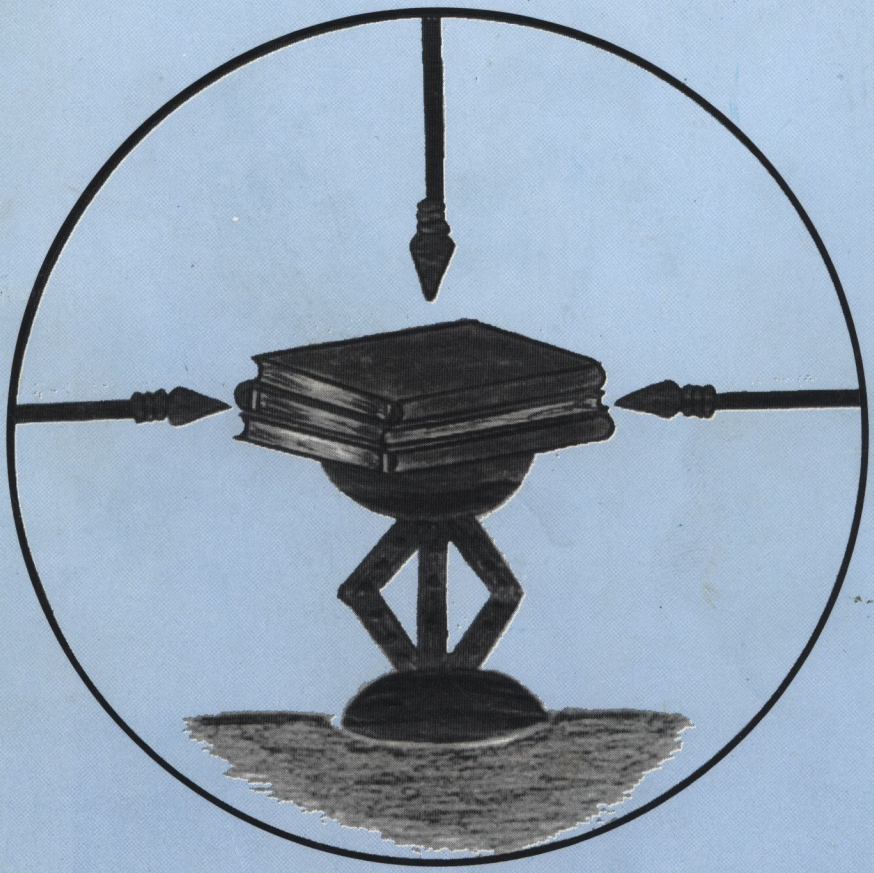
Mayasanino aa Busongo

Summit of knowledge



Charles Lwanga College of Education Journal
January 2009 VOL. 1 No. 1

THE FUNCTIONS AND ROLES OF COLLEGE LIBRARIES IN FORMING GOOD TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

A library in a college of education contributes to the attainment of the goals of the system that make it an integral component. The library like other components of the education system plays a unique role in the formation of good teachers. Recognising the pivotal role that libraries play in colleges, Kantumoya observed that:

Libraries are regarded as essential component(s) or the backbone of an education system in any society. The library is the centre of intellectual activity in an academic institution .This is so because the library is central to the learning process. It is in the library that students will explore and develop their ideas beyond what they learn in class. In other words the library should be integrated in the education system" [1]

From the views expressed above, it can be stated that the general purpose of a college library is to support the activities of the college through the provision of requisite information materials to its users with a view to attaining the goals of the education system. This article focuses on the functions and the roles college libraries play in forming good teachers and my experience with students regarding the use of the library at Charles Lwanga College.

Functions of a College Library

What are the functions of a college library? Shonga outlined the functions of a college library in a teacher training college as:

To supply books, periodicals and other information materials needed by students in all subjects of study.

To provide support for teaching and research for members of staff.

To provide for a wide range of background reading books and periodicals in related subjects.

To meet specialised needs of a college which arise naturally out of its specialists and interests by building up appropriate collections to satisfy the intense demand by students in their special studies using library stocks and to provide bibliographical guidance by library staff.

