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Towards Digitisation of Kiswahili Programmes: Problems and Prospects for the University Libraries in Kenya - A Case Study of Tom Mboya University College

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This paper explores the concept of digitisation. Basically, digitisation is no longer a new concept when it comes to the field of library and information science. But as a third world country like Kenya, with specific reference to Tom Mboya University College, to narrow down, to Kiswahili programmes, it is still a challenging issue. The paper mainly focused on the recent updates of the library digitisation activities and more particularly identified the digitisation process identically. The findings of this paper are quite shocking, this is so because, very few university libraries in Kenya have taken digitisation of Kiswahili programmes successfully. In essence, Tom Mboya University College library as a case study is still far behind any sort of digitisation of Kiswahili programmes. More so, Tom Mboya University College is still struggling to put in place the required infrastructural facilities to take up the digitisation project. It is assumed that the initiatives for coming up with a bibliographic database, full-text database, hosting indigenous information product and specifically the Kiswahili programmes by the Kiswahili lecturers in the department over the internet and technology-based information activities are at the elementary level at Tom Mboya University College in Kenya. This paper, therefore, hopes that the findings of this research will help Tom Mboya University College library to identify its problems regarding digitisation and hopefully be able to find out the most suitable solution.

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INTRODUCTION

A library is a resource centre where patrons including lecturers and students search for information for various reasons. Some of the main reasons why university students go to the library are to complement what has been taught in their various courses and lecture notes, complete their assignments and term papers etc. When exploring the history of library automation, it is possible to reflect on past centuries when visionaries, before the computer age, created a device to assist with their book lending system. It is also noted that if we trace back to the year 1588, there was the invention of the French 'Book wheel' that allows scholars to rotate between books by stepping on the pedal that turns a book table. Basically, digitisation is the conversion of text, pictures or sound into a digital form that can be processed by a computer.

Digitisation has become a very vital and practical necessity with technology interventions to provide improved access to information sources, preservation and dissemination as required. Some university libraries have embraced automation while others are still doing it manually and some operate under the hybrid system (operate both manual and digital). Automation is a term in technology applications where human input is minimised as digital content is maximised. Basically, library automation is the use of computers and general/customised software designed in line with the library and information services procedures that are meant to be used to carry out specified lines of information services

delivery. Therefore, in this paper, automation and digitisation are two key terms that are used to refer to the embracing of technology as far as the offering of library services are concerned. It is on this logic that university librarians and archivists find themselves facing the prospect of digitisation. Kenya, being a third world country, is yet to answer questions like; What is digitisation? What does digitisation equipment do? What does the digitisation process entail? (Wentzel, 2006). All these questions are popping up because, university library digitisation is not yet a familiar and well-known topic in most Kenyan university libraries with particular reference to Tom Mboya University College, specifically the digital Kiswahili content/programmes. Therefore, this paper discusses and evaluates the problems and prospects of Tom Mboya University College library towards the digitisation of Kiswahili programmes. It is hoped that this work will give an impetus to students, researchers and scholars, librarians and in particular, Kiswahili lecturers to adopt change and digitise Kiswahili materials, programmes /content to provide a basis for the future generation.

Study Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the digitisation of Kiswahili content /programme and digital librarianship initiatives by the library service providers or the librarians or/and Kiswahili lecturers in the Department of Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Education in the public university college of Tom Mboya which is a

constituent college of Maseno University. The specific objectives of the study were:

- To identify the current digitisation status or situation in the Tom Mboya University College library as far as the Kiswahili content/programme is concerned.
- To examine different constraints of digitisation in Tom Mboya University college library that hinder the digitisation of Kiswahili content /programme.
- To evaluate the infrastructural facilities required for the digital information system of Kiswahili content / programme (Scanner, computer, software, output media, access point, network support etc.).

