



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Mitigating Space and Resource Materials Constraints Using 24/7 Service: A Case Study of Nkumba University Library

Dr. Robinah Kalemeera Namuleme

Librarian, Nkumba University, Entebbe, East Africa, Uganda

Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether 24/7 library service can be used to mitigate space and resource materials constraints facing academic libraries the developing world.

Design/methodology/approach Mixed methods approaches, involving generation of descriptive qualitative and quantitative data was employed.

Findings: Results indicate that 24/7 services are in very high demand because the service allows users the opportunity to share the limited library space and resource materials. Although the university pays extra load to staff for the provision of this service, the cost of providing the service is not terribly high when compared the benefits derived there from.

Originality/value: The paper highlights the ways in which resource constraints can be addressed by innovatively providing 24/7 library services in the developing world.

Keywords: Academic libraries, library facilities, library users, space utilization, Uganda

1. Introduction

Nkumba University is a private university in Entebbe, Uganda. It was established in 1994 as part of a group of schools and colleges which originally grew from a kindergarten set up in 1951. The vision of Nkumba University is to provide quality education that cultivates competence, confidence, creativity, and high moral character in teaching, learning, research and community engagement. The mission of Nkumba University is to be a leading nation, regional and global hub of academic excellence.

On the other hand the vision of Nkumba University library is to provide access to the world's knowledge in order to enhance the position of Nkumba University as a centre of academic excellence, while the Mission is to plan, avail and facilitate access to a broad spectrum of information resources and services in an outstanding learning environment, with friendly and expert help.

Nkumba University Library operates in a resource constrained environment with an allocation of only three percent (3/100) of the university budget yet the National Council for Higher Education provides for ten percent (10/100) of the university budget. This has resulted in inadequate space, resource materials and ICT facilities and consequently users compete for these resources. For example Nkumba University library that serves a clientele of 6,920 users of can only accommodate 373 users at a seating. Thus it is not an over statement to say that library's capacity is way below the standards of the National Council for Higher Education (2005) which requires the library to provide seating for $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population – that is $6920 * \frac{1}{4}$ – which comes to 1730 users at a seating.

The resource constraints are also exhibited in the fact that although the library subscribes to e-resources, inadequate bandwidth makes information retrieval, including downloading of full text articles a daunting task.

In addition, the library an EZproxy to facilitate access to library resources from remote locations. This state of affairs implies that library users need to access the library in order to use both print and electronic resource materials.

While University libraries are an integral part of the education system charged with the provision of support services not only for courses of formal and informal education but also for those geared to research and the generation of new knowledge in the universities as postulated by Allen (1982), Nkumba university faces space, resource materials and ICT constraints which undermines its capacity to carry out its mandate. In the light of the above, 24/7 library service innovation was developed.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether 24/7 library service can be used to mitigate space and resource materials constraints facing academic libraries the developing world, taking Nkumba University as the case study.

3. Methodology

Mixed methods approaches, involving generation of descriptive qualitative and quantitative data was employed.

The main methods employed to generate data on the 24/7 library service included

- I. Review of the usage statistics from 11:00 pm -7:00am for period October –December, 2013
- II. Review of the university expenditure on extra load to facilitate the 24/7 service for the period October –December, 2013
- III. Conducting a user survey in February, 2014

Descriptive analysis involving the analysis of one variable; that is, Univariate Analysis was applied to the quantitative data.

This entailed counting the frequency of responses, grouping responses into categories, presenting these frequencies in graphical form and calculating measures of central tendency.

On the other hand, qualitative data was coded and collated into categories. Verbatim quotations were employed for triangulation purposes.

4. Findings

This section presents findings of the evaluation of the 24/7 library service under the following headings:

- I. staffing and financial implications;
- II. Usage of the 24/7 service
- III. Users perception about the 24/7 service

4.1. Staffing and financial implications of the 24/7 service

This section discusses the staffing financial implications for providing library services from 11:00pm to 7:00am. The service was provided using the existing staff who expressed interest to work at night. Each shift consisted of an Assistant Librarian, a Library assistant and a Library Attendant. The staffs were paid according to seniority and responsibility as shown below:

Assistant Librarian 30,000/=per night

Library Assistant 25,000/= per night

Library attendant 15,000/= per night.

