

Users' needs and expectations on information services provided in libraries: case of four public university libraries from the western region of Kenya

Information
services
provided in
libraries

1

Received 24 December 2020
Revised 19 September 2021
Accepted 20 September 2021

Irene Nyakweba

Kisii University, Kisii, Kenya

Joyce Muwanguzi Bukirwa and Eunice Sendikadiwa

Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, and

Felicitas Ciabere Ratanya

Library, Egerton University, Egerton, Kenya

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to assess the users' needs and expectations on information services provided in libraries, in four public universities from the western region of Kenya. The study explores the extent to which the libraries address users' needs and expectations examining the challenges being encountered, remedies and best practices put in place to mitigate the challenges. The level of users satisfaction towards the information services provided is also examined.

Design/methodology/approach – Structured questionnaires were distributed among undergraduates (384) and lecturers (86), where 342 were successfully filled and returned, giving a response rate of 73%. The study interviewed ten library staff revealing their views in addressing users' needs and expectations in respective libraries. Collected data were analysed descriptively using statistical methods and presented in figures and tables. Qualitative data were analysed in narrative form.

Findings – Majority of users had a positive perception towards the library, while others indicated that their needs were yet to be met. The study noted the poor state of affair with inadequacies in information materials infrastructure, dwindling budget, facilities and unskilled personnel. The study recommended the need for additional library budget to facilitate acquisition of additional and up-to-date information resources and facilities.

Originality/value – The concept of user needs and expectations has been widely discussed in developed countries. Identifying and understanding users' requirements in the context of public libraries in developing countries would start up constructive trends towards building useable collections.

Keywords Information services, University, Libraries, Users' needs and expectations, Western Kenya

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

University libraries are entities within the parent institutions involved in the provision of information materials for purposes of supporting the teaching, learning and research obligations of the university (Umoh, 2017). As a hub established within the university, the library plays a vital role in facilitating acquired knowledge to be disseminated and shared. Habre and Kammourié (2018), argue that the information services provided by the library are required to match the needs and expectations of the core stakeholders. Consequently, understanding the users' needs and expectations is an important aspect for information professionals. To achieve this role, firstly, the university libraries acquire information resources to support courses in the curriculum, teaching, learning and ongoing projects of the faculties. Secondly, the resources are organised in a manner that allows easy access and retrieval. Thirdly, the libraries ensure that users are equipped with necessary information



Library Management
Vol. 43 No. 1/2, 2022
pp. 1-14
© Emerald Publishing Limited
0143-5124
DOI 10.1108/LM-12-2020-0178

literacy skills sets to assist them in locating and retrieving the information that they require (Kekana and Kheswa, 2020).

A considerable empirical literature has cited research on libraries focusing on users' needs and expectations. For example, Frati *et al.* (2021) found out that, since libraries have for centuries constituted as significant part of universities, librarians are not only placed to identify the needs of the users and find information sources that address them, but are competent in availing instruction on practical literature searches and skills for accessing the resources. In their study on, "Researchers expectations regarding online presence of academic libraries", Mierzecka *et al.* (2017) suggested that, to maximise usage of services, libraries should encourage users' active participation during the design of the information services. Such approaches, however, seem to focus more on what the users need and fail to mitigate some of the challenges users face as they try to access the services provided.

In this context, public university libraries in Kenya have consistently been mandated to support the core business of the parent institution by providing information services that are up to date and those that match the needs of the users (Waigumo and Otiike, 2017). Advancements in ICT have tremendously enhanced services in the libraries with the ability to provide information access to the survey-centric users, disseminate and preserve information for posterity (Husain and Nazim, 2015). For instance, Habre and Kammourié (2018) point out that in academic libraries in the developed countries, the online public access catalogues (OPACs) have almost replaced card catalogues, offering enhanced search capabilities and discoverable platforms for accessing the local collections, numerous e-resources, automated services and leveraged on networks all geared towards meeting the needs of the users. Several studies (Husain and Nazim, 2015; Mierzecka *et al.*, 2017; Jabur, 2019) observe that as information professionals in responding to varied user needs and in providing quality information, they are required to be conversant with different disciplines offered in the institutions.

Of particular concern is whether libraries in academic institutions can provide information services that satisfy all the information needs of the users they serve. However, it is important to assess if the same is happening in university libraries in developing countries with challenges of inadequacies notwithstanding. This indicates a need to examine how the public university libraries go about addressing the needs of their users and the challenges faced and how they are mitigated. The authors in this study are set to assess the current state of information provision in line with the user needs and expectations among students, lecturers and staff in four selected public university libraries in Western Kenya.

1.1 Background information of the public university libraries in Western Kenya

The emergence of university libraries in Kenya came into being with the establishment of the universities by an Act of parliament. Nairobi University College, currently the University of Nairobi (UON), was a constituent College of the University of East Africa, which become Kenya's first university in 1970. This was in 1984, followed by Moi University in Eldoret. In 1987, Kenyatta University College, which served as a Constituent College of the University of Nairobi, became a fully-fledged university. Between 1987 and 2003, other additional universities were established, namely; Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Juja near Thika, Egerton University in Njoro near Nakuru, Moi University in Eldoret and Maseno University near Kisumu (Otiike and Omboi, 2010).

