

Impact of Access and Use of Information in a Selected Higher Institution's Academic Library in the Eastern Cape of South Africa

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ABSTRACT The study set out to investigate the ease with which University of Fort Hare (UFH) students' access and use the information available at the university library. The study used self-administered questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The objectives of the study are: to establish the types of information sources that the University of Fort Hare students mostly access and use; and to discover the extent to which the UFH students are satisfied with the information resources available within the University Library. The finding of the study reveals that majority of the students mostly use library information resources such as books, journals and websites for a variety of reasons such as: class assignments and research. However, the findings also showed that it is not easy for the students to access and use the information in the library due to obsolete resources; the students are also dissatisfied with the library internet. The study recommended that government should donate, purchase and supply all the academic libraries with new information resources such as recent books and academic journals in order to replace some of the obsolete ones available in the shelves and also the UFH management should always ensure that the internet facilities are improved and constantly available for all the users in order to ensure effective and efficient internet access.

INTRODUCTION

There are many types of libraries such as; special library, national library, public library, research library, academic library etc. However, the focus of this study is on an academic library. An academic library is a library that forms an integral part of a college or university whose major objective is to meet the academic needs of a particular institution for which it is created to serve (Krolak 2005). However, academic library is seen as one of the types of libraries that is at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities or areas which comprises of students, lecturers and researchers in order to support teaching, learning and

research needs. According to Jonathan (2012), the purpose of any academic libraries is to help students acquire more skills or knowledge by accessing and using information available within the libraries vicinity when they are away from their teachers.

Information is now considered as the fifth factor of production because it is needed in all stages of human development. Students need information to learn new skills and also to satisfy their courses or academic demands. Ramasodi (2009) stated that academic library information is seen as an input which is utilized in the library in order to provide good learning environment for students and teachers so as to be able to achieve educational goals. One primary objective of any academic library is to offer vast amount of information to users (Agyen-Gyasie et al. 2010). However, according to Abdullahi (1998), usefulness of a library depends upon its proper organization which includes the accessibility and availability of information resources.

The University of Fort Hare Library (UFHL) was established in 1916, and it has since grown

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to include three institutional libraries serving the Alice, the Bhisho and the East London campuses. The library provides the materials and services to meet the information and research needs of the students of the University with the help of its librarian. This study therefore focused on the UFH Alice library serving a population of 7503 students comprising of both residents and non-residents. UFHL serves four faculties which include Management and Commerce, Education, Sciences and Agriculture, as well as Social Science and Humanities. However, the library has over 185,000 volumes of books, periodicals and other materials. These are housed in various sections of the library. The library also provides access to the internet and subscribes to various online databases to all registered students (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2009).

Problem Statement

Academic libraries play an important role in enabling access to information, in whatever format. This can be done either through the physical collection or by electronic means or through resource sharing activities (Buchholz 2011). The basic function of an academic library is to support the academic and teaching that goes on in the institution (Thanuskodi 2013). Students depend heavily on the library for information that is needed in pursuing their individual and collective goals. Many students need information but due to a number of factors, the information is either unavailable or inaccessible at their library. As a result, they do not see the need of using the library. In trying to solve their problem, students cannot access and use information due to the challenges noted by Anafo and Filson (2014) and Somi (2004), such as lack of information literacy skills, problem of loan period as well as slow internet to access digitized information. Students' academic work, research and other activities in the university will suffer if library resources are not fully exploited. Similarly, the library activities would fail if the university community are not able to access and use available resources in carrying out its functions (Clifford 2014). Therefore, academic libraries are essential to fulfil students' information needs. Students also use other information they obtain from sources held by libraries.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the ease with which the University of Fort Hare students access and use the information available at the University Library.

Objectives of the Study

- ♦ Establish the types of information sources University of Fort Hare students mostly access and use.
- ♦ Discover the extent to which University of Fort Hare students are satisfied with the information resources available within the university library.

Research Questions

- ♦ What types of information sources do University of Fort Hare students mostly access and use?
- ♦ To what extent do University of Fort Hare students get satisfied with the information resources available within the University library?

Literature Review

Academic Library

According to Troll (2002), academic library is a library that is attached to a higher education institution which serves two complementary purposes to support the university academic curriculum. It provides access to knowledge through various ranges of information resources and thereby allowing their retrieval at the time of the students' need. Thanuskodi (2013) pointed out that the basic function of academic library is to support the academic and teaching that goes on in the institution. In this effort, the academic library aim is to capture and hold the interest of the academic community, to produce intelligent users of all types of documents, and to cultivate in users an appreciation of libraries as academic institutions. The academic library provides the essential information resources. In order to determine the extent to which an academic library achieved its objectives, one should examine the extent to which the users use the library resources. A well-established academic library is important for any institution for the

purpose of teaching and learning of research problem. Currently, academic libraries are struggling to keep their place as a major of enquiry in the face of emerging digital technology.

