

Serving remote users in selected public university libraries in Kenya: perspectives of the section heads

Mary Njeri Wachira^{1*}

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
Department of Information Science, University of South Africa
mnwachira@yahoo.com

Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha²

Department of Information Science, University of South Africa
onyanob@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

The provision of information services to support teaching, learning and research has long been a major objective of libraries in higher education. The students being served by these libraries, specifically in Kenya, may consist of on-campus and remote user groups. This study set out to explore the library section heads' perspectives of the support services and resources meant for remote library users in selected public university libraries in Kenya with a view to recommending measures towards improving library services for this emerging group of library users. The study used a case study research design whereby qualitative data was collected using focus group discussions (FGDs) with section heads in four selected public university libraries in Kenya, namely the University of Nairobi (UoN), Kenyatta University (KU), Moi University (MU) and Egerton University (EU). The findings of the study are discussed under four main subject areas: services for remote users, physical facilities available for remote users, how libraries create awareness of their services to remote users, and policies and regulations that govern remote use of library resources. It is hoped that the study's findings will not only create awareness of the existence of remote users in academic libraries in Kenya, but will also open up debate on how effectively and efficiently this category of users can be served.

Keywords: Academic libraries, Kenya, universities, library users, remote users

*To whom correspondence must be addressed.

Introduction

Over the last 10 years, an expansion in higher education has been driven by social and economic imperatives. Equity of access to education for all potential students (including those qualified but who are unable or unwilling to participate as regular full-time students as well as distance learners, e-learners and part-time campus-based students) is increasingly recognized as important in serving the needs of not only rural or dispersed communities but also other disadvantaged groups in society. Flexible learning has been further stimulated by efforts to promote lifelong learning to ensure that the workforce has the skills required in a modern and changing economy, and to provide intellectual opportunities for an aging population. These factors have resulted in numerous initiatives. For example, conventional universities and new commercial competitors, using satellite centers or the Internet to deliver higher education, have initiated some flexible teaching programmes (Colins & Moonen 2002).

In Kenya, the social demands with respect to higher education have clearly intensified. The Kenya Government strives to make education accessible and affordable to all Kenyans by encouraging institutions to admit students based on learning facilities as opposed to the availability of accommodation space, besides self sustaining strategies of having those who have acquired a minimum qualification and can pay for their learning as opposed to government sponsorship.

This government initiative has seen a rise in the number of public and private universities, accredited colleges and the establishment of self-sponsored programmes in the public universities. Student enrolment in public universities in Kenya rapidly increased since 1964 (Ngare & Muindi 2008; Gudo, OIel & Oanda 2011). The number of students enrolled in public universities in Kenya was half a million in 2014/2015 financial year (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2016). As additional students are increasingly being enrolled in the open and distance learning (ODL) and continuous education degree programmes (CEP) in both the public and private universities, the numbers are obviously much higher. Distance

1. Mary Njeri Wachira is a librarian at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya. She completed her masters degree at the University of South Africa.
2. Bosire Omwoyo Onyancha is a Research Professor in the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa.

education programmes, part-time learning and self-sponsored students who do not reside on university campuses are now standard in most colleges and universities.

These developments have led to increased enrolment of learners who are not limited by distance, in effect causing a paradigm shift in support and information service delivery in the institutions of higher learning. It is well acknowledged that justification for investing in higher education libraries lies in the extent to which linkage is demonstrated between such an investment and the library's role in the improvement of quality, efficiency, and achievement in university education (Kavulya 2004). A university library is an instrument that aids teaching, learning and research and/or scholarship. The librarian serves as a teacher, guiding the student in the ways of investigation and research. To achieve this, libraries acquire information materials to support tuition and research by the faculty and students, and organise the resources in a manner that permits easy access to the contents and ensuring that such access is facilitated by giving users the necessary skills to retrieve the required information (Virkus & Metsar 2004). ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services (ACRL, 2000) state that "Members of the distance learning community are entitled to library services and resources equivalent to those provided for students and faculty in traditional campus settings".

