Development of Higher Education in Albania:

The Case of the Public University Libraries in Efforts to Build Digital and Electronic Services for the Academic Community

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Abstract

Between the obligation of carrying out their mission to ensure the quality development of higher education and the right to function as important centers where knowledge is taken, developed and transmitted, this paper will examine the technological developments of university libraries as an important part of higher education. Digital and electronic experiences applied in Albanian universities libraries will be brought to the attention of the public.

This paper is based on the questionnaire survey conducted at public university libraries in Albania. Opinions of librarians regarding ICT application were elicited using a structured questionnaire, followed up with interviews. In the case of non-response by libraries is consulted their official web sites to have a more complete information. In addition, secondary sources were consulted as domestic and foreign literature in this field.

Results show that: 1) the level of application information technology in public university libraries in Albania is acceptable. The most important and serious problem is the lack of the unique University Library ICT Policy; 2) serious handicap is the lack of educated librarians in using information technology; 3) the proportion of university library activity goes more digital, so the digital collection becomes reality in the public university libraries.

This paper brings conclusions that contribute to: a) national information communication technology policy for university libraries and b) the creation of an integrated system for management and transmission of knowledge at the national level for all Albanian university libraries.

Keywords: University Libraries in Albania, Higher Education Developments in Albania, University Digital Libraries, University Libraries, Information Communication Technology, Higher Education

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Introduction

The working environment for university libraries has changed radically over the past two decades. Hormia Poutanen et al.[2] think that there are three main reasons for this: a) the digital dissemination of scientific information has changed the collection-based paradigm of the libraries into one of access-oriented service, b) the new learning paradigm has changed the role of the libraries radically. The higher education library is no longer a separate institution, but a living part of teaching, learning and research. Teaching of information literacy skills is nowadays the most important task in the higher education library and c) perhaps most importantly, is the fact that higher education is seen as the nation's most important investment for the future.

According to Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education[3], the Member States of European Union agreed to create a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (EHEA), a process that started in Bologna in the summer of 1999 and developed further in Berlin in 2003 in order to review the progress achieved and to set priorities and new objectives with the view the realization of the EHEA. Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education[4] emphasizes the importance of all elements of the Bologna Process for establishing the EHEA and stresses the need to intensify the efforts at institutional, national level.

According to Albanian Ministry of Education and Science: National Plan for the Implementation of Stabilization and Association Agreement[5], in Albania, this led to a thorough renovation of the legislation on higher education, which was renewed during 2007 until 2011. Based on the "National Plan for the Implementation of Stabilization and Association Agreement, chapter 25: Scientific Search" of the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science[6], the development of scientific activity and investments in scientific research support the economical development, promote the excellence(human capital and the excellence scientific centers) in the county and affect the knowledges' transfer and modern technologies in teaching laboratories in universities in order to apply science in the function of the life's improvement. Bazillion[7] thinks that as higher education moves aggressively into technology-enhanced learning, universities libraries find themselves "in the throes of a revolution".

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[2] K. Hormia-Pountnen et al., *The teaching and research environment in Finland in 2020: university and polytechnic libraries in a digital service network,* in Library Management, 2011, p. 599-600.

[3] Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, *Realizing the European Higher Education Area: Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003*, Berlin, 2003, p.1-5.

[4] Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, *Realizing the European Higher Education Area: Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003*, Berlin, 2003, p.1-5.

[5] Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkences, *Raporti per kapitullin 26 Arsimi dhe Kultura,Tirana,* 2010, p 1-18.

[6] Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkences, *Plani Kombetar i SA Kapitulli 25 Kerkimi Shkencor,* Tirana, 2010, p.1-7.

[7] J. R. Bazillion, *Academic Libraries in the Digital Revolution: libraries in the midst of revolution need new ways of thinking about their mission*, in Educause Quarterly, 2001, p.1.

According to Marmuthu and Paraman[8] with evolving technological innovations and the variety and abundance of information that is becoming available to information users, competitive pressures will continue to intensify for universities libraries so the products/services introduced in the library should match the requirements of intended users, academic community.