This study will specifically target libraries in four public universities from Western Kenya, namely, Maseno University, Maside Muliro University of Science and Technology, Jaramogi Odiga Ogiga University and Kisii University.

1.1.1 Maseno University Library. Maseno University Library is a department of the main Maseno University. Maseno University was the first institution of higher learning to be established in 2001 from the western region of Kenya. According to Mwiria and Ng'ethe (2007),

this was realised following the inability of Moi University to cope with a large number of students admitted to degree programmes. Currently, Maseno University is fully-fledged, with over 15,000 students enrolled in various courses, four campuses, a college and a constituent college, all of which cater to the ever-increasing educational demands in the region and beyond. Maseno University Library has a sitting capacity of 600 users and a rich collection of print and electronic resources. Services include reference materials, reading rooms, reserved collection, periodicals, special collection, bindery services, reprography, selection dissemination of information (SDI), current awareness services (CAS), bibliographic services, lamination and information and communication technology (ICT) services.

1.1.2 Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MUUST). Now fully-fledged, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology emerged from Moi University as a constituent college in 2007 to respond to the training needs for technical manpower to encourage self-reliance and enhance active participation among youth within the western region and the nation. Muliro University Library was established with the aim of supporting the teaching, research, learning towards achievement of the mission of the university. The library focuses on user-centred services, which include readers' services, reprographic/photocopying services, consultancy and community outreach services, abstracting and indexing, circulation services, SDI, CAS, internet services, periodical services, desktop publishing, virtual services, community extension services. The library also provides access to a multidisciplinary collection of e-resources, both in- and off-campus, as well as information literacy sessions. The operations at the library are automated using the KOHA, an open-source library management system.

1.1.3 Jaramogi Odinga Oginga University of Science and Technology (JOOST). Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOST) was founded in 2009, as Bondo University College, a constituent college of Maseno University. In 2013, the university received its own charter as an independent institution of higher education in Bondo in Siaya county ([Universities Act, 2012](#)). JOOST library was established geared towards supporting teaching, learning and the research activities as core businesses of the university. Over the years, JOOST library has partnered with the faculty staff in ensuring that the core and supplementary texts recommended in the curricula are acquired, organised and disseminated to the users for access and utilisation. JOOST library provides information services that include print and electronic e-resources, consultation and outreach services, circulation services, digital services and information literacy.

1.1.4 Kisii University Library. Kisii University is situated in Kisii town, was originally a constituent college of Egerton University in Rift Valley region. The ever-growing student population saw the upgrade of Kisii University in 2013. Kisii University has so far grown and has established campuses in Nairobi, Kericho, Migori and Kapenguria. Each of the campuses has elaborate libraries that provide services to support the mission of the university. Besides the rich collection of print resources in various subjects, the university library has established a well-populated institutional repository (IR) and provides e-resources both on- and off-campus. The university conducts regular training among all the cadres of users, ensuring that they attain the required skill set in accessing and utilising the information resources.

1.2 Research questions

The study will aim at addressing the following questions:

- (1) Are the four public university libraries in Western Kenya meeting the needs and expectations of the users with the information services they provide?
- (2) What challenges do the libraries encounter in their effort to meet the users' needs and expectations, and what remedies are being undertaken or else, best practices being adopted to address the challenges?

2. Literature review

In the past few decades, university libraries have had to contend with the changing needs and expectations of users. Several studies conducted on user needs and expectations indicate how libraries have redefined roles in providing user-centred information services (Gudi and Paradkar, 2018; Mierzecka *et al.*, 2017). This study reviewed such literature and others to have a view of what was presented earlier, which forms the basis for this discussion.

With the emergence of new technologies necessitated by the threshold of the 21st century, Habre and Kammourié (2018) confirm that libraries, especially in academic institutions, have had to redefine their mode of information service provision more innovatively to meet the dynamic needs of the users who are the reason why they exist. Gyau *et al.* (2021) agree that academic libraries cease to perform their functions if users do not exist.

The study by Andrews *et al.* (2016) revealed that as the drastic changes continue to advance, libraries are poised to focus more on redesigning their localised information services to satisfy the needs of the “new” user while remaining at the forefront in participating in the achievement of the institutions goals, vision and mission. These findings explain why, as many university libraries struggle with dwindling budgets, The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) developed guidelines to help them work through the challenges of rethinking their services and affirms that access to information is a fundamental right that can break the cycles of poverty and enhance sustainable development for all. IFLA (2019) is in the forefront in championing libraries to provide opportunities to all, “regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, gender or sexual preference, age, disability, religion, economic circumstances or political beliefs, and support the vulnerable and marginalised groups”; libraries to empower people through information; libraries to provide access to the world’s knowledge and expert guidance, and that libraries to be recognised in development of policy frameworks.