Moyo and Cahoy (2003) argue that some institutions have not ensured that they are fully serving remote students. Traditionally, library facilities in most public institutions of higher learning were established and designed to serve the needs of on-campus users. This presents major limitations as time goes by and as the user behavior changes (Gust & Haka 2006; Wayne, Butters & Brophy 1997). Post the 1990s, there has been an increase in the demand for higher education thus a gradual increase in demand for more and quality services, including those offered by the libraries. Library and information services world over are facing new challenges that require reforms in information management and delivery styles. The increase in student enrolment and establishment of more colleges and campuses as well as expansion of programmes in institutions of higher learning present a higher demand for library and information services. According to Slade (2000) and Nyaigoti (2004), the adoption of new technologies has provided opportunities in education delivery as well as other service and product delivery, including library services. Other factors such as the changing user characteristics, internal factors which include the level of involvement by librarians as partners in the development of higher education, and the rapid pace at which new knowledge is created, presented and utilised, are among the recent developments which pose challenges in the provision of information and library services.

Traditionally, libraries offered circulation services, interlibrary loans, course reserves, an information desk, and reference desk and library instruction (Reynolds & Whitlatch 1985; Jurkowski 2003). Users had to physically get to the library building for a variety of services such as circulation services (borrow, return or reserve a book), readers' services, user registration, reference services, reprographic and binding services, bibliographic services, research, book and newspaper services, abstracting/indexing services, selective dissemination of information (SDI), current awareness (CAS), user education, searching and retrieval services, audiovisual services, and user support. The opening hours were posted at the entrance to the main building. Advances in technology, digitisation of resources (Black 2003), limited physical space in the library and an increased enrolment (Saleh 2014), have caused changes in the way users interact with their libraries. Johnson *et al.* (2004), too, believe that the use of ICTs in libraries has presented libraries with opportunities to extend access to and improve the quality of the services they offer to clients. However, Henner (2002) sees ICTs as tools that have not only created competitive environments in terms of the provision of information services such as bibliographic instruction which is now offered through the Internet, but also as drivers of a revolution that libraries and librarians face. Henner (2002: 80) aptly captures the revolution that ICTs pose for libraries and librarians thus: "given the near-ubiquitous ability to connect to library databases and full-text via a network, even users within close physical proximity to a library can be classified functionally as remote users". Wright & Waugh (1998: 75), in their article on remote users of health sciences libraries, argue that "trends in health management systems, education initiatives, and the rise of consumerism challenge health sciences librarians to evaluate and extend their services more than ever before using new technologies". Increasingly, the library users are no longer limited by time and space as they can access library services and information sources from anywhere and at any time (Baikady, Jessy & Bhat 2014). These developments, among others, have created an additional category of users who access information both on-campus and off-campus but through virtual means. These users are commonly referred to as remote users.

Remote users can be defined as any individuals accessing library resources from any site outside a library, without regard to physical distance and time (Cooper, Dempsey, Menon and Millson-Matula 1998; Graham and Grodzinski 2001). The remote users can be categorised into three primary groups, namely:

On-campus remote users,

Off-campus remote users

Distance education users (Cooper, Dempsey, Menon and Millson-Matula 1998; Graham and Grodzinski 2001; Henner 2002; Horo 2006; Baikady, Jessy & Bhat 2014).

On-campus remote users include those accessing library resources from the halls of residence, offices, classrooms and computer laboratories (Niemi, Ehrhard & Neeley 1998). This group has access to the library building but from time to time they require to access library services from places outside the library building. Reaching this category may not be a major concern as they are within the institution's Intranet and can easily connect to the resources as long as one has access to a connected facility (Niemi, Ehrhard & Neeley 1998; Horo 2006).

The off-campus remote users, on the other hand, consist primarily of students taking regular programmes but who are non-residents as well as some members of teaching and non-teaching staff members taking part-time classes within the campus or other institutions of higher learning (Niemi, Ehrhard & Neeley 1998). They may access library resources from their homes or other locations away from the library building. Another class of remote users consists of distance learners, including e-learners. The users in this category access the library's resources from greater distances and remote access is often their only means of obtaining library materials and services. We can safely argue that all members of staff in any given academic institution are potential library remote users as far as electronic services are concerned.

According to Debowski (2003), knowing the type of library users and their needs is critical to any successful information service. The 21st century library user is increasingly accessing the library services from computers and other external support tools. Debowski (2003) argues that the impact for the library as a place becomes significantly diminished as users seek alternative means of accessing information they need from distant facilities. Hence, he defines the remote user as any patron who accesses the library services without actually entering the library doors. The definition is flexible and may be tailored to fit a specific circumstance since the intent is to provide the broadest possible interpretation, not the narrowest, in order to provide library access to all who are eligible. Those registered as students or employees are the primary clientele; but the library may choose to collaborate with and provide services and resources to others to the extent that time, staffing, and licence agreements with database vendors permit.

