



Trends in funding of university libraries in Kenya: a survey

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Abstract

Purpose – To investigate recent trends in funding and collection development in university libraries in Kenya.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on primary data collected from four university libraries in Kenya as well as secondary literature relating to university libraries in Kenya.

Findings – This paper concludes that funding of university library services in Kenya is inadequate. Due to diminished governmental fund allocations for these institutions, their library collection development levels have deteriorated and are characterized by low monographic purchases and limited journal subscriptions. This decline is at odds with rapidly expanding student enrolment levels. Private universities experience these problems too, but to a lesser extent.

Originality/value – The paper recommends that to ensure that university libraries continue to provide adequate information services supporting teaching, learning and research, the adoption of a strategic plan in all areas of library management, and especially in funding and collection development, is needed.

Keywords Academic libraries, Financing, Higher education, Economic conditions, Information media, Kenya

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The university library represents one of the largest capital expenditures on any campus and requires ongoing annual investment for it to retain its value and achieve its goals (Wiemers, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Hunt, 2003). Institutional commitment is needed to fund library development, and ongoing services, requiring sound financial planning. Financial planning involves the process of economic analysis – that is, identifying, costing and allocating revenue to the resources and activities that allow the objectives of the information service and its parent organization to be achieved. At the macro level, economic analysis can be achieved through the budget process, while at the micro level, economic analysis can be used to determine the optimum use of staff and resources in order to achieve cost effectiveness (Bryson, 1995).

In Africa, the state of library and information services is generally perceived to be inadequate and financial support of library development viewed as small in scale, piecemeal and lacking in coordination. In an earlier study, Rosenberg (1997) observed that since the mid-1980s, in Africa the relative value of local university libraries has declined to a near total collapse. This decline is characterized by low numbers of monographs per student, inadequate journal subscriptions and limited access to electronic information that has led to libraries being unable to adequately support teaching, learning and research activities in universities. It has also been noted that limited space and declining budget levels prevent universities from servicing the growing demand for education. As a result, universities in Sub-Saharan Africa suffer from low numbers of trained faculty, virtually non-existent levels of research, poor



quality educational facilities (including libraries), inadequate laboratories and outmoded programs (World Bank, 1996).

According to UNESCO (1998), the economic situation in many developing countries is such that many university libraries do not have the resources to purchase information resources, which has had negative and damaging effects on training and research capacities. As such, in spite of the fact that there are many institutions of higher education, developing countries, such as Kenya, have to cope with the challenge of an increasing demand for education without compromising the quality and relevance of teaching and research. Three key issues are at play in discussing funding of university libraries in developing countries. First, is the escalating demand for and the correspondingly high levels of enrolment in universities in developing countries. Second is the explosion in the quantity of desirable published materials for use in universities supporting teaching and research. This wealth of information has been accompanied by a rapid escalation of prices for these items, making it difficult for African universities to purchase them. This jeopardizes the traditional research mission of the university library, which is to create and maintain large research collections for their users. Third, there is a rapid emergence and development of electronic information which have made it possible to envision radically different ways of organizing library collections than those traditionally provided, but which present a big financial challenge in their adoption.

All information service activities are subject to expenditures and revenues and must be allocated funds in a comprehensive budget. Broadly, we can distinguish two entities that need to be budgeted for – capital expenditures and an operating budget. Capital expenditures include allocations for fixed assets such as new buildings, renovations, and installation of automated systems. It also includes budgetary provisions for maintenance, replacement, repair, and renovation – and for investment in new and improved means of information access and delivery. The operational budget includes funds required to sustain all operations such as salaries, purchase of new materials, maintenance and running automated systems.

Methodology

This paper is the result of an investigation on the recent trends in funding university libraries in Kenya. Kenya has 11 universities, both publicly and privately supported. This study is based on data collected from four university libraries in Kenya, which were selected for their size and experience in providing information services over a substantial period of time. These universities are: University of Nairobi (UON), Kenyatta University (KU), United States International University (USIU), and Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). Both UON and KU are large publicly supported universities whose histories date to the early 1970s. USIU and CUEA were the first privately supported universities in Kenya to obtain accreditation from the government of Kenya.