To help with the day to day needs of users by supplying them with ready reference information such as, statistics or addresses, special material about the locality and the environments in which teaching practice takes place.

To provide bibliographical training for the use of books and libraries necessary to help students find their way about the literature of their subjects and to enable them to become familiar with the use of books and other materials in their teaching.

To provide bibliographical training for the use of books and libraries necessary to help students find their way about the literature of their subjects and to enable them to become familiar with the use of books and other materials in their teaching.

To provide guides, lists of additions, reading lists and other publications, and to hold displays and exhibitions of library books in order to reinforce the teaching of the college staff and illustrate the library's resources.[2]

Qualities of a Good Teacher

It is cardinal to outline the qualities of a good teacher before discussing the role of college libraries in the formation of good teachers. Samy in his article "The qualities of a good teacher: how can they be acquired and sustained"[3] advanced the following qualities:

Committed to the work

Encourages and appreciates diversity
Interacts and communicates respectfully.
Motivates students and co-workers
Brings a wide range of skills and talents to teaching
Demonstrates leadership in teaching
Encourages an open and trusting learning environment
Fosters critical thinking
Encourages creative work
Seeks continually to improve teaching skills
Emphasises team work
Provides positive feedback and helps people to grow

The question that arises is, "How does a college library fit in the education system and secondly, how does it contribute to the formation of good teachers?" The mission of a college library is and should be closely linked to the mission of the parent institution or system. The role of the college library is to offer learning services, books and information resources that enable all members of the college community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. The library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to developing critical, analytical and independent thinkers. The library equips students with life long learning skills and develops their imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens.

Therefore, the role of college libraries in teacher education can be seen from two angles:

(1) Provide access to information in a variety of formats for research, teaching and learning purposes through identification, selection, acquisition, processing, organisation, storage and dissemination; and

(2) Promote and facilitate use of information through teaching of information literacy skills to users.

1. **Providing Access to Information**
Identification and Selection

Knowledge of the curriculum and programmes offered at a particular institution of learning or educational level is important in the selection of relevant materials or sources of information. The library in the college of education plays a major role in the identification and selection of information materials. This is followed by acquisition process. Materials are acquired through purchase, donations and exchange.

Material Processing

When a college library receives the materials, they are accessioned, catalogued and classified. Products of processing include accession list, catalogue and indexes. All these tools aid in identifying what is available on what subject in the library collection. During material processing, certain information is repackaged and presented in a format that allows access to facts without doing a lot of reading.[4] In education, guidance to materials in itself equals teaching.

Organising and Storage of Materials

Material processing is followed by organising information materials on shelves, cabinets or other facilities (Web Pages) to provide for easier browsing and retrieval of information/documents. Materials are organised in a way that promotes discovery and relationships of knowledge.[5]

Information materials are not just organised and stored; the library ensures that the existence of information resources and services are known to potential as well as actual users through Current Awareness Service (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI). Other methods of awareness include display of newly acquired materials where they can be seen by users.

Evaluation

College libraries from time to time evaluate the relevance of the holdings and services in relation to current needs and technological environment. Evaluation of the library holdings and services result in weeding unwanted and outdated materials from the collection and replacing them with current materials and

services relevant to curricula. Secondly, evaluation results in improving or introducing new services and products to meet changing needs and expectations. One good example is Charles Lwanga College Library that has launched a new product called E -learning to meet the needs of its users. All the above put together will result in the institution producing good teachers.

2. Teaching Reading and Information Literacy Skills.

The role of college libraries in formation of good teachers can also be seen from the promotion and facilitation of use of information through teaching information literacy skills to the library users. Libraries advise and guide students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information.[5] This is done through user education and library orientation. User education in a library setting is the sum total of all the ways whether formal or informal meant to bring about development in peoples' attitudes, abilities and knowledge relating to libraries and their services. It involves giving detailed instructions of the modern tools employed in libraries. The aim of user education is to explain the mechanisms of information and to teach users how to exploit the resources available. Why user education? Libraries are among the institutions that provide information. However, for people to make full use of the information contained, they need to understand how information is organised and how to retrieve it.