Information

Information is a fundamental ingredient for any development process in any given society. The students live in a society where information generation and consumption are necessary. Information is therefore a basic resource and product in all spheres of life and in all sectors of the society. In addition, information is vital to the students' daily operation in any academic field of study. It is true that the academic library cannot function effectively and efficiently in the absence of information (Abdul-Salami 2013).

Ajiboye and Tella (2007) stated that information is a data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering user's query be it recorded, summarized, or simply collected that would help decision making. It is well understood in terms of books, journals, magazines, public and private sector documents of all kinds, whether published for mass circulation or unpublished and restricted or confidential in nature, results of research efforts which are made available to users in form of reports, books articles and non-printed materials.

Access

Abdul-Sami (2013) defined the term access as an information products, devices and services that are made accessible to patrons either by means of electronic or physical products made available for use or easy reach. Nwachuku et al. (2014) explained accessibility as the degree to which an information resource is easily accessible and useable by a wide range of users. Students are faced with many challenges in finding the information they need at library because of the new technology that makes information to be accessed in different ways. However, Ugah (2008) conducted a research on access to information in academic libraries believes that Information is not easily accessible to the users due to poor indexing and cataloguing, inefficient loan and circulation system, poor shelving, and lack of adequate guides to library arrangements, as well as administrative and physical barriers. Matsveru (2014) stated that accessibility is a

prerequisite for the use of an information sources and the choice to seek information depends on its perceived accessibility, information users make use of a library when information is easily and conveniently accessible to them.

Availability

Ugah (2008) defined availability as a means of ensuring that information sources are represented in the library for their immediate use. Nwachuku et al. (2014) revealed that information resources are available in the library but users cannot access them because they cannot use catalogue quickly. Users need to know how to use catalogue in order to find sufficient information resources on the shelves quickly. In addition, access to information depends on the availability of information resources. Therefore, if information resources are not available users would not find anything to lay-on. In order to improve information resources at the library, other retrieval devices should be developed to make it easier for users to locate information resources.

Use

The term "Use" refers to the extent to which users make use of the resources of a library to meet their information needs (Nwachukwu et al. 2014). Benard and Dulle (2014) did a research on the use of library information resources by students in Morogoro, the findings indicate that the vast majority of the students use text books to satisfy their information needs and also textbooks may contain useful information which is relevant to academic needs. Benard and Dulle (2014) also noted that the most frequently used library information resources by students are only books and novels, the other library resources such as atlases and maps, dictionaries, novels, audio visuals and poetry are not accessible by students hence those resources are not satisfactory to meet their information needs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted quantitative research design to investigate the access to and use of information at the University of Fort Hare Library.

Population

The population consists of PhD students, masters' students, post graduate diploma students, Honours students, and 3rd year Bachelor Degree students. The researchers used this target population in order to obtain a clear understanding about the access to and use of information at the University of Fort Hare Library

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was used to select fifty (50) respondents which consisted of four (4) PhD students, seven (7) masters students, one (1) post graduate diploma students, five (5) Honours students, thirty-three (33) 3rd year Bachelor Degree students at the University of Fort Hare.

Research Instrument

Data for the study was collected through self-administered questionnaires and were used to elicit information from the respondents. The questions consisted of open-ended structured questions which made it easy for the respondents to express their opinions.

Data Analysis

Data collected was analysed using descriptive of frequency and percentage

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. Experts in the same field validated the instrument.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information

This section provides the demographic information of respondents. However, the questions asked in this section focused on gender, age, faculty, and level of the study.

Gender Distribution

Table 1 shows that there were more female than male respondents in the study. Seventy-six

percent of respondents were females while twenty-four percent of respondents were males. This is because the UFH enrolls more female students than males. In fact, according to the study conducted by Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2009), findings revealed that UFH enrolls more female students 62.3 percent than males 37.7 percent. This variation undoubtedly has an impact on the percentage of female and male students who access and use information in the academic library.

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	38	76
Male	12	24
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Age Distribution

Table 2 shows the age distribution of the respondents. The findings revealed that (19-22) years of respondents were forty-eight percent, forty percent of the respondents were (23-26) year old while twelve percent of the respondents were age 27 years old and above. Therefore, the findings indicated that, the majority of respondents fell into the age range of (19-22) year age group. Aged less than 19 years old were not included in the study because at the age less than nineteen, one would still be in secondary school or doing first year and may not have been knowledgeable enough about access and use of information at academic libraries.