To achieve this study's objectives, a survey was carried out using statistical forms, and interviews were used as data collection instruments. Statistical forms were circulated to each of the four university librarians to collect statistical data relating to various sources of library funding, fund allocation, and library expenditures in the university libraries. Statistics were collected for a five-year period, covering the academic years 1996/1997 to 2000/2001. This made it possible to capture recent

changes that have taken place. Interviews were conducted with the four university librarians to collect data on the conditions in the libraries over the five-year period. Key questions in the interviews were:

- What are the major sources of funding for library operations in your institution?
- What changes have occurred in university funding during the 1996 to 2001 period? (Please state changes relevant to amounts allocated, methods of allocation and expenditure control.)
- Are university authorities becoming more or less supportive of library activities?
- Does the library generate income?
- Has there been any change in the nature of donor support during the 1996 to 2001 period? If so what changes?

Discussion of findings

Sources of funds for library activities

University libraries in Kenya have three main sources of income: funding from a parent organization; user fees; and donor funding and income generation. Of these three funding sources, university libraries depend mainly on fund allocations from their parent organization. There is evidence that while funding support for libraries in private universities has been consistently stable, the situation in public universities has deteriorated to the point where fulfilment of their intended goals and objectives is hampered. The public university libraries have experienced a general reduction in funding from their parent institutions. In fact, as far as public universities are concerned, libraries exist in a paradoxical situation, whereby university authorities recognize the library's importance to academic programs, but give them a low funding priority.

All public universities have experienced dramatic budget reductions from the central government, and it is true that support from parent institutions is diminishing. Up to the early 1980s meaningful library funding used to take place and established amounts were set aside to purchase monographs, journals, and support capital development. The situation gradually changed for the worse through the 1990s and culminated in dismal funding by the beginning of the twenty-first century. All the government currently does is to release money on a monthly basis to cover personal salaries for the entire university system, and if there is a remainder for the library, it is used to purchase stationery and a few new materials.

At the same time that funding has dwindled in public university libraries, one must take into account the prevailing poor economic performance of Kenya. In 1991 and 1992, the country witnessed very high inflation rates caused mainly by large increases in the money supply and bank credit. As a result of the tight monetary policy introduced by the Central Bank of Kenya, exchange rates fell drastically. Subsequently, the rate of growth improved to 4.8 percent in 1995 and 4.6 percent in 1996 (Republic of Kenya, 1997). In 1997 and 1998 the economy witnessed a significant slowdown in the growth rate to just 2.3 percent and 1.8 percent respectively. Although the rate of inflation declined from 11.2 percent in 1997 to 6.6 percent in 1998 (Republic of Kenya, 1999), the trend reversed between 1998 and 2001 (Republic of Kenya, 2002). These conditions have continued to weaken the government's ability to finance all sectors of national life, such as education and health, and as a result the financial allocations to

universities have continued to deteriorate, which means that fewer funds are available for public university libraries to finance their activities.

In public universities, government supported students do not pay a library fee, while those who are self-supporting are required to pay an amount ranging between Kshs.1500-2500 (US\$30-35). In some cases it has had a positive impact on library funding in that each program has to buy books and journals using this money through the library. In universities where this is happening, library funds collected through parallel programs are giving libraries a new lease on life as acquisition and processing departments are becoming active again. However, these funds are of limited significance to the library's overall financial needs. In privately supported university libraries, fees charged to students range between Ksh. 4000 and Ksh.5000 (US\$55-70) per year.

Although librarians have been active in seeking donor support, such funding has diminished. All the universities surveyed are part of several donor initiative efforts intended to facilitate better access to electronic information. The two most significant are Supply of Academic Publications (SAP) and Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI). SAP is an initiative of the International Federation of the University Presidents (IAUP) in cooperation with International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) and the Flemish International Council (VLIR). The PERI project is organized by the London based International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). These two projects have similar objectives to provide sustainable solutions for key problems that universities in developing regions are facing today, including lack of access to current scientific literature published in international academic journals and their inability to publish and present their own academic publications beyond their local regions.

