

Chapter 4

University Librarians' Role in Supporting Academic Writing

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ABSTRACT

The university library is often referred to as the heart of the university because of the central role it plays in providing information resources to support research, teaching, and learning activities. The study was carried out among reference librarians and subject librarians at selected universities to establish how the librarians have been supporting academic writing endeavours by researchers at their respective institutions in Zimbabwe. The study also sought to examine the challenges faced by university librarians when offering services to support academic writing by researchers at Zimbabwean universities. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Ten librarians were interviewed. Findings from the study reveal that university librarians are readily available to offer their services in support of academic writing by researchers. There is however a need to increase researchers' awareness of the role of academic librarians in supporting academic writing. A strong partnership between academic librarians and researchers throughout the research cycle is recommended.

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INTRODUCTION

The university library is often referred to as the heart of the university because of the central role it plays in the provision of information resources to support research, teaching and learning activities taking place at the university. Made (2000) points out that the library and its resources have an influence on the nature of university education in a country. It is therefore important to have good university libraries which in turn contribute towards good university education and a quality education system in any given country. The library is the fuel that propels operations at the university. There is also a link between university libraries and the national education landscape. As Made (2000) puts it, universities are as good as their libraries. Investing in good libraries is essential as this in turn contributes significantly towards a good national education system. Good university libraries should be managed by equally qualified, dedicated professional staff. University library staff with competence in efficient service delivery are necessary for the university library to make meaningful impact to its faculty, students and society at large. For instance, Mugwisi (2015) confirms that university librarians in Zimbabwe offer information literacy skills training to their patrons so that the patrons can effectively use information sources at their disposal independently.

Availability of research output on a particular subject ought to be known or else it remains unknown. University libraries have a responsibility of publicising research output of academics and students on their websites (Wai Fan 2005). In Zimbabwe, several libraries have established institutional repositories (IRs) where journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters and technical reports by faculty and students are uploaded for access by the other users online (Kusekwa and Mushowani 2013). IRs are a practical solution to providing visibility and access to research output at a low cost. Most IRs are open access. By providing free access to research output through the open access model, researchers' work has become more visible, accessible thereby promoting greater use of research output. Chisita and Chiparausha (2019) report that at least six university libraries in Zimbabwe have their IRs readily accessible on the worldwide web. Although there has been a steady growth in the number of IRs in Zimbabwe, Tapfuma and Hoskins (2019b) lament the low number of articles uploaded on each IR. Tapfuma and Hoskins (2019a) also report that some librarians in Zimbabwe lack news skills associated with the changing library and information service provision environment. University librarians in Zimbabwe should be challenged to acquire newer and relevant skills that match demands of modern day library and information services delivery.

The objectives of the study were to:

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