As seen in the Canadian Health Libraries Association (CHLS), Frati *et al.* (2021) states that the purpose of guidelines is to allow individual libraries to base their decisions on services they provide on the users’ needs, which should be in tandem with the organisational goals they serve. The standards indicate the areas of the library that need to be addressed as far as quality and effectiveness are concerned. The areas include the library mission and vision, information resources/collection development, services provided, staffing and their required qualifications, facilities/equipment, adoption of ICT, budget allocation/funding, administration, e-learning and library spaces. This notwithstanding, Lannuzzi and Brown’s (2010) study used a survey to find out how libraries demonstrated their value to the users. The study revealed that the users’ proficiency in using the library services depended on what was availed and how helpful the personnel were in assisting them locate, retrieve and use the services.

Similarly, in their study, Gyau *et al.* (2021) user survey at Jiangsu University Library revealed, besides being aware and interested in the library services, they used the resources within the premises of the library and what was available on the website. A study on the state of university libraries in Kenya by Kavulya (2004) revealed that as libraries demonstrated their value to the users amidst inadequate funding from the parent institutions, it gave a paradoxical circumstance as it beats logic in the midst of the scramble for funding for the library to be given a low priority, yet it is recognised as a central entity in the academic arena. He continues to argue that “the library collection must not only be organized in a manner that enhances easy access and retrieval by users, the collection must be sufficient, assure value, multi-disciplinary in nature, available in all formats and up to date geared at supporting the teaching and research goals of the university, but this was not being done”.

Assessing the users’ needs against what is provided can speed up provision of effective services (Ziaei and Korjan, 2018). Emphasis is more on the user than the structures of the library. For instance, a report for the Society of College, National & University Libraries

(SCONUL) provided by [Pinfield et al. \(2017\)](#) gives a new paradigm of identifying the library as, “inside-out library” as aspects of rebranding. Such efforts do not only bring the user closer to the services but their needs and expectations are well articulated and addressed.

In Kenya, the [Commission for University Education \(CUE, 2014\)](#) standards and guidelines stipulate that a university library shall provide for all academic programmes; varied, authoritative and up-to-date information resources, which facilitate teaching, learning, research and community service. A library shall ensure that the information resources are relevant, adequate in quality and quantity; that the university library should develop and implement a collection development policy, which shall be reviewed within a period not exceeding five years; that the library subscribes, facilitates access and availability of electronic information resources; that it establishes and sustains institutional repositories, that it installs library systems that support data exchange using standard protocols and formats; and that the library should ensure it has an advisory committee, which shall be responsible for collection development.

2.1 User needs and expectations

Fulfilling user needs and expectations has been the primary objective for libraries and librarians in academic institutions. [Adam \(2017\)](#) observes that users come to the library with varied type of needs, and the extent to which the information services are provided determines their success insatisfying those needs. Libraries should thus identify and learn how the users are utilising the services available so as to improve them and consistently attract more users to the library ([Gyau et al., 2021](#)). One user survey at Jiagsu University revealed that, as academic libraries strive to attract users to access their services, the advent of new technologies has led to the deterioration of its value and importance. Users are more inclined to use virtual and electronic resources than the physical library. [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) believe that despite the changing environment, libraries can still change the concept and familiarise with the current users’ needs. Once the user needs are well understood, modification of the existing services and functions can take place to address the needs.

[Kiriri \(2018\)](#) confirmed that the needs of the library users of a private university in Africa as far as accessing the available resources were met. The study also revealed that some users were dissatisfied due to the inability to access the library electronic resources at their homes. Such findings, according to [Huwiler \(2015\)](#), imply that although most libraries are striving to provide services to all users as guided by IFLA, the reality is that not all the obstacles to meeting users’ needs can successfully be addressed to equally provide services to all users. The same study investigated library services for students on distance learning and revealed most students lacked awareness of the available library services, lacked ICT-based facilities and the skills to access the services. The study suggested that the management of the institution should as well enhance the skill levels of the staff to better understand what resources to meet the user needs.

2.2 Information services provided by university libraries

IFLA provides a guideline that “libraries to provide services to all regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, gender or sexual preference, age, disability, religion, economic circumstances or political beliefs, and support the vulnerable and marginalised groups”. With the paradigm shift towards advancing technologies, [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) suggest that to meet the changing needs of the users, libraries should keep abreast with the changes, establish reliable customers relationship, improve quality of services and provide information services to meet the diversified user needs or else the perception of the users towards the library will be negative as most research has made known. [Huwiler \(2015\)](#) conducted a study to find out the

kind of services provided by academic libraries. The study revealed the main services provided were circulation services, reference services, customer care services, help desk, information literacy, ICT and internet services library marketing and promotion and reading space. This is echoed by the findings from a study by [Click et al. \(2017\)](#), which concluded that identifying and critically understanding the needs of the users is always the guaranteed way to providing effective and useful library services.

2.3 Challenges in provision of information services

While academic libraries strive to understand users' needs, they face a myriad of challenges and obstacles majorly related to communication, technology, geographical limits, resources and skills. Sometimes, such kind of challenges facing librarians are not always easy to mitigate ([Huwiler, 2015](#)).