While donor assistance has been useful, it has various shortcomings. One main problem is that of sustainability. Since donor programs run for specified periods, their presence tends to create false impressions of adequacy, while in reality they perpetuate dependency. Whenever a funding program comes to an end, university libraries are unable to sustain the levels of collection development, journal subscriptions or even carry out training programs and provide equipment formerly supported by donors. Another problem is the relevancy of donated materials, with some libraries experiencing that donations can be less than useful. This creates problems in sorting, processing, space and disposal. This is not to diminish the usefulness of donor agencies in the development of university libraries in Kenya, but consideration needs to be given beforehand on the drawbacks associated with donations.

With the dramatic reduction in government and donor funding, public universities have had to seek ways of strengthening their financial base. While this is not emphasized as much in private universities, there is evidence that they are also involved in generating income. Like their parent organizations, libraries have embraced this practice and have used their facilities and skills to generate some income through photocopying, binding, word processing services, internet services, and in the case of UON, the library has mounted a library diploma course. According to the librarians, these activities can enhance library finances. However, in most cases libraries have no control over generated funds since all the money goes to the central finance office and these funds are used to address the university's immediate needs.

Trends in institutional funding of library activities

Public universities continue to rely heavily on the central government for funding, which is currently based on Kshs. 120,000 (US\$1,600) per student per academic year. However, the government contribution has increasingly diminished, leading to serious financial problems. In relative terms, the proportionate share of the Ministry of Education budget devoted to public universities has declined steadily over the years from 20 percent in 1991 to 12 percent in 2000/2001 (World Bank, 2004).

According to Table I, the institutional allocation of UON funds declined from Kshs. 92 million in 1996/1997 to only about Kshs. 31 million in 2000/2001. This represents a 66 percent drop. Corresponding to the declining financial support, library expenditures on monographs has declined steadily from Kshs. 64 million in 1996/1997 to only Kshs. 0.65 million in 2000/2001. Accordingly, in 1996/1997 69.6 percent of expenditures went to the purchase of monographs while only 2.9 percent and 2.1 percent were spent for the same purpose in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 respectively. Expenditures for salaries and wages grew from Kshs. 28 million in 1996/1997 to Kshs. 40 million in 1998/1999, then dropped to 27 million in 1999/2000 before slightly increasing to Kshs. 28 million in 2000/2001. This decrease can be attributed to the massive retrenchment undertaken in all public institutions – including public universities. It can also be observed that with low allocations for library support, salaries and wages accounted for 97 percent and 90.2 percent of library expenditures in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 respectively. Notably, no expenditures were made between 1996 and 2001 in support of journal purchases, maintenance and computerization.

Like UON, the highest expenditures at KU, as seen in Table II, is on salaries and wages, which account for 90.1 percent (1996/1997), 64.1 percent (1997/1998), 60 percent (1998/1999), 98.4 percent (1999/2000), and 98.4 percent (2000/2001). Expenditures on monographs accounted for only 1.5 percent in 1997/1998. This declined to 0.6 percent in 1999/2000. Expenditures on journals has also been erratic, being highest in 1997/1998 (about Kshs. 11.4 million) and 1998/1999 (about Kshs. 16.7 million), before sinking to less than Kshs. 1 million in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. Like UON, during this period there were no expenditures on equipment, furniture, maintenance and computers apart from 2000/2001, when a meager Kshs. 0.1 million was spent on furniture and maintenance. Total expenditures for library purposes increased from Kshs. 26.7 million in 1996/1997 by 38.3 percent in 1998/1999 before declining by 33 percent in 2000/2001.