RELATED LITERATURE

A number of studies have been done regarding library digitisation in other countries, even though not much has been done in Tom Mboya University College library as far as digitisation of Kiswahili content /programme is concerned. Most scholars have only dealt with the digitisation of other fields and disciplines with little reference to Kiswahili content /programme. Liu (2006) studied library digitisation practice in the USA. His study revealed a number of prominent libraries digitisation practices, methods and challenges and then highlighted the best practices, trends, and interests in library digitisation pertaining to both policy and technology marketplace issues. Ajuwon (2003) carried out a study on the use of computers and the internet among first year clinical and nursing students in University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria and discovered that the students used these facilities to search for relevant information for their studies but some factors such as insufficient computer and internet use proficiency as factors affected their use.

Lisero's (2018) research on information technology integration with special reference to students access and utilisation of library services at Maseno University indicate that the learners had made an attempt to embrace technology though most of them are majorly interested in social media. Ibegwam (2004) discovered that the students of the College of

Medicine, University of Lagos, Nigeria listed frequent computer breakdowns and slow speed of downloading materials as factors affecting their use of the internet. In essence, it was observed that the effects of these constraints might be reduced in the federal universities due to the intervention of ICT infrastructure in such institutions. Wentzel (2006) gives a detailed discussion on the scanning process for library digitisation process; thus, he includes flatbed scanners, digital cameras, other digitisation equipment, understanding resolution, bit depth, colour, space, file formats etc. Murthy (2005) provides some guidelines on the procedures and process of digitisation on the basis of a practical experience at the National Tuberculosis Institute, Bangalore. His ideas revolved around library digitisation as far as the policies are concerned.

Loptain (2006) discovered a selective bibliography of literature that explores issues and provides guidelines on library digitisation projects. He laid a basis for the process of digitisation of any form of library anywhere in the universe. He put across some key issues, steps, and criteria to be followed in the process of library digitisation. Jeevan (2004) did a study on digital libraries in India where he provides special preference to identifying sources of content for developing countries, especially in India. He put into consideration various issues including the need and purpose for the digital library, what and how to digitise library materials, content indexing and metadata, arguments for digitising, storage, retrieval, and dissemination, among other issues.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a number of methods. The methodological approaches entailed, in-depth interviews with a structured questionnaire, literature survey and observation checklist. The study employed a pilot study that was used to test the validity and reliability of the research tools. According to Sekaran (2003) and Orodho (2004), reliability is a means of estimating the consistency of measurements over time or successful trials. Therefore, in this context, the reliability of this study was tested by pretesting the questionnaire to a small number of respondents. Based on the methodology of in-depth interviews, 10 librarians, 5 information professionals and three Kiswahili

lecturers were targeted in the study. The study used the varied ways of sampling procedures where the ten librarians and the professionals were chosen through simple random procedures of picking slots of 'yes' and 'no' while the three Kiswahili lecturers were selected purposively as they were the only Kiswahili lecturers in the department.

The researcher used field visits, postal and electronic mediums for data collection. In the field visit, the researcher was fully involved from the initial onset stage by doing the pilot study to test the tools of research using a small sample that was not reused in the actual research. The researcher also came physically to the field to conduct an interview with the professionals in question. The study also involved the use of Posta, where some questionnaires were posted via the post office to the respondents, and some were sent through email addresses. The questionnaires were filled and there was also an interview for the highest-level professionals.

Related studies have been done on library digitisation in other countries, even though, not much has been done in Tom Mboya University College library as far as digitization of Kiswahili content /programme is concerned. Most scholars have only dealt with digitization of other fields and disciplines with little reference to Kiswahili content /programme. Liu (2006) studied on the library digitization practice in the USA. His study revealed a number of prominent library digitization practices, methods and challenges and then highlighted the best practices, trends and interests in library digitization pertaining to both policy and technology marketplace issues. Ajuwon (2003) carried out a study on the use of computer and internet among first year clinical and nursing students in University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria and discovered that the students used these facilities to search for relevant information for their studies but some factors such as insufficient computer and internet use proficiency as factors affected their use. Lisero (2018) did research on information technology integration with special reference to students' access and utilisation of library services at Maseno University. His results were that the learners have made an attempt to embrace technology though most of them are majorly interested in social media. Ibegwam (2004)