We have noted that this category of users has been surveyed in terms of their needs and expectations and findings have been presented in various studies (e.g. Cooper, Dempsey, Menon and Millson-Matula 1998; Saleh 2014). For instance, Saleh (2014: 3) raises pertinent issues for academic libraries in their drive to serve students at a distance, thus: "are the services and collections provided to remote users equivalent to those offered to on-campus users? Which services and resources are most used and/or most needed by remote users and why?" The author approached the study by exploring the perceptions of the users who felt that the services and resources provided by the Ramat libraries, University of Maiduguri, were satisfactory. The study did not investigate the perceptions of service providers and, for this reason, the current study targets librarians (service providers) to explore the status of service provision to remote users in selected public universities in Kenya. Broadly, the study focused on both the library directors and section heads in order to explore the library services, information resources, physical facilities, policies and procedures available for remote users in public universities in Kenya. The objectives of the study included:

- To identify and describe the library services and resources available for remote users in public university libraries in Kenya.

- To identify and describe the physical facilities available in the library to assist remote users in public universities in Kenya; and

- To investigate how libraries in public universities create awareness about their services and resources to remote users.

- To examine the library policies and procedures of serving remote users in the selected public libraries in Kenya

2. Methodology

Due to the nature of the problem investigated and the subsequent type of data to be collected, the study adopted a descriptive case study research design. Descriptive research designs are used in preliminary and exploratory studies to allow researchers to gather information and summarise, present and interpret data for the purpose of clarification (Orodho 2003). According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) the purpose of descriptive research is to determine and report the way things are and it helps in establishing the current status of the population under study. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) note that descriptive survey research is intended to produce statistical information about aspects of a study that interest policy makers. Gay (1992) says that surveys are self-report study that requires the collection of quantifiable information from the sample. They are useful for describing, explaining or exploring the existing status of two or more variables (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999).

Four public universities, namely the University of Nairobi (UoN); Kenyatta University (KU); Moi University (MU) and Egerton University (EU), were selected for the study. The universities were selected based on the following factors: (a) they are among the oldest universities in Kenya and (b) they offer some online programs. The researchers also

considered the geographic location of the universities, whereby two universities each were selected from urban and rural areas in Kenya.

The study employed focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect data. According to the Bureau for Social Research (n.d.) cited in Moyane (2007), focus groups are carefully planned discussion groups designed to obtain perceptions on a specific area of interest. The focus groups constitute of six to eight participants and a skilled moderator who conducts the interview (Kombo and Tromp 2006:95). Bryman (2004) elucidated that focus groups emphasise a specific theme or topic that is explored in-depth. Walden (2004) affirmed that focus group interviewing can be successfully employed in a wide range of endeavors within librarianship. Compared with other social sciences, the field of library and information science has underutilised the method. Patricia Cavill, president of Pat Cavill Consulting (Taher 2006), observes that focus groups are an under-utilised market research tool in many libraries. In support of the method, the above mentioned scholars have noted that focus groups are cheaper than questionnaires and that the results tend to have a greater influence on decision makers because they use the words and feelings of library supporters. Lewis (2000:3) acknowledges that focus groups are a particularly good method for data collection as they enable researchers to understand how people feel or think about an issue, product, service, or idea.

Merton, Fiske, and Kendall as cited in Lewis (2000), suggest that "the size of the group should manifestly be governed by two considerations ... it should not be so large as to be unwieldy or to preclude adequate participation by most members nor should it be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater coverage than that of an interview with one individual". Lewis (2000) explains that the number of participants will depend on the objectives of the research, while Kreuger (1988:94) advises that smaller groups (4-6 people) are preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion. The focus group should be made up of homogeneous members of the target population (Kombo and Tromp 2006).

