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The Usage of Khudze Multipurpose Community Telecentre in Mwanza District, Malawi

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Abstract: Despite that Khudze Multipurpose Community Telecentre has been operating for over five years, observations showed that it is used by a few people. This study empirically investigated the usage of Khudze Multipurpose Community Telecentre. Specifically, it examined the Telecentre's usage patterns; benefits of using it; and reasons why some community members do not use the Telecentre. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from users, non-users and the Telecentre management. The study reveals that the Telecentre is mostly used by males, youths, the average educated and students. The users benefit by improving their knowledge and skills; reduce travelling costs and time to access the same services; improving social interaction and improving communication. Despite these benefits, the Telecentre usage is low due to illiteracy, lack of awareness of the existence of the Telecentre and its importance, technophobia, lack of interest among community members, lack of unique services in the Telecentre and lack of skills of using the Telecentre. The Telecentre Management and Government should address the factors to increase its usage.

Keywords: Malawi, Telecentres, Multipurpose Community Telecentres, Khudze Multipurpose Community Telecentre

1. Introduction

Information is regarded as a crucial commodity for development worldwide as it is used and needed in all aspects of life. Information brings about social, political, educational and economic development in every community [22]. With the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), information has more impact on development because ICTs enhance storage, access, retrieval and distribution of information to the users. Regardless of information being a crucial commodity for development and that ICTs support this, rural areas in many developing countries like Malawi are not benefiting fully from ICTs. Mostly, ICTs are found in urban areas [29]. To link this gap, many developing countries including Malawi are establishing telecentres in rural areas so that local people have access to ICTs. A telecentre is a public facility where people access computers, the Internet and other digital technologies, often at a subsidised fee. Services provided at telecentres include public phone facilities, computer typing, faxing, printing, photocopying, laminating, access to internet services, and computer training courses [17].

The notion of telecentre was born almost 35 years ago in what was referred to as teleport. This was a facility that combined access to satellites, real estate economic development project and fiber optic distribution network [24]. It is believed that the first telecentre was established in the mid-1980s in a rural farming community in Sweden to provide services, training and jobs to the local community through computers and modern telecommunications equipment [18]. To date, there are various kinds of telecentres offering

different services. For example, micro telecentres offer access to phones with web browser, a smart card reader and a receipt printer while full service telecentres offer access to a range of services including many phone lines, multi-media computers with Internet connectivity, color and black and white printers, photocopiers, a scanner, a digital camera, a video camera, television, overhead projector, laminator, meeting and video conferencing room [12]. Multipurpose community telecentres, the focus of this study, provide access to different services targeting different within their respective communities. The services that they provide include library, telephone, fax, e-mail, Internet access, word processing and photocopy, training on the use of ICTs that they provide access to [11, 13]. In general, a multipurpose community telecentre is a structure that encourages and supports communities to manage their own development through appropriate facilities resources, training and services [30].

As mentioned above, Malawi, as one of the developing countries, started establishing telecentres in rural areas in early 2000s to bring the benefits of ICT in rural areas thereby developing the areas. The Malawi Government establishes telecentres in rural areas through the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority with the help of the International Telecommunications Union. As with other developing countries, the aim of the Malawi Government in establishing these telecentres is to bridge the digital divide so that people in rural areas are able to access and use the information on aspects of life [5].

Despite that the Malawi Government is investing in telecentres to develop rural areas to support the goal of universal access to the evolving information society, the usage of telecentres in Malawi is low [15]. Observations by the researchers of this study and preliminary interviews with Khudze Multipurpose Community Telecentre (henceforth, Khudze Telecentre) staff reveal that the community members appear to be underutilizing the telecentres. Therefore, the aim of the study reported in this paper was to investigate the usage of Khudze Telecentre.

The paper provides study's objectives, brief literature review, methodology, case description, results and discussions, benefits of the study and conclusions and recommendations.

2. Objectives

Specifically, the study was set to
- Find out usage patterns of Khudze Telecentre
- Determine benefits of using Khudze Telecentre to the users
- Find out the reasons why some community members do not use Khudze Telecentre.