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS TOM MBOYA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Tom Mboya University College (TMUC) can be traced to Maseno University Learning Centre, which was set up in Homa Bay town on 7th September 2010. By 2014, the centre had developed to be known as Maseno University Campus with 1,087 students. After some consultative meetings between officials from Maseno University and the County Government of Homa Bay, an idea to establish a University College in the County cropped up. The prime objective was to increase access to university education and at the same time take education closer to the people. On this basis, it

was unanimously agreed that the university is named after the late honourable Thomas Joseph Mboya, MP. Therefore, on 2nd March 2015, an Ad-hoc committee comprising of officials from Maseno University and the County Government of Homa Bay was set up to steer the registration of Tom Mboya University College through Maseno University as a mentoring institution. It was then established through Legal Notice No. 55 in the Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 45 of 8th April 2016, the University College then started offering diploma and degree programmes anchored on those undertaken at the Maseno University and Certificate programmes offered at the Homa Bay Agricultural Training Centre (ATC).

The facility, Homa Bay Agricultural Training Centre, where Tom Mboya University College is situated was handed over officially to Maseno University by the County Government of Homa Bay in April, 2016. Tom Mboya University College admitted its first group of 114 students in September, 2016 and at that time had 19 staff which included seconded (13) staff from Maseno University and staff inherited (6) from Homa Bay Agricultural Training Centre (ATC). The first University College Council was inaugurated in January 2017. This gives us a background of our area of research. In this context, the Tom Mboya University library, narrowing down to digitisation of the Kiswahili content/programme, in the Department of Language and Literature Education, School of Education.

The Concept of Digitisation

Digitisation is a concept that is basically the process of converting written and printed records into electronic form. The content may be in the form of text, image, audio, or a combination of this which is known as multimedia. Digitisation is a complex process, time-consuming and it requires a highly qualified staff that is experienced and equal to the task. The output of digitisation process is an electronic document that can be hosted on the internet or intranet. The electronic document can be in Portable Document Format (PDF) or Tagged Image File Format (TIFF). Most scholars agree that the PDF format is usually used to store information on the Web while the file size format is smaller and easily downloaded and transferable (Murthy, 2005).

This scholar suggests three steps or phases of a digitisation project.

The first phase is grounded on activities that relate to the preparation for digitisation and the actual process of digitising materials. This first phase takes the role of making the source materials in a digital form. The second phase entails the process required to make sure that the digitised materials are easily available to the users. This comprises cataloguing, indexing and compression. The end-users are only able to use the digitised materials after they have been properly processed. According to Chowdhury and Chowdhury (2003), the third stage is known as the last phase, and it involves other issues that are related to the accomplishment of the work like; preservation and maintenance of the digitised collection and services. According to these scholars, digitisation as a process is costly in its nature. It involves paying for the equipment, the digitisation process, paying for staff salaries and those involved in the whole process of digitisation. The whole process involves initiating the digitisation process; establishing start-up costs and securing funding; preparing a detailed project plan including milestones, assessing and selecting materials for digitisation; digitise materials (prepare source materials, digitise, check quality), post-process digitised materials by editing where necessary, store in appropriate file formats, compress (if necessary), catalogue, index; deliver digitised materials and make them available to the users; support/ prepare for maintenance, archiving and migration as the last step in the process of digitisation.

Digitisation Status in Tom Mboya University College

There are few initiatives that have been made to digitise library materials with Kiswahili content/programmes in Tom Mboya University College. This implies that this process is yet to kick off. This research has revealed that the Kiswahili lecturers had a departmental meeting with the English lecturers in early 2020 and they came up with the strategies of putting in place the program of preparing Kiswahili content to be digitised. They started off by making modules in order to find out which content could be digitised. The modules were derived from the course descriptions, outcomes were specified, but somehow the process could not

progress well due to some reasons that this research has unveiled like financial constraints. From the findings, mostly the English content was digitised.

