



RE-IMAGINING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Proceedings of the
26th Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern
African Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL XXVI)
held on 22nd — 26th April 2024 in Mombasa, Kenya

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The twenty-sixth edition of the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central, and Southern African Libraries (SCECSAL XXVI) would not have been held successfully without the tireless and selfless contributions of many individuals and organisations. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of the following local organising committee members:

- Irene Muthoni Kibandi – Chairperson
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- Dr Sarah Kibugi – Treasurer
- James Nyakundi – Secretary
- Prof Constantine Nyamboga
- Prof Tom Kwanya
- Dr Arnold Mwanzu
- Dr Naftal Chweya
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- Mary Kinyanjui
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I also appreciate the keynote speaker, Prof Clara Chu, for her exciting, inspiring and informative address. Prof Chu also facilitated a workshop on strengthening library leadership for innovative and sustainable institutional development. I also acknowledge Prof Bosire Onyancha who conducted a workshop on the impact of bibliometrics on academic libraries. I also recognise the support of the SCECSAL Secretariat, particularly Dr. Justin Chisenga, in coordinating diverse aspects of the conference.

As the Kenya Library Association, we are forever grateful to the delegates, sponsors, volunteers, and other service providers who contributed in any way to making the conference a success. We hope that the conference experience was memorable and that the networks initiated will be maintained and maximised for the benefit of our profession and user communities, fostering future collaboration and growth.

Prof Peter Gatiti

Chair, Kenya Library Association & Chair SCECSAL Council

The information universe, within which libraries currently operate and offer services, is not just dynamic and volatile, but also brimming with transformative potential. Rapid technological advancement, technology-savvy and impatient patrons, vast volumes of information, and increasing pressure on libraries to demonstrate return on investment are some factors catalysing this change. Information professionals have been pushed back to the drawing board. To remain relevant, they must re-imagine the substance and delivery of information services and products. The digital era offers diverse opportunities and channels for tailored, proactive and prompt information products and services. How well information professionals harness these opportunities depends on their creativity.

This publication is a comprehensive resource, a collection of 36 creative cases that provide invaluable insights on how to deliver information products and services in the digital era. Each of the 37 papers in these proceedings is a treasure trove of knowledge, discussing issues crucial to mastering the ropes of service design and delivery in the digital information era. The papers are grouped into seven categories and sections, providing a structured and comprehensive approach to the topic.

The papers on the best practices in the records and information management category present invaluable insights on redesigning organisational records and archives through emerging information and communication technology tools and techniques. These technologies facilitate the strategic collection, classification, preservation and dissemination of organisational records and national archives. This transformation turns records and archives from costly to valuable assets for operational and strategic endeavours, underscoring the potential benefits of adopting new technologies and techniques.

Information workers have always been the bridges between information and its users. Their role has been crucial in identifying, collecting, organising, and disseminating materials for users who visited the information centres. However, the situation has evolved, and so have their roles. The focus of the information centres has shifted from collections to connections, and information professionals are at the forefront of this change. The second set of papers in this publication elaborates on the changing and increasingly important roles that library and information sciences professionals have to shoulder in this digital era, making them feel valued and integral to the industry.

Information is power and should be handled with utmost care. Ethical, legal, and moral guidelines regulate information production, organisation, dissemination, and preservation. As information users become more aware of their rights, information professionals and service providers need to stay abreast of their obligations. The papers on information ethics share ideas on how to avoid ethical, legal, and moral conflicts in information service design and delivery.

Research is the source of new ideas and innovations driving socioeconomic development. Available evidence shows that many people currently do not begin or complete their information-seeking with libraries. Therefore, it is incumbent on libraries and information centres to reposition themselves in the core of the information universe as sources of credible research data. Skills and competencies to contribute and manage research data are essential for contemporary information professions. Papers in this collection highlight essential research insights for the progressive information worker.

There are papers on education and training programmes and approaches that build the digital-era capacities of information workers to conceptualise, develop, and deliver responsive and futuristic information services and products in this age and into the future using both conventional and technological platforms.

All the papers were peer-reviewed using a double-blind approach. The editors have made all efforts to ensure that the papers are of the highest scholarly standard possible. However, we apologise for any errors which may have escaped undetected. We wish you an insightful reading.