The objective of this paper is to report on the study carried out to investigate the usage of Khudze Telecentre.

3. Brief Literature Review

3.1 Usage patterns of Telecentres

Telecentres are facilities that provide access to ICT services for development. They aim to serve different groups of people in their communities. However, review of literature reveals that telecentre usage is dominated by males, youths and with an average income [6, 8, 15]. Some telecentres are used by the educated ones [6] while in some communities only those with low qualification like secondary school qualification dominate telecentre usage [15].

3.2 Benefits of Using Telecentres to the Users

Telecentres are an important tool for promoting socio-economic development in rural areas. This is due to the fact that telecentres have the potential to offer benefits to rural communities in education, health, agriculture and business [4]. Telecentres provide rural

dwellers with access to new ICTs such as telephones and the Internet to equip the people with the tools, skills and information they need to compete on an economic level with others at community, national and world levels [31]. Furthermore, telecentres improve sales of farmers [20] and help reduce travelling costs in search of similar services [4, 20].

3.3 Reasons for Non-use of Telecentre

Although telecentres are taken as critical aspects of developing rural areas, it has been noted that usage of the telecentres by patrons is low [15]. Several factors contribute to the low usage of telecentres.

Illiteracy affects the usage of telecentres negatively [1, 4, 20, 26]. Literacy is needed to access telecentre services. Without literacy people cannot access ICTs even if there is connectivity [26].

Community members need to be aware of the existence of telecentres and services that they provide to access them. However, rural dwellers are not made fully aware on the benefits of telecentres services on their lives. Lack of awareness of the benefits of ICTs in by the rural dwellers contributes to telecentre non-usage [4, 26].

The cost of telecommunication services in the developing world is high [26]. This high cost may result into higher charges to the use. This, in turn, affects the usage of telecentres negatively because people in rural areas earn low [20, 26].

Some other factors affecting the usage of telecentres include: technophobia, lack of content relevant to the community, complexity of ICTs [26]; language problems as Internet is mostly in English which most users in rural areas are not familiar with; the type of information services offered, presence of other similar services [20]; distance of users from a telecentre [1, 20]; social ties between telecentre staff and users [1]; and lack of skills [4, 15].

It has to be noted that the use of telecentres is influenced by various factors and that factors influencing the use of telecentres vary from one community of telecentre users to another. Therefore, there is need to evaluate the factors in respect to the telecentres being studied [23] hence this study.

4. Methodology

The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods. This was done in order to seek the answers, explanation to questions and also the statistics data from the respondents to determine the percentages on the usage of the Telecentre [7, 16]. Data were collected using questionnaiAres and interviews. The questionnaires, which were administered to 42 users, contained both closed and open ended questions. This helped to have answers that were not anticipated [25]. Most users completed the questionnaires except a few who did not respond to the open-ended question which required them indicate their views on how Khudze Telecentre is developing its community. The researchers also collected data from 11 non-users and two telecentre staff through interviews. The interviews with the non-users lasted for 7 to 10 minutes while with the Telecentre staff interviews lasted for 20 to 25 minutes.

4.1 Study Population and Sampling

The study targeted users and non-users of the Telecentre. Convenient sampling technique, which targets people who are conveniently available to participate in the study [3, 9] was used to get respondents. Questionnaires were administered to 42 users who were found in the Telecentre during the data collection period of one week in May 2016. Interviews were conducted with 11 non-users in March 2017 who were found close to the Telecentre to find out why they do not use the Telecentre. These interviews were conducted in Chichewa. The study also targeted telecentre staff to get their views on usage of Khudze Telecentre. Two staff members: Telecentre Manager and the Customer Care Manager were slected using

purposive sampling technique as these were deemed to be knowledgeable on the topic under study [3, 10, 27, 28]. Interviews were conducted to collect data from these staff.

4.2 Ethical Consideration

Voluntary participation was adhered to during data collection. Participants were not forced to take part in the research so that participation was on freewill of participants [2]. Furthermore, participates were informed in advance the purpose of the study and gave their consent of participating in the study.