A study by [Rashmi Rekha \(2020\)](#) on "exploring users" experiences with digital information services in the law college libraries in the University of Mumbai, Maharashtra, revealed that 2.07% of the students and 1.19% of the faculties indicated that there was inadequate number of the subscribed databases that they could access, lack of enough funds, 3.2% indicated inadequate ICT facilities and resources, while 2% indicated lack of searching skills and information literacy skills, while 2.3% indicated poor connectivity and network system. The study outcome suggested the need for enhancing the database subscriptions, increasing budget allocation to leverage on the ICT infrastructure and recruiting more skilled staff and training users on how to access and utilise the resources.

3. Research methodology

The scope of this study was limited to four public universities' libraries in Western Kenya, namely; Maseno, University, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), JOUST and Kisii University. A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The study targeted a sample size of 470 respondents (384 students, 86 lecturers) who were randomly selected from each of the universities and ensured that the faculties were well represented. Ten library staff were purposively selected to participate in an interview session. A structured questionnaire and interview were the main instruments used for collecting data. Quantitative data were analysed to give descriptive statistical data and presented in tabulated summaries. Qualitative data were analysed in narrative form.

4. Research results

Data collected from the questionnaires were systematically analysed. Out of the 470 questionnaires administered to students and lecturers, 342 were successfully filled and returned, giving a response rate of 73%. Meanwhile, data collected from the interview with library staff were transcribed and thematically presented. The results are presented in [Table 1](#).

4.1 Information resources

Respondents were asked to indicate what information resources were important to their information needs, as shown in [Figure 1](#).

Respondents indicated print books (88%) as the most preferred information resources, followed by ask the librarian online (87%) and reference services (80%), followed by the electronic resources (64%), instruction on how to access the resources through information literacy sessions (29%). Such findings support previous authors, [Husain and Nazim \(2015\)](#), [Al Khajeh \(2018\)](#), [Jabur \(2019\)](#), who found out that services related to print resources,

Item		Frequency	Percent (%)
<i>Status of respondent</i>	Students	264	77.2
	Lecturers	78	22.8
	Total	342	100.0
<i>Gender</i>	Male	229	67.0
	Female	113	33.0
	Total	342	100.0
<i>Name of university</i>	Maseno	98	28.7
	MMUST	80	23.4
	Kisii	95	27.8
	JOOST	69	20.2
	Total	342	100.0

Table 1. Demographic details of students and lecturers

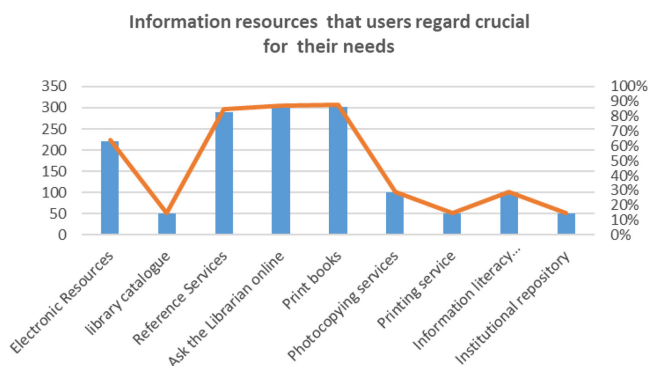


Figure 1. Information resources regarded crucial by users

reference service, electronic resources and library websites were frequently sought for by users.

JOOST University Library provided services to users with special needs. The library has installed a special screen reader and the Job Access With Speech (JAWS), a software program that enables the visually impaired users access and use information content on the computer.

MMUST Library has outreach services purposely to reach out to the marginalised group of users besides the university community. The library creates linkages to help channel book donations to needy groups and institutions. Some beneficiaries are Luanda Secondary School, Shinyalu Community Resource Centre, among others. The library had received funding from the Commission for University Education (CUE) to carry out a project that focuses on delivering information to the local community by establishing a village FM station. Such kind of service impacted positively towards the development of the village by availing valuable information for their day-to-day activities. Figure 2 shows additional services that students and lecturers suggested to be introduced in the libraries.

Respondents suggested other services they hoped the libraries would introduce besides the existing ones. Introduction of wireless connection (33.8%) emerged as the most preferred service, followed by automated services (27%) and printing services (20.9%). Other respondents preferred business journal services and books (9%). Collection development policies were in place to guide on the acquisition of resources commensurate to the teaching