Based on the above background the focus group discussions were deemed helpful in gaining in-depth knowledge that may not be obtained when using other methods. The study used the focus group interview schedule to guide the researchers in the discussions. As recommended by Lewis (2000), this guide was developed directly from the research questions that were the impetus for the research. When formulating questions for the interview guide, the questions were ordered from a more general to the more specific one according to the objectives of the study as advised by Stewart and Shamdasani (as cited in Lewis 2000). Questions of greater importance were given higher priority while those of lesser significance were placed towards the end of the schedule.

One discussion group interview was held with the section heads in each of the four selected public university libraries in Kenya. The subject librarians, circulation librarians, periodical librarians, reference librarians, acquisition librarians, and ICT librarian/E-resource librarians constituted the target population for the study. The target was to have a group of six respondents in each library of the study. There are a total of four focus groups, each representing each university investigated in the study. At the UoN where we had the highest number of members of the group (i.e. 8), the team included the librarian in charge of the College of Education and External Studies and the IT librarian. The discussions focused on support services delivery for remote users in public university libraries in Kenya. The researchers, with the help of a library assistant, guided the discussion in each institution. We spent between one and two hours to conduct the discussions as advised by Lewis (2000) and Krueger & Casey (2000).

3. Results and discussion

This section presents the findings from the focus group interviews. The data is discussed in line with the objectives. As explained in the methodology section, the focus group interviews targeted section heads only. The data is presented and discussed under the following main themes: respondents' profiles, services for remote users, information resources for remote users, staffing, physical facilities, creation of awareness of services for remote users, policies and procedures as well as challenges of serving remote users.

3.1 Respondents' Profiles

This section presents data on the profile of the focus group respondents as stipulated in Table 1. The respondents were the section heads in charge of key service areas that serve or are directly linked to remote user services in the four public university libraries. Each library had a different title for the person in charge of the sections. An analysis of the staff titles who participated in the focus group discussions is shown in the table. UON and EU had 7 group members each. UON group comprised of circulation, ICT system, acquisition, periodicals and reference librarian reference librarian, and cataloguing librarian. KU group comprised six members: ICT, education librarian, social science librarian, head of humanities and cataloguing librarian. MU had 5 members composed of the circulation librarian, reader service librarian, and systems librarian while the Egerton University's group comprised 7 members, namely: reader service librarian, e-

resource librarian, acquisitions librarian, information librarian, periodical and special collection librarian, reference librarian, subject librarian, and cataloguing librarian.

Table 1 Focus group memberships

Respondent title	UON	KU	MU	EU
Circulation Librarian	X		X	
Reader Service Librarian			X	X
ICT Librarian		X		
System Librarian	X		X	
E-Resource Librarian				X
Acquisitions Librarian	X	X	X	X
Information Librarian				X
Periodical and Special Collection	X			X
Reference Librarian	X			X
Subject Librarian	X			X
Education In Charge		X		
Social Science In Charge		X		
Head Humanities		X		
Cataloguing Librarian	X	X	X	X
Total group members	7	6	5	7

3.2 Services and resources for remote users

This section presents data obtained from focus group discussions and covers services and resources for remote users in the following sub themes; services, resources and staffing (human resource).

3.2.1 Services for remote users

Questions were posed to respondents on how remote users were served, how the libraries ensured that users got what they sought, whether users could reserve and renew loans online, and how access to services was provided. From the onset, it was apparent that librarians were not aware of the exact meaning of 'remote users'. For instance, a member in the UON discussion group commented thus: "we do not have remote users in our library and all we have is an online catalogue where once an item is identified, a user has to make a personal visit to the issue counter with the book for fresh borrowing or renewal." This was inferred in the other libraries' discussion groups.

They also added that only when an item was available on the shelves was a user contacted by e-mail. The staff at MU and EU commented that they did not address the issue of off-campus users due to inadequate resources and lack of infrastructure to meet these needs. Discussants at the UON, KU, and MU did not identify services for remote users but indicated that the library offered traditional services while discussants at EU reported that book loans were supported by AMLIB NetOpacs automated loan system. However, users had to come to the library to borrow and renew books.

On how the groups ensured that users got what they sought, all the participating focus group discussants said that the resources were organised using the Library of Congress Classification scheme (LC) and shelves are well marked; while web-based resources depended on the keyword used to query the system. Remote users could call the librarian for assistance. Discussants at MU said that the users presented themselves for print-based materials, and visited the Internet at the campus and also used the provided passwords to access e-resources. At EU, the discussants said that the library collection was mainly print-based and the library staff ensured that books were shelved properly for ease of identification. However, users had access to e-resources which were available on the Local Area Network. Users were provided with passwords which were posted at the library's entrance. Passwords were provided to users to access HINARI, OARE and AGORA databases.