The present study has the objectives: a) to highlight the application of information and communication technology(ICT) in public university libraries in Albania and to clarify whether this application is made on the basis of a library ICT Policy in the surveyed libraries, b) to inventory the available information technologies and online services being used for library operations in public university libraries, c) to identify the advantages and disadvantages arising from the adoption of ICT for library service and d) to emphasize the necessity to create ICT Policy for all university libraries with purpose the creation of the unique infrastructure to exchange and to share the scientific information and resources between them.

Material and Methods

This paper is based on the questionnaire survey conducted at public university libraries in Albania. Opinions of librarians regarding ICT application were elicited using a structured questionnaire, followed up with interviews. The questionnaires prepared after thorough study and review of related literature In the case of non-response by libraries, such in the case of the Library of Polytechnic University, is consulted their official web sites to have a more complete information that will help in the results' finding.

The present research has been designed to study the rate of application of ICT tools in public university libraries such as the integrated library systems, the electronic sources, information networks, internet, online databases, databases on CD, searching engines, training courses for librarians and identifying the difficulties, challenges and problems related to the use of IC.

The surveyed communities are 14 libraries that are part of Public Universities in Albania such as: University of Tirana: History and Philology Faculty; Faculty of Law; Faculty of Political and Social Sciences; Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Arts, University of Sports, University of Korça "Fan S. Noli", University of Elbasani "Aleksander Xhuvani", University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", University of Gjirokastra "Eqerem Çabej", Agricultural University, Polytechnic University, University of Durresi "Aleksander Moisiu", University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali".

[8] V. Marimuthu and V. Paraman V, *Analysis of information technology (IT) applications in academic libraries in Kuwait*, in Library Hi Tech News, 2011, p.9-10.

The questionnaires were mailed to 17 directors or head of public universitiy libraries in the country, out of which 13 respondents (76.4 percent) were received filled out completely with all the relevant information requested in the questionnaire. However, geographically the scope of the study is limited to only public university libraries located in the country. The collected data are presented in tables and charts.

Contemporary literature in this area is consulted, setting the theoretical framework to the paper presented and empirical data is analyzed as well.

Results

The collected data about the automation profile of university libraries are presented in Table 1. As can been seen there are many types of library management software normally used in university libraries. Responses from the Table 1 suggest that library automation in Albania is facing problems, which will be discussed later in this study.

Libraries	Is library automated/LSI/Year
Faculty of Natural Science	Partially/Libraries for Windows 98/
Faculty of Philology & History	Partially/Procite4/
Faculty of Law	Partially/ WinIsis/1999
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences	No
University of Arts	Partially /Koha/2011
Polytechnic University	Partially/Procite4/2012
University of Sports	No
University Korca	Partially/Digilib/2010
University of Gjirokastra	Partially/JSUS/2005
University of Elbasani	No
University of Shkodra	Partially/PMB/2010
Agricultural University	Partially/ABEKT5.5/2000
University of Vlora	No
University of Durresi	Partially/E-Libra/2011

Tab.1. LSI Softwares

Skandali[9] argued that library automation means not only entering and reading data on the computer, but the different functional areas of a library also should be automated. The collected data about the automation of functional areas of the library is summarized and presented in Table 2.

Library Operations	Universities	
	n	%
Cataloguing	9	(64.2)
Circulation	3	(21.4)
Serials	0	
Acquisition	2	(14.3)
Search	3	(21.4)

Tab.2. Automated Operations

Academic community in Universities retrieves electronic information only through ICT devices like computers, intranet, internet, email, fax, facebook, list-serves etc. Table 3 contains details of the various ICT that are using in libraries.

Technology	Available	
	n	%
Computer	13	(92.8)
Cd- Rom	12	(85.7)
Internet	10	(71.4)
Intranet	4	(28.5)
Email	14	(100)
Fax	0	
Facebook	2	(14.2)
Listserve	2	(14.2)

Tab.3. ICT Availability

Even though there are plenty of e-resources available in different types and forms, users' preferences are often focused on some specific types of e-resources. The study sought to identify those types of e-resources through the respondents' reply which are shown in Figure 1. It reveals that faculty members pay high preference to the use of e- articles (72.4 percent); followed by e-journals (67.3 percent), while the least preference goes towards the use of electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) (28.6 per cent). Since e-articles carry much importance for research and academic assignments, their high requirement for faculty members is quite obvious.