4.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel. On the other hand, thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. This involved the transcription of data, identification of themes, matching the themes with the ideas of respondents and naming of the themes.

5. Case Description, Results and Discussions

5.1 Case Description

Khudze Telecentre is located in Traditional Authority Kanduku, Mwanza District, Malawi. The Telecentre is about five kilometers from Mwanza Town. The Telecentre started operating in July 2010. It is surrounded by nine villages and serves people from these villages. The Telecentre has seven workers: a manager, customer care personnel, a librarian, two care takers and two security guards. It also has the local management committee which has ten members to support the workers.

Khudze Telecentre aims at providing access to ICTs. To achieve this, it offers various services at low costs and some of which are for free. Table 1 shows the services and their charges.

Table 1: Services provided by Khudze Telecentre

Services	Charges
Printing	K100.00/page
Scanning	K100.00/page
Lamination	K250.00/page
Binding	K250.00
Photocopying	K15.00/page
Colour printing	K200.00/page
Conference (Main hall and Min hall)	K5000.00 and K3000.00 respectively
Library	Free
Internet	K10.00/minute
Computer lessons	K1000.00/week

* $1= MK721

5.2 Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the study on the objectives stated above. As stated above, these are results from 42 users, 11 non-users and two telecentre staff: Khudze Telecentre Manager and Khudze Customer Care Manager.

5.2.1 Usage Patterns of Khudze Telecentre

This section examines who uses the Telecentre and the services that they use. The first aspect is examined by looking at demographic information of users.

Demographic Information of Users

This section presents personal details of telecentre users in terms of gender, age, educational level and occupation. Table 2 depicts the results on this. Out of the 42 respondents, 27 (64%%) were males. Most respondents (39.93%) were below 35 years old implying that the Telecentre usage is dominated by youths. Majority of the users (35.83%) had secondary school qualification as their highest qualification. This is in line with the findings of many studies in literature [6, 25]. The majority of secondary school qualification may be attributed to the fact they have literacy skills which they acquire from their respective schools vital for using the Telecentre. Interviews with the Telecentre staff indicated that some schools also offer computer studies. This motivates students to be using the telecentre for their practices. On occupation, majority (26.62%) were students followed by school leavers (6.14%) who include those who have just completed their secondary school education. Some responses in open ended question indicate that these school leavers visit the Telecentre to print and photocopy materials for job application. On the other hand, students visit the Telecentre to write assignments as evident in the following comments by some users:

> "*As a student, it helps me to do my assignment because I come here and use the space in the library for reading and writing my assignments.*" Questionnaire (QR)30
> "*School leavers we come and print our materials for job application. Sometimes we photocopy materials related to job application as well*" QR 25

Table 2: Demographic information of users N=42

		Number	**Percentage**
Gender	Female	27	64
	Male	15	36
Age	10-15	4	10
	16-20	30	71
	21-35	5	12
	Over 35	3	7
Highest qualification	Primary school certificate	2	83
	Secondary School certificate	35	5
	Tertiary education	5	12
Occupation	Students	26	62
	School leavers	6	14
	Teachers	4	10
	Business workers	3	7
	Agriculture extension workers	2	5
	Farmers	1	2

Services Frequently Used

Khudze Telecentre users were asked to indicate the services that they had used in the past week to determine what users frequently use. As shown in Table 3, responses indicate that most users visit the Telecentre to print materials (28.67%) and photocopy materials (27.64%). Library (17.41%), Internet (16.38%) and computer lessons (15.38%) are also used by a good number of users. The results on ICTs like Internet and computer lessons being used by a good number people differ from the findings of [15] which found that ICTs are not chief attraction within telecentres. This is why it is important to understand usage of Telecentres within context.

