

The Experience of Library Users on the use of Educational Resources in College Libraries: A Case Study of Morogoro Teachers' College in Tanzania

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Abstract

Many educational institutions in Tanzania are faced with a shortage of educational resources. The few available resources are irrelevant and outdated. The aim of this paper was to investigate the experience of tutors, librarians and student-teachers of the educational resources in the teachers' college libraries. The notion „educational resources“ was functionally defined as „books“. Two perspectives dealt with in the theoretical background included: the library as an educational resource and the teachers' college as a learning context. This study was „qualitative“ in character, applying a case study approach. Morogoro Teachers' College Library was studied. Three Heads of Departments, two librarians, five tutors and ten student-teachers were interviewed. Two study questions were constructed to investigate the experience of tutors and trainees on the educational resources in the college library and their conceptions of the ideal college library. The data were analysed thematically. The results show that educational resources in Teachers' College Libraries relate minimally with the teaching and learning process at the colleges. They are outdated and irrelevant to the needs of the library users. The ideal college library described should create a strong learning context, ensure full participation of trainees in the teaching and learning process and create more activities for library users. In order to alleviate the situation, some recommendations have been put forward including looking for resources suitable to the needs of the library users.

Key Words: Experience of Tutors, Experience of Student-Teachers, Experience of Librarians, Educational Resources, Learning Context

INTRODUCTION

The library as an educational resource has been operating throughout the world. The library services have been provided globally and in Africa. Findings from previous studies (Trinkner, 1962; Burnett, 1978) show that the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) provided library services a long time ago. The two countries used the system known as container library services. In this system, the books were taken to urban areas in container in 1973. The first library in the United Kingdom was called Cornwall country library. The first library in the United States of America was called the library of congress.

Kaungamo and Ilomo (1979) observe that the keenness to providing libraries in schools and teachers' colleges in Tanzania goes back to 1961 when there was the need for adequate school and college library facilities. Thus, the development of libraries of education for self-reliance started through the assistance from UNESCO. However, the above mentioned researchers do not give data to show the number of library users, the number of books supplied and the relevance of books to the society.

There were rural libraries, that is; mobile library in Tanzania (Shishiwa, 1998). The books were taken to rural areas and people were encouraged to read. Obviously, the implication is that the readers had only a short time to read the books. However, the relevance of the books is not shown. Later on, mobile libraries died a natural death due to lack of transportation. Shishiwa (ibid) emphasizes that the inherited curriculum at the eve of independence was euro-centric. It was inappropriate, inadequate, poor and encouraged learning by rote. It was geared towards passing examinations. The implication is that mobile libraries were meaningless because what was said by teachers was always right and therefore unquestionable.

The libraries are very important in the process of teaching and learning. This importance was discussed by Kaungamo and Ilomo (1979). The libraries are tools of national development, looking at the literacy context as well as a tool for research. In the library research, the research problem is defined from the literature found in the library. Besides, Harrod (1984) emphasizes that a library is a place for locating and discovering certain data that will be analysed and interpreted in the research process. Likewise, according

to Khan and Ijari (1990), the library is an instrument of unity because it unites library users and the authors of the materials.

The general aim of the paper was to investigate the experience of tutors and student-teachers of the educational resources available in the Teachers' College libraries. The notion 'educational resources' in this study has been operationalised for the purpose of the study. Therefore the operational definition of educational resources is 'books' the term 'books' includes textbooks, reference books, supplementary books and teachers guides. Harrod (1984) defines a library as a collection of books and other literary materials kept for teaching, studying and consultation. Likewise, Burnett (1978) defines the college library as an organized collection of books and non-book materials placed in a college for the use of tutors and student teachers.

The findings of the study were intended to illuminate the library conditions in Teachers' colleges at large. This is due to the fact that the quality of teacher education in Tanzania is one of the major issues being discussed in meetings, seminars, courses and educational institutions (Mosha, 2000). In addition, the findings of the study were intended to remind educators, trainees, librarians, tutors and administrators and hopefully make them conscious on the kind of books available in the libraries of teachers' colleges and what roles they can play to alleviate the situation.