Tom Kwanya, Irene Muthoni Kibandi, Peter Gatiti

Editors

Innovation in the Provision of Library Services in Universities in Zambia: Prospects and Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

The ease of accessibility of information due to technological innovations has presented challenges to libraries and librarians to look for more proactive ways of serving their users in order to remain relevant. For more than a decade, librarians in the SCECSAL region have devised and implemented innovative library services as evidenced by papers in conference proceedings stretching as far back as 2012. Contributions from libraries in Zambia were visibly absent, which raises a question whether there are no innovations in library services taking place in the country. In the wake of COVID-19, librarians in Zambia shared their innovations in offering library service during this crisis and beyond, which included use of email, tele-conferencing, and social media platforms such as Facebook, and WhatsApp to conduct orientations, register users and for Selective Dissemination of Information, to mention a few. This paper is based on a survey that was conducted to obtain a comprehensive picture of innovative library services that are currently prevalent in university libraries in Zambia. The results revealed that more than 90% of the libraries were offering innovative services, notable of which are: videos for library orientation, online registration of users, electronic book downloads from open source, library blog and plagiarism check. Challenges faced include, inadequate ICT infrastructure and technical know-how, financial constraints, and crippling staffing levels. In conclusion, the paper recommends that Library and Information Association of Zambia and the Zambian Library Consortium spearhead collaboration among public and private universities in skills exchange, and replication of best innovative services in all universities. These survey results are important because they provide a basis for university librarians in Zambia to collaborate for the benefit of their users. It also contributes to the literature on innovation in library services in the SCECSAL region.

Keywords: Innovative Library Services; University libraries; Collaboration; Skills exchange; Zambia

1.0. Introduction

The ease of accessibility of information due to technological innovations has presented challenges to libraries and librarians to look for more proactive ways of serving their users in order to remain relevant. Brundy¹ asserts that ‘libraries are facing times of unprecedented challenges and unparalleled change. Librarians need to innovate as never before if library and information services are to have a vital and vibrant future’. It is thus clear that innovation in library and information work is a matter of survival and relevance to the environment the library serves. For the purpose of this paper, Rogers² definition of innovation will be used, which is ‘**an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption**’. This definition implies that librarians should come up with ideas, practices and products that they perceive to be new and adopt them to the provision of information to users, although this may differ from one librarian to another depending on one’s experience and exposure. In this paper, whatever libraries have done and continue doing in order to renew or update their services through application of new methods, or techniques so as to add value, will be considered to be innovation, relative to the perception of the librarians involved and not in relation to when they

were discovered or first used for library applications. This paper is based on a survey that was conducted on public and private universities in Zambia to find out library usage of innovations, type of innovations in use, the challenges experienced and the perceived opportunities for value-added service provision.

1.1. Innovation in library services

Innovations in library services go as far back as the history of librarianship. According to Katz³, reference service can be traced back to Sumeria, more than 5000 years ago. Since then, librarians have sought ways of making life easier for their users. Green⁴, Wyer⁵, and Rothstein⁶ expressed different theories of reference service in the quest of improving service in libraries. Over decades, library services have undergone change due to advancements in technological developments. Callahan⁷ discussed the new role of librarians as change agents in the electronic information environment and argued that librarians must be conversant with the technology, provide bibliographic instructions, and assist users in addressing information needs and evaluating the relevance of information retrieved. Baker⁸, pointed out that libraries of all kinds would need to adapt for two basic reasons: namely, the need to survive and in order to enable their users to get the support and advice that they required within the new information architecture that had been brought so rapidly to the fore through the development of, and pervasive connectivity to, the Internet. Rowley⁹ asserts that innovation is pivotal to survival and success in a dynamic and complex organizational environment. However, she stresses the importance of collaborative innovation and management in the development of library services as well as the need for institutions to understand the challenges of collaborative knowledge creation and inter organizational barriers to innovation. Jantz¹⁰ conducted a study on innovation in academic libraries which centred on factors that can influence the ability to innovate from the librarians' perspective. The findings of the study revealed that all the librarians who participated in the study affirmed that innovation was a critical process for the library to survive and thrive in the 21st century. The study concluded that 'the understanding of the complexity of innovation required a more multi-faceted approach..

Librarians in the Southern, Central and Eastern African region have, for over a decade now, devised and implemented innovative library services in order to be more useful to their clients. Most of these initiatives revolved around application of Web 2.0 technologies (Makori¹¹ Muneja and Abungu¹²; Oladokun¹³). The literature on innovations in libraries indicate that librarians everywhere are taking advantage of technological applications to improve service to their users, all to varying degrees and at different paces. Innovation in library service, especially keeping up with the ever changing technology, is no longer an option, but mandatory.