Table 3: Services frequently used N=42

S/N	Services	Frequency	Percentage
1	Printing	28	67
2	Photocopying	27	64
3	Internet	16	38
4	Library	17	41
5	Computer lessons	15	56
6	conferences	8	19
7	Binding	5	12
8	Lamination	1	2

5.2.2   Benefits of Using Khudze Telecentre

The aim of this section was to find out the benefits of Khudze Telecentre. Firstly, users were asked if the Telecentre is of benefit to them. Majority, (39.93%) view the Telecentre as beneficial to them. They were then asked to indicate the benefits that they draw from using the Telecentre. As shown in Table 4, Khudze Telecentre is helping users improve knowledge and skills through computer literacy (30.71%), access to information in the library (25.60%), and provision of reading space (12.29%); reducing travelling costs and time to access the same services (20.48%); and improves social interaction (16.38%) among community members.

Table 4: Benefits of using Khudze Telecentre N= 42

S/N	Benefits of using telecentre	Frequency	percentage
1	Improving computer literacy skills	30	71
2	improving knowledge and access to the library	25	60
3	Reduce travelling costs and time in accessing the same services	20	48
4	Access to internet	16	38
5	Encourages social interaction	16	38
6	Provides reading area	12	29
7	Communication purpose	9	24
8	Others (specify)	0	0

Most of these benefits correspond well to the responses that users gave when they were asked to give their views on how the Telecentre is contributing to the development. From Table 5, four themes emerge: that the Telecentre is improving knowledge and skills especially on computers and performance in school; the Telecentre is improving communication and social interaction; the Telecentre helps users to save money and time used to access the same serves from other places; and the Telecentre helps users to easily access information.

Khudze Telecentre staff agree with users on the benefits. In the extracts below, the Telecentre Manager comments that the Internet helps user to easily communicate; the Library provides conducive environment for reading and that users have acquired computer skills.

> *"Users have access to internet services which helps the use to acquire knowledge and information in various aspects…..Internet services like social networks helps our users to in communication with their family and friends…the library provides the reading space mostly for the schools surrounding this telecentre whereby the students bring their studying materials (notes, books, and pamphlets). In addition, users have benefited by accessing*

computer lessons which has improved their computer literacy skills" Telecentre Manager

Table 5: How Khudze Telecentre is developing its community

Units of meaning	Selected quotations
Improving knowledge and performance	• Students go their and get their studies as a result they will pass well and get selected to different colleges QR 37 • It is helping in terms of knowledge to other people QR35 • It has helped a lot of people in terms of education QR33 • People know how to type QR26 • It has improved computer literacy skills QR4 • It helps to know how to use computer information. It helps to improve knowledge, skills about computer using and it easier fasting and accountable QR2 • People in the community have known hot use the Internet QR3
Improving communication and social interaction	• Easy communication with other people from other countries QR38 • Encourages social interaction QR27 • It has improved communication purpose QR4
Saving time and money	• In my opinion I think that the information centre helps to save time and money that can be used for other beneficial activities this develops the community QR31 • It has reduced travelling costs and time QR4
Easy access to information	• It helps people to easily access information QR8 • It enables many people to access knowledge and information QR14

The findings in this section are in line with many studies in literature [4, 14, 15] that telecentres developing the communities they serve.

5.2.3 Reasons Why Other Community Members Do Not Use the Telecentre

This section sought the reasons why some community members do not use Khudze Telecentre from the 42 users. It also examines responses on the same question from 11 nonusers of which 6 were females; 6 were house wives, 2 business personnel, one working at a maize mill and one carpenter; eight of the respondents are primary school dropouts, two have MSCE certificate and 1 with JCE certificate. Two telecentre staff were also asked their views on why some community members do not use the Telecentre.

Users were asked to indicate if they think that the Telecentre is fully patronized. Majority (36.86%) indicated that the telecentre is not used to the maximum. These were asked to indicate what they think makes people not use Khudze Telecentre. Table 6 depicts the results. From the Table, illiteracy (36.86) is the main reason for not using the Telecentre. This might be attributed to the fact that illiteracy levels in rural areas of Malawi are low [19]. According to [26], "no matter how "wired" a country becomes, without basic literacy, the major benefits of ICTs will be lost." Illiteracy also emerged as the main reason for not using the Telecentre from non-users responses. Most of them indicated that they did not use the Telecentre because they did not go far with their education as evident in the following comment made by one of the non-users: "*I do not use the Telecentre because I am illiterate.*"Non-user(NU)1. This is in agreement with what the staff members said. In the extract below, the Telecentre Manager states that illiteracy is the main factor that stops community members from using the Telecentre:

"illiterate is the major factor why some people do not users the telecentre. Many people in the surrounding villages did not go to school, as such it's difficult for them to use our services. This factor has made the telecentre to be highly utilised by students compared to other group of people," Telecentre Manager.