Table 1 below provides a summary financial implications for providing the 24/7 library service, particularly the night shift.

| Designation | Number of staff | Rate per night in Uganda Shillings |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Assistant librarian | 1 | 30,000/= |
| Library assistant | 1 | 25,000/= |
| Library attendant | 1 | 20,000/= |

Table 1: Staffing and financial requirements for the night shift

The analysis of data revealed that the university paid Uganda Shillings 4,725,000 in extra load for staff who worked on the night shift for the period October – December, 2013. Table 3 below provides the breakdown of the expenditure.

| Date/month | Expenditure |
|--|-------------|
| 21 st -31 st , October, 2013 | 890,000/= |
| 1 st -26 th November, 2013 | 2,260,000/= |
| 27 th – 15 th December, 2013 | 1,575,000/= |

Table 2: Expenditure on the 24/7 project for the period October –December 2013

The average expenditure was obtained by summing up the expenditure in the period October to December 2013 and dividing it with the number of months as follows:

$$890000+2,260,000+ 1,575,000 =4725000/=$$

Therefore the mean expenditure for the period October to December 2013 is:

$$4725000/3 =1,575,000/=$$

Table 2 above as well as the computations of the mean expenditure revealed that the university paid an average of 1,575,000/= per month towards the 24/7 library service for the period October-December 2013.

Given that the core business of the library is to support teaching, learning and research activities of the university, payment of extra load worth 1,575,000/= per month towards the 24/7 service is a worthwhile expenditure because the service not only allows for equitable access to and use of library space and resource materials but it provides students with an opportunity to study and carry out research at their convenience.

The service was provided using the existing staff thus it did not require recruitment of extra human resources.

4.2. Usage of the 24/7 Library Service

This section presents data on the usage of the 24/7 service that was generated from the usage statistics.

4.2.1. Usage Statistics from 11:00 pm -7:00am

The usage statistics for the night shift provided useful insights about the 24/7 service. Table 1 below provides a summary of usage statistics for the period October-December 2013.

| Month | Number of users |
|---|-----------------|
| 21 st -31 st October,2013 | 448 |
| 1 st -30 th November,2013 | 2718 |
| 1 st -15 th December,2013 | 1404 |

Table 2: Library Usage Statistics for the Night Shift for the Period October –December, 2013

Table 2 above indicates that the number of users who visited the library from 11:00pm-7:00am grew steadily from 448 users in October, 2718 users in November to 1404 users in December 2013. The above finding indicates that the service was perceived to be useful.

4.2.2. Survey of the user's perception of the 24/7 service

In addition to obtaining usage statistics a user survey was conducted in February 2014. The aim in so doing was to establish user perceptions about the 24/7 library service. A questionnaire consisting both closed-ended and open-ended questions was administered for a period of two weeks in February 2014.

4.2.3. General Information about the Sample: Gender Distribution

A total 250 questionnaires were administered out of which 187 were returned. Of the 187 respondents, 66 were female while 119 were male and 2 never indicated their gender.

Table 3 below provides for the gender distribution of respondents.

| Gender | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Female | 66 |
| Male | 119 |
| Gender not specified | 2 |
| Total | 187 |

Table3: Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution above suggests that the male users are more likely to use the library during the night shift as compared to their female counterparts. The above result suggests the need to assure female students that their safety can be guaranteed.

4.2.4. Distribution of the Population by Category

The two main categories of respondents were students and staff. Of the 187 questionnaires that were returned, 177 were filled by students while 07 were filled by staff while 3 did not indicate their category. Table 4 below provides the distribution of respondents by category.

| Category | Frequency |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Students | 177 |
| Staff | 07 |
| Category not specified | 03 |
| Total | 187 |

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Category

The data in table 4 above suggest that the 24/7 is predominantly popular among students than staff.

4.3 Rating of the 24/7 Library Service

The analysis of data revealed that users attach a lot of importance to the 24/7 service.

Table 5 below provides a summary of findings regarding the importance users attach to the 24/7 library service.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very Important | 127 | 67.91 |
| Important | 33 | 17.65 |
| somehow important | 10 | 5.35 |
| Not important | 8 | 4.28 |
| Don't Know | 9 | 4.81 |
| Total | 187 | 100 |

Table 5: Respondents' Rating of the 24/7 Service

From table 5 above, 127 respondents rated the service to be very important, 33 rated it important, 10 thought it was somewhat important while 9 did not know.

The pie chart below was employed to visualise the importance library users attach to the 24/7 service.