2.2. Purpose of the study

The overall purpose of the study was to obtain a comprehensive picture of innovative library services that are currently prevalent in university libraries in Zambia. The study sought to investigate what innovative ways of serving users in public and private university libraries in Zambia, to discover the challenges they were facing, explore possibilities of replicating the best innovative practices in all the university libraries and to recommend areas of collaboration and skills exchange in implementing further innovations in university libraries.

3.0. Statement of the problem

Review of the literature indicates that while librarians in the SCECSAL region devised and implemented innovative library services for over two decades, librarians in Zambia only appeared on the scene during the

covid-19 crisis and beyond. However, no comprehensive research had been conducted to indicate to what extent the innovations compare to what is obtaining in the sub-region and indeed globally. In order to avoid lagging behind, it was necessary to check the extent librarians in Zambia providing innovative library services and to examine opportunities to leapfrog and move in tandem with current practices in library service world over.

4.0. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods research design. Institutions included in the study were selected from the list of universities accredited by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) of Zambia. Purposive sampling was utilized to target those universities that had a well-established library, a website and qualified library staff. A survey questionnaire was created using Google form and distributed via email or WhatsApp to twenty seven (27) Universities comprising ten (10) public and seventeen (17) private ones. Quantitative and qualitative data was analysed using google form while a thematic content analysis was conducted on fourteen (14) university library websites to assess the prevalence of innovations in library service provision.

5.0. Research findings

5.1. Demographic profile of respondents

Twenty-two (22) out of the twenty-seven (27) universities responded to the questionnaire. This is 81.5% response rate in which all public universities responded. There is also gender balance in the distribution of respondents as there were ten male and twelve female (i.e. 45.5% male and 54.5% female) . In terms of age, eight (8) were between 26 and 35 years of age while fourteen (14) fell in the thirty-six years old and above category. The age of the respondents seemed to be skewed toward the older generation. There were four (4) respondents who had worked for five (5) years, eight (8) whose work experience was between six (6) and ten (10) years while the remaining ten (10) respondents had worked for more than ten (10) years. The levels of education of the librarians varied from one (1) certificate holder two (2) diploma holders, nine (9) first degree holders , nine (9) master's degree holders and one (1) PhD holder as shown in figure 1 below.

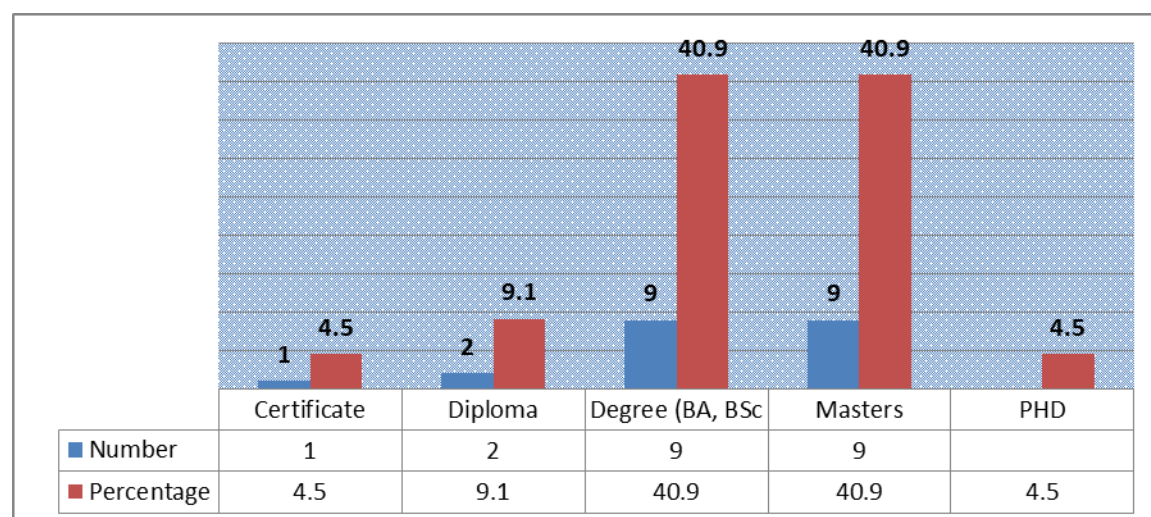


Figure 1: Respondents' highest level of education

5.2. Use and type of innovations in Zambian university libraries

Twenty (20) libraries indicated that they were using innovation in service provision while two (2) were not, giving a ninety point nine (90.9) percent against nine point one (9.1) percent respectively. Innovation that

libraries were using included: use of email for selective Dissemination of information (SDI), use of social media for announcements and Current Awareness Service, videos for library orientation, on-line registration of users, electronic books download from open source, digital libraries, institutional repository, remote access to catalogues and e-journal databases, library blog and CCTV, outreach services and plagiarism check as shown in figure 2 below.