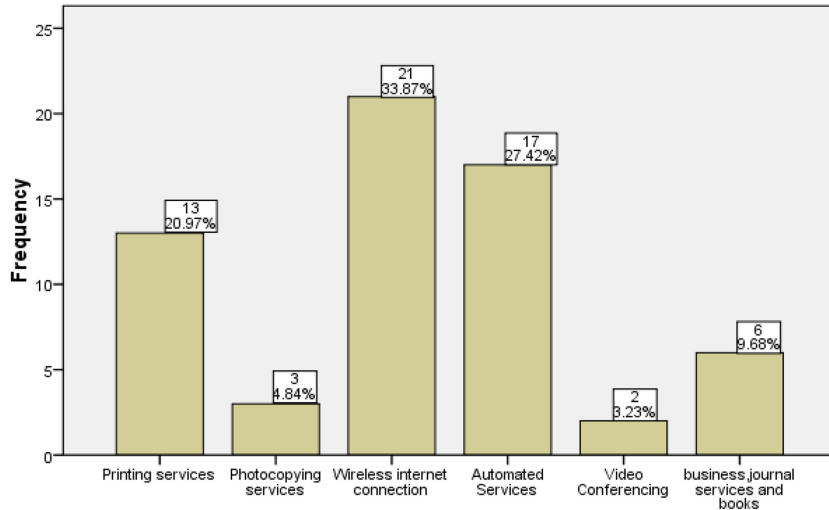


Figure 2. Information services that users suggest to be introduced

and research needs of respective faculties. However, in Maseno University Library, beside the collection development policy, the library operations are guided by work procedures in the acquisition, circulation, librarian’s office/organisation of resources, library reprographics, library systems and virtual library. The library staff provided statistics on the kind of information resources in terms of print and electronic resources available in the four public university libraries, between 2017 and 2019. The details are shown in [Table 2](#).

All the four university libraries select and acquire information materials economically and expeditiously as possible based on the current and future programmes offered at the respective universities. In support of this finding, [Huwiler \(2015\)](#) noted that challenges academic libraries faced many challenges along the dwindling fund allocations by the parent institutions. Similar findings were noted in all four libraries where they relied on donations that enabled them achieve the intended goals and objectives.

Maseno University Library had the highest number of print collections in 2018 (24,588). The library staff pointed out that this was attributed to a donation of 23,000 books received from the Canada and 905 medical books received from Tom Mboya University College. The libraries are members of the Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) where they subscribe to e-resources at subsidised purchase models. Only JOOST Library was able to give their current subscription of over 60,000 e-journals and five million eBooks, including those on open access (OA). The e-resources in the all the four libraries are accessible through an off-campus arrangement.

Library	2017		2018		2019	
	Donations and purchase	E-resources	Donations and purchase	E-resources	Donations and purchase	E-resources
Maseno	3,523	KLISC	24,858	KLISC	2,120	KLISC
MUUST	5,376	KLISC	7,413	KLISC	6,718	KLISC
JOOST	7,168	KLISC	6,119	KLISC	4,094	KLISC
Kisii	5,118	KLISC	7,211	KLISC	8,023	KLISC

Table 2. Number of information resources acquired in 2017–2019

Note(s): (*E-R: electronic resources)

4.2 User satisfaction level of print and e-resources

Respondents were asked to rate their preference of print and electronic resources. The items from the questionnaire were presented on a 1–5 Likert scale, where 1 = the least, 5 = highest. The results are as shown in [Table 3](#):

In total, 35% of the respondents preferred print resources, followed by the electronic resources (29%). This results are in agreement with [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) who suggested that librarians should not ignore the trends of the user’s preference and need to keep abreast with the changes in procuring resources, improve quality of services and provide information services to meet the diversified user needs.

4.3 Adoption and maintenance of information and communication technology (ICT)

The study sought to assess how the four public university libraries had adopted ICT in the main functions of the library. The reviewed literature indicated that users were more inclined to use virtual and electronic resources than the physical library ([Zhang et al., 2021](#)). In spite of that, this study indicated both print and ICT-based resources were preferred. Though not at par with the population of users in each of the libraries, [Table 4](#) shows the number of computers assigned to cater for; services in circulation, acquisition, cataloguing, in OPAC, virtual services, IR and JAW services to users with special needs. All the libraries had automated their services, and though not adequate, have internet connection points for both students and staff. Adoption of the full potential of ICT facilities in the majority of university libraries in Kenya is generally hampered by inadequate funding, high levels of computer illiteracy among staff who are expected to provide the services and other factors to be discussed later in the study. The results are shown in [Table 4](#).

All the four libraries use the open-source software, KOHA, for automating operations. Kisii University uses the RemoteXs platform for the off-campus access to e-resources, the other libraries use Ezproxy. Library websites are embedded on their respective university websites. By the time this study was done, Maseno University Library and MUUST had an ICT policy guiding the operation of ICT facilities. Kisii and JOOST University Libraries had a draft ICT policy awaiting senate approval. The other policy awaiting approval in the four universities was the IR policy, although the platform was up and running.

The ICT facilities are maintained by the ICT departments in the respective libraries. Most libraries have a systems librarian in the library establishment, while others said

Resource	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Electronic resources	22	6%	40	11%	85	24%	100	29%	75	21%
Print resources	20	9%	42	12%	90	26%	120	35%	90	26%

Table 3. Use preference of e-resources and print collection

Library	CD-ROMs	For OPAC	For staff	For users	LMS*	Off-campus platform	URL webpage
Maseno	2,920	5	30	45	Koha	Ezproxy	www.maseno.ac.ke
MUUST	2,200	4	26	45	Koha	Ezproxy	www.mmust.ac.ke
JOOST	2,000	10	18	70	Koha	EZproxy	www.JOOST.ac.ke
Kisii	2,500	1	22	128	Koha	RemoteXs	www.kisiiversity.ac.ke

Note(s): (LMS* library management system)

Table 4. Level of ICT adoption

they were yet to hire. Kisii, MUUST and Maseno University Libraries have designated system librarians who liaise with the ICT department in overseeing the performance of the ICT-related facilities. JOOST Library relied on the ICT department to maintain the systems.