According to Galabawa (2000), most of the educational institutions are faced by a shortage of educational resources such as curriculum materials and teaching learning materials. Besides, Shishiwa (1999) shows that the few available resources are irrelevant and outdated. Many libraries in Tanzania face the problem of irrelevant and outdated resources particularly textual resources. Similarly, most of the librarians are not qualified. In addition, most of the libraries in educational institutions are used for other activities, including seminars, courses and other session that involves the teaching and learning process.

Good and poor libraries have implications on tutors and/ or student-teachers. According to Nawe (1989), the library is one of the major resources and the key element in the educational production and reproduction of knowledge and power. Kaungamo and Ilomo (1979) state that literates get books and other reading materials to read so that they may sustain their literacy as well as acquire knowledge and skills that may be applied to bring about development. With reference to Osaki (2000), poor libraries make trainees (who interact daily with student-teachers in the classrooms) not well prepared. Besides, teaching becomes dishing out of information and education becomes teacher-centred.

Teacher education in Tanzania faces problems of under qualified tutors, lack of educational resources, low morale and underfunding (Galabawa, 2000). The present educational resources are mostly outdated thus, affect negatively educational institutions like colleges and create poor learning environments. Sometimes, one wonders how educational institutions are still able to produce high grade results despite the terrible condition of the libraries, laboratories and classrooms. However, the experience of other main users of college library, that is, tutors and trainees, is not known. Do the tutors and student-teachers have the same experience? If that is the case, what do they suggest? This is a knowledge gap that needed an empirical study to be filled in. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out the experience of tutors and student – teachers about educational resources in the teachers, college libraries in Tanzania.

The following specific objectives of the study were formulated to indicate what type of data to be collected: to explore the sources of educational resources, to examine the attendance in the library, to explore availability of books, to study the support of books to the teaching and learning process, to investigate the level of satisfaction of library users, to find out other activities performed in the library and finally, to investigate the problems faced by library users.

Based on the specific objectives highlighted, the researcher came up with the following research questions:

- a) How do library users describe the educational resources in the Teachers' College Library?
- b) How do library users describe the ideal library at the college?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to Husen (1988), two classical paradigms in educational, research can be identified: the quantitative approach (the functional – structural, objective – rational and technocratic approach) and qualitative approach (the interpretive, humanistic and subjective approach). This study is qualitative in character, applying a case study method. The author preferred the qualitative approach because it leaves room for reinterpretation and reshaping the problem during the study process. According to Kirk and Miller (1986), qualitative research depends on interacting with people in their own language. The study is concerned with library situations and context where the writer interacts with the tutors, trainees and librarians as the main library users. The case study is taken as the main method of understanding how tutors describe the educational resources in the college library and the ideal library at the college as the learning context. The author investigated an individual teachers college library to understand a case. He could not study many teachers colleges because time and financial resources were limited; the literature review examined two main perspectives: the library as an education resource and the college as learning context.

The target population for the study included all of the heads of departments (English, Geography, Kiswahili and Education), tutors, student-teachers and librarians at the college. A total of twenty respondents were involved in this study. I used few participants to allow more in-depth generation of data. Therefore, the percentages are not indicated because the study was not based on the measurement of quantity or amount (Adam, 2007). The respondents included five tutors, ten student-teachers, three heads of departments and two librarians. The summary of the respondents is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of the sample

Sample	Male	Female	Total	Criteria of selection
1. Tutors	03	02	05	Library users
2. Student-teachers	05	05	10	Library users
3. Librarians	-	02	02	Library staff
4. Heads of Departments	02	01	03	Keepers of some books
Total	10	10	20	-

Basically, I was guided by the need to select participants who were likely to give rich and in-depth information on the issue being studied as it is the expectation in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, I used purposive sampling to select only those respondents of which I believed that they would be able to deliver the required data. The heads of departments were selected because they keep some of the books to be used by the tutors and trainees. The librarians were purposely selected because already they have knowledge and experience of working in the library. The interviews were used to obtain information from the participants. The technique was chosen because qualitative data involve people's views expressions, opinions and feelings. Through the interview, twenty participants expressed their words orally.

