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Article

The Use of Academic Library and Information Seeking Behavior of Students at Lusaka Apex Medical University

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Abstract: The study surveyed the use of academic libraries and information seeking behaviour of students at Lusaka Apex Medical University. The objectives of the study were to determine how often LAMU students used the libraries, to ascertain the purpose for which students used the library and to determine the challenges faced in accessing library services. Using a survey research design, 230 students selected using simple random sampling participated. Findings revealed that there were more male (51.1%) students who participated. The study also found that the majority of students (54.7%) were occasionally using the library. Results on the purpose for using the library showed that the majority (39.6%) were using it to read in order to improve personal competence. In relation to the challenges, majority students (42.6%) stressed the inadequacy of relevant materials. The need for librarians to make themselves available to aid students that seek information for different purposes was recommended. This was seen as a way through which many would have access to the available information in their field. There is a need for proper orientation and sensitization to students on how to access both physical and online materials. This would increase the library use as well as improve the performance of students. Lastly, it was recommended that a study on the digital literacy of students be done in order to ascertain their competence and search skills in sourcing for information.

Keywords:

Introduction

World over, the need for information has been the basis for which critical decisions are made. In the field of health, old men and women relied on Indigenous Medical Knowledge (IMK) to treat different diseases in the non-existence of conventional knowledge generated through scientific research [1]. The origin and continued advancement in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) across all fields demand a new approach of creating, organising and presenting information to users. In the academic context, libraries in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the mandate to adopt approaches that meet the information needs of users to support teaching, learning, research and innovation.

As a repository of knowledge, academic libraries in HEIs must promote reading and lifelong learning, provide access to important and up-to-date research information, developing information literacy skills and providing training and support for students' learning needs as well as those of faculty staffs through a variety of mechanisms [2].

academic libraries play a pivotal role in HEIs in helping improve academic performance among other mandates. Academic performance refers to a measurable and obvious behaviour of a student within a certain period and collective of scores fetched by an intellectual in various evaluations through class tests, mid and end semester examinations [3]. The earning of these scores in any assessment expressed in the definition are of paramount importance to the parent institution of learning because it constitutes vital indices in the rating of the university and, therefore such

academic performance is dependent upon the information seeking behaviour one possesses as well as the source from which the information is sought.

The information needed and the behavior developed in the process of searching for that information determines user satisfaction. Information needed is the amount of positive or rather useful information which an individual or a group of students need to have for their work, recreation and purposes. These desires arise when there is a gap between what one ought to know and what he/she presently knows [4].

On the other hand, information seeking behavior implies signs, vocalizations, conduct and other verbal and non-verbal indications which information users exhibit when searching for information. It is a broad term which involves a set of actions that individual students take to express information needs [5].

Libraries are repositories where information acquired, processed, stored is kept for use and reuse. Information use generates information in the form of knowledge. In order to satisfy information needs of the user, libraries are trying very hard to improve themselves by acquiring required methods and methodologies from time to time [6]. In this information age, the search for information has become paramount to helping find answers to questions raised in academia or individual lives. Libraries are at the centre of providing services to meet the needs of the users.

In academics, Libraries are determined to serve the users in sharing the information as well as seeking the information needed which in turn paves the way for success [7]. Students' success in most Higher Education Institutions entirely depends on the quality of information they acquire from academic and institutional repositories. This poses a responsibility on students to have good information seeking attitudes and skills to enhance their chances of obtaining the requisite information to meet their academic needs. This is because information seeking is central to learning, and students who lack information seeking skills may be deprived of the information they look for.

The field of Information Seeking behaviour in Information Science can broadly refer to that which deals with determining user's information needs, searching behaviour and subsequent use of information.

A study [8] which looked at information needs as well as seeking behaviours for health science students at Deemed University, in India. The findings revealed that the majority of students used e-resources for information retrieval through the internet/e-library rather than other retrieval processes. Text reference books were cited as the second most frequented information source. It is clear from the findings on how impactful ICTs are on information access and services.