[9] A. Skandali, *The Science of Information and Documentation*, Athina, 1990, p. 23-24.

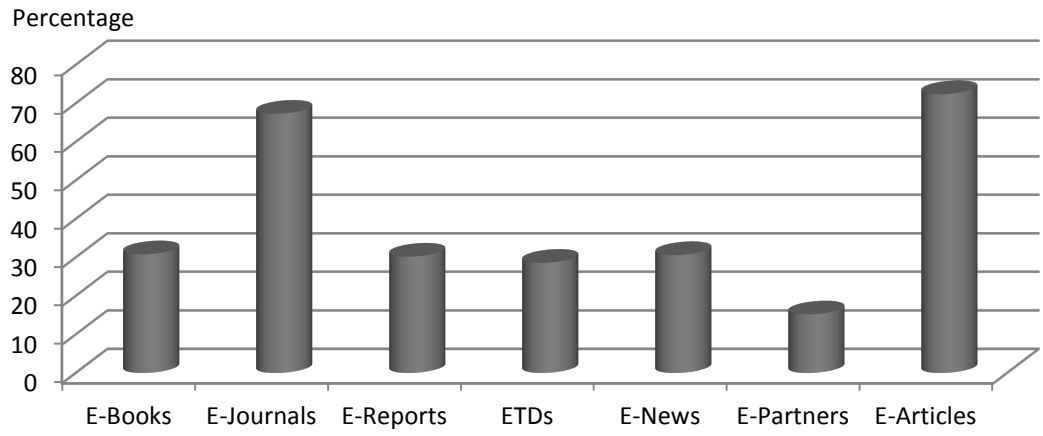


Fig.1. Chart of using of electronic resources

Table 4 depicts the respondents' opinion on use of various online databases. It is found that the use of online databases is: EMERALD (71.4 per cent), Taylor & Francis Library (64.2 per cent), IOP Science (50 per cent), EBSCO (42.8 per cent), Cambridge Journals Online (35.7 per cent) and PROQUEST (28.5 per cent) and these are the most favorite online databases of the faculty members.

Online Databases	No of Libraries	Using on %
BioOne	1	7,1
Cambridge Journals Online	5	35,7
Ebray Academic Complete	1	7,1
Ebsco Academic Search Complete	9	42,8
Emerald Engineering eJournal	1	7,1
Emerald Management eJournal	2	71,4
IOPScience	7	50
Multi Science Journals Collection	2	14,2
New England Journal of Medicine	1	7,1
Oxford English Dictionary Online	2	14,2
Oxford Textbook of Medicine	1	7,1
Oxford Reference Online	1	7,1
Taylor & Francis Library	2	64,2
Proquest Central	4	28,5
Alexander Street Literature	1	7,1
Alexander Street Drama	1	7,1
Music Online: Listening	1	7,1
Music Online: Reference	1	7,1
Music in Video	2	14,2
OECD iLibrary	1	7,1

Tab.4 Availability of online databases

Figure 2 shows how the respondents replied to question which search engines are normally used by the users of university libraries. Based on the opinion of the respondents, most of the time users seek information through Google, Infoseek, while Google Scholar, Msn are seldom in use.

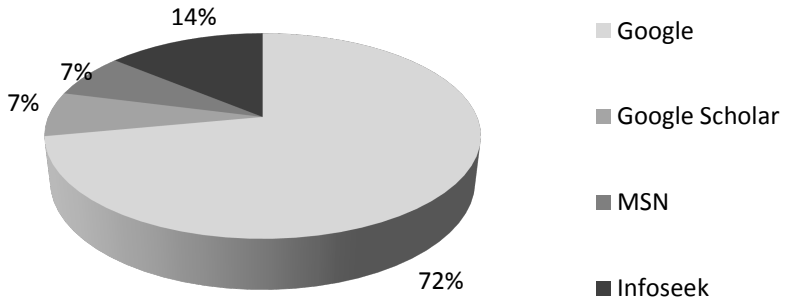


Fig. 2. Chart of using of search engines

Print and electronic documents in the library collections are broadly considered. Figure 3 shows the preferences of the users in using of them.