4.4 Organisation and access to information resources

The four libraries organised their information materials using the Library of Congress (LC) classification scheme. The resources were centrally classified and catalogued at the main campuses. The libraries liaised with faculties and departments in selecting the materials based on the programmes offered. Such centralisation ensures consistency and prevents duplication of entries. Bibliographic information is adequately availed in the OPAC, both through the intranet and internet by the four libraries for easy retrieval.

4.4.1 Use of the library catalogue. Respondents were asked to state their ease in the use of the OPAC in locating information resources in the libraries. The findings are shown in Figure 3.

Majority of users (80%) indicated that it was difficult in using the library catalogue, while 70% indicated using the catalogue was too difficult for them, while 20% indicated it was easy to use the catalogue. Such findings generally agree with [Alice et al. \(2021\)](#) whose study found out that most retrieval tools like the OPAC were rarely used in Nigerian university libraries, and that most users were not aware of how to use the tools or used them with a lot of difficulty. Such findings concur with the study by who suggested that librarians should consistently organise training sessions for users on how to use the OPAC.

4.5 Library facilities

The findings revealed that apart from Kisii and Masinde Muliro University Library with modern library buildings, the other libraries operated in the old library buildings. The seating capacity for the libraries is also below the recommended number. Maseno has a 600 seating capacity compared to a population of approximately 15,000 students excluding staff. Most libraries are yet to design and build ultra-modern libraries to cater for the growing user population. All the libraries had elaborate entrances and exit points with reliable and working electronic security gates. At the period of this study, the entrance area at Maseno library was under repair, and at the JOOST library, a lift was being put in place to provide ease of movement for users with special needs.

Albeit concerns on the inadequacy of library facilities and equipment available in the four university libraries, the respondents were satisfied with the carrels (96.8%) and tables for

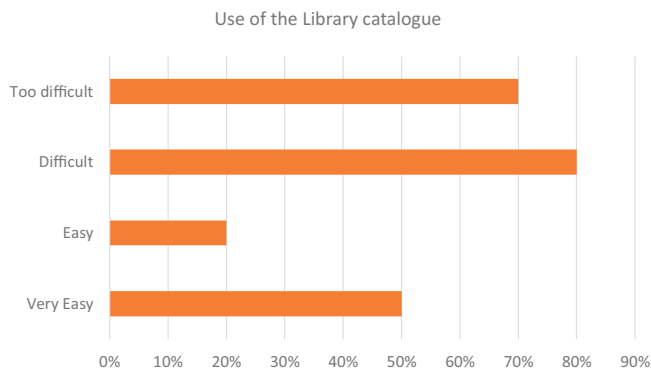


Figure 3.
Use of the catalogue to find materials in the library

accommodating laptops (47.7%), the ambience and conducive to learning (64.3%), good ventilation and conducive fenestration (61.3%), sufficient doorways for exit in case of emergency (60%), location in central place (30.7%).

4.6 Library budget

The budget should be adequate to acquire print, electronic resources and library facilities. Although majority of public university libraries in Kenya may not have attained the 10% requirement in the budget to enable them upscale their services, libraries have tried to showcase their worth by providing innovative services such as use of the library management system in the operations and the subscription to e-resources.

The four libraries had not met the threshold of 10% of the institution's operational budget as stipulated by CUE standards. Budget limitations were cited in all the libraries as a major challenge towards implementing ideal library services. At Maseno University Library, "the library budget has been fluctuating due to government/treasury meager capitation allocation. The budget had been downsized and becomes very difficult to know what to prioritize". At JOOST, "we have not achieved the 10% threshold as per CUE requirements".

4.7 Enhancing library skills through information literacy and competency

To scale up the users' skill set, the libraries offered programmes such as orientation, in-house training, information literacy, workshops and seminars, notices, library, website, use of social media, fliers, library guides that reach out to the users in matters of sensitising and creating awareness of the variety of resources and services offered. A JOOST, "we regularly invite students and teaching staff to our continuous training sessions on access and utilisation of e-resources". The results agreed with the findings by [Husain and Nazim \(2015\)](#) study who revealed that as libraries enhance their collection, there is a need to provide instructions to users and equip them with experiential skills on how to locate, access and retrieve the resources.

5. Discussion and implications

Numerous studies from literature revealed that for librarians to excel in their information provision in academic institutions, there is a need to critically assess the user needs and expectations. The findings of this study presented in detail from the previous section led to a general conclusion that the four public university libraries in Western Kenya were providing information resources with the user in mind. This notwithstanding, to ensure maximum utilisation of the available resources in the library, there is a need for the users to be actively involved in the design of the services and in the resources acquisition. Such strategies would help libraries in focusing more on availing user-centred services, and in so doing, mitigate some challenges.

Regarding the information services, respondents hoped additional services and resources could be introduced such as wireless connection (33.8%) as the most preferred service, followed by automated services (27%) and printing services (20.9%); other respondents preferred business journal services and books (9%). The library staff indicated that the universities select and acquire information materials economically and expeditiously as possible based on the current and future programmes offered at the respective universities. Similar findings were noted in all four libraries where they relied on donations that enabled them achieve their intended goals and objectives.