Table 2: Age distribution

<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
19-22	24	48
23-26	20	40
27 and above	6	12
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Faculty

Table 3 illustrates the various faculties in which respondents were registered. As indicated in the Table 3, the majority fifty-eight percent

of respondents were from Social Science and Humanities, followed by Management and commerce with eighteen percent and also the respondents from Education, Science and Agriculture were twelve percent. The results show that social science and humanities is the biggest faculty in the University of Fort Hare.

Table 3: Faculties in which respondents were registered

<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Management and commerce	9	18
Education	6	12
Science and agriculture	6	12
Social science and humanities	29	58
Total	50	100

Level of Study

The researcher wanted to find out the levels of study of the respondents as a factor of accessing and utilizing library information resources. Levels of study of the respondents varied from one department or faculty to other. University of Fort Hare (UFH) students enrolled for three to four years bachelor's degree and PhD students. As shown in Table 4, fifty-six percent of the respondents enrol for Bachelor's Degrees, twenty-four percent of the respondents enrol for Honours Degrees, four percent of the respondents enrol for Postgraduate Diploma, fourteen percent of the respondents enrol for Master's Degrees and two percent of the respondents enrol for PhDs. Therefore, the results showed that the library information is mostly accessed and used by the students enrolled for bachelor's degree.

Table 4: Levels of study

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
PhDs students	1	2
Masters students	7	14
Post graduate diploma students	2	4
Honours students	12	24
Bachelor's degree students	28	56
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Types of Information Sources UFH Students Mostly Access and Use

Information Sources Frequently Used By Students

The respondents were asked to choose the information sources they used frequently and also they were allowed to specify any other information sources not included in the checklist. The researcher aimed at identifying the various information sources frequently used by students in the library. The Table 5 shows that the majority thirty-eight percent of the respondents relied on books, twenty percent of the respondents relied on websites, fourteen percent of the respondents relied on journals while fourteen percent of the respondents relied on databases and also two percent of the respondents frequently use encyclopaedias. However, the findings are reliable with those of Benard and Dulle (2014) about the information sources used by students. The findings showed that the most frequently used information sources by students are books and websites. For that reason, students use books to satisfy their information needs and also books may contain useful information which is relevant to subject areas. There are few respondents who used databases, newspapers and encyclopaedias.

Table 5: Types of information sources

<i>Information sources</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Magazines	2	4
Academic journals	7	14
Databases	6	12
Newspapers	5	10
Books	19	38
Encyclopaedias	1	2
Websites	10	20
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Reasons for using Library Information Resources

Table 6 indicates the reasons for using library information resources. Respondents were asked about their reasons for using library information resources. They were asked to choose more than one option from the following reasons: for class assignment, for research, to get

answer to some specific topic, to gain general information, recreation and leisure. However, the results showed that the majority forty percent of respondents use library information resources to do assignments, twenty-eight percent respondents use library information resources to do research, eighteen percent to get answer to some specific topic, eight percent of respondents use library information resources to gain general information, four percent of respondents use library information for Leisure reading while only two percent use library information resources for recreation. The findings showed that the majority of students use library information resources to do class assignments, for research and also to get answer to some specific topics. Therefore, the findings are relevant to those of Benard and Dulle (2014) that students use information when conducting a research, development of personal competencies and writing of assignment.

Table 6: Reasons for using library information resources

<i>Information sources</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
For class assignments	20	40
For research	14	28
To get answers to some specific topics	9	18
To gain general information	4	8
Recreation	1	2
Leisure	2	4
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Frequency in Finding the Information Materials in the UFH Library (UFHL)

Table 7 indicates the frequency in finding the books and any other information materials in the University of Fort Hare (UFH) library. Respondents were asked to choose option from the following answers: always, sometimes, rarely, never, and not sure. The results showed that sixty-eight percent of respondents find books and any other information materials in the UFH library sometimes, twenty percent of respondents always find books and any other information materials in the UFH library while it is rarely for twelve percent of respondents to find books and any other information materials in the UFH

library. Therefore, the findings showed that it is not easy to find books and any other information materials in the UFH library.