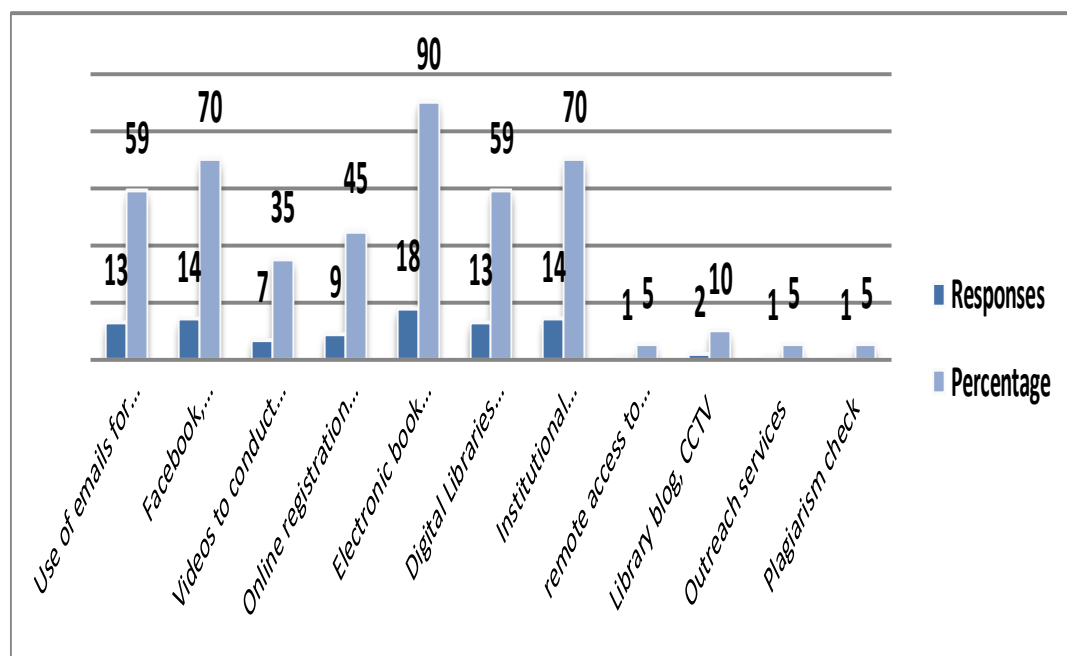


Figure 2: Innovative services libraries were providing

Reasons why the two libraries were not offering innovative services were: inadequate ICT infrastructure, problems in the use of Astria digital Library, lack of support from management and lack of funding. Respondents were invited to state other innovative services they were offering apart from what the questionnaire had tabulated. Their responses include: hosting a book club/reading group (1 response) , plagiarism check (2 responses), access to past and unlimited Internet (1 response), cloud computing for storage (1 response) and Koha Library Management System (2 responses). Only seven (7) respondents answered this question while the fifteen the respondents (68%) did not respond, an indication that they had been catered for in the innovations tabulated in the questionnaire.

Thematic analysis of websites revealed that six (6) public universities were using Casebook and Whatsapp for announcements, eight public universities downloaded e-books from open source and six (6) public and two (2) private universities had Institutional Repositories. Five of these were offering all the three services.

The challenges that university libraries were facing in applying innovation in library service include: the low usage of electronic resources due to lack of technical know-how, restrictive institutional policies hindering libraries from adopting innovations, inadequate ICT infrastructure, financial constraints and crippling staffing levels.

The survey invited the librarians to indicate what innovations they were not currently offering that they would like to effect in their service provision. Responses are portrayed in Figure 3 below.