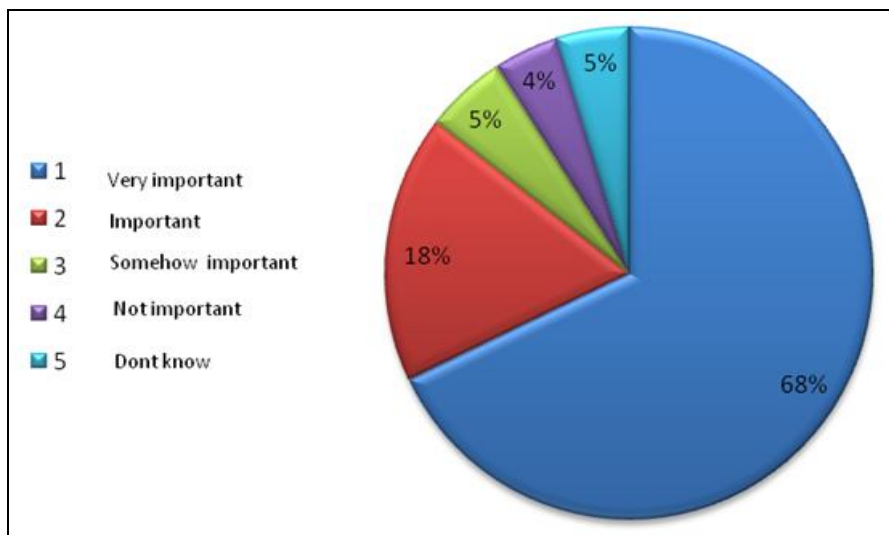


Figure 1: Respondents' rating of the 24/7 service

Table 5 and figure 1 above revealed that 68% of the respondents perceived the service very important, 18% perceived it to be important, 5% perceived to be somewhat important while 4% did not perceive to be important and 5% did not know.

The importance users attach to the 24/7 service suggest that this service plays a great role in mitigating the challenges posed by resource constraints in the library.

4.4. Schedule for the 24/7 service

The respondents were also requested to give their opinion as whether the service should be provided throughout the semester, during exams only or discontinued. The respondents were also given an option to say no or indicate if they did not know. In addition they were given an opportunity to provide reasons for their responses. Table 1 below provides a summary of the responses regarding the resumption of the 24/7 service.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| All semester | 150 | 80.2 |
| During exams only | 16 | 8.6 |
| Not at all | 17 | 9.1 |
| Don't know | 4 | 2.1 |
| Total | 187 | 100 |

Table 6: Schedule of the 24/7 Service

The figure 2 below visualises the respondents' opinions regarding resuming the 24/7 service.

