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Itumeleng Aaron Khanya
itumelengkanya@gmail.com

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Information communication technology usage in Limpopo public libraries

Khanya Itumeleng Aaron

Department of Information Studies, University of Limpopo

Itumelengkhanya@gmail.com

ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0002-7554-7751

Abstract

Background: Most libraries are still rendering services without incorporation of ICT facilities.

Aim: This study sought to examine usage of Information Communication Technology in Limpopo public libraries.

Method: The study adopted quantitative research approach, and data was collected through questionnaires comprising of open and closed ended questions.

Results: Majority of public libraries in Limpopo are not ICT equipped, however, those that are ICT equipped do render digitalised service. Challenges found pertaining lack of ICT systems in public libraries were: lack of funds; outdated technology; untrained staff and low staff morale. Libraries should source funds from Department of Sports, Arts and Culture in order to be able to procure ICT systems. This will help in improving the state of Limpopo public libraries.

Keywords: Information and communication technology, library, digitalisation, Limpopo, information technology, mzansi libraries online.

Introduction

The public library system in South Africa is considered the most sophisticated on the continent (Issak, 2000). However, public libraries in various parts of South Africa are now facing an alarming deterioration. It is reported that 8 million out of 12 million users do not have full access to library facilities because of lack of internet (Issak, 2000). This becomes a greater challenge in terms of accessibility of services rendered by public libraries.

This study was prompted by unsatisfactory service provided by Limpopo public libraries. The service provided is largely manual and this affect accessibility and quality of library services. Digitalisation appears to be a solution towards improving the library services. Digitalisation is the conversion of analog based data into electronic (Oshiri, 2020). Fabunmi, Paris, and Fabunmi (2006) express that “major purposes of digitalisation are to enhance access and improve preservation of library materials.” However, it appears as if many public libraries are still lagging behind in terms of digitalisation. As a result, Library and Information Service become inefficient and ineffective.

South Africa has approximately 1612 public and community libraries, which are all serviced by the 9 provincial library services. It also has approximately 381 public libraries that are serviced by the metropolitan library services systems in order to meet the needs of the existing population of about 51 million (National Library of South Africa, 2015). According to the National Library of South Africa (2015) there are 385 public libraries in South Africa without internet. This becomes a challenge for public libraries to provide library services electronically.

Contextual setting

Limpopo province is predominantly rural. It is alienated into five municipal districts, which are Capricorn, Waterberg, Sekhukhune, Vhembe and Mopani (Municipalities of South Africa, 2012). National Library of South Africa (2012) stipulates that Limpopo has sixty-nine community and public libraries as depicted below.

Table 1: Number of public libraries in the five Limpopo districts

District	Capricorn	Mopani	Sekhukhune	Vhembe	Waterberg	Total
Number of public libraries	14	17	14	11	13	69

(Source: Library and Information Association of South Africa, 2015)

There is a paradigm shift from manual library system to digitalisation. This is also caused by the world pandemic disaster called covid 19, where social distance is practiced. This pandemic together with the 4th industrial paradigm shift forces libraries to render digitalised services through digital preservation. Khan and Rubina (2017) explains that digital preservation and cloud computing are the new ways for offering best information sources and service

The benefits of digitalising library resources are manifold. Stewart and Newman (2018) notes that digitalisation facilitates simultaneous online access from anywhere at any time and accelerates the collection and delivery process. Stewart and Newman (2018) highlight that digitalisation is important because there are extended opening hours and equitable access.

In South Africa, strides have been made to digitalise public libraries through Mzansi Libraries Online project. Mzansi Libraries Online (MLO) is a programme of the National Library of South Africa, in collaboration with the Department of Sports Arts and Culture, and the provincial library services in all nine provinces. The overall objective of MLO is to empower communities in South Africa to develop their lives through the provision of free accessibility to information, providing community and public libraries with Information Communication Technology facilities as well as internet (National Library of South Africa, 2015). Mzansi Libraries Online aims to assist three libraries per province with internet connection and ICT facilities. In Limpopo, one library already has been provided with internet and ICT facilities named Thulamela Public Library (National Library of South Africa, 2015).