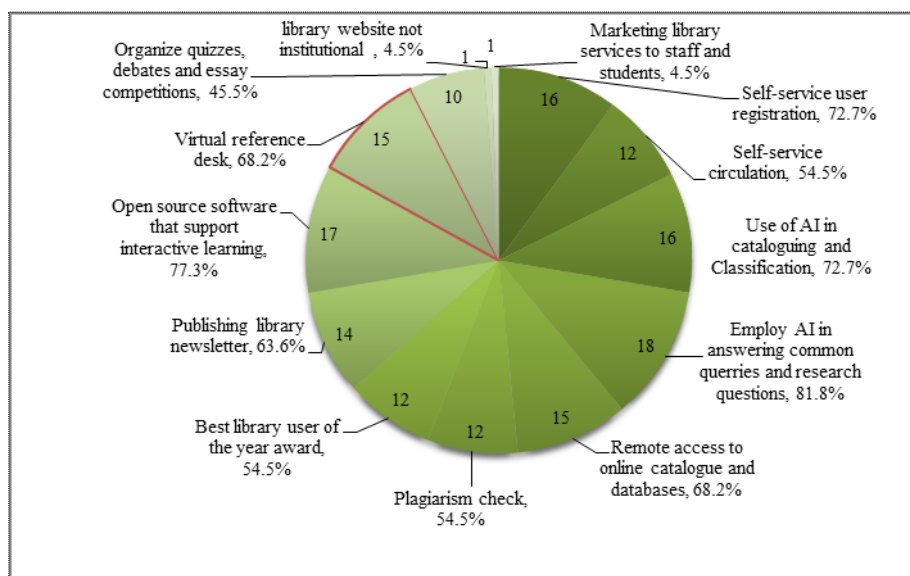


Figure 3: Innovations libraries would like to introduce.

The question on measures that librarians in Zambian universities ought to take in order to enhance innovative library services yielded thirteen (13) respondents who recommended that academic libraries undertake the institutional publisher role, engage students in university research, automate libraries and archives, collaborate with other libraries in skills exchange, and replicate best innovative services in all universities

6.0. Discussion

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The age of the respondents seemed to be skewed toward the older generation, which could affect what innovations libraries adopt. Youths are more quick to embrace newer technological applications than the older ones. In terms of years of work experience, it is good to note that all the librarians had work experience of not less than five years. This is important because it ensures that librarians can initiate innovative services with a high level of confidence. The level of education of three librarians is not very impressive (i.e. 1 certificate and 2 diploma). Level of education affects how seriously institutional authorities take the proposed initiative. People tend to look down on those not very highly qualified and often do not take them seriously.

6.1. Innovation use and types

More than 90% of the university libraries who participated in the survey are using some innovations in offering services to their users, which is highly commendable. The types of innovation indicated by the respondents such as use of email for SDI, video for orientation, on-line registration of users, hosting Institutional Repository, access to catalogues and e-journal databases, may not be viewed as innovations by other librarians, but as routine activities. But as Rogers observes: 'it matters little, so far as human behaviour is concerned, whether or not an idea is "objectively" new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. If an idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation' (p. 11).

7.0. Challenges

The challenges that university libraries were facing in applying innovation in the provision of information are neither new nor unique. Collaboration among academic libraries that respondents in the survey recommended can help offset some of these challenges. The Library and Information Association of Zambia (LIAZ) and the Zambian Library consortium can jointly conduct training on identified skills required for innovative services and facilitate staff exchange programs of member institutions. The Association and Consortium can also devise ways of fund-raising with identified institutions in the corporate world and channel the proceeds to support innovation in financially strapped libraries.

8.0. Possibilities and prospects

Librarians in Zambian universities have indicated that they would like to introduce self-service user registration, self-service circulation, use of artificial intelligence (AI) in cataloguing and classification, employ AI in answering common queries and research questions, remote access to on-line catalogues and databases, plagiarism check, best library user award of the year, publishing newsletter, open source software to support interactive learning, virtual reference service, marketing library services and organize quizzes, debates and essays competitions on topics of popular interest. As Callahan argued, librarians must be conversant with the technology by continuing training in new applications to information work. Baker pointed out the need to provide users with the support and advice that they required within the new information architecture. That calls for skills update on the part of librarians in order to adapt to the ever changing information environment.

9.0. Conclusion

The study has revealed that university libraries in Zambia indeed do offer innovative services to their users, although to varying extents. Librarians have expressed the desire to enhance innovation in service provisions despite the challenges and have acknowledged the importance of collaborating with other libraries for skills exchange in order to succeed.

10.0. Recommendations

The respondents recommended that academic libraries undertake the institutional publisher role, engage students in university research, automate libraries and archives, collaborate with other libraries in skills exchange, and replicate best innovative services in all universities. This paper recommends that: i)LIAZ should undertake a skills audit in all university libraries and identify areas of need and expertise for its training workshops; ii)LIAZ and ZALICO should devise ways of fund-raising in order to support innovation in financially strapped member libraries; and iii)LIAZ and ZALICO should collaborate in updating skills of their members and empower them to initiate and implement innovative services through practical training.

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