During further discussions, which happened after clarifying who remote users were, the following services were identified: book reservation, online loan renewal, online reference service and online information delivery as services that can be rendered to remote users. The group at UoN said that remote users could reserve items online since the catalogue was web based and could be accessed by any registered user by logging into the website; the respondents further indicated that users could identify whether or not the items are available and thereafter place a reservation

request where applicable. However, users have to personally present the books at the issue counter for initial borrowing and renewal. The discussants at KU revealed that although the term 'remote user' was not quite understood before, after discussions it was noted that KOHA an open source Integrated Library System (ILS) had the ability to provide remote services. The library, however, had not activated the system, and therefore was not able to determine and provide services to remote users.

MU indicated that remote users services would be possible upon the conversion of TINLIB (an open-source library for creating Triangulated Irregular Networks) to a web-based software, namely: ABCD, "Automatización de Bibliotecas y Centros de Documentación" (Spanish), which means: Library and Documentation Centers Automation that supports online information services. At EU, where they use a web-based library system called AMLIB NetOpacs, the respondents said that they did not offer online reserve and renewal services as some of the libraries in Kenyan public universities.

The issue of access protocols was considered in the group discussions. Some scholars (e.g. Nooshinfard & Ziaei 2011) have underscored the importance of websites as tools of access to resources held in the libraries are concerned. In that respect, the discussants from the UoN, KU and EU indicated that their libraries had their own websites. At MU, the website was being upgraded and in addition, the OPAC was being converted into a system that would allow web-based user services as earlier mentioned. At EU, the discussants reported that the campus provided access to resources through the local-area-networked computers. They also indicated that users could request information searching by e-mail from the Librarian or visit the campus and use any computer laboratory to access resources. Tutorials on how to access the resources were available on the university library's website. Most libraries indicated that using the e-resources require authentication and authorisation, which in turn requires that on registration, users are provided with user IDs and passwords. The UoN group reported that their users were required to register with the library to gain full access rights to e-resources. Users use electronic identity or smart cards to access electronic resources at KU and MU campuses. At EU, passwords were issued for OARE, HINARI and AGORA while the rest of the electronic resources were accessed through the Internet.

The UoN, MU and KU focus groups said that users need not come to the university since they can access the library from outside the university where the campuses were interconnected by a proxy server. However, users had to visit the university library in case there are problems accessing the system from off-campus points. At the UoN, all users have to present themselves during orientation and registration while at the EU the electronic resources and databases are used within the campus as the systems at the time of discussion were not accessible beyond the LAN.

On the document delivery procedures, discussants at the UoN commented that photocopying and scanning of requested pages was done and copies sent to the users by courier services or by e-mail. Similarly, e-mail attachments were also common at KU and MU. In contrast, respondents from all the public universities said that users were encouraged to collect materials from the library by themselves.

The discussants were further prodded on how the students requested resources; all the groups said that the students physically visit their libraries, call, or send e-mails to the designated librarian. The UoN focus group further said that the librarians used web help link on the library web page which users can use to send their requests. Any support service has its challenges and to these the discussants submitted that power failure, slow Internet, inadequate computers in the library, unmanageable user numbers against a shrinking staff base and lack of IT trained personnel were key challenges faced by the discussants from UoN, while lack of IT specialists was a major limitation at KU. The discussants at MU identified lack of connectivity in some areas, limited resources, and increased enrolment of school based learners. On the part of EU, delays in document delivery due to lack of follow-up by the users on their requests and poor connectivity were cited as major challenges.

3.2.2 Information resources for remote users

To provide support services to remote users, a library must have the appropriate resources. In that regard, several questions were posed to identify the available resources. Discussants identified the following as the available information resources: print and electronic books; PERii e-resources; full-text journal databases; and CD-ROMs. In addition, the UoN has micro-fiche films while the EU discussion group reported that they also have the Essential Electronic Agriculture Library (TEEAL) online database.