With the emergence of new technologies, the libraries had partially embraced use of ICT. In spite of that, the findings revealed that most users to a greater extent still preferred the print books than other resources. Contrary to the findings from literature where

Zhang *et al.* (2021) indicated that users were more inclined to use virtual and electronic resources than the physical library, significantly, the needs of the academic staff had shifted to preference of online resources, despite the challenges faced in poor connectivity, inadequate searching skills and lack of awareness of the available resources. However, the preference of electronic resources, ask the librarian, reference services, information literacy sessions and IR is worth noting. Previous studies (Husain and Nazim, 2015; Al Khajeh, 2018; Jabur, 2019) established that libraries related to print material, reference service, electronic resources and library websites were frequently sought for by users.

The findings revealed that most libraries have services for users with special needs. JOOST University Library provides services to users with special needs through a special screen reader and the JAWS, a software program that enables the visually impaired users access and use information content on the computer. MMUST library also provides outreach services to vulnerable communities neighbouring the university such as the Luanda Secondary School, Shinyalu Community Resource Centre.

Studies also found out that competency and relevant skill sets was one among prerequisites for librarians. However, the findings revealed that majority of staff still require to upscale their skill levels to enable effective service delivery. Huwiler (2015) established that despite the dwindling fund allocation by the parent institutions, academic libraries faced challenges regarding the low skill levels among library staff. For instance, Kisii, MUUST and Maseno University Libraries had system librarians who liaise with the ICT department in overseeing the performance of the ICT-related facilities, JOOST Library said they were yet to hire and relied on the ICT department to maintain the library systems.

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the library facilities. Albeit challenges on the inadequacy, most respondents (98%) felt that all the libraries provided adequate carrels for use as well as adequate tables for accommodating laptops, and the whole reading environment was very conducive for learning.

Ideally, the library budget should be adequate to acquire print, electronic resources and other facilities. However, the findings indicate that none of the four university libraries had met the 10% threshold of the operational institutional budget as the requirement from the CUE. Without an adequate budget, the libraries fail to fully provide resources and services that satisfy the user needs. Literature suggests that proper budgeting in the libraries suggest availing adequate funds to cater to the service-based programmes that would enable the library achieve its objectives and those of the parent institution.

From the study, the four libraries provided information literacy training sessions to all the users. Such sessions were used with an aim of creating awareness of the available information resources, how they can be located, accessed and ethically utilised. Examples of strategies applied in creating awareness include orientation, seminars, workshops, one-on-one demonstrations sessions, notices, library page, use of social media, brochures and library manuals.

6. Conclusion

The study was conducted for the purpose of assessing the user needs and expectations on information services provided in selected public university libraries in Western Kenya. The results revealed that libraries in academic institutions must articulately find out what the users need and expect from the resources and services they provide. Generally, as revealed from both the literature reviewed and study findings, in the new era of technological advancements, libraries are required to actively involve the users while developing the collection, design of services and programmes that are user-centred. Such kind of strategies not only ensure the users utilise the resources provided, but the library is also able to achieve its goals and objectives and those of the parent institutions.

The study recommends that, despite the dwindling budget allocations, libraries should establish income-generating programmes that would enable them supplement the budget in operationalising the proposed activities. The university libraries should consistently create awareness and proactively sensitise users on the available resources and how to use them. In so doing, the library justifies its very existence and its role in satisfaction of user needs.

