

Chapter 10

Access to and Usage of E-Resources in Selected Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses the usage of e-resources in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. It identifies how electronic resources are acquired, determines the factors influencing the usage of e-resources, and assesses how e-resources are managed and disseminated. The chapter also investigates the efficiency of the Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries in enhancing accessibility and usage of e-resources. The study employed a survey in data collection where face-to-face interviews and online surveys were used. Collected data was analysed through content analysis. The study found that all higher learning institutions in Tanzania had Internet connectivity, thus providing an opportunity for usage of online and offline resources. It was found that the usage of e-resources was influenced by users' attitudes, preference and searching skills, funds for e-resources subscription, Internet connectivity, and electric power. It is recommended for higher learning institutions to invest in ICTs infrastructure and support the current trends of subscription and usage of e-resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have changed the way information resources are stored and disseminated. ICTs are used for data storage and they facilitate the communication and exchange of information by electronic means. Most higher learning institutions in developing countries including Tanzania have basic Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure for storage and provision of electronic resources (e-resources). E-resources are also known to provide access to information, which is more current, can be accessible by multiple users at a time, can be used by people separated by distance, and can be easily manipulated. Dadzie (2005) added that e-resources increase accessibility of information that would otherwise be restricted to specific geographical location.

E-resources have some advantages over print resources. Some of the advantages of e-resources include improved accessibility, ease of retrieval, and additional hyperlinks to outside contents (Sarasvady and Khatri, 2007). Dadzie (2005) gave a good description of some of the e-resources that are freely available, easily utilized and made available for users before the print version. Despite the potential of e-resources in timely meeting the information needs among members of higher learning institutions in developing countries. Several studies in Tanzania and elsewhere have showed that the usage of e-resources in most developing countries is still low when compared to the usage trend of developed countries. (Achonna, 2008; Manda and Nawe, 2008).

This chapter assesses the usage of e-resources in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The chapter identifies how electronic resources are acquired by libraries among higher learning institutions; identifies the factors influencing the usage of e-resources among communities in higher learning institutions and determines how e-resources are managed and disseminated. The

chapter also assesses the efficiency of the Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries (COTUL) in enhancing the accessibility and usage of e-resources among member institutions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Information and Communication Technologies in Higher Learning Institutions

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be defined as the techniques, methods and tools used to manipulate, manage, access and communicate information. The phrase is equally used to refer to applications of computer and Internet, which are used for collection, processing, storage, and dissemination of information resources. The usage of ICTs can be acknowledged from all aspects of man's life. In supporting the argument, Emmanuel and Sife (2008) presented the positive effects of ICTs in various sectors including business, production, education, politics, governance, culture and other aspects of human life. In the educational sector, ICTs are used for teaching, learning and research purposes. This is possible as ICTs have capacities to create/collect and manipulate data, store and share information resources. The technologies are also used for accessing stored information from electronic storage devices.

ICTs have influenced the way people access information. In the education sector, ICTs are commonly used for instructional activities. For instance, in developed countries these technologies are adopted from primary to higher education. In developing countries, the technologies are mainly accessible and applied in higher education. Moreover, ICTs and information hubs for higher learning institutions in developing countries are libraries. In fact, it is a prerequisite for each of the higher learning institutions to have a library for supporting teaching-learning process to be accredited. In libraries, ICTs are used for acquisition, storage and

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