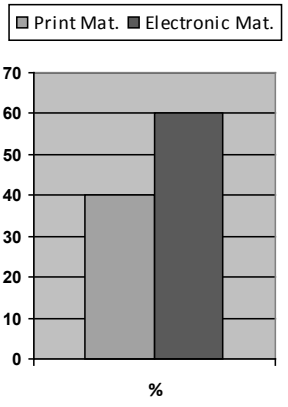


Fig 3. Chart of level of using library materials

The rapid development in ease of digitization, reduction in costs and improvement in facilities for giving access has led to enormous numbers of digitization projects. According to Collier[10] many libraries, typically those that own significant heritage or primary research collections, are carrying out or have completed digitization projects. In this digital library era, Albanian university libraries have started their project to digitize their special collections which are part of our national heritage at the same time. Table 5 shows that library of University of Arts and library of Luigj Gurakuqi University have started the digitization projects. Library of University of Arts is digitizing

[10] M. Collier, *Strategic change in higher education libraries with the advent of the digital library during the fourth decade of Program*, in Program: electronic library and information systems, 2006, p.340.

the unique collection of dramas of the Albanian dramaturges, the scores' collection of Albanian compositors. Library of University of Arts is using the DSpace software to manage the digital collection and the file formats are: Pdf for texts files, MP3 for audio files and Mpeg-4 for video files. The Library of University Luigj Gurakuqi has started to digitize the collection of books that date back to the sixteenth century. This collection contains 100 books of this period. Library is using the Dublin Core Metadata for the description of the digital files and the file formats is DjVu.

Libraries	Digital Collection
Faculty of Natural Science	No
Faculty of Philology & History	No
Faculty of Law	No
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences	No
University of Arts	Yes
Polytechnic University	No
University of Sports	No
University Fan S.Noli	Yes
University E. Cabej	No
University A.Xhuvani	No
University L.Gurakuqi	Yes
Agricultural University	No
University I. Qemali	No
University A.Moisiu	No

Tab.5. Digital Projects

Discussion

Information and communication technology facilities have profound effects on university libraries. Let me analyze the above results. The data from Table 1 suggests that library automation in university libraries is facing with serious problems. Some of the university libraries are using softwares (Libraries for Windows 98, JSUS, E-Libra) which are not constructed based on international library standards, with the result that the bibliographic data created are not share. These universities libraries have created an isolated island in electronic format where their data can use and consult only in the libraries and in the future the conversion of these data will require a very high cost to the University.

Some of the others university libraries are using softwares (ProCite4, WinIsis) that are bibliographic management software package, which are not specialized for library management. The bibliographic management software packages are not including modules of Circulation, Serials, Acquisition etc. that help in management of library as integrated system.

Another interested finding of this survey is the usage of Integrated Library Systems(ILS) which are open source. The survey shows that 3 libraries of the responding libraries are using open source ILS, which are KOHA, PMB and DigiLib. Egunjobi and Awoyemi pointed out Koha ILS is one of the most advanced and cost effective open source automation solution for the libraries. Egunjobi and Awoyemi[11] also evaluated that the advantages in using the open source systems are: a) budget: they are free, b) they are a LIS for all library operations including acquisitions, cataloguing, serials, and circulation modules, c) reputable developers, and d) user friendliness and possibility of log-ins at different times and places.

Another notable finding of the survey is that the public university libraries offer access to different online databases and users of the university libraries prefer to use electronic databases in their research. These electronic resources are provided under the project Era 2012. Based on information received from Project Era 2012, these electronic resources will be offered to their users until December 2012. It not sure if this project will be ongoing or the universities will pay to continue to join these electronic databases. A solution could be that the universities organize as a consortium in order to diverse the payment for the subscribing to the electronic resources.