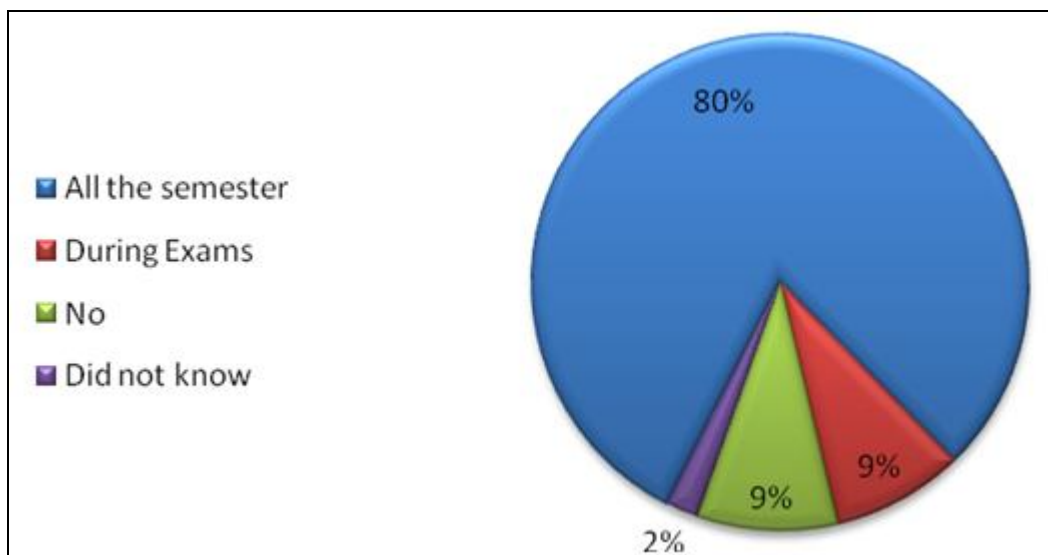


Figure 2: Respondents' opinion on resuming the 24/7 service

Figure 2 and Table 6 above indicate that 80% of respondents who took part in the survey suggested that the 24/7 service should be provided throughout the semester, 9% suggested that it should be offered during exam only, 9% indicated that it should not be offered at all while 2% did not know. The fact that the majority of the respondents, that is, 80% suggested that the service should be provided throughout the semester, confirms that the 24/7 greatly contributes to the alleviation of the challenges posed by resource constraints that libraries and library users may face. For instance problems of the slow bandwidth are reduced as the link is a lot faster at night than during day time. Similarly users are saved from paying exorbitant prices to Internet Cafes in order to access the Internet.

In addition to the descriptive statistics, verbatim quotations from open ended interviews were employed to corroborate the role of the 24/7 library service in mitigating the challenges posed by resource constraints.

The common themes that run through most of the respondents' opinions as to why they perceived the 24/7 service useful included affording flexibility and convenience for students on varied programmes, including day, evening and weekend programmes.

The 24/7 service was particularly perceived to be a feasible innovation in a resource constrained context – where the demand for resource materials exceed the supply. For instance one respondent reported that:

“It reduces congestion of students since some books are few and are on high demand” [student]

The analysis of data also revealed that the 24/7 service provides an environment that facilitates teaching, learning and research, particularly for non-resident students whose residences do not provide facilities for private study:

“Tilpat Hostel area which was gazetted as a reading room has no seats and lights” [non-resident student]

The service was rated high because of the convenience it affords library users. For instance, working students, as well as those who may want to use the library at different times:

“Some of us prefer reading at different hours let's say at night and some during day time.” [Student]

“It helps people who don't have time to read during the day” [Student].

“Early morning hours/time helps to conceptualize material covered on the previous day.” [Student]

The analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data has revealed that in contexts where library resources are inadequate, and where the library users may not be in position to pay for private services like the internet or even be able to access outside the campus due to lack of Ezyproxy, provision of 24/7 library services can go a long way in mitigating the challenges posed by resource constraints.

4.5. Discussion of Findings

The findings on the usage of the 24/7 library service suggest that this service is an invaluable innovation that does not only facilitate access to library resources at all times but facilitates optimal use of the limited library resources. The finding is corroborated by (Cocciolo, 2010) who suggested that scarcity of physical collaboration spaces does not lead users to library-provided virtual space, but rather to work around the scarcity in the physical world. This finding emphasizes the need to be able to proactively provide library services in a manner that does not limit access to and use of library resources. This paper suggests that such opportunities can best be achieved through the 24/7 library service provision.

The findings on the staffing and financial implications of the service suggest an investment of an average of Uganda shillings 1,500,000/= to facilitate the provision of the 24/7 service is worthwhile the investment, particularly when compared to the benefits that are accrued from the 24/7 library service discussed above.

The finding that fewer women used the library during the late night shift points to a need to guarantee safety for female students, particularly when they need to go home during the late night shift.

4.6. Recommendations and Conclusion

In view of the findings above, it is the view of this researcher that the 24/7 library service, should be embraced by academic libraries in the developing world to cater for students on day evening and weekend programmes to be able to promote library service provision in space and resource material constrained contexts.

This paper has demonstrated that the 24/7 service is an invaluable innovation that should be harnessed, particularly given its capacity to facilitate optimal use of library resources and also contribute towards the attainment of academic excellence at Nkumba University.

5. Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the 187 participants who took part in the survey for taking the time to complete the survey. I sincerely thank them for their feedback on the 24/7 library service.

Special thanks are extended to the library staffs who not only worked during the night shift but also meticulously recorded the usage statistic.

I am grateful to the University community for embracing the 24/7 service as well as University Management for providing moral and financial support.

6. References

1. Allen, G. G (1982) the role of the library in higher education and the implications for the external mode of study: An Australian perspective. *Higher Education* Vol. 11, Issue 5, pp 531-542
2. Cocciolo, A. (2010). Alleviating physical space constraints using virtual space? *Library Hi Tech*, 28(4), 523-535. doi:10.1108/07378831011096204
3. The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, Act No.7 of 2001 (2005 No. 85.) Entebbe: UPPC