The findings on illiteracy negatively affecting the usage of the Telecentre are in line with many studies in the Literature [1, 4, 20, 26]. If the Telecentre is to be used by many, illiteracy has to be dealt with, by, for example, introducing literacy classes as most non-users are primary school dropouts as described above.

Effective patronage of the telecentre depends on awareness of the importance of services offered. Majority of Telecentre users (34.81%) as shown in Table 6 viewed lack of awareness as one of the main reasons why some community members do not use the Telecentre. The Telecentre staff also agree with users that lack of awareness distracts people from using the Telecentre. In the extract below, the Customer Care Manager attributes lack of awareness due to inability of the Telecentre to conduct awareness campaigns. According to her, this was only conducted once, in 2011.

"I think it is because of lack of awareness campaigns. ...We only conducted awareness campaign in early 2011 up to now we have not conducted the awareness campaign to the 9 villages surrounded by the telecentre," Customer Care manager.

In their studies [4, 26] also found that lack of awareness negatively lead to low usage of telecentres.

Majority of users (33.79%) view that technophobia which is fear or suspicious of the new technology by some community members [26] also contribute to telecentre low usage. 17.41% also indicated that lack of skills also stop some community members from using Khudze Telecentre. The findings on lack of skills negatively affecting the usage of telecentres agree with [4] in the literature.

Table 6: reasons why some community members do not use Khudze Telecentre from Khudze Telecentre users perspective N=42

	Reasons for not using telecentre	Frequency	Percentage
1	Illiteracy	36	86
2	Lack of awareness	34	81
3	Technophobia	33	79
4	Lack of skills to use the services	17	41
5	Language problems	15	35
3	Some services are expensive	9	21
7	Long distance	3	7

Interviews with the telecentre non-users and telecentre staff also revealed that some community members do not use the Telecentre because of lack of interest among community members. Some non users indicated that despite knowing the existence of the Telecentre and its benefits they do not use it because they are not interested as evident in the following comment by one of the non-users: "*It is not that I do not know about this telecentre. It is just that I am not interested that is why I do not use it.*" NU 7.

Non users also indicated that lack of unique services within the Telecentre makes them use alternative service providers.

6. Benefits of the Study

The study is important to the Telecentre Management and the Government of Malawi which establishes telecentres in the country. The study and the findings will help Khudze

Telecentre to find strategies on how to promote the usage of the telecentre, hence achieving the purpose of its existence. In addition the findings of the study will also help the management of the Telecentre on how to motivate users to patronize the Telecentre effectively.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study investigated the usage of Khudze Telecentre. The themes examined in this paper include: usage patterns of Khudze Telecentre; benefits of using Khudze Telecentre; and reasons why some community members do not use Khudze Telecentre. It can be concluded users draw a number of benefits from using it. Specifically, the Telecentre helps users gain knowledge and skills; reduce travelling costs and time to access the same services; improves social interaction among community members; and provides fast and easy way of communication and easy access to information through the Internet. Despite these benefits, the Telecentre usage is very low and uneven. The reasons why some community members do not use the Telecentre include: illiteracy, lack of awareness the existence and benefits of the Telecentre, technophobia, lack of interest among community members and lack of unique services within the Telecentre because the Telecentre offers services that could be accessed from alternative ICT access points.

If Khudze Telecentre is to be used to the maximum, these factors have to be addressed by the Telecentre Management as well as the Government. The study therefore offers the following recommendations which have been made by both respondents and researchers based on the findings:

- Establishing awareness campaign programmes.
- Introducing literacy programmes to the community members.
- Using the youth as channel of diffusion of technology to family and friends.
- Provision of local content.
- Offering services targeting different age groups.

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