The issue of the tools used to access various resources identified above was also addressed. When a question was posed regarding the type of tools that remote users use to access the resources, participating discussion groups' comments showed that users made use of all or any of the following methods: forms on the library link on the institutional website, personal visits to the library, the library OPAC, and e-mails sent to the librarians. Feedback forms were not fully exploited as only the UoN discussion group indicated that students used the tool to access resources.

A question was posed to the groups about the most commonly requested resources. The UoN discussants indicated that most users requested online journal articles. However, KU discussants were not sure about the type of resources that are commonly requested by users, as the exact meaning of the concept of remote users was not very clear to them. On the question of whether or not the libraries kept the statistics of requests placed by remote users, the discussants indicated that their libraries did not keep statistics at the time of the discussion. On the question of what resources were in heavy demand, discussions revealed that postgraduate students would normally seek current journal articles in areas of interest.

3.2.3 Staff available to serve remote users

The human resource is critical to any undertaking. The need to have adequate qualified staff was seen to be of concern for effective remote user support services. When the discussants at the UON were asked whether they had adequate staff to handle services for remote users, they said that the remote users were served alongside the other users and added that the number of staff members that are available to serve users was inadequate to provide specialised services to special groups of users such as remote users. At KU, the human resource was not adequate to serve both remote and internal users. Generally, the discussants revealed that there was inadequate staff responsible for effective service delivery despite the continued increase in the number of users.

A question was posed on the qualifications required of the staff serving remote users. To this question, the discussants indicated that all staff providing information service in the library required a minimum certificate level. In addition, the discussants were categorical that knowledge of ICTs and their usage was essential for staff to manage ICT related operations.

3.3 Physical facilities for remote user services

When the researcher sought to information on the facilities that support remote user services in the libraries under investigation, the discussants indicated that their libraries had computers with Internet connection. Computers were also available in other buildings on the university campuses. Furthermore, the UoN, KU and MU have intranet connecting the constituent campuses, which enable remote users to access the OPAC and e-resources. All the discussants revealed that the libraries had printers, scanners, and fixed telephone lines. Of particular importance in terms of the latter facilities and in their relation to serving remote users, the scanners and fixed telephone lines are the most commonly used. Students received scanned documents from library workers as well as call in to request assistance.

On the question of whether the facilities were adequate, all the discussants indicated that the facilities were inadequate. However, discussants felt that improvement of the wireless technology would be more helpful in dealing with the inadequacy. One commentator said thus: "... given that the y-generation has access to laptops, cell phones or Portable Data Accessories (PDA) such as smart phones, the users can get information from the convenience of their space".

At MU, the discussants said that an independent library server was a pre-requisite for effective support of the library services. When the question was posed on the availability of an independent server, all the focus groups confirmed that their libraries had servers which enabled their users to access e-resources. On the question of capacity of the server to handle the queries submitted by users, only the EU discussants provided the memory size of the server (that is, 32GB RAM module server). The others did not mention the memory of their library servers due to the fact they may be sharing with the rest of the ICT infrastructure and did not have one that was specifically serving the library service.

When the discussants were asked whether they received support for remote users from other players, discussants at the UoN said that their support came from the department of open and distant education and departments which run school-based programmes, which take place only when the regular academic programmes are in recess. At KU, the informants said that they provide document delivery support services to users who cannot come to the library due to the nature of their programmes from the open and distance learning (ODEL) departments, while MU and EU received support from ODEL and the College of Education.

3.4 Creation of awareness of services and information resources to remote users

When discussants were asked how they created awareness of library services and resources to the remote users, they gave different answers, just as was the case in the previous questions. The UON discussants said that their library used class-based lessons, library user guides, brochures and e-mails to inform users of new products. KU indicated that they used the University website to market new information to users as well as the office of the ODEL to pass on the information to users. MU markets their services through the Campus librarians, who in turn inform their users through such avenues as annual conferences, which are commonly used to promote library and information services. EU said that they organise a training session every Friday on the use of e-resources, wherein one of the activities is to alert the users about the services and products available in the library for them.

In regard to the specific tools used to market library services and resources to remote users, the UoN discussants indicated that they use library guides, the OPAC, new books displays, and exhibitions, while KU used the library website and institutional bulletin to inform and update users on the faculties of the services available in the library. MU uses brochures and the website to announce new items on the library services while EU uses the university notice board to announce training for users on new services and products.