Expenditures supporting the library at USIU (Table III) reduced by 18.8 percent from Kshs. 48,152,000 in 1996/1997 to Kshs. 39,107,770 in 2000/2001. The purchase of monographs accounted for between 40 percent and 48 percent of the annual expenditure throughout the five-year period studied. Journals accounted for between 5.9 percent (1996/1997) and 17.6 percent (2000/1), while funds spent on equipment and furniture accounted for between 4.8 percent (1999/2000) and 15.3 percent (1996/1997). Maintenance ranged from 6.4 percent in 1999/2000 to 6.1 percent in 2000/2001. The decline in the allocation for journals starting in 1997/1998 is attributed to a shift in subscriptions from print to e-journals, which cost less.

Institutional funds at CUEA supporting the library have risen consistently from Kshs. 5.4 million to Kshs. 18.1 million representing about a 150 percent increase (see Table IV). The statistical information collected and presented in Tables I-IV support the observation by library managers that fund in public universities for library

Table I.

Use of funds for library activities at UON (Kenya shillings)

Library expenditure	1996/1997 Amount	1997/1998 Amount	1999/2000 Amount	2000/2001 Amount	2001/2002 Amount
Monographs	64,000,000	50,000,000	55,000,000	800,000	650,000
Journals	–	–	–	–	–
Equipment and furniture	–	–	–	–	2,400,000
Staff (salary and wages)	28,000,000	33,000,000	40,000,000	27,000,000	28,000,000
Maintenance	–	–	–	–	–
Automation	–	–	–	–	–
Total in Kshs	92,000,000	83,000,000	95,000,000	27,800,000	31,050,000
Total (US\$)	1,260,274	1,136,986	1,301,370	369,863	424,658

Note: Exchange rate 1USD = 73 Ksh

Source: University of Nairobi Library

Table II.

Use of funds for library activities at KU (Kenya shillings)

Library expenditure	1996/1997 Amount	1997/1998 Amount	1998/1999 Amount	1999/2000 Amount	2000/2001 Amount
Monographs	1,342,997	3,774,681	636,922	162,598	662,107
Journals	1,415,320	11,361,800	16,742,200	243,471	329,139
Equipment and furniture	–	–	–	–	–
Staff (salary and wages)	25,000,000	27,000,000	26,000,000	25,000,000	28,000,000
Maintenance	–	–	–	–	–
Automation	–	–	–	–	–
Total in Kshs	27,758,317	42,136,481	43,379,122	25,406,069	28,991,246
Total (US\$)	380,251	577,212	594, 235	348,028	397,140

Note: Exchange rate 1USD = 73 Ksh

Source: Kenyatta University Library

Table III.

Use of funds for library activities at USIU (Kenya shillings)

Library expenditure	1996/1997 Amount	1997/1998 Amount	1998/1999 Amount	1999/2000 Amount	2000/2001 Amount
Monographs	14,500,000	21,060,000	16,000,000	18,000,000	16,008,000
Journals	18,484,000	2,995,840	4,500,000	6,100,000	6,900,000
Equipment and furniture	–	668,000	3,540,000	1,750,000	2,000,000
Staff (salary and wages)	7,000,000	7,492,995	7,053,857	8,023,304	8,900,000
Maintenance	168,000	497,519	1,165,000	2,340,000	2,340,020
Automation	8,000,000	7,303,000	1,540,000	1,410,000	2,959,750
Total in Kshs	48,152,000	40,017,354	33,798,857	37,623,304	39,107,770
Total (US\$)	659,616	548,182	462,998	514,388	535,723

Note: Exchange rate 1USD = 73 Ksh

Source: USIU Library

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Table IV.
Use of funds for library
activities at CUEA
(Kenya shillings)

Library expenditure	1996/1997 Amount	1997/1998 Amount	1998/1999 Amount	1999/2000 Amount	2000/2001 Amount
Monographs	4,148,732	3,369,417	4,423,463	8,419,041	12,100,000
Journals	1,374,831	1,172,356	474,971	284,207	1,400,000
Equipment and furniture	–	–	–	380,528	435,905
Staff (salary and wages)	1,408,480	1,748,526	2,000,000	2,740,487	3,445,314
Maintenance	271,181	269,628	–	395,804	748,990
Automation	–	–	–	–	–
Total in Kshs	7,203,234	6,559,928	6,898,434	12,220,067	18,130,209
Total (US\$)	98,674	89,862	94,499	167,398	248,359

