

User-friendly libraries for active teaching and learning

A case of business, technical and vocational education and training colleges in Uganda

Fredrick Kiwuwa Lugya

The Library, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

User-friendly
libraries for
active teaching

275

Received 19 July 2017
Revised 25 September 2017
Accepted 17 December 2017

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report the training of college librarians, academic and management staff, IT managers and students on how to organise, manage and use a user-friendly library. In Uganda, as in many countries, the problem is that school and/or college libraries are managed by librarians who may have good cataloguing and management skills, but who do not have the pedagogic skills and knowledge of the school curricula that are necessary for librarians to be able to guide and mentor both teachers and students or organise curriculum-related activities or facilitate research. The development of user-friendly libraries contributes to improving education quality through nurturing the interest of students and teachers in literacy activities and active search for knowledge. Under the stewardship of the Belgium Technical Cooperation and the Ministry of Education in Uganda, library stakeholders were trained on how to put users – rather than themselves – in the centre of the library's operations and introduced to active teaching and learning methodologies and activities with emphasis on getting engaged in transforming spaces, services, outreach to users and collections. Several measures, short and long term were taken to address the gaps limiting the performance of the librarians. Given the disparities in the trainees' education level and work experience, the training was delivered in seven modules divided into three units for over eight months in 2015. By the end of the training, trainees developed unique library strategic plan, library policies and procedures, capacity to use library systems, physical design and maintenance systems, partnerships, library structure and staff job descriptions.

Design/methodology/approach – To effectively engage the participants each topic was conducted using active teaching and learning (ATL) methodologies, including: lecture with slides and hands-on practice – each topic was introduced in a lecture form with slides and hands-on exercises. The main goal was to introduce the participants to the concepts discussed, offer opportunities to explore alternative approaches, as well define boundaries for discussion through brainstorming. The question-answer approach kept the participants alert and to start thinking critically on the topic discussed – brainstorming sessions allowed thinking beyond the presentation room, drawing from personal experiences to provide alternatives to anticipated challenges. The goal here was for the participants to provide individual choices and approaches for real life problems; group discussions: case study/ scenario and participant presentations – participants were provided with a scenario and asked to provide alternative approaches that could solve the problem based on their personal experience at their colleges. By the end of the group discussion, participants presented a draft of the deliverable as per the topic under discussion. More so, group discussions were an excellent approach to test participant's teamwork skills and ability to compromise, as well as respecting team decisions. It was an opportunity to see how librarians will work with the library committees. Group discussions further initiated and cemented the much-needed librarian-academic staff – college management relationship. During the group discussion, librarians, teaching staff, ICT staff and college management staff, specifically the Principals and Deputy Principals interacted freely thus starting and cultivating a new era of work relationship between them. Individual presentation: prior to the workshop, participants were sent instructions to prepare a presentation on a topic. For example, participants were asked to



Author wish to extend his sincere thanks to Belgium Technical Cooperation and Ministry of Education staff for the support given to him through his work on the TTE project, most especially on the User-Friendly Libraries Project. Special thanks go to Mr Hannes Decraene, Ms Barbara Radelli, Ms Shelley Heugen, Mr Robert Buwule and all the staff of the four participating institutions. May the Almighty God Bless you all.