A question on what tools were most effective in marketing library services was posed the discussants. The discussants at the UoN said that the OPAC could do better on condition that the Internet connectivity was up to standard and campuses and colleges were internetworked, while KU, MU and EU groups said that all the tools mentioned above to some extent were effective. All groups concurred that library guides and brochures provided to users on registration as takeaway reference materials were effective. The website also was very effective as users could login from anywhere and gain access to sources of information. The discussants at the UoN and KU also suggested other tools such as electronic media and radio shows as well as exhibitions and public talks which can be organised in conjunction with other faculties and departments within the university and its campuses as alternative ways to market services to remote users. MU, on the other hand, posited that the use of radio advertisements and book talk shows would help reach more people. Finally, EU indicated that forums like the Commission of Higher Education (CHE) exhibitions for all Kenyan universities which take place once a year in all counties on a rotational basis, and deans and senate committee meetings would be vital in marketing and promoting library services.

3.5 Policies and procedures for remote user services

Discussants were asked whether there were written policies on remote user services and resources, to which question the UoN discussants indicated that they have policies which generally govern access to resources, membership and ICT policy, but none of the policies specifically addresses remote users. KU, MU, and EU said they did not have policies for remote users.

The study also sought to establish whether resources and services were updated regularly and all the groups answered in the affirmative. All the discussion group members indicated that as members of the Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC), they renewed their subscription to PERii-based resources on a regular basis as required. In respect to the OPAC, all groups said that the catalogue was updated as regularly as possible. When they were asked how their libraries monitored and evaluated user satisfaction, the discussants said that they used suggestion boxes. They also said that they used customer satisfaction questionnaires.

In order to determine whether or not there existed proper procedures to handle user requests, the discussants were asked about the procedures followed when a user submits a request to the library, to which question the UoN reported that users would normally send their queries through the online help desk, either to the circulation librarian or the ICT librarian who reviews the requests and responds accordingly. KU and MU groups said that the ICT librarian receives the requests and forwards them to the relevant information desk while the EU group said that the requests are directed to the Reference and Reader Service librarians.

On the question on how the remote users' requests were administered within the library, the UoN discussants said that a search is conducted using different access tools within the library. In the case of searches on print sources, the information is then scanned or photocopied and forwarded to the user by e-mail or by courier services.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Although the participants initially indicated that they do not serve remote users, it was later realised that the concept 'remote users' was not well understood by the discussants, as upon clarifying the concept, they were able to discuss the issues raised in the interview schedule. The librarians' lack of understanding of the concept was attributed to the fact that, for a long time, they have served on-campus students. In fact, all the universities surveyed in this study were contact institutions.

In terms of the services that are available for remote users in public university libraries in Kenya, it was observed that there exist a variety of services, which include book reservation, online loan renewal, online reference service and online delivery of information resources. Other services included the Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs), electronic access to e-resources, which are accessed through passwords and electronic identity cards. These services have made it easier for users to access information sources that libraries subscribe to. As technology changes, there have been changes in the provision of OPAC services in other countries such as South Africa. For instance, the University of South Africa has reconfigured and customised the OPAC to be accessed through mobile electronic devices such as mobile smart phones and tablets (Raubenheimer 2012). Many libraries in Africa and particularly those investigated in this study should follow suit and enhance the accessibility of their services for off-campus students. It is illustrative that the librarians indicated that students sometimes visit the libraries to collect their orders, which were placed through online means. It follows

therefore that there still exists a preference for traditional methods of service delivery, perhaps due to the lack of appropriate technologies to execute the online orders or lack of funds to purchase the ICTs (Haliso 2011).

The resources available for users were identified as follows: print and electronic books; PERii e-resources; full-text journal databases; and CD-ROMs. Microfiche films were also identified as being among the resources that can be accessed by remote users. However, this type of library material is no longer desirable to users who are increasingly becoming interested in e-resources downloadable from the Internet (Okello-Obura and Ikoja-Odongo 2010; Joshi and Nikose n.d.; Kacherki and Thombare, 2010). These resources were accessed by users through request forms available on the institutional websites, personal visits to the library, the library OPAC, and e-mails as well as feedback forms. Apparently, users employ almost all forms of electronic communication to get in touch with the libraries. Some of the communication tools missing from the list are fax, mobile phones (call-ins), land line telephones, and telegraph, although the latter two are seldom in use. The missing tools are seldom used, as most of the resources require online attention on the part of the users. Furthermore, some of the missing tools are no longer desirable while some of them have long ceased to exist.