References

- Adam, R. (2017), "Assessment of library service quality and user satisfaction among undergraduate students of Yusuf Maitama Sule University (YMSU) library", *Library Philosophy and Practices (e-journal)*, pp. 1-20, available at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac?utm_source=digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1675&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.
- Al Khajeh, E.H. (2018), "Leadership styles on organizational performance", *Journal of Human Resources Management Research*, pp. 1-10, doi: [10.5171/2018.687849](https://doi.org/10.5171/2018.687849).
- Alice, E.U., Aniekeme, G. and Nna-Etuk, G.M.P. (2021), "Awareness of online public access catalogue and utilization of library resources by undergraduates in federal universities in South- South Zone of Nigeria", *International Journal of Library and Information Science Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 1-8, available at: <https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Awareness-of-Online-Public-Access-Catalogue-and-Utilization-of-Library-Resources.pdf>.
- Andrews, C., Wright, S.E. and Raskin, H. (2016), "Library learning Spaces: investigating libraries and investing in student feedback", *Journal of Library Administration*, Vol. 56 No. 6, pp. 647-672, doi: [10.1080/01930826.2015.1105556](https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1105556).
- Click, A.B., Wiley, C.W. and Houlihan, M. (2017), "The internationalization of the academic library: a systematic review of 25 years of literature on international students", *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 78 No. 3, pp. 328-358, doi: [10.5860/crl.78.3.328](https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.3.328).
- Commission for University Education (2014), "Universities standards and guidelines", Nairobi, available at: https://www.cue.or.ke/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&id=8&Itemid=494.
- Frati, F., Oja, L.A. and Kleinberg, J. (2021), "CHLA standards for library and information services in Canadian health and social services institutions 2020", *Journal of the Canadian Health Libraries Association/Journal De l'Association Des bibliothèques De La Santé Du Canada*, Vol. 42 No. 1, doi: [10.29173/jchla29526](https://doi.org/10.29173/jchla29526).
- Gudi, S.P. and Paradkar, P.M. (2018), "Users' satisfaction with library resources: a survey of engineering college libraries, Pune, India", *Journal of Indian Library Association*, Vol. 54 No. 3, pp. 135-142.
- Gyau, E.B., Jing, L. and Akowuah, S. (2021), "International students library usage frequency patterns in academic libraries: a user survey at Jiangsu university library", *OALib*, Vol. 08 No. 07, pp. 1-20, doi: [10.4236/oalib.1107610](https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1107610).
- Habre, C. and Kammourié, H. (2018), "Redesigning Spaces for effective learning: challenges facing Riyad Nassar library in meeting users' perceptions and expectations", *Journal of Library Administration*, Vol. 58 No. 5, pp. 519-544, doi: [10.1080/01930826.2018.1468674](https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2018.1468674).
- Husain, S. and Nazim, M. (2015), "Use of different information and communication technologies in Indian academic libraries", *Library Review*, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 135-153, doi: [10.1108/LR-06-2014-0070](https://doi.org/10.1108/LR-06-2014-0070).
- Huwiler, A.G. (2015), "Library services for distance students: opportunities and challenges", *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 275-288, doi: [10.1080/1533290X.2015.1111283](https://doi.org/10.1080/1533290X.2015.1111283).
- Jabur, N.H. (2019), "Information professionals' perspectives towards the competencies acquired from education and work", *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 353-366, available at: <http://www.qqml-journal.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/481>.

- Kavulya, J. (2004), "University libraries in Kenya: a study of their practices and performance", Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Humboldt, Arcata, CA.
- Kekana, M.D. and Kheswa, S.E. (2020), "The gap between user perceptions and expectations of students at the main library of the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg campus", *SA Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 1-9, doi: [10.4102/sajim.v22i1.1195](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v22i1.1195).
- Kiriri, P.N. (2018), "Service delivery: the perceptions of users' of library services in a private university in Africa", *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 4, pp. 221-231.
- Lannuzzi, P. and Brown, J.M. (2010), "ACRL's standards for libraries in higher education: academic library directors weigh in", *College and Research Libraries News*, Vol. 71 No. 9, pp. 486-487, doi: [10.5860/crln.71.9.8442](https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.71.9.8442).
- Mierzecka, A., Kisiłowska, M. and Suminas, A. (2017), "Researchers' expectations regarding the online presence of academic libraries", *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 78 No. 7, pp. 934-951, doi: [10.5860/crl.78.7.934](https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.7.934).
- Mwiria, K. and Ng'ethe, N. (2007), *Public University Reform in Kenya: Mapping the Key Changes of the Last Decade*, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi.
- Otike, F. and Omboi, B.M. (2010), "Challenges faced in establishing University Libraries in Kenya", *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 2 No. 8, pp. 148-154, ISSN 2141 - 2537, available at: <http://www.academicjournals.org/ijlis>.
- Pinfield, S., Cox, A. and Rutter, S. (2017), "Mapping the future of academic libraries: a report for SCONUL", available at: <https://sconul.ac.uk/publication/mapping-the-future-of-academic-libraries>.
- Rashmi Rekha, G. (2020), "Exploring users' experiences with digital information services in the Law College libraries affiliated to University of Mumbai, Maharashtra", *Lincoln* (Sep 2020): 1-15, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 3 No. September, pp. 1-15, available at: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/3923132061b23f19cc6d4a49d3e56fb7/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=54903>.
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) (2019), "IFLA guidelines on public internet access in libraries", in Cooke, L. (Ed.), *Licensed Under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License*, available at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>.
- Umoh, E.B. (2017), "Information and services provision by academic libraries in Nigeria", *International Journal of Academic Library and Information Science*, Vol. 5 No. 5, pp. 153-159, available at: <https://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJALIS/PDF/2017/August/Umoh.pdf>.
- Universities Act (2012), Government Press, Nairobi.
- Waigumo Mathangani, S. and Otike, J. (2017), "The legal implications of providing information services in PUL in Kenya", *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekskultur*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 22-37, doi: [10.12685/027.7-5-1-168](https://doi.org/10.12685/027.7-5-1-168).
- Zhang, L., Wang, D. and Zhao, L. (2021), "Enlightenment of information consultation to library user service", *Proceedings of the 1st International Symposium on Innovative Management and Economics (ISIME 2021)*, Vol. 185, Isime, pp. 596-600, doi: [10.2991/aebmr.k.210803.081](https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.210803.081).
- Ziaei, S. and Korjan, F.R. (2018), "Assessment of services quality in Tabriz central library from the users point of view based on LibQual model", *Library Philosophy and Practice*, pp. 1-15.

Corresponding author

Felicitas Ciabere Ratanya can be contacted at: fratanya@gmail.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com