Without digitalisation, library users have to physically visit libraries and gain access to print or microfilm material with the help of a librarian (Stewart and Newman, 2018). This affect the accessibility of Library services and this is the reason why digitalisation should be considered.

Theoretical framework

Theories play an important role by providing underlying guidelines. This study was based on Technology Acceptance Model by Fred Davis. The model was used to evaluate the usage behavior of library staff towards library ICT systems. The theory focuses mainly on the ICT usage by the library staff. It has six stages, which are External variables, Perceived usefulness, Perceived ease of use, Attitude, Behavior and Actual system use (Davis, 1989).

Problem statement

The problem that led to this study is ineffective and inefficient library service offered by Limpopo public libraries. Library staffs are usually unable or struggle to render timely and effective library services to citizens due to unavailability of ICT systems and resources. Presently in South Africa users have to physically visit the library for service and this is financially costly and time consuming (Salman, Mugwisi, and Mostert, 2017). Digitalisation of resources and services can be used to ensure that users have timeous access to right information at the right time.

ICT incorporated library allows users round the clock access, whereby users can access information sources twenty-four hours a day (Yakkaldevi and Ghante, 2014). As would Ariole, (2017) attest, applying Information and Communication Technology in library services increases the number of usages of library resources and patronage. Therefore, there is a need for effective library system for improvement of public library services.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study was to examine Information and communication technology usage in Limpopo public libraries. The objectives were to:

- Investigate the usage of ICT systems by librarians
- Underscore the challenges of ICT in public libraries

Literature review

Literature in this study is reviewed looking at the research objectives, usage of ICT systems by librarians; as well as challenges of ICT in public libraries.

Usage of ICT systems by librarians

Library staffs are increasingly using ICTs to access digitised information (Enakrire and Ocholla, 2017). Using ICT not only enhances the services of public libraries but also improves the librarian's abilities and the organisation of the library (Leung, Nkhoma, and John, 2013). Public libraries have an important role to play in getting older people connected and teaching them skills they need to utilise ICT facilities in public libraries. Elderly people

who are housebound should have the same degree of access and ICT utilisation as those that are able to visit their local public libraries (Pateman and Williment, 2016). Leung, et al. (2013) also affirms that male and female library staffs are not significantly different regarding ICT usage.

When service is digitalised, accessibility becomes easier and faster which increases the usage of materials in public libraries. Salman, et al., (2017) indicate that high-quality service with integration of ICT offered by libraries can increase user satisfaction. Despite the significant progress in equipping libraries with digitalised systems, there are weaknesses in the public library digital infrastructure, which prohibits the usage of these systems. Some of the problems are broadband width and broadband speeds (Pateman and Williment, 2016). Isiyaku, Ayub, and Abdulkadir (2015) highlight that ICT usage behaviour has slightly higher ratings in Nigerian libraries, with only 54% of library staff using ICT facilities in the library. The other 46% provide service traditionally so without ICT incorporation. However, 54% of ICT incorporation is not sufficient in terms of rendering good quality service in this 4th industrial society era.

Broadband width can affect usage of library ICT systems. Broadband width can also affect library staff when using ICT systems in libraries. They slow the speed and efficiency of the service rendered. If the library broadband width is low, possibilities are that the service will also be slow. This may discourage library staff to provide information services using ICT systems.

Goulding (2016) advocates that although some of the staff members are eager to take on the role of ICT usage in public libraries and training, others shy from the increased responsibility and this involves especially as it is rarely accompanied by extra remuneration. Goulding in her study explained that the minority library staff who are not eager to use ICT lack motivation. Goulding (2016) found out that people are likely to be more committed to learning how to use ICT if they can be shown that it gives them easier access to information and resources that they find useful and interesting. Many public libraries are trying to encourage use by identifying and signposting websites considered to provide quality assured, reliable, accurate information relevant to the needs of users. This is only accessible by the use of ICT systems in libraries. In contrast to the above findings, a study conducted in Kwazulu Natal public libraries by Hoskins (2005) highlight that 94% of library staff use computers

and other ICT facilities in their workplace, and they encounter no problems because of the training they received.