provide their views of what a “user-friendly library” would look like or what would constitute a “user-friendly library”; the college library of HTC-Mulago was asked to talk about their experience working with book reserves, challenges faced and plans they have to address the challenges, while the college librarian from NTC-Kaliro was asked to describe a situation where they were able to assist a patron, the limitations they faced and how they addressed them. Doing so did not only assist to emotionally prepare the participants for the training but also helped to make them start thinking about the training in relation to their libraries and work. Take-home assignment: at the end of each session, participants were given home assignments to not only revise the training material but also prepare for the next day training. Further the take-home assignments provided time for the participants to discuss with their colleagues outside of the training room so as to have a common ground/ understanding on some of the very sensitive issues. Most interesting assignment was when participants were asked to review IFLA section on library management and write a two-page report on how such information provided supported their own work, as well as a participant report came from their own observation after a library visit. Invited talks with library expert: two invited talks by library experts from Consortium of Uganda University Libraries and Uganda Library and Information Science Association with the goal to share their experience, motivate the participants to strive higher and achieve great things for their libraries. Library visitation: there were two library visits conducted on three separate days – International Hospital Kampala (IHK) Library, Makerere University Library and Aga Khan University Hospital Library. Each of these library visits provided unique opportunities for the participants to explore best practices and implement similar practices in their libraries. Visual aids – videos, building plans and still photos: these were visual learning aids to supplement text during the lectures because they carried lot of information while initiating different thoughts best on the participants’ past experience and expertise. The training advocated for the use of ATL methodologies and likewise similar methodologies were used to encourage participants do so in their classrooms.

Findings – Addressing Key Concerns: Several measures, both long and short term, were taken to address the gaps limiting the performance of the librarians. The measures taken included: selected representative sample of participants including all college stakeholders as discussed above; active teaching and learning methodologies applied in the training and blended in the content of the training materials; initiated and formulated approaches to collaborations, networks and partnerships; visited different libraries to benchmark library practices and encourage future job shadowing opportunities; and encouraged participants to relate freely, understand and value each other’s work to change their mindsets. College librarians were encouraged to ensure library priorities remain on the agenda through advocacy campaigns. Short-term measures: The UFL training was designed as a practical and hands-on training blended with individual and group tasks, discussions, take-home assignments and presentations by participants. This allowed participants to engage with the material and take responsibility for their own work. Further, the training material was prepared with a view that librarians support the academic life of teaching staff and students. Participants were tasked to develop and later fine-tune materials designed to support their work. For example, developing a subject bibliography and posting it on the library website designed using open source tools such as Google website, Wikis, blogs. The developed library manual includes user-friendly policies and procedures referred to as “dos and don’ts in the library” that promote equitable open access to information; drafting book selection memos; new book arrivals lists; subscribing to open access journals; current awareness services and selective dissemination of information service displays and electronic bulletins. Based on their library needs and semester calendar, participants developed action points and timelines to implement tasks in their libraries at the end of each unit training. Librarians were encouraged to share their experiences through library websites, Facebook page, group e-mail/listserv and Instagram; however, they were challenged with intimate internet access. College libraries were rewarded for their extraordinary job. Given their pivotal role in the management and administration of financial and material resources, on top of librarians, the participants in this training were college administrators/ management, teaching and ICT staff, researchers and student leadership. Participants were selected to address the current and future needs of the college library. These are individuals that are perceived to have a great impact towards furthering the college library agenda. The practical nature of this training warranted conducting the workshops from developed but similar library spaces, for example, Aga Khan University Library and Kampala Capital City, Makerere University Library, International Hospital Kampala Library and Uganda Christian University Library. Participants observed orientation sessions, reference desk management and interviews, collection management practices, preservation and conservation, secretarial bureau management, etc. Long-term measures: Changing the mindset of librarians, college administrators and teaching staff is a long-term commitment which continues to demand for innovative interventions. For example: job shadowing allowed college librarian short-term attachments to Makerere