In terms of the personnel available to assist remote users, it was noted that there are no staff members dedicated to serve remote users only. It is the same personnel employed to serve all users in the library that serve remote users. As expected, the libraries do not have a specialised office or officers to deal with issues of remote use of library resources. Perhaps, this aspect should be looked into and implemented in the libraries so that the ever-increasing number of remote users can be served effectively and efficiently. The libraries might also want to re-train their personnel who will be specifically stationed to serve remote users. The training can focus on communication, ethics associated with online communication, document delivery and sharing through the use of ICTs, sharing or circulation services associated with e-resources (including e-books, e-journals, etc.), trouble-shooting online service delivery systems, collection development for remote access, copyright, understanding the information needs of remote users, technologies for remote users, remote access and course management software, social networks and Web 2.0 technologies, mobile technologies, and virtual libraries, among others (see Fulkerson 2012).

As mentioned in Section 3.3, there are a number of physical facilities that libraries can and use to serve library remote users. These include computers, printers, scanners, and fixed telephone lines. It was also notable that the libraries do have Internet connectivity, which has continued to draw unprecedented interest in the whole world. As of 30 June 2016, the Interworldstats.com³ reported that there were a total of 3.68 billion Internet users in the world, accounting for 50.1% of the world's total population of 7.34 billion. It is worth mentioning that Africa has continued to experience the highest growth rate in terms of Internet penetration. For instance, the region had the highest growth rate of 2,988.4% between 2000 and 2011. With the emergence of multipurpose ICTs (e.g. smart phones and iPads), libraries will be faced with complex challenges on how to serve their clients. Already, some university libraries such as the University of South Africa (Unisa) library have implemented what they have called AirPAC, a wireless catalogue which gives users access to the library's catalogue and documents via their cellphones (UNISA 2010).

Finally, in regard to the means that libraries use to create awareness about the library services for remote users, university libraries in Kenya are using a handful of methods and tools. These include class-based lessons, library user guides, brochures and e-mails, university website, campus librarians, annual conferences, training sessions, library guides, the OPAC, new books displays, and exhibitions, institutional bulletins, and university notice boards. It is illustrative that the libraries have not taken advantage of the Internet's features and applications to market their library services and resources. For instance, despite the fact that social networking sites are the most commonly visited sites on the Internet by users (Onyancha 2012), none of the universities indicated that they have made or do make use of them to create awareness of the services and resources. It is important that the libraries assess information needs and seeking behavior of their clients and formulate appropriate guidelines/policies for marketing or creating awareness about their services and resources through the most commonly used ICTs by their users.

In conclusion, the introduction of flexible learning models in public universities in Kenya is impacting on library services in ways that call for redesigning policies and service delivery processes to ensure accessibility and use of their resources. Ocholla, Mutsvunguma & Hadebe (2016) have reiterated the call for libraries to consider innovative ways, products, facilities and services to serve their clients in what the authors call the 'rapidly-changing academic environment'. Feeney (2004) proposes the development of a website (and similar tools) that centralises information about library services and resources for remote users. The services would include, among others, online orientation, research guides, chat reference and document delivery (Feeney 2004: 129). However, in their article titled *making the invisible visible: personas and mental models of distance education library users*, Lewis & Contrino (2016: 15) advise that libraries should take into

3. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

consideration the users' research habits and challenges when designing digital learning objects and the library website to avoid adverse user experiences. It is worth noting that the libraries' reliance on serving users over the counter is likely to phase out in the future as library users are increasingly relying on accessing library services remotely (Baikady, Jessy & Bhat 2014). The emergence of remote users desiring to access libraries through remote means has had and will continue to have far-reaching effects on everyday practices of libraries as well as on librarianship as a profession. The proliferation of diverse information and communication technologies and more particularly social media technologies (Burkhardt 2010; Collins & Quan-Haase 2012; Collins & Quan-Haase 2014) will exacerbate remote access of library services and information resources in academic libraries in Kenya. While routine tasks have been removed, additional work in running the online or virtual systems is necessary. Processing, implementing and running systems have meant that librarians need to develop appropriate policies and infrastructure that ensures equitable access to information services and resources for their users, especially where remote users are concerned.

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