Challenges of ICT in public libraries

There are certain challenges that are brought about by ICT. For instance, challenges such as lack of funding, few trained staff, outdated technology and inadequate infrastructure produce library staffs which are, both negative and dispirited (Sharma, 2012). The section below discusses the challenges.

➤ Poor infrastructure

A quantitative study conducted by Gichohi, Onyancha and Dulle (2017) in Kenyan public libraries revealed that 45% of library users are reluctant to use community libraries because of poor infrastructures and lack of electronic resources. This becomes a challenge because a library without users becomes a white elephant. Hove and Brindle (2015) identified another challenge as the issue of coding and outdated technology. They imply that digitalisation captions and coding may be representative of the current time and may use terms that will not be used in future.

➤ Untrained staff

The other challenge is the issue of untrained staff. A quantitative study by Wachira and Onyancha (2016) highlights that librarian in the University of Nairobi have not received adequate training on how online services work. Some of them were also not mindful about the precise meaning of 'remote users'. For example, a member in the discussion group during an interview commented: "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 conditional in the other public libraries' debate groups. They also added that only when an item was available on the shelves was a user contacted by e-mail. This clearly shows that resources are there, but library staffs have not received adequate training on how to operate them and a clear meaning on how those technologies work. Remote user refers to an individual working on a computer, on a different network or in a different terrestrial place from the Local Area Network server (Dean, 2012).

➤ Lack of finances

The only way library remote users can access library materials is through the internet, using OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) and Local Area Network in order to access databases. However, as highlighted earlier in Section 1 of this research that 385 libraries in South Africa do not have the internet, which means that they will never be able to serve remote library users. This also means that it may be difficult to access those demarcated isolated libraries, especially in rural counterparts. Issak (2000) demarcates that 8 million out of 12 million people in South Africa cannot access library materials because of a lack of ICT infrastructure that is perpetuated also by lack of finances.

Research methodology

Quantitative research is a process that is systematic and objective in its ways of using numerical data from only a selected subgroup of a universe or a population to generalise the findings to the population that is being studied (Maree, 2017). It is the use of numerical measurement and analysis in research (Gratton and Jones, 2004). Quantitative method was adopted in this research. This approach was used for examining theories and objectives by assessing their relationship as well as variations.

Research findings and discussion

This section outlines and discusses the research findings. Research findings are discussed based on the objectives of the study.

Usage of ICT systems by librarians

This question was included in the questionnaire to determine whether librarians do use the ICT systems in their respective libraries. The results are shown in figure 1 with percentages and number of sampled library staffs.

Figure 1: ICT usage (N=87)