Digitisation Trends in Tom Mboya University College

It has been observed that both the two libraries in Tom Mboya University College are yet to digitise the Kiswahili content/programme. It was also indicated that only one of the libraries had commenced the process. The first step was to approach the Kiswahili Course lecturers to come up with the relevant content/programme. The materials were handed over in CD-ROM and PDF files. The process has not gone far because the librarians are still busy with the digitising of the English content and other units that are taught in English, like Special needs education and Psychology. During the investigation process to find out why Kiswahili content/programme had not been digitised, the corresponding librarians cited some problems like lack of funds, lack of concepts or technical know-how about digitisation, fear of technology and failure to embrace change, among other reasons.

Major Barriers for Digitization of Kiswahili Content/program in TMUC

Financial Constraint

This is one of the barriers to the library digitisation process in Tom Mboya University College. (TMUC). In TMUC, being a constituent college of Maseno University, has a lot of teething problems and a number of hiccups. Another striking issue is that it is yet to get a Charter. On this note, the library also needs a separate budget for library digitisation. Thus, it is very difficult for the University library to undertake any sort of digitisation project like that of digitising the Kiswahili content / programme due to lack of funds.

Lack of Understanding

TMUC library is still in darkness about the digitisation concept. It seems as though there is no clear idea about the library digitisation of Kiswahili content. Since the digitisation process is yet to begin, it has only taken the library automation attempts, but generally, it is still proceeding on the manual system at every means. Therefore, in this

case, it is a bit impossible to embrace the digitisation of Kiswahili content/programme and understand the whole process and its benefits.

Inadequate Infrastructure

In the TMUC library, the available infrastructural facilities of the library are not at a satisfactory level. These kinds of infrastructural facilities slow down the rate of digitisation of important materials like Kiswahili content/programmes.

Problems of ICT and Automation of Kiswahili Content/Programme

As a developing country, Kenya has technical limitations which are dragging behind the university libraries like Tom Mboya hence making it not to take up strongly on digitisation of Kiswahili content//programme. Most librarians and even other workers in the library have not easily accepted change from the manual era to the automation era. The study revealed that some of them are even computer illiterate.

Lack of Standard and Uniformity

At Tom Mboya University College, there are two libraries. There is no competition among the two libraries to better serve the students as far as digitisation of Kiswahili content /programme is concerned. They still believe and practice traditional library activities and services and are completely isolated from modern library activities around the world that are automated.

Lack of Skilled Manpower

In order for the library digitisation of Kiswahili content/programme to be realised, skilled manpower is fundamental. Without skilled manpower, it will be difficult for the TMUC university library to kick off. Basically, the digitisation process of any university library requires very smart and intelligent personnel with adequate technical and ICT knowledge. This is totally different in TMUC.

Priority to Traditional Library Services

Most of the library staff, particularly the librarians and the library professionals still have a backward

mentality and some of them have not embraced the Wi-Fi and even the modem technology to enable library digitisation. They are still dealing with traditional library activities and services. This research tried to compare the traditional and computerised library services and the results were that the modern services like access to e-resources, Online Public Access Catalogue –OPAC were not fully utilised but instead, they were still using the print collection and manual card catalogue respectively. The result of this research shows that customers still embrace the physical collection. Despite the fact that the library, is trying to focus on the digitisation process, some patrons are still using the manual way, for instance, when the students are searching for past papers and books and other physical publications.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the reasons Tom Mboya University College has not been able to digitise Kiswahili content/programme. First of all, there is a need for efforts to be made by the Kiswahili lecturers to make sure that they thoroughly prepare the Kiswahili material that is to be digitised. Secondly, there is also a need for the two libraries and their professionals to be able to understand the benefits and the whole process of digitisation. Seminars and workshops should be organised by the university management in order to sensitise and create awareness among librarians and other stakeholders about the current changes and developments in technology. There must be a clear budget set aside annually for the digitisation process. There is also a need for government intervention in funding the process of digitisation in university libraries and more specifically, the Kiswahili content /programme.

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