

The Status of College Librarians: A Case Study of Tanzania

By

Rochus Oswald Matefu

M.A. (Information Studies), University of Dar es Salaam, (2002)

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to find out why college librarians in Tanzania were accorded low status and how this impacted on their job performance and satisfaction. In particular, the study sought to determine the role of college librarians in Tanzania and, consequently, the factors leading to low status of these librarians in higher education institutions. Further, the study aimed at identifying factors that might enhance the status of those librarians so that they could be recognised as occupying the rightful place in academic institutions.

The key variables in this study were 'low status of college librarians' as a dependent variable, and 'education', 'role', 'categorisation of academic librarians', 'accreditation', 'marginalisation' and the 'Tanzania Library Association' as independent variables. 'Low status' was measured by way of facts which were revealed by respondents in accordance with the questions or indicators listed in the measuring instruments. Such facts included: low pay, exclusion from certain decision-making organs, minimal budget allocation for library development, etc. 'Education' was measured by noting each staff's educational and professional qualifications.

The nominal, interval and ratio scales were used and, in rare occasions, the ordinal scale was used. A questionnaire was used for measuring views of administrative, faculty and library personnel as well as students. Indeed, this research relied considerably upon multiple sources of information. The study was conducted at three colleges — Institute of Development Management, Mzumbe in Morogoro, Institute of Finance Management in Dar es Salaam, and Co-operative College Moshi in Kilimanjaro. These institutions were chosen because they were all Grade B academic institutions offering courses at Advanced Diploma and Master's professional qualifications. The institutions were considered representative of the then existing colleges in Tanzania.

The research was conducted during the month of January through March 2001. Prior to the main survey, a pre-test of the instruments was conducted at the University of Dar es Salaam involving M.A students and staff. Findings from the pilot study became the basis for revising the research instruments.

In this study, the significance of information was explained in detail including the functions of a college library and librarians. The impact of new information technologies on the roles of college libraries and librarians was also discussed.

A review of literature showed that most college librarians had no academic status. Vroom's 'Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy' theory and Adam's 'Equity' were used to explain why academic status for college librarians was important.

A combination of methods was used to collect data for this research including a questionnaire, direct observation and face-to-face interviews. This combination was considered appropriate in order to ensure validity and reliability. Seventy-five (25 at each institution) randomly selected respondents from three selected institutions participated in this study. They included librarians, lecturers, administrative staff and students.

Sampling frames were sought from each of the three colleges using Staff lists. Names of respondents were selected from various departments using proportionate Stratified sampling. All units were fairly represented in the final sample. The proportion of the units in each department was found in respect of the total list and then calculations were made to get the sample size for each department. For students, the proportion of units was per each course.

Primary data were collected through a standard questionnaire which was administered to each of the selected respondents by the researcher personally. The questionnaire was structured consisting of both open and close-ended questions. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with Principals and Directors in the three institutions. The purpose was to seek their personal views on various policy issues including academic status of college librarians.

In addition, physical observations were made in actual library service settings in the three institutions. The purpose was to alleviate limitations in other data collection techniques. The exercises were systematically planned because a definite period of time was spent in observing the library units in each institution. The average time taken for the observation ranged from two to three hours for two days in each institution. A form was designed in which to record starting time, client's status, sex, service sought in the library, patterns of behaviour shown while in the library and time of leaving the library. Both obtrusive (where units being observed were informed) and unobtrusive observations (where the observed units of analysis were not informed of what was taking place in the library) were conducted. Those observed constituted the sample of all observations that could take place. This was an uncontrolled exercise because it was done in a natural setting so as to monitor the behaviour of clients as they interacted with librarians.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in data analysis. Data were analysed using multivariate descriptive analysis as well as inferential descriptive statistics using SPSS. This was because the first type could provide a profile of the three institutions under the study. The study entailed more than two variables. The process involved classification of raw data into usable categories, editing, coding, tabulation and manipulation of data using computer. Relationships among research questions were tested for their significance to determine the validity of the data prior to testing the hypotheses so that variations could be sufficiently explained.

According to the study, librarians were being marginalised and accorded low status despite the fact that they played dual roles both as educators and information specialists in supporting the mission and objectives of their colleges. This attitude could be attributed to several factors. Low level of education was one of the factors. This was primarily because, in the post-independence era, people who joined librarianship were not highly educated. However, even when later most librarians were university graduates, the poor image persisted. The understanding among most top administrators in the studied colleges was that the key functions of librarians were only to lend and shelve books. The study observed that most of the librarians who participated in this study were highly dissatisfied with jobs and conditions of services.

Some of the recommendations put forth by this study include the following:

- College librarians should strive to pursue further studies to enhance their academic proficiency;
- College librarians should consider the possibility of creating their own professional association where they discuss issues of mutual interests and concerns;
- The scheme of service to college librarians should be reviewed to motivate librarians so that they could improve performance;
- College librarians should be more aggressive in marketing their profession in order to improve their image and also create awareness among various users of their services;
- Professional librarians should be fully involved in college governance, curriculum development and teaching; and

There was need to improve collaboration between college librarians and the college teaching staff.