

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM USAGE AND HOW IT FACILITATES LIBRARY SERVICES AND COLLABORATIONS: A CASE OF LIBHUB USE AT SUA

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Abstract

This paper in general shares the experience, benefits and challenges learnt through the use of RMS at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA). Through the initiative and support from iAGRI (Innovative Agricultural Research Initiative), the Sokoine National Agricultural Library (SNAL) has managed to subscribe to Libhub/Kiox to manage e-resources at the university. The introduction and use of Libhub/Kiox as an information gateway helps researchers, students, staff and others in accessing e-resources from SNAL more easily and effectively. This software opened a window of success in information dissemination and use to both information professionals and users at SUA. These include issues of cooperative collection development, dissemination, partnership and collaborations, financial, technical skill and information literacy programme. Since its introduction in the mid 2014, the use of e-resources has been simplified, statistics has been available, and tracking of use of e-resources has been possible. SNAL has been also facing some challenges including electricity shortfalls; internet problems; lack of enough funds especially for marketing and publicity; and reluctance of students and staff to attend information literacy programme. The paper recommends that academic libraries should subscribe to RMS for their institutions to increase the usage of e-resources; the process which can be also done jointly as it is done on the subscription of e-resources.

Keywords: E-resources; Information Literacy; Partnership; Libhub; Resource Management Systems

1. Introduction

Sokoine National Agricultural Library (SNAL) is a University Library for the Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) as well as a National Agricultural Library for Tanzania. It was established to serve information needs of the students, staff, researchers and other groups within and outside Tanzania. The library has a collection of more than 100,000 publications mainly in agriculture. SNAL's efforts on computerization started early in 1989 when it first acquired an IBM computer through a donations from Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC). Currently, SNAL has more than 70 pieces of computers at main and Solomon Mahlangu (SMC) campuses to support access to electronic resources and other library uses.

Apart from computers, SNAL managed to purchase the Essential Electronic Agricultural Library

(TEEAL) in 1999 and upgraded to LAN TEEAL in 2008 with many of electronic resources. Currently it has adapted to WEB TEEAL which serves library users together with other electronic resources. SNAL has access to online journals most of which are jointly acquired through the Consortium of University and Research Libraries in Tanzania (COTUL) with the support from the International for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). These resources are accessed through Libhub both within SUA campuses and outside.

2. Resource Management System (RMS) and Electronic resources

Libraries especially in the academic institutions in this 21st century have to embrace the change and implement the use of electronic resources. Libraries change according to user's needs. The generation of students attending universities right now is of digital age. They have a number of gadgets and if librarians are skilled and creative in ICT use they can facilitate access of information to them and that will be of help to students' academic achievement. Most of library users currently are using mobile technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and iPad in which it is easy for them to have everything they need at hand. RMS helps to manage all subscribed and other free electronic resources in the library and enable the resources to be used effectively. SNAL has been using the RMS to manage the electronic resources and making them available for users since the mid 2014.

SNAL users have unlimited access to a lot of electronic resources including the electronic journals, e-books, databases and links from a number of providers of digital information locally and internationally. Among them includes Research 4 Life resources such as AGORA (Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture), HINARI (Access to Research in Health), OARE (Online Access to Research in the Environment), and ARDI (Access to Research for Development and Innovation); DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals); Emerald; JSTOR; Oxford University Press; SAGE; Springer and many more. Also, SNAL hosts the institutional repositories such as TaCCiRe (Tanzania Climate Change Information Repository) and SUAIR (Sokoine University of Agriculture Institutional Repository) which collects information on Climate change and SUA publications such as theses and dissertations respectively. The available electronic resources cover almost all disciplines offered at SUA.

Before the use of RMS users used to search individual database separately. By using RMS, users are able to meet their information needs by discovering information from several databases simultaneously. The system searches across all databases registered in the RMS and bring the results into a single interface. This process in turn serves time for users and makes an economic use of resources. In that case users have an extensive option of the materials compared of those who are using a single resource to access information of their choice. The practice of using RMS has enabled SNAL to improve the services provision as it is argued by Minde *et al.*, (2013) that, today a successful library is no longer only measured by the number of books or student; rather, it is more a function of how active the library is in embedding ICT utilization including digital access to literature.

2. 1 Libhub

Libhub is an electronic Library Gateway to Information and provides a single interface to discover and access the institution subscribed to and recommended information resources (Rawtani and Babbar, 2013). It is a Central Index search tool enabling true Web-Scale Discovery of resources available through the library and beyond which is enabled by the configuration of the Knowledge

Base of the RMS. This central index of resources enables researchers and students to search across all available information resources, and to locate relevant information across multiple databases through one single search interface (SemperTool, 2016). “Libhub integrates metadata from publishers, database providers, e-print archives and any institutional local information resources including the library catalogue into one central index” (SemperTool, 2013 cited in Rawtani and Babbar, 2013). Spurr (2010:16) defines Libhub as a term that can be employed to search all articles in all journal databases available at the university. Libhub initiatives have been working to solve the problem of space and invisibility faced by many libraries “through action and working to collectively understand the problem space around raising the visibility of libraries on the web” (Libhub, 2014). It “allows users complete freedom to search, access, and download full-text of resources available through all products subscribed to by the library, as well as enabling browsing, by alphabetical listing, or subject category” (SemperTool, 2016a).

