Examination of Virtual Library and Information Services for Enhanced Provision and Utilization at Makerere and Uganda Christian Universities

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Technological advancements, innovations and research have affected traditional libraries significantly, engendering 21st-century users who are less inclined to physically visit the library but instead rely on alternative sources of information such as Google from their convenient locations. In order to effectively adapt to the technologically driven academic landscape and fulfil their mandate of information provision, libraries should consider adopting Virtual Library and Information Services (VLIS) as the most feasible approach. Despite the numerous benefits it offers, such as timely and convenient access to a wide range of current electronic resources, the adoption and implementation of VLIS remains limited. The study purposed to examine VLIS at Makerere and UCU in order to propose areas of intervention for enhancing VLIS in University libraries in Uganda. Adopting a pragmatic research paradigm and mixed methods approach, data was collected from library users and staff, using a semi-structured questionnaire and interview guide. Quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS software while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings established that Makerere and UCU provide VLIS albeit with low levels of utilization. Out of the 18 VLIS offered at the two universities, only two; the library website and e-resources scored 68% and 60% respectively, with the rest scoring below 40% in terms of utilization. The study further established that the faculty perception was negative and they exhibited a general lack of interest in VLIS. Majority of librarians too, were reluctant to participate in VLIS activities, with their skills largely lacking. The study concluded that the existing environment facilitates VLIS provision and utilization to a limited extent. This is due to the findings which indicated inadequacy of relevant policy framework, inadequate funding and staffing, insufficient ICT infrastructure, poor information literacy (IL) skills, password hindrances and subscription frustrations, competition from non-library gateways, poor internet connectivity, power outages, high cost of e-resources, technophobia as well as copyright and licensing challenges. The study among others recommended modification of the IoDeL of the universities to consider VLIS provision, integration of active links of e-resources in students' reading lists so as to directly involve the faculty, a media monitoring room to assist users as they browse library e-resources, zero rating on all library websites/databases to cut internet cost, incorporation of IL into the university curriculum, involving all library staff in VLIS provision, capacity building and full integration of VLIS in all library activities. A framework was also proposed for VLIS enhancement.

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