Some library users do not and cannot determine the type of information they need and use it to their best advantage. The college librarian serves as an intermediary link between complex masses of information and the specific individual needs of the users.[6]

Therefore, user education in colleges of education is a continuous process, starting from the time students enter the college to the time they complete their studies. During user education programme, students are taught how to carry out what is called literature search. Literature search means going through various sources of information such as catalogues, databases, bibliographies, indexes, periodicals, books, newsletters, CD-ROMs, e-mail and the internet. The students carrying out literature search are reminded to note the following:

What subject areas the information material they are looking for must cover.
How information is to be used; this will affect the type of information material.
What format is preferred (for example, articles, books, videos).
What time span the material should cover. This helps students to know what format of materials to search for.
How soon the information is required.
Who the material is for. Knowledge of who the material is for enables students to decide whether to look for materials written in technical or non-technical language, or whether to look for illustrated materials.

The other way the college library helps students find the information they need is through reference interviews. Reference interview is a process of finding out what the user wants, what the user's question really is and what kind of information the user needs. Reference interview involves the user and librarian in a joint effort to resolve a problem. This is one activity that I enjoy as a librarian and it has proved to be very useful in determining what the users really want.

Current Situation

Following the interaction I have had with students, I discovered that despite students receiving the above services offered by the library, they still face two major challenges to effectively utilise the library. The first challenge is locating books they want for their assignments. Instead of searching for books using the card catalogues provided for them, students tend to search for books at random from one shelf to the other. This has proved to be very difficult and takes up more of their time and worse still very few locate books using this method. The second challenge I have observed among students is searching for specific information. Even when books are given to them, some students find it difficult to locate specific information they want. I always take my time to teach students who come to the library how to use the index and table of contents when searching for specific information, but very few use such a method.

The Root Cause of the Problem

One of the root causes of the problem is the background of most students. Students come from schools where a library is non-existent. The first point of contact with the library is when they come into college. This is evidenced by a research I conducted in eight basic schools in Kalomo District of Southern Province. No school had a library in place for pupils. All the schools I visited kept their information materials locked up in storerooms and teachers' offices where pupils had no access. As a result, most pupils come to college without library search skills. Lack of library search skills has impacted negatively on performance of some students as they spend more time searching for books in wrong places. Poor time management among students has also hindered most students from effectively utilising the library.

The other problem that has contributed to students not utilizing the services offered by the library is the poor reading culture. This has proved to be a very big challenge because the current syllabus is too academic and students tend to concentrate on the subjects that are examined. They study for passing the tests and examinations. When students have no tests and assignments, they rarely come to the library to read. The question one might ask is "who is to blame? Is it the policy makers, teachers, lecturers, librarians, parents or students themselves?" Personally I feel we are all partly to blame.

What Could be the Possible Solutions to the Problem?

I feel one of the solutions to the problem could be intensifying user education from the time students come into college to the time they complete their studies. The college syllabus must also include the teaching of library research skills. We should not assume that students have research skills as they come from high schools. There is enough evidence that this assumption has not been helpful to students. The syllabus should allow for enough time for students to cover research content, which they need to be good teachers as well as good researchers. Each class should be given some contact periods in a week for user education, where library research skills will be taught. Students also need to be taught basics about what goes on in the library circles, how the numbers they see on the spines of books are

combined. This will give an insight to students on how subjects are subdivided and grouped. Once they know this, it would be easy for them to locate the books on the shelves.

Conclusion

This article has clearly described the functions and the role college libraries play in the formation of good teachers. The article has also stated some qualities that are needed for one to be a good teacher. It has further pointed out some of the major difficulties students face in the use of the library. These include: locating information materials and searching for specific information from both books and other information materials. Lastly, the solutions to some of the problems facing students regarding the use of the library have been advanced.

Mr. Chikwekwe Nkatya is the Librarian at Charles Lwanga College of Education. His research interest lie in College libraries.