Most of the electronic resources subscribed for users at SNAL have been linked and they are accessed through Libhub. Users get a single window search like Google to search the rich content of the library collection (Rawtani and Babbar, 2013), from all electronic resources available for them. Users are issued with a single username and password to have access. This has helped SNAL users to avoid the hazards of remembering username and passwords for each database and e-resources points subscribed by the university.

Since its introduction in the mid 2014, the use of e-resources has been simplified due to the fact that it has been made easier to access the resources when users are on campus and off-campus. This solves the problem reported by Ahmed’s (2013:302) study which indicated that faculty members complained failing to access e-resources from home. This is not the case at SUA because with the support of RMS users are able to access the electronic resources even when they are off campus by using their username and passwords. Apart from the issue of access, the work of librarians has been simplified as they don’t need any longer to keep the username and passwords for various subscribed databases as well as taking trouble of generating user statistics. Records of the statistics has been collected by the system and made available, including tracking of use of e-resources and failure which before was a challenge to both users and librarians.

3. Cooperative collection development

Using of RMS has shown way to have a cooperative collection development in a way that a collective purchasing can be simplified in terms of subscription. As said earlier, academic libraries have been jointly subscribing to electronic resources through COTUL with the support from INASP. The same can be done in the subscription of RMS discovery tool as it was done in other countries. For example, in Uganda the subscription for RMS-Libhub and proxy is done jointly through Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL) with the support of Maklib’s collaboration with Global Ring Network for Advanced Application Development team (GLORIAD) (Namugera and Kobusingye, 2014).

Academic libraries can have the environment to acquire more resources and that will strengthen their collection. There is a strong potential for libraries to incorporate more digital content and mixed media. The practices in traditional collection development in a way hinder those libraries with small space to build an extensive collection compared with current situation when a library uses RMS. Through libHub, SNAL users can access into more than 17,416 e-journals, 15,454,766 articles and 35,552 e-books.

4. Partnership and collaborations

Acquiring and use RMS at SNAL originate more on the philosophy of working together with others. With the help of iAGRI (a component at SUA under USAID) which also emphasize on the networking, RMS has the potential of bringing together libraries. In Tanzania SNAL is working closely with Mzumbe University (MU) where librarians and Information Technology technicians assist each other in technical issues. Still the issues of e-resources and digitization are new to many of third world countries but cannot be avoided and thus why the partnership and collaboration is important.

SNAL has continue to emphasize on the need of other librarians in universities to have knowledge on RMS specifically Libhub as to have a technical knowhow but also share on its use. Under the concept of sustainability on RMS subscription and management, SNAL in partnership with iAGRI enabled several other Tanzanian universities to attend training at their own expense to learn more about digital librarianship. Three training sessions were done together with Libhub creator and more than 20 librarians and ICT personnel from six universities were invited to learn together on its use in e-resources management and services to library users (SemperTool, 2016b). Their participation builds support for the Libhub system nationally and increases the likelihood that it will be adopted by the Consortium of Tanzanian Universities and Research Libraries (COTUL) iAGRI (2015).

5. Financial and technical skills

In order to be successful in using RMS, the respective institution needs to have sustainable financial support. Financial support is needed to pay for proxy as well as conducting various technical trainings to Librarians and IT personnel. Also, funds are required to continue marketing the resources to users in order to raise awareness and usage. SNAL is grateful to iAGRI who have supported this project so far. But also it has plan in coming budget Libhub and proxy will be included in annual budget. Discussion still underway to see if the COTUL member institutions can join together in subscription as it is done now in e-resources through INASP.

6. Information literacy program

Information literacy training is aimed at raising awareness of the RMS and the available e-resources to users so as to increase the usage of these resources. In order “to make use of electronic resources students and staff need to be aware of the existing electronic resources, appreciate their scholarly value and know how to access and search them effectively” (Harle, 2010:24). Kinengyere (2007:340) argued that Information literacy training programme should be provided in order to give more emphasis to the acquisition of learning skills which will help to generate information literate students, staff and researchers. For that case, in 2013/2014, SNAL managed to have a project on information literacy training mainly focused to postgraduates and academic staff. Almost 500 SUA community members benefited with the trainings provided during the project. This training managed to raise awareness among the students and staff and increased the usage of the electronic resources for the year 2014 as indicated in Figure 1.

