The establishment of the National Library of Uganda: its inception, challenges and prospects 1997-2007

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Abstract
There are several reasons why national libraries of the world have emerged. In some countries, they were established as symbols of national prestige and status, while others felt that a modern country should have a national library. There has been a debate on whether the developing countries should have national libraries. Alternatives such as university libraries and national archives were suggested. This thesis therefore aims at gaining a clear understanding of the establishment of the National Library of Uganda (NLU) as an institution. The study tries to examine the factors that influenced the establishment of the NLU; the motivations, actions and roles of the politicians and library professionals that led to its establishment. The present conditions shaping the NLU and how it shapes the library environment in the country are investigated.

New institutional theory was used to analyse the institutionalization process of the NLU. The conceptual framework is drawn from Scott’s institutional change perspective who argues that institutions do not emerge from a vacuum, but borrow from previous institutions and to a certain extent displace them. Oliver’s pressures of deinstitutionalization provided the lens through which I analyzed the political, social and functional pressures that triggered off the process of the institutionalization of the NLU. Additionally, coercive, mimetic and normative mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs as identified by DiMaggio and Powell was chosen. These helped me to analyse the institutional process and change in the library and information sector during and after the institutionalization of the NLU.

The study is based on qualitative research comprising of in-depth face to face interviews of twenty librarians who were purposefully selected. Documents like the Hansard, annual reports, minutes of meetings and newspapers were analyzed. Observation of the infrastructure of four (4) public libraries was made.

The findings revealed that the NLU was established due to the decentralization of the public libraries to the districts Makerere University Library (MULIB) and the Deposit Library and Documentation Centre (DLDC) have weak, outdated legal deposit laws and inadequate resources to perform the national library functions efficiently and effectively. The politicians enacted the National Library Act, 2003 to support the decentralized public libraries.

During the institutionalization process of the NLU, the librarians tried to imitate other national libraries which they perceived to be successful. Ideas such MULIB and DLDC to update their legal deposit laws, MULIB to become the second national library; the NLU to house the copyright office, ULIA to be represented on the NLU Board were rejected. The NLU apart from the collecting and publishing the National Bibliography of
Uganda is still performing most functions which were performed by the Public Libraries Board. The challenges faced by the NLU include lack of mechanism to implement the National Library Act, 2003; It has too many functions and inadequate resources; lack of collaboration between MULIB, DLDC and NLU leading to duplication of the limited resources.

The contribution to knowledge is derived from adapting the new institutional theoretical approach to Library and Information Science on the development of a national library in a developing country, Uganda.