.

Mentorship programs for library personnel

When asked to indicate the benefits of mentoring and coaching library staff, the respondents noted that there is succession planning and business continuity. There is also knowledge sharing. It creates a learning culture and organizational development, it provokes staff to look for solutions in terms of the challenges they are facing. Further, mentorship and coaching create new opportunities for library staff.

The University librarians were asked to state how they assess the effectiveness of library mentoring and coaching programs in the library. According to the findings, delegated leadership helps to assess the effectiveness of library mentoring and coaching programs. Performance appraisal also helps to assess the effectiveness of library mentoring and coaching programs. Additionally, the effectiveness of library mentoring and coaching programs can be assessed by observing work done when the librarian is not around.

The University librarians were asked to advise other university libraries looking to implement capacity-building programs. According to the findings, librarians should share knowledge and skills with staff to build their capacity. The budget for training and development needs to be increased so that the library can identify skills gaps. The training and development policy needs to be revised to meet the staff needs. There is a need to activate a community of practice, which involves bringing people who are working in a certain organization together to share their experiences.Findings from Jain (2017) highlight the benefits of mentorship such as succession planning and business continuity, knowledge sharing, creation of a learning culture, organizational development, and promotion of problem-solving.

Challenges of capacity building programs

The University librarians were asked to state challenges encountered when implementing capacity-building programs. Based on the findings, the respondents highlighted a lack of self-motivation by staff to acquire new skills. The skill gap is also a major challenge where

most staff are unable to perform critical tasks due to a lack of necessary skills.

According to Atiknson (2019), a lack of sharpening of skills leads to redundancy and duplication of old processes in the new era. Further, there is the problem of staff turnover, especially after gaining the necessary skills and experience. The findings are consistent with the work of Monica and Harrison (2016) who noted that inadequate teaching resources, mismatch of course content offered with the job market, and insufficient internship opportunities were highlighted.

One university librarian said:

> *"… In terms of skills training, I have provided my staff with the valuable skills they need to succeed in the industry, and as a result, some of the best people I've trained left the institution to find new opportunities …"*

IV. CONCLUSION

The investigation found that libraries have implemented several capacity-building programs including leadership training, training on customer care, training on information retrieval building, and training on reference management systems. Strategies used to ensure that library staff are equipped to deliver on library services include sharpening staff skills, and entrenchment in the performance contract. There is also monitoring such that library staff are personally monitored and corrected when necessary. Opportunities are provided for library personnel to participate in professional development activities. For instance, library personnel are invited whenever there is a professional meeting like workshops or seminars.

V. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that library management need to develop and host seminars/workshops focusing on the latest advancements and innovations in library science to equip library staff with relevant skills and knowledge. The study recommends university management to provide adequate budget for training and professional development needs. Furthermore, the library management needs to review the training and development policy to be in line with the current needs of the staff, faculty, and students. Similarly, the library management to consider developing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of capacity-building programs to identify areas of improvement.

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