Table 7: Frequency in finding the information materials in the UFHL

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Always	10	20
Sometimes	34	68
Rarely	6	12
Never	0	0
Not sure	0	0
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Reasons for not Finding Information Materials

Table 8 indicates the reasons for not finding information materials in the University of Fort Hare library. The results showed that the majority, thirty percent of respondents said that library has no information on the subject, twenty-eight percent of respondents were unable to find information because the items were checked out, twenty-two percent of the respondents were unable to find the information in the library because all the computers were down, twelve percent of the respondents were unable to find information materials in the library, six percent of the respondents said that they were unable to find the information in the library because all the computers were in use while two percent of the respondents do not know how to use computers. Therefore, the findings showed that the rea-

Table 8: Reasons for not finding information materials

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Item checked out	14	28
Library has no information material on the subject	15	30
Unable to find the materials	6	12
The computers being down	11	22
All the computers being in use	3	6
I do not know how to use the computer	1	2
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

son for not finding books and other information materials in the library is due to the fact that library has no information on the shelves and another reason is when the item is being checked out. The findings are reliable with those of Somi (2004) that libraries do not have enough materials to support the student's information needs as a result books are placed on short loan to allow all students to access them and other students on the other hand keep the materials for longer period of time while others are suffering.

Respondents were also given a chance to write any further comments about where else do they look for information if they are unable to access and use the information they need at UFH library. The majority of respondents said that they also consult internet to use e-books and any other online information using their personal computers or smartphones in their rooms.

Frequency of Using Internet-based Information Resources

Table 9 indicates how often University of Fort Hare students (UFH) use the internet-based information resource in the UFH library and any other library. The results showed that the majority fifty-two of the respondents used internet-based information resources daily, twenty-eight percent of the respondents use internet-based information resources weekly, twelve percent of respondents used internet-based information resources once a month while four percent of respondents use internet-based information resources in the UFH library and any other library once every two to three weeks. Therefore, the findings of the study showed that the UFH students use the internet-based information resources in the UFH library and any other library everyday.

Table 9: Frequency of using Internet-based information resources

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Daily	26	52
Once a week	14	28
Once every two weeks	2	4
Once every three weeks	2	4
Once a month	6	12
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Availability of Library Internet for Accessing Information

The researcher wanted to know the availability of library internet for accessing the information in the UFH library. The Table 10 shows that the majority forty-four percent of respondents said that the library internet for accessing information is good, twenty-six percent of the respondents said that the availability of library internet is fair while sixteen percent of respondents said that the library internet for accessing information in the UFH library is poor and fourteen percent of the respondents said that the library internet in the UFH library is excellent.

Table 10: Availability of library internet in the library

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent	7	14
Good	22	44
Fair	13	26
Poor	8	16
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Satisfaction of Students with Information Resources Available within the University Library

Usefulness of Library Staff in helping Students and other Users to Access Information in the Library

Respondents were asked to rate library staff in helping them and other users to access information in the library. The Table 11 indicates that the majority eighty-two percent of respondents said that the library staffs were very helpful and pleasant in helping them and other users to access information in the library, twelve percent of the respondents said there are no bases for rating, four percent of the respondents said that the library staffs were too busy to help them and other users to access information while two percent of the respondents said that library staffs were not skilled enough to help them and other users to access information in the library. Therefore, the findings of the study showed that the UFH library staffs were very helpful and pleasant in helping the UFH students and any other users to access information in the library.

Table 11: Responses on the usefulness of library staff

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Helpful and pleasant	41	82
Too busy to help me	2	4
No basis for rating	6	12
Not skilled enough	1	2
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

Usefulness of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in Helping Students in Finding Information in the Library

Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in helping them to find the information in the library. The Table 12 indicates that the majority sixty percent of respondents agreed that the OPAC was indeed useful for them to find the information in the library, thirty-four percent of the respondents said that OPAC was very useful in helping them to find the information in the library while six percent of the respondents said that OPAC was not helpful for them to find the information in the library. Therefore, the findings showed that the OPAC is very useful in helping the students to find the information in the library.

Table 12: Responses on the usefulness of using OPAC

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Very useful	17	34
Useful	30	60
Not useful	3	6
Not useful at all	0	0
Total	50	100

Source: Field survey

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the information resources frequently used by University of Fort Hare students are textbooks and websites in order to do their class assignments, research and to get answer to some specific topic. The University of Fort Hare staff are very helpful in helping the students and other users to access and

use the information in the library although library is experiencing many challenges in enabling access and use of information. For instance, there is a lack of current information material available in the library to provide access to information relevant to the students' academic needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the research, the following are the specific recommendations regarding access and use of information at academic libraries.

- ♦ It is very important to recommend that government should donate, purchase and supply all the academic libraries new information resources such as books and academic journals in order to replace some of the obsolete ones available in the shelves.
- ♦ The University of Fort Hare management should always ensure that the internet facilities are improved and constantly available for all the users in order to ensure effective and efficient internet access.
- ♦ The University of Fort management should also encourage the University Library to embark fully in their library orientation to students in order to enlighten new admitted students and those who registered late on how to access internet and use library information wisely.
- ♦ The University of Fort Hare Library should employ more library academic staff that are capable of dealing directly to the students and all academic staff by providing or rendering effective and efficient library assistance to them.

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