University Library, Uganda Christian University Library, Aga Khan Hospital University Library and International Hospital Kampala Library – these libraries were selected because of their comparable practices and size. The mentorship programme lasted between two-three weeks; on-spot supervision and follow-up visits to assess progress with the action plan by the librarians and college administration and college library committee; ensuring that all library documents – library strategic plan, library manual, library organogram, etc are approved by the College Governing Council and are part of the college wide governing documents; and establishing the library committee with a job description for each member – this has strengthened the library most especially as an advocacy tool, planning and budgeting mechanism, awareness channel for library practices, while bringing the library to the agenda – reemphasizing the library's agenda. To bridge the widened gap between librarians and the rest of the stakeholders, i.e. teaching staff, ICT staff, college administration and students, a college library committee structure and its mandate were established comprising: Library Committee Chairperson – member of the teaching staff; Library Committee Secretary – College Librarian; Student Representative – must be a member of the student Guild with library work experience; and Representative from each college academic department. A library consortium was formed involving all the four project supported colleges to participate in resource sharing practices, shared work practices like shared cataloguing, information literacy training, reference interview and referral services as well a platform for sharing experiences. A library consortium further demanded for automating library functions to facilitate collaboration and shared work. Plans are in place to install Koha integrated library system that will cultivate a strong working relationship between librarians and students, academic staff, college administration and IT managers. This was achieved by ensuring that librarians innovatively implement library practices and skills acquired from the workshop as well as show their relevance to the academic life of the academic staff. Cultivating relationships takes a great deal of time, thus college librarians were coached on: creating inclusive library committees, timely response to user needs, design library programmes that address user needs, keeping with changing technology to suite changing user needs, seeking customer feedback and collecting user statistics to support their requests, strengthening the library's financial based by starting a secretarial bureau and conducting user surveys to understand users' information-seeking behaviour. To improve the awareness of new developments in the library world, college librarians were introduced to library networks at national, regional and international levels, as a result they participated in conferences, workshops, seminars at local, regional and international level. For example, for the first time and with funding from Belgium Technical Cooperation, college librarians attended 81st IFLA World Library and Information Congress in South African in 2015. College libraries are now members of the Consortium of Uganda University Libraries and Uganda Library and Information Science Association and have attended meetings of these two very important library organisations in Uganda's LIS profession. The college librarians have attended meetings and workshops organized by these two organisations.

Originality/value – At the end of the three units training, participants were able to develop: a strategic plan for their libraries; an organogram with staffing needs and job description matching staff functions; a Library Committee for each library and with a structure unifying all the four project-support Colleges; a library action plan with due dates including deliverables and responsibilities for implementation; workflow plan and organisation of key sections of the library such as reserved and public spaces; furniture and equipment inventory (assets); a library manual and collection development policy; partnerships with KCCA Library and Consortium of Uganda University Libraries; skills to use Koha ILMs for performing library functions including: cataloguing, circulation, acquisitions, serials management, reporting and statistics; skills in searching library databases and information literacy skills; skills in designing simple and intuitive websites using Google Sites tools; and improved working relationship between the stakeholders was visible. To further the user-friendly libraries principle of putting users in the centre of the library's operations, support ATL methodologies and activities with emphasis on getting engaged in transforming spaces, services, outreach to users and collections the following initiatives are currently implemented in the colleges: getting approval of all library policy documents by College Governing Council, initiating job shadowing opportunities, conducting on-spot supervision, guide libraries to set up college library committees and their job description, design library websites, develop dissemination sessions for all library policies, incorporate user-friendly language in all library documents, initiate income generation activities for libraries, set terms of reference for library staff and staffing as per college organogram, procurement of library tools like DDC and library of congress subject headings (LCSH), encourage attendance to webinars and space planning for the new libraries.

Keywords Professional development, College libraries, Active teaching and learning, College librarians, Librarians mentorship, User-friendly libraries

Paper type Case study

1. Context and background

Uganda's socio-economic setting is considered highly populated and growing at 3.0 per cent annually – and is regarded among the world's highest with 47 per cent of the population less than 15 years; while 55 per cent are aged 18 years or younger [Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2016, p. 13]. Uganda's labour force is largely rural (77.2 per cent) with women taking 49.8 per cent of those engaged in subsistence farming [Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2016, p. 30]. The Education Sector Strategic Plan for the period 2003-2015 and as reviewed and adapted to cover the period 2012-2015 [Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), 2008] was focused on consolidating enrolment gains in Universal Primary Education (UPE), continuing expansion beyond primary, improving equity, improving overall governance, driving up standards and reducing wastage (Gabršcek and Gena, 2015).