RESULTS

The participants (heads of departments, tutors, trainees and librarians) differed in responses concerning their experience of the books found in the college library and their propositions on the ideal library. Their description resulted in different categories which are presented following the order of the research questions. The percentage of their response is not included because the information is not numerical. Since this a qualitative study, most of the information is in the form of descriptions. Therefore, the use of numbers and percentages is not applicable. I have paraphrased the statements of the participants and retained a few direct quotations that represent the voice of participants. My aim is to ensure the study is reporting what actually occurred in the field.

The following categories of description were discovered and labelled: Source of educational resources, attendance in the library, availability of books, support of books to the teaching and learning process, satisfaction of library users, activities in the library and problems faced by library users.

Different sources of educational resources were shown by the respondents. The sources include; purchasing, borrowing home library and college library. The respondents were also required to explain

their attendance in the library. The respondents revealed that they had poor attendance that is, once in two weeks because they did not get the books they were looking for. They also complained about the lack of relevant materials and lack of service after the classroom sessions as cited below:

...But, when (library users) they visit the library, they cannot find the books.

Hence, they are discouraged to visit the library. Moreover, the Library lacks recent periodicals... (Head of Department)

Generally, there was attendance in the library but the library users were only discouraged by the poor services provided in the library. With reference to availability of books, the respondents indicated that they did not have enough books to use. They insisted that there were not enough books either in the library or in the departments as quoted:

...No; there are not enough books either in the library or in the departments. There is the lack of books in the college... (Students-Teacher)

...Not enough books (textbooks). They are not available in the department and the college library. Maybe not much effort is made by MOEC, Dar es Salaam because the department provides book lists to the principal, with no response... (Head of Department)

From this experience, it can be concluded by the remarks that there was a shortage of books. The library users used private sources of educational resources. In terms of the support of books available to the teaching and learning process, many respondents said that the books act as general references in most of their studies; they provide essential materials needed in the programme and the few books are relevant to their course. In addition, some respondents said that the books available were irrelevant.

...There are few books and the books for some subjects such as History and Geography are not available. Most of the books are irrelevant to the learning process. They do not cope with subjects especially teaching methodologies and education. Also, the books are not enough because when someone wants to read a certain book, she or he might find it has been taken by someone else.... (Student-teacher)

As presented above, there were few copies of education resources. Similarly, one of heads of department argued that:

...The books do not support very much the process of teaching and learning at the college. It needs tutors' initiatives to go out of the college library. There are no supportive books... (Head of department)

Therefore, the findings from the participants showed that the few irrelevant outdated available books support the teaching and learning process minimally. The users depend on private sources to get books.

The satisfaction of the library users was also investigated. The information was provided by trainees, librarians, tutors and heads of department. A greater number of participants said that they were not satisfied. The reasons given include: most of the books are outdated and some books are used in the college. Also, most of the educational resources were more western-oriented, that is, they did not focus on Tanzanian society and they are not as many as the number of students as mentioned by the respondents:

...The books available do not relate to the subject; and the number of the library users is not proportional to the resources found in the library... (Student-teacher)

...No, I am not satisfied because I do not get all the required books from it. Moreover, I sometimes miss most up-to-date reference books.... (Tutor)

...How are you going to be satisfied? The days of giving satisfactory services do not exist, that is, the books (relevant books) for general studies (GS). That is why maybe

the library is not opened fully in the evening hours for so long; it has not been for five years... (Head of department)

From the above findings on the satisfaction of library users, it is obvious that outdated, irrelevant and western oriented, religious educational resources and poor services were the sources of dissatisfaction. The activities of the library users were also investigated. The respondents mentioned the following activities: reading books, magazines, and journals as the main activity. The librarians also mentioned other activities done in the library building: seminars, teaching and learning process (classroom). These activities affected the library users because they caused noise.

Likewise, the respondents were required to indicate the challenges faced while they were in the college library. The following challenges were indicated: the books in the college library were outdated, there was a lack of educational resources, especially a shortage or lack of books; poor arrangement of books, shortage of chairs and tables, irrelevant books to the syllabuses and noise. Generally, the activities carried out in the library by the library users were contrary to the objectives of having the library at the college, which is to create a learning context and to be used as one of the educational resources.

