Assessing the impact of electronic journals in the faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Zimbabwe

Jesten Marufu

University of Zimbabwe

Harare

Zimbabwe

Jesten Marufu

In its endeavor to fulfill its mandate of providing relevant and up to date information to support research and teaching at The University of Zimbabwe (UZ), the UZ Library subscribed to a number of electronic journal databases. These databases cover all subjects taught at The UZ including Veterinary Science. This paper assesses the impact that these electronic journals have had so far to the Faculty of Veterinary Science. The impact has been assessed on both the teaching staff and students. This paper will help libraries realize that merely providing the electronic journal information is not enough, but should make sure that the information is being utilized by its target market for it to be useful.

Assess the impact that electronic journals have had to the Faculty of Veterinary Science. The impact is assessed on both staff and students who are the primary targets of the e-journals.

Use of well structured questionnaires to be completed by a randomly selected number of students and staff will provide the needed information. Also, the use statistics of the electronic journals will be used to measure their impact.

A clear indication of the usefulness of the electronic journals to their target market

The paper exposes some of the reasons why electronic journals can fail to have an impact on their target market. This is then calls for libraries to address these shortcomings so that the rich and up to date information in electronic journals can be used fully.
INTRODUCTION

The University of Zimbabwe (UZ) is the largest research and learning institution in Zimbabwe and was established to cater for the research and learning in the then new country. The University is situated 6km North of Zimbabwe's capital Harare on 191.8 hectares of land donated by the Harare City Council. All 10 faculties are located at the Mt Pleasant site. The College of Medicine is situated at Parirenyatwa Hospital, Zimbabwe's largest referral hospital.

A new Health Sciences college, the Bulawayo College of Health Sciences was set up in Bulawayo with a Pro Vice Chancellor and a Dean. The college is situated at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and the clinical departments are situated at Mpilo Hospital and United Bulawayo Hospital.

History of the University of Zimbabwe
1945: The idea to establish a university college in Rhodesia is mooted.

1946: The Legislative Assembly of Southern Rhodesia accepts a motion calling for the establishment of a university college to serve the needs of the Rhodesians and neighbouring territories.

1947: His Excellency the Governor of Southern Rhodesia establishes by deed of trust, the Rhodesia University Foundation Fund.

1948: The City of Salisbury (Harare) offers land for the construction of the campus.

1952: The Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly enacts a bill for the incorporation and constitution of the university. An Inaugural Board is established by the Act.

1952: Classes for part-time students in Accountancy start at the old premises (115 Baker Avenue).

1953 July: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, lays the foundation stone on the Mount Pleasant site.

1953 Nov.: An interim Principal, Dr William Rollo, is appointed for two years. During the two-year period, appointments are made to the first 10 headships of academic departments and to the post of librarian. The basic layout plan of the site is formulated and approved. The first building begins.

1955: Dr Rollo is succeeded as Principal by Dr Walter.

1956: The College is admitted to the privilege of Special Relation with the University of London. The Academic Board is formed.

1957: The College vacates its premises at 115 Baker Avenue and transfers all its activities to Mount Pleasant. Teaching for full-time students begins in the Faculties of Arts and Science and for graduates taking the one-year Certificate in Education programme.
1963: The Medical School is opened and is affiliated to the University of Birmingham and thus students for the MBChB degrees obtain a Birmingham qualification.

1963: Dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. It is agreed that the University College should continue as an independent institution of higher education and research, open to all races.

1970: A phased termination of the scheme of Special Relation with the University of London is agreed upon.

1970: The College's formal association with the University of Birmingham is also terminated.

1971: The University College achieves university status and becomes the University of Rhodesia.

1974: First year students are accepted to the four-year honours degree programme in Engineering.

1980: University of Rhodesia becomes the University of Zimbabwe.

1980: The Faculties of Agriculture, Commerce and Law are established.


A library was then established in order to cater for the informational needs of the students. From 1996 going into 2000, Zimbabwe’s economy took a downturn due to a number of factors. This placed a major constraint on the UZ library as it found it difficult to purchase its needed books for its users. The above plus the advancement in the technological revolution led the library to subscribe to a number of electronic journals (e-journals). Some of the e-journals are Blackwell Publishing, EBSCO Host, AGORA, African Journals Online (AJOL). These have an advantage over books in that; They provide up to date information as they are continuously updated.

A user does not necessarily have to come to the library to use them. They can be accessed anywhere on campus.

In order to make sure that the journals are put to use by their targeted clientele, the library introduced Information Literacy Skills (ILS) as a compulsory course for all new students and staff members. This course emphasizes much on the importance of these e-journals to both staff members and students. Use statistics are continuously being taken in order to measure the usefulness of the journals to both their potential and actual users. This paper assesses the impact that these electronic journals have had so far to the faculty of Veterinary Science users.
FACULTY OF VETERINARY SCIENCE

The Faculty was established in 1984 in order to train animal health specialists. A number of these electronic journals do provide comprehensive and useful information on Veterinary Science. Some of them are AGORA, Blackwell Publishing and AJOL.