Uganda's education system is structured in a hierarchical order of 7-4-2-3 and comprises of pre-primary school education of 7 years; secondary education covering 4 years of ordinary level secondary and 2 years of advanced level secondary; teacher education and business, technical and vocational education and training (BTVET) of 2 to 3 years; and tertiary education including university education for 3-5 years. Students who pass with two principle passes at advanced level secondary may choose to progress to university for bachelor's degrees or those with a minimum of one principle pass can join other tertiary institutions that award diplomas and certificates. Some tertiary institutions, like primary teachers' colleges and some nursing schools, also admit students who have only completed their ordinary level secondary education (Gabršcek and Gena, 2015).

The national vision is to use education as a basic tool for the transformation of society and for national integration and development. The vision of the Ministry of Education and Sports' is "Quality Education and Sports for All" and its mission is to "provide technical support, guide, coordinate, regulate and promote quality education and training for all persons in Uganda for national integration, development and individual enhancement". The current major education policy thrusts continue to prioritize access, equity, quality, relevance and efficiency of education service delivery in Uganda [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2010; Uganda Government. Ministry of Education and Sports (GoU. MoES. USDP), 2008]. In 1997 Universal Primary Education (UPE) was started which led to increase in total enrolments of pupils from over 3 million pupils in 1998 to about 8.6 million pupils in 2010 all enrolled in government, community and private schools. However, the focus on increasing the number of pupils attending school led to poor quality education. Thus, the BTVET colleges in Uganda had been challenged with providing education that is: relevant to economic growth, meets the quality of skills needed in the labour market and accessible and equitable, amidst challenges of organizational effectiveness and financial and internal efficiency [Uganda Government. Ministry of Education and Sports (GoU. MoES. USDP), 2008]. As a result of these limitations, the old BTVET education system failed to produce the appropriately skilled workforce that Uganda requires to increase income and employment and to compete internationally. The colleges failed to deliver training commensurate to the required standards and few students access the training (Okinyal, 2012).

To address the above challenges and increase uptake of the increasing number of pupils leaving primary schools and ordinary level secondary schools, the universal post primary education and training (UPPET) and universal post O-level education and training (UPOLET) were launched and led to the development and expansion of BTVET hence leading to establishment of the BTVET act of 2008 (Okinyal, 2012). With technical and financial support from the World Bank and the Kingdom of Belgium, the Ministry of Education and Sports developed the BTVET 10-year strategic plan that operationalized the

staffing as per college organogram, procurement of library tools like DDC and library of congress subject headings (LCSH), encourage attendance to webinars and space planning for the new libraries.

6. Conclusion

Detailed programme to follow-up with the action plans from the training to ensure sustainability of the skills acquired by the trainees is currently being implemented. The follow-up action plan will build on the existing resources and demand result oriented actions from the college librarians. Based on the progress so far made, there is no doubt that the college librarians and the entire stakeholders have the capacity to cause change in their libraries. What needs to be done now is to keep motivating college librarians through a well laid out action points as a guide under the supervision of a professional. If given the required support from college management and the Ministry, it is hoped that these libraries are on the right trajectory not only in supporting active teaching and learning but also positively influencing the change in the communities around them. In a future article we hope to report on the implementation plans including progress with seizing the achievements. The future article will address issues of approval of library manual, library collection development policy by the College Council, constitution of a library committee, implementation of the library organogram, weeding policy and action plan, establishment of college library consortium, creation of income generating activities for the college library, implementation of Koha integrated management system, library website design, job shadowing practices, support supervision, participation in CUUL and ULIA, library spaces and user-friendly libraries.