Another study [9] on health information seeking behaviours among students of Gonabad University of Medical Sciences found that majority students were seeking information about the type of sickness and their treatment and this information were mostly sought from the internet and practising doctors. The findings indicate clearly that there is also tacit source information where students had to seek information through those practising it.

The studies above have both shown the desire for information which is sought in different formats as a result of the genesis of Information Communication Technology (ICTs) in academic libraries. However, it is evident that information seeking behaviour dictates where and how users can acquire the information they need. A study [9], is a notable example. In the absence of documented experiences (tacit information), users opted to seek information from those living the experience.

A similar study conducted [10,11] on the use of academic library and information seeking behaviour of student at Livingstone International University of Tourism Excellence and Business Management (LIUTEBM) revealed that majority students used the library occasionally and they visited the library in order to read books related to improving personal competence. Further, findings revealed that students had inadequate time to seek the information they needed as the library provided limited operational hours.

Material and Methods

The study utilized a survey research design. This is a design in which a structured questionnaire is used to collect data from a sample of participants. The study targeted students from the faculties of pre-medical sciences, nursing and midwifery science, medical radiation, medicine and surgery, health sciences and pharmacy, nutrition and dietetics at LAMU. The sample size for this study was 230 students who were selected using simple random sampling. Data was collected using google form questionnaires which were distributed in various WhatsApp groups of different faculties and data was analyzed using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Findings and Discussions

The study surveyed the gender, age and programmes of study of the students who participated. The findings on gender showed that 51.1% were males while 48.9% were females. This clearly shows the increase of males in pursuing health related programmes.

Furthermore, the majority were those aged between 16 and 22 years who recorded 54.1%. 38.5% was recorded for those aged between 23 and 30 years while 36 and above showed 3.9%. In relation to programmes of study, majority were under Pre-Medical Science (40.8%), Nursing and Midwifery Science had 14.5%, Pharmacy, Nutrition and Dietetics recorded 14%, Medical Radiation Sciences had 9.2% while Medicine and Surgery recorded 5.7% as indicated in Table.1 below.

Table 1.

VARIABLES	VALUES	FREQUENCY
Gender	Male	51.1%
	Female	48.9%
Age	16 – 22 years	54.1%
	23 – 30 years	38.5%
	31 – 35 years	3.1%
	36 & above	3.9%
Programme of Study	Pre-Medical Science	40.8%
	Nursing & Midwifery Science	14.5%
	Medical Radiation Sciences	9.2 %
	Medicine & Surgery	5.7%
	Pharmacy, Nutrition & Dietetics	14%

Frequency of Library Use

The survey solicited students to indicate how often they used the library. Findings showed that majority students (54.7%) used the library occasionally. 20.9% indicated three times per week, those who frequented daily indicated 16% while those who visited the library once in two days accounted for 8.4% as shown in Figure 1 below.

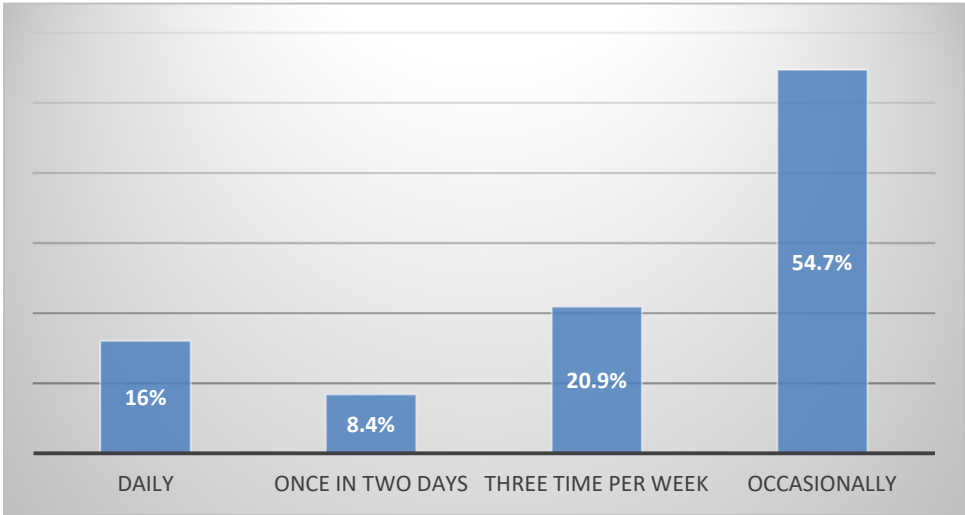


Figure 1.