Impact of ICT policies is another interested finding in this study. This study was carried out to assess the views of librarians about the impact of ICT policies on the utilization of library resources and services. Anie and Achugbue[12] explained that library ICT policies are official statements that articulate the objectives, goals, principles and strategies intended to guide and regulate their development, operation and application for library services and resources. The opinion of the respondents shows that there are many public university libraries that have not yet formulated and integrated library ICT policies. Table 6 presents the respondents' view on this topic. Related of the impact of ICT application on university libraries, the surveyed libraries rated improved access to library collections as number one with 92.8 per cent. The second ranked the improving of the speed of technical processing and making a document available faster to the end-users with 85.7 per cent. The third rank was given to offering improved resource sharing among member libraries, followed by improving cooperation through participation and utilizing national and international databases through computer networks/internet and so on with 71.4 per cent.

[11] R.A. Egunjobi and R.A. Awoyemi, *Library automation with Koha*, in Library Hi Tech News, 2012, p . 12-13.

[12] S.O. Anie and E.I. Achugbue, *Library information and communication technology in Nigerian universities*, in Library Hi Tech News, 2009, p.8.

	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Adoption of ICT will make work easier and faster	13	(92.8)	-	-	-	-
Implementation of ICT will enhance effective utilization of library resources and services	13	(92.8)	-	-	-	-
The economic situation in the country poses a barrier to ICT implementation	10	(71.4)	3	(21.4)	-	-
Lack of ICT policies and applications discourage library users	7	(50)	3	(21.4)	3	(21.4)
Adoption and implementation of ICT will make retrieval of information easier	13	(92.8)	-	-	-	-

Tab.6 Advantages of ICT policies in university library operations

Problems and difficulties in using ICT are other findings in this study. As it is apparent, at university libraries, lack of training of personnel with 50% and the cost of ICT devices and applications with 50% are the most serious problems for the librarians.

Training of the librarians in using ICT is very important because the wide variety of services in university libraries has increased the expectations of university librarians. According to Samson[13] the university librarians need to attend special training courses to increase their skills on a continuous basis during their work periods. As seen in Figure 3, the majority of staff has quoted that the users' demands for electronic resources is high 60 %. Under such circumstances, the effective usage of technology depends on the librarians' skills, knowledge and abilities, because the university librarian's role has changed. The study indicates that over half (60 per cent) of librarians have passed training courses related to the internet, around a third (34 per cent) have passed a course on system operations and another third (30 per cent) on introduction to databases, and 11 per cent have passed training courses on programming.

So these results raise an important question: why did they say that the most serious problem is the lack of training courses on information technology for university librarians? It maybe attributed to the quality of training courses or the lack of desire in staff for learning or usage of the skills already attained in training courses. It has to be emphasized that all librarians and information scientists have to engage with information technology and as time goes on, their engagement will increase. Mohsenzadeh[14], argued that therefore, to keep their performance acceptable, they have to learn continuously and update themselves with new skills and related information as well as knowledge.

[13] S. Samson S, *The academic library as a full-service information center*, in Journal of Academic Librarianship, 2006, p.350.

[14] F. Mohsenzadeh and A. Isfandyari-Moghaddam, *Application of information technologies in academic libraries*, in The Electronic Library, 2009, p. 348.

The finding of the present study that university libraries has started to digitize their collection is very important not only for the university community but for all the library community in general. According to Mohsenzadeh[15] the existence of the digital university libraries is as result of emergence of digital environment and necessity of navigation in such digital sphere, in digital era.

Conclusions

The present research may conclude the following points: 1) that the level of application information technology in public university libraries in Albania is acceptable. The most important and serious problem is the lack of the unique University Library ICT Policy, that will enable the ICT development plan for universities libraries, with the result the creation of integrated infrastructure for the communication, the development of shared scientific information and scientific knowledge between public university libraries and the possibility that the university libraries can reduce their cost offering electronic services to their universities. Precisely this is one of the key recommendations that this study proposes the creation of a national strategy for the development of information technology particularly for university libraries; 2) serious handicap is the lack of educated librarians in using information technology, because the university librarians must become more and more multi skilled in order to serve students successfully, the librarians themselves should learn, change and grow constantly[16]; 3) the proportion of university library activity goes more digital, we see less need for the types of work related to physical collection circulation and more related to digital resources management and navigation[17], so the digital university library becomes reality in Albania.

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