References

- Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) (2017), "Business, technical, vocational education and training: Uganda BTVET-portal", available at: www.btvvet-uganda.org (accessed September 2017).
- East African Standard (EAS) (1922), *The Red Book 1922-23: Handbook and Directory for Kenya Colony and Protectorate, Uganda Protectorate, Tanganyika Territory, and Zanzibar Sultanate*, East African Standard, Nairobi.
- Endra, C.J. (2002), "Public and school libraries in Uganda", Proceedings of the PanAfrican PanArab Conference on Public and School Libraries, *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Netherlands*.
- Gabrscek, S. and Gena, G. (2015), *Improving the Training of BTVET Technical Teachers/Instructors and Health Tutors, and Secondary Teachers (TTE): Uganda Mid-Term Report, for Belgium Technical Cooperation and Government of Uganda*, Ministry of Education and Sports, Kampala.
- Government of Uganda (Nat. Lib. Act) (2003), (GoU. Nat. Lib. Act, 2003) The National Library Act, 2003, Government of Uganda, UPPC, Entebbe.
- Government of Uganda. (GoU.BTVET Act) (2008), "Business, technical, vocational education and training act 2008, The Uganda Gazette, 37, Acts Supplement No. 7", available at: <https://www.ulii.org/> (accessed 24 September 2017).
- Government of Uganda. Education Act (GoU. Edu. Act) (2008), The Education Act, 13 (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act 2008, The Uganda Gazette, 44 (Acts Supplement No. 8), Government of Uganda, UPPC, Entebbe.
- Government of Uganda. Ministry of Education (GoU.MoES) (2012), "The BTVET strategic plan 2012/13 - 2021/22: skilling Uganda", available at: www.education.go.ug/data/smenu/16/BTVET.html (accessed September 2017).

- Kawalya, J. (2009), "The National Library of Uganda: its inception, challenges and prospects, 1997-2007", Doctoral dissertation, Institutionen Biblioteks-och informationsvetenskap/Bibliotekshögskolan Högskolan i Borås och Göteborgs universitet), available at: www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:876932/FULLTEXT01.pdf
- Kigongo-Bukenya, I.M.N. (1990), "Combatting illiteracy in Uganda through the public library services", *Information and Libraries in the Developing World*, Library association, London, pp. 124-133.
- Kinengyere, A.A. (2007), "The effect of information literacy on the utilization of electronic information resources in selected academic and research institutions in Uganda", *The Electronic Library*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 328-341.
- Lugya, F.K. and Weech, T. (2015), "Library's role in overcoming barriers to information flow in East African community", *International Journal of Library Science*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 1-11, available at: www.ceser.in/ceserp/index.php/ijls/article/view/3499
- Makerere University (Mak.) (2012), "Makerere University: historical background", available at: <http://mak.ac.ug/about/historical-background> (accessed October 2012).
- Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) (2008), "Revised education sector strategic plan 2007-2015, Kampala", available at: www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/92144/107158/F231568736/UGA92144.pdf (accessed September 2017).
- Okinyal, H.F. (2012), "Reforming the business, technical, vocational education and training (BTVET) sub-sector: challenges, opportunities and prospects", paper presented to the Uganda Vice-Chancellor's forum (UVCF) (accessed September 2017).
- Otiike, J. (2004), "The development of libraries in Kenya", *Innovation*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 1-8.
- Uganda Association of Private Vocational Institutions (UGAPRIVI) (2017), "Uganda association of private vocational institutions: about us", available at: www.ugaprivi.org/ (accessed September 2017).
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2016), "2016 statistical abstract", available at: www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/statistical_abstracts/2016%20Statistical%20Abstract.pdf (accessed September 2017).
- Uganda Community Libraries Association (UCLA) (2017), "Uganda community libraries association: home", available at: <https://espenj.wordpress.com/> (accessed 9 September 2017).
- Uganda Government. Ministry of Education and Sports (GoU. MoES. USDP) (2008), "Uganda skills development project", available at: [www.education.go.ug/data/smenu/76/UGANDA%20SKILLS%20DEVELOPMENT%20PROJECT%20\(USDP\).html](http://www.education.go.ug/data/smenu/76/UGANDA%20SKILLS%20DEVELOPMENT%20PROJECT%20(USDP).html) (accessed September 2017).
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2010), "World data on education = Donnees mondiales de l'education = Datos mundiales de educacion, 7th Ed. 2010/11: Uganda", available at: www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Uganda.pdf (accessed September 2017).

Corresponding author

Fredrick Kiwuwa Lugya can be contacted at: flugya@gmail.com