METHODOLOGY

In order to get a clearer picture on the usefulness of the electronic journals, five Faculty of Veterinary Science students and five staff members were randomly selected to answer a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the users were asked to indicate the number of times that they visit the electronic journals port per week. They were then asked to mention the database that they usually visit and the one that they find most useful and the reasons why. The respondents were then asked to give a rating out of ten on the usefulness of the following

- Electronic journals to them
- Electronic journals to their studies
- Information Literacy Skills in informing them about and bringing out the relevancy and usefulness of the electronic journals.

The users were then finally asked to give their suggestions on what needs to be done for the journals to be useful to them and their studies. Also, the use statistics of the electronic journals were obtained in order to ascertain how often these electronic journals are used by Veterinary Science users.

RESULTS

The results from the questionnaire clearly indicated that both the staff and students clearly appreciate the existence of valuable and up to date information on the electronic journal databases. This is so because all the respondents indicated that they know of the existence of these rich informational resources. Three of the respondents indicated that they visit the e-journal databases at least three (3) times a week. They attributed their constant visits to training offered to them through library orientation as well as ILS. These respondents subsequently gave very high ratings on the usefulness of the e-journals. Five (5) of the respondents indicated that they rarely visit the e-journal databases. They actually indicated that at most, they visit the e-journal once a fortnight. They attributed their less visits to the low speed of the Internet in opening. They also attributed it to the unavailability of Internet on campus on large periods of time. They also indicated that on the times that the Internet is available, it is still difficult to visit the e-journals because the computer portals are not enough for all the users. They indicated that they have very limited time slots when they can have access to the computers. The combination of slow Internet speed and limited time slots on computers means that the respondents often find it difficult or impossible to access the electronic journals. Two (2) users indicated that they do not visit the e-journal databases completely. They indicated that they prefer books in the library because it is easier to access them as compared to the electronic journals. The study also indicated that Blackwell Publishing is the most popular e-journal database among the Veterinary Science users. The respondents attributed their constant visits to Blackwell Publishing to its rich resources as well as its relatively faster opening speed as compared to other e-journal databases.

The use statistics of the electronic journals for a period of one month clearly showed that the use of the e-journals by Veterinary Science users is still very low. This is so
because the statistics showed that the e-journal databases receive an average of 5 users per day. This is against the fact that the faculty has around 250 users. Also, queries submitted by users to the librarian shows that the rich resources contained in the electronic journals are not being fully exploited. This is so because one out of ten queries submitted is on electronic journals.

Although the use of the electronic journals by the faculty users is generally still very low, the few users who fully use the e-journals find them very relevant and useful in their studies. One of the respondents actually described the e-journal databases as one of the richest resources that the library has been able to provide in a very long time.

**CONCLUSIONS FROM RESULTS**

From the various answers and results that the speaker got for the respondents, it can be concluded that the University of Zimbabwe Library is providing a very rich collection to its users through subscribing to the electronic journal databases. The fact that the UZ is actually paying for these resources means that they have to be put to use. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as most of the users are not using them. This can be attributed to a number of internal and external factors. These are;

1. **POVERTY**
   Zimbabwe’s economy took a huge nosedive in the 1990s due to political problems. Also, its relations with the Western world became so strained that some countries like Denmark actually closed their embassies in Zimbabwe. Most of the UZ donors came from the Western world and so this affected the institution very much. The institution needed adequate computers in order to match its students’ requirements so that they could access the e-journals. Unfortunately, economic problems which started in the 1990s meant that the university could not purchase the adequate number of computer terminals to cater for its students. To further compound the problem, the strained relations with the west led to the pulling out of donors that were very vital partners with the UZ. As a result, the number of terminals at the university is so low that it can hardly cater for the number of students. A case in point is the Faculty of Veterinary Science Library, which have only 5 terminals for its 250 users. These are not at all adequate and this acts as a hindrance in the usage of the e-journals. All the above problems are likely to be further compounded by the global recession that has spared no one.

2. **LIMITED INTERNET BANDWIDTH**
   The university, like other institutions in developing countries, has a limited bandwidth and this means that it is difficult to cater for the ever-growing number of students. This results in very slow opening speed. This is a big problem, as the university does not have equal terminals for its users. As a result, the users have to take turns to use the terminals. This means that the user has a limited time on the computer and this is against the slow opening speed. What this means is that sometimes, a user’s time elapses before he/she can be able to access the e-journals. This is further compounded by the fact that the university uses a radio link for its Internet connection. This has proved to be unreliable as most of the time the link is down.
3. USER – EDUCATION
“A user who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively”
This statement is true for the UZ Library. Even though the library has introduced ILS, it is still in its infancy and is yet to cover all the users. This also is one of the reasons for the low usage of the e-journals. This problem is further exacerbated by the high staff turnover at the university. Most of the University’s skilled staff members are leaving for greener pastures and this has had an effect on the user – education programmes of the library. This then calls for the library to aggressively market these resources through orientation and ILS.

CONCLUSION
All the above clearly shows that all libraries need to realise that merely providing informational resources is not enough. They need to do much more to make sure that these resources are put to use by their potential and actual users. Libraries now need to embrace marketing in order to be strategically positioned to survive in future. Up until the UZ library addresses the problems mentioned above, it is likely that the rich resources it is providing will remain under-utilised.

BIBLIOGRAPHY