SNAL has continued to market the electronic resources as well as providing information literacy training to users to increase awareness of the electronic resources available and equip them with necessary skills on using Libhub to access the resources. The training is always conducted on every Wednesday in the Library computer laboratory. Despite the fact that many staff and

students do register for these training, but not all attend to these training with various reasons for example, some staff claim that they know how to use internet so they don't need the training and some say that they have tight academic schedules and have no time for such training. This might be the cause for statistic falling in the year 2015. However, there is a convincing raise of usage of e-resources this year as the January usage statistics has raised compared to past years.

The trend of downloading indicates that there is a great use of e-resources and thus now has become part and parcel of daily academic activities. When we started using Libhub in April 2013, downloads of full-text online articles were only 304 per month as compared to 1,733 articles per month as at January 2016 (SNAL Libhub statistics, 2016). With e-resource use in libraries information literacy programs are crucial. Library users needed to be introduced to these systems so that they can enjoy accessing information wherever they are at the same time feel more close to the library. The figure indicate on downloads and thus give a clear picture on how the RMS is effective in tracking downloads and use of subscribed e-resources.

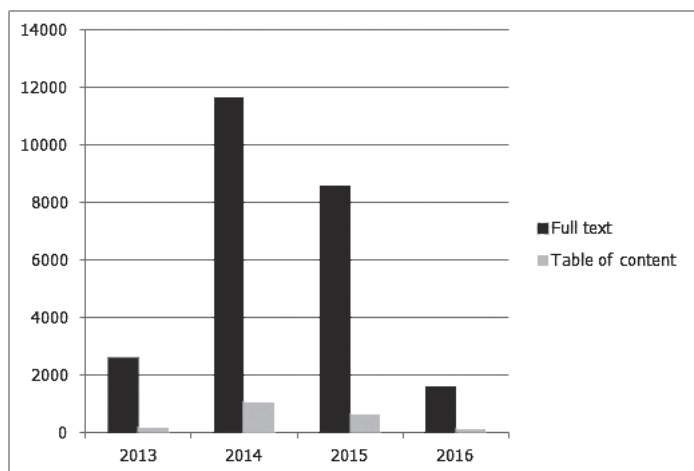


Figure 1: The trend of downloads of articles yearly.

Apart from information literacy training programmes conducted at SUA, SNAL in partnership with SemperTool and iAGRI introduced an online guide to digital librarianship website (SempeTool, 2016b). This guide has been developed with a particular focus on librarianship in the digital world and as a tool to support skills development of librarians. The site will enable librarians in developed countries to have knowledge on the various aspects on the digitization. It is important for African librarians to impart themselves in Information and Communication Technology as to have better and quality services to their users.

7. Challenges

SNAL is not free from challenges. It has been facing a number of challenges including the culture of some staff and students not being ready to participate in training until they actually in need to search for resources. For example, in one of the planned training, the participation of academic staff was lower than expected as many said they were too busy with teaching and research. However, the library has continued to encourage them by communicating with them through their faculty leaders to participate in these training as they are so useful.

Other challenges include electricity shortfalls, internet problems, and lack of enough computers and other ICT facilities; These challenges were also reported by the study by Manda (2005:280), Shija (2009), Harle (2009:14), and Agber & Agwu, (2013:274). Another challenge is lack of enough funds especially for marketing and publicity like printing leaflets, brochures, and so on. This was also reported by the study by Shija (2009), who argued that fund is always needed to market the resources, increase awareness and skills of users. The library has continued with its efforts to negotiate with sponsors like iAGRI and others to continue supporting e-resources usage and overcome these problems at SUA.

8. Conclusion

RMS uses in academic libraries are important due to the ICT use and digitization process among libraries. Libraries subscriptions on e-resources continue to grow and it is through RMS the library can manage and make effective use of them. Libraries budgets, planning and management has to give special consideration on RMS to enable not only facilitate the use and access to whom we are serving but also enable libraries to evaluate the efficiency of what it subscribe. Through RMS statistics the library can track the use on individual e-resource and decide either to stop or continue its subscription. Training among library staff and users is a continuous process since the electronic environment is not static as it used to be in traditional librarianship. Marketing and lobbying should be emphasized since libraries are used to collect millions of funds for subscription of electronic resources and library collection; using RMS is one of the effective ways to show that the funds used can bring changes in our societies by bringing libraries closer and in a 24/7 to users.

9. Recommendation

RMS software is very important in the management of electronic resources. It increases the usage of electronic resources at the university and helps the librarians to best track the statistics of usage and hence help them on planning and budgeting on what to include and not to include in the subscription procedures. Academic libraries should think of subscribing to RMS in their institutions to increase the usage of e-resources. Subscription to RMS could be jointly done or at the individual level.

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