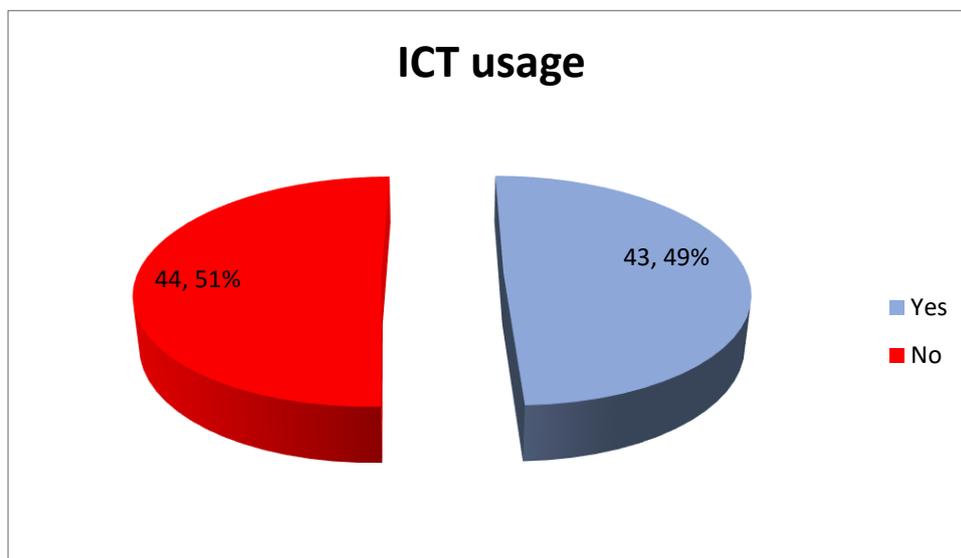


Figure 1, reveals that majority of 44 (51%) library staff do not use library ICT systems. Goulding (2016) found out that library staff who are not eager to use ICT lack motivation. Librarians are likely to be more committed to learning how to use ICT systems if they can be shown that it gives them easier access to information and resources that they find useful and interesting (Goulding, 2016).

Challenges of ICT usage

Respondents were asked about the challenges accompanying ICT usage in Limpopo public libraries. Figure 2 below demarcates percentages as well as numbers of challenges encountered.

Figure 2: Challenges of ICT usage (N=87)

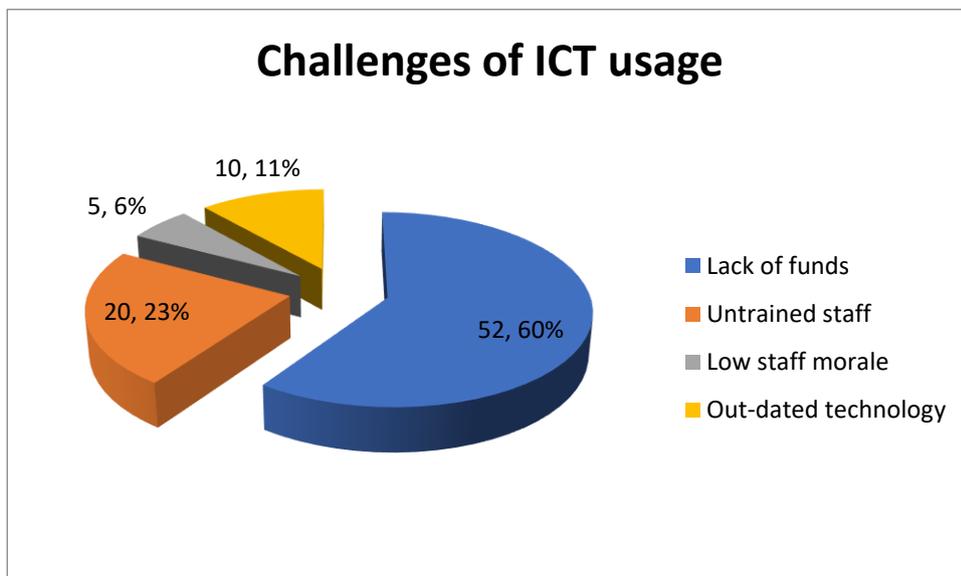


Figure 2 show that 52 (60%) Library staffs think that the reason behind lack of ICT usage is lack of funds. However, 20 (23%) of them stated that it is because of untrained staff, meaning resources are there, however staff is not trained. Juma, Wamukoya and Wekullo (2014) highlights that public libraries have faced a series of difficulties: first technical problems such as introducing ICT systems without adequate training of library staff, this includes new library software systems, self-serving machines in rural libraries, radio frequency identification scanners and systems. The other challenge was that 10 (11%) of them implied that their ICT resources are outdated and malfunctions, whereas 5 (6%) of them think it is because of low staff morale.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings revealed that 51% of libraries in Limpopo are not well ICT adequate. They render service manually. However, 49% of Library staff do have ICT systems and use them in their respective libraries. This is in concurrence with the Literature review; According to Salman, Mugwisi and Mostert (2017) access to and use of ICT systems in public libraries is affected by availability and quality of those resources. Lack of funds, outdated resources, low staff morale and lack of skills were depicted major challenges in the findings. Libraries should source funds from municipalities, and Department of Sports Arts and Culture in order to be able to procure ICT systems. This will help in improving service rendered in public libraries. There should also be a library policy in place to ensure that public libraries that do have ICT systems do use them when rendering library services.

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