The findings above showed that majority students used the library occasionally. These results could be looked at in two perspectives. The first one unfolds the need to make students aware of the services the library offers that go beyond providing a quiet reading space. The second is continuous orientation of students on how they can locate the needed materials for their assignments, test preparations, tutorials, labs, research writing etc.

Common Purpose for Using the Library

The survey solicited students to indicate the purpose for which they used the library. Findings showed that majority students (39.6%) used the library for reading to improve personal competency. 24.2% indicated searching for data/information to use, those who went to study for the exams indicated 16.7% while those who visited the library to prepare for tests/lectures accounted for 19.4% as shown in Figure 2 below.

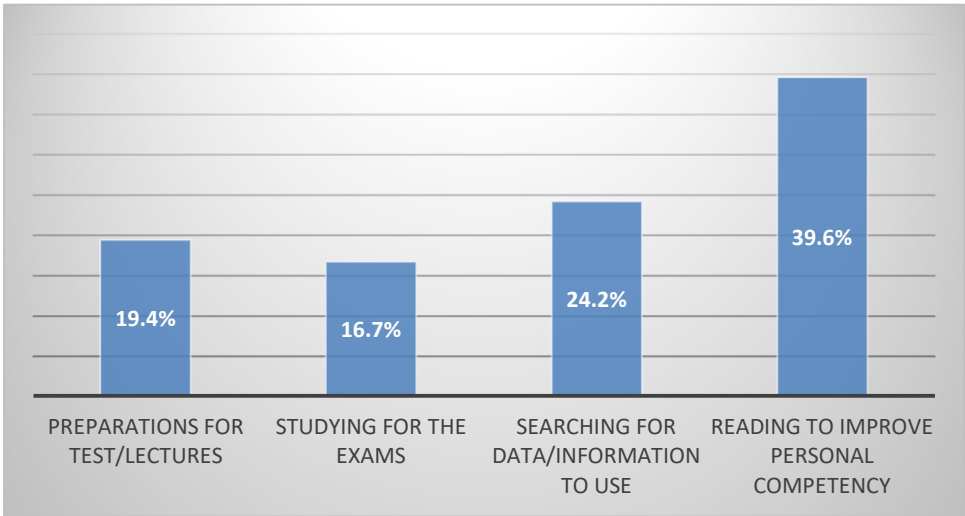


Figure 2.

The findings above revealed that majority students used the library for reading to improve personal competency. These findings may be influenced by the fact that most students don't find the materials they seek; hence they prefer using the library as a reading space for other personal competencies rather than school related activities. Accordingly, this is made possible through the provision of internet access which allows them to browse for non-academic activities.

Information Sources and the Most Used Device When Accessing

The survey solicited students to indicate the major source of information in the library. Findings showed that the majority of students (34.7%) used physical books as a major source of information. 30.7% indicated accessing through other internet sources, those who accessed through online books/journals accounted for 30.2% while those who accessed information via online institutional repository accounted for 4.4% respectively.

Similarly, majority students (62.2%) indicated accessing the information using their smartphones. 21.1% indicated using their laptops, those who used Personal Computers (PCs) accounted for 14.5% while those who used Epad/Tablet accounted for 1.8% as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

MOST SOURCE OF INFORMATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Online books/journals	68	30.2
Physical books	78	34.7

Online Institutional repository	10	4.4
Other Internet sources	69	30.7
Total	225	100%

DEVICE USED MOST IN ACCESSING INFORMATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Personal Computer (PC)	33	14.5
Laptop	48	21.1
Smart Phone	142	62.2
Epad/Tablet	4	1.8
Total	227	100%

The findings have revealed that despite accessing several materials online, majority students indicated that physical books were the most available sources of information. The study further established that the majority of those who accessed online information used their smartphones. These findings are influenced by different factors. The frequent use of information accessed through physical books can be necessitated in three ways. One is by non-ownership of a smart gadget which forces the students to depend entirely on physical books. The second factor would incorporate the first, thus a student does not have a smart gadget and lacks the skills to operate one. Therefore, this student cannot make use of the computers made available in the library. The third factor brings to light the restrictions of internet access to personal gadgets such as a smartphone.