Note: Exchange rate 1USD = 73 Ksh

Source: CUEA Library

purposes are declining. For example, in UON it was reported that the government allocation is so little that no meaningful budgeting can be done. Before the 1980s, substantive expenditures on libraries were done and specific amounts were set aside for the purchase of monographs and journals as well as capital development. In the 1990s a World Bank loan was used to purchase books for all public university libraries. This program ended in 1999. Today the government releases funds monthly to cover salaries for the entire university system. The remainder is used for the purchase of information materials. This accounts for the low percentage of institutional funds being used to purchase reading materials in UON, which has declined to only 2.1 percent in 2000/2001.

Due to limited funds, acquisition of both monographs and journals in Kenyan public university libraries has overall been insufficient over the five-year period of this survey. Public institutions have been unable to respond proportionately to the high rates of increase in journal prices, especially when faced with dwindling budgets. Libraries have responded by discontinuing journal subscriptions. Substantial debts with suppliers have led to suspension of further supplies until outstanding debts have been settled. Administration's failure in releasing funds according to the university budget has made it impossible for libraries to plan activities. Over the five-year period under review, UON library has depended entirely on donor support for its computer needs, with IT equipment being donated by the University of Antwerp (Belgium), and the Dutch and British embassies. Lack of expenditure on furniture and infrastructure maintenance has resulted in broken furniture not being replaced and no binding or book repair services.

Private university libraries enjoy a relatively better level of institutional support. As indicated in Tables I-IV, there is fairer distribution of institutional funds for library purposes, with the purchase of reading materials accounting for more than 40 percent annually. Funds are also allocated for more library purposes, including equipment, furniture, maintenance, and infrastructure. It can be concluded that the relatively small but rapidly expanding private universities consistently support their libraries allowing them to meet the requirements of the Commission of Higher Education (1988), which attracts more students.

Conclusion and recommendations

Financial constraints in Kenya have reduced government funding of university education to a level that is little more than salary support and essential operating costs. Non-salary expenditures, including support for library services, are at a minimum. With the decline in the budgetary provision from the exchequer, the poor performance of the Kenya shilling against international currencies and the corresponding increase in debt, public universities have reached a crisis level that has threatened the ability of public university libraries to accomplish their role in the university. In the first place, library collection development in public universities has deteriorated to the extent that in some cases budgets in support of book and journal purchases do not exist. Secondly, there is inadequate staffing and training, which has been aggravated by the government policy of retrenchment and a freeze on recruitment of civil servants. Thirdly, there is evidence of overcrowding, as library buildings cannot comfortably accommodate staff, library materials and the increasing number of students. Consequently, the present situation of public university libraries is characterised by extremely poor resources in terms of books, journals and electronic resources, equipment and staff. The information service provided is at the minimal level, mainly that of lending what material the library currently owns. Private universities also experience these problems, but to a lesser extent.

Although there is widespread opinion among students, lecturers, and university administrators that university libraries play a critical role in teaching, research, and learning activities, there is also awareness that university libraries in Kenya, especially those in public universities, are not effectively providing services. This has led to a devaluation of libraries and a marginalization of them at universities. It was observed that comparatively, libraries in private universities are doing better in terms of acquisition, providing service and adoption of information technology. This is in part because they are better funded by their parent institutions and operate under the Commission of Higher Education, which requires that they adhere to their standards.

Urgent measures are required to salvage the situation and restore quality to university education in Kenya. These measures include, first, library managers demonstrating the centrality of libraries in the overall mission of the university and being proactive in the politics of the universities in order to influence the distribution of resources among programs and departments. Most importantly, there needs to be strategic planning in all areas of library management, such as human resources, collection development and service provision. This will enable libraries to evaluate their role in the university, establish goals based on user demand and introduce a more systematic approach to the allocation of resources on a priority basis

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