In conclusion, the findings presented above, show that tutors and trainees had poor and negative description on the educational resources available in the college library. The major findings of the study indicate that irrelevant resources occupied a lot of space, hence the need to replace them with relevant ones to the courses studied at the college. Also, librarians were not satisfied with their qualifications, hence the need to apply for more studies. However, the library users can be criticized for not presenting their request to the authorities concerned. Finally, the resources (books) available did not cater for all subjects taught in the college especially science subjects. The respondents had complaints but they had not presented them to the administrators.

DISCUSSION

Libraries can make the teaching and learning process efficient and effective. Generally, the respondents supported the aspects discussed in the theoretical background. This is due to the fact that most of the books used in classrooms and private studies are kept and used in the libraries. Sometimes the library users including tutors, trainees or students and teachers borrow books from the library. This kind of environment is contrary to previous research results, which emphasizes the importance of libraries in the teaching and learning processes.

According to Nawe (1989), the library is one of the major resources and key element in the educational production and reproduction of knowledge and power. Obviously, the emphasis is that the libraries are sites of excellence for the application of new literacy. Additionally, Kaungamo and Ilomo (1979) state that literates get books and other reading materials to read so that they may sustain their literacy as well as acquire knowledge and skills that may be applied to bring about development. Consequently, Altbach and Kelly (1988a) and Altbach and Kelly (1988b) insist that books stand at the heart of educational enterprise. Certainly, what is emphasized is how the availability of books appears so consistently associated with higher achievement.

The findings of this study are consistent with the previous studies because it has been found out that the library is an important educational resource because other educational resources (books) are located, used or borrowed from the library. The educational resources made the college library ineffective and inefficient. The available resources did not relate with the courses taught at the college because most of them were outdated and irrelevant to the new curriculum used in teachers colleges in Tanzania. Likewise, other irrelevant activities were performed in the college library. For example: seminars, courses, workshops and classroom sessions. This situation discourages library users and librarians. Generally, the library was a poor education resource because it did not produce the expected results.

The findings have impacts on the tutors and student-teachers because the educators, trainees, librarians, tutors and administrators are reminded and made conscious of the kind of books available in the libraries of teachers' colleges and what role they can play to alleviate the situation. For example, purchasing current and relevant books and creating conducive environments for learning in the libraries. The study

helps educators, particularly teachers to elevate teaching from the dishing out of information to creative and learner-centred education.

The second main task was to find out how tutors and student teachers describe the ideal college library that satisfied the needs of the library users. The ideal college library should create strong learning environment and fulfil its conditions and ensure that learners are participating in the teaching and learning process. It has to create a strong learning environment and lead to active participation and involvement of the trainees. Therefore, a good library should provide current educational resources such as curriculum materials and teaching materials. The resources include syllabus, teachers' guides and manuals, supplementary materials, instructional materials, instructional manuals and text books. Similarly, a good college library should avoid or minimize irrelevant and outdated resources, unqualified librarians and other activities like seminars, courses and other sessions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to alleviate the situation pertaining to the educational resources in the college libraries, the following recommendations are put forward in the light of the presented findings and conclusions. The participants who are also library users have revealed that they do not get all of the required resources from the library. Other educational resources suitable for the needs of the library users should be found and increased as the experience of the respondents showed that the resources available were not suitable for their needs. Trinkner (1962) emphasizes that —better libraries make better schools. The saying needs the provision of current and relevant materials.

Furthermore, librarians are encouraged to obtain higher studies, for instance diplomas and degrees in librarianship. The study established that both of the librarian workers attended ordinary secondary schools and then studied a course in librarianship for some months at the headquarters of library services. Better libraries can be made by knowledgeable and highly qualified librarians. Finally, the services in the library should include extending the working hours, arranging few available resources properly, increasing number of chairs and tables and minimizing the other activities that create disturbances to the library users like seminars, workshops and lectures. The services were also proposed by the library users as part of the ideal library.

Further research on the experience of tutors, trainees and educators of the educational resources available in other colleges should be carried out as most of the studies carried out have only focused on primary and secondary school. More studies could provide a better analysis of the situation and improve the quality of education. It was not the intention of this study to generalize the findings because the contexts of the cases do differ.

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BIO-DATA

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