On the other hand, the majority use of smartphones in accessing information may be necessitated by the fact that most gadgets are faster when downloading materials or accessing needed sites. The smartphone also makes it easier to share information with others using WhatsApp, emails etc.

Challenges in Accessing Library Services

The survey solicited students to indicate the challenges faced when accessing library services. Findings showed that majority students (42.6%) stressed on the inadequacy of relevant materials. 30.8% indicated having no knowledge of where and how to obtain the needed materials, those who stressed inadequate time to seek the needed information accounted for 25.8%. 19.5% were for those who indicated lack of assistance from library staff while those indicating uncooperative attitude of the library staff accounted for 8.6% as shown in Figure 3 below.

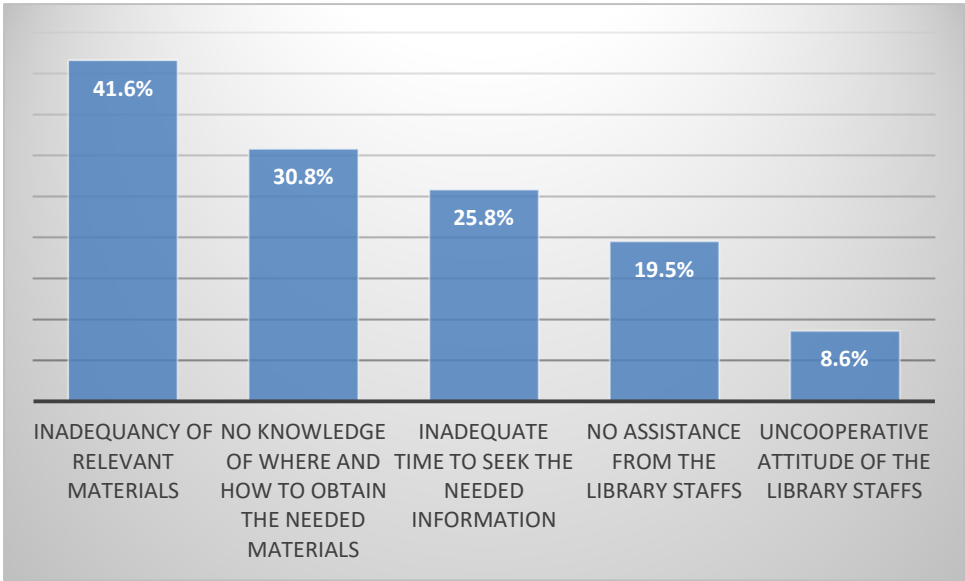


Figure 3.

The findings revealed that majority students had challenges of inadequacy of relevant materials. The results are necessitated by two factors. Most students view librarians as guards of information and not custodians. This therefore makes it unnecessary for them to frequent the offices of the librarians in search for help pertaining to the needed information. Another factor may be the unavailability of the custodians or attitude towards students which may lead to fear of inquiring if they need information which is available but cannot locate it.

5.0. Conclusion

The study findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were males, this indicates some major dominance of males into health programmes. Further, the majority of the respondents were enrolled under Pre-Medical Sciences. The majority participants used the library occasionally and most to read in order to improve personal competency. their major source of information as indicated by the majority were physical books. Majority of those who accessed information online stressed using smart phones. Among the challenges faced, the majority emphasized the inadequacy of relevant materials.

6.0. Recommendations

1. There is a need for librarians to make themselves available to aid students that seek information for different purposes. This was seen as a way through which many would have access to the available information in their field.
2. There is a need for proper orientation and sensitization to students on how to access both physical and online materials. This would increase the library use as well as improve the performance of students.
3. The need to conduct a study on the digital literacy of students to ascertain their competence and search skills in sourcing for information.

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