

A library model for delivery of library and information services to distance learners at the University of Zambia

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Abstract

Although the University of Zambia (UNZA) has a strategic plan that advocates for the provision of both on and off campus learning, there is no clear model in use for the delivery of library services to distance learners. However, introducing a model for distance learners demands analyzing the many factors that need to be taken into account as the University of Zambia Library seeks ways of providing better library services including electronic library and information services. The objective of this study was to establish a suitable model of providing library and information services to UNZA distance learners. The specific objectives were to describe a profile of UNZA distance learners; explore the extent to which UNZA Library information resources and services meet the needs of distance learners; describe the information seeking behavior of distance learners; and propose a policy framework to guide the provision of library and information services to distance learners at UNZA. The study adopted a mixed method research. A semi-structured questionnaire with both closed and open ended questions was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 351 respondents. The findings of this study reveal that distance learners at UNZA have very little library support available to them and mainly limited to conventional library and information services. In the light of these findings, a blended library support model is proposed to meet distance learners' information needs.

Keywords: Distance Education, Centralized Model, Distributed Model, Library Services, Library Model

1. Introduction

The need to provide access to post-secondary coursework at a distance has been identified as a top priority for many universities and colleges. However, distance learners have unique needs for library services and resources, which cannot be met through traditional services because they face distinct and different challenges involving library access and information delivery (Gopakumar and Baradol, 2009). Given that university libraries are traditionally set up for on-campus use, distance learners in Zambia have accepted the fact that they need to travel to an academic or public library to fulfill most of their course-related information needs. Therefore, traditional library services may need to be adjusted to adequately meet the needs of distance learners.

This may also call for some level of civic awareness and civic knowledge on the part of the distance education students to appreciate such services offered at the University of Zambia. As has been contended by Muleya in his works (2017a; 2017b; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2019), civic education serves as an important vehicle which

delivers civic knowledge among the general citizenry. It also creates possibilities for the people to be aware of their obligations and responsibilities in life. Similar arguments on civic awareness and civic knowledge have also been raised in other works such as Bergersen & Muleya (2019); Machila et al. (2018); Magasu et al. (2020); Mupeta & Muleya (2019); Habanyati et al. (2020); Mupeta et al. (2020); Mwanangombe et al. (2020). Therefore, the need for extending learning opportunities at various levels to people who do not have access to traditional modes for various reasons becomes imperative in this era. There are various understandings of what distance learning entails. According to Mabawonku (2004), the term distance education refers to forms of instruction in which classroom sessions are not the primary means of communication. In the context of this study, distance learners refer to those people who are registered for courses at the University of Zambia (UNZA) and are administered under the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) (Simui, 2018; Simui et al., 2018a; 2018b; Manchishi et al., 2020). These are truly "distance learners" in that they do not have the advantage of physical access to UNZA library and information

resources and in-person services for the greater part of their study (Imasiku, 2016; Mundende et al., 2016).

Provision of library services for distance-learning programs is a complex activity. It involves all library resources and requires coordination among library staff, other teaching faculty, the distance-learning program directors, and affiliated or local site librarians. Core activities, which include bibliographic instruction, collection development, and reference services, demand librarian attention, as does the work of policy development and service evaluation. Just as library systems provide services to regular students; it is the mandate of the university libraries to make available equal services to distance learners. Hence libraries must come up with innovative approaches to the design of procedures or systems to meet these needs.

According to ACRL standards for distance learning library services (2016), there are several service models of library services to distance learners, which generally include centralised model, distributed model and a combination of distributed and centralised model. The centralised model entails the provision of service from the central library, whereas the distributed model is that one that provides services from satellite centres. The combination of the two models is one where services are provided from both central library and satellite libraries.

In all these models, the basic services beneficial to students and faculty who are at a distance include planning and management; collection development; course design; research and educational services; resource access; and document delivery (ACRL, 2016). This study sought to analyze the many factors that need to be taken into account as the University of Zambia Library seeks ways of providing better library and information services to its distance learners.

1.1 Background to the study

The University of Zambia was established in 1996 following the recommendation of the Lockwood commission (Lockwood, 1964). When the University was opened in 1966, it had 310 full-time students (Kelly, 1991). Over time, the enrollment numbers have been increasing. This increase was on one hand in response to the country's need for human resource development at the time of political independence and on the other hand the demand for this level of education from people who had got into employment without university education (Siachiwena, 1998).

However, in the 1990s, the enrollment was reduced due to inadequate physical facilities and shortages in financial and human resources (Siachiwena, 2000). To mitigate this reduction in enrollment figures, UNZA incorporated distance education as a means of providing wider access through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), to cater for those unable to participate in regular schemes of study (UNZA, 2002). Distance education is now recognised all over the world as a mode of education, which helps large numbers of learners to access quality education (Molefi, 2002). Through this mode, quality

education is made accessible at very low costs to people whose work, family responsibilities or even personal preferences would bar them from attending college on a full-time basis (Demiray 2002; Usun 2004). It also provides opportunities to design flexible curricula for a wide spectrum of clientele who may take courses at their own time depending on their ability and convenience. However, without effective library resources and services to support distance learning, the outcomes of education may be compromised (Watson, 2006).

1.2 Problem statement

According to ACRL (2016), on and off-campus, services must be equitable, and that services should be integrated into distance learning mode of education. "This principle of access entitlement, as applied to individuals at a distance, is the undergirding and uncompromising conviction of the Standards for Distance Learning Library Services" (ACRL, 2016).

Apparently, distance learners at UNZA are still disadvantaged in terms of academic, logistical and administrative support, including library and information services. This support is limited, irregular, or one-time only. Lack of access to adequate library services compromises the quality of education being offered to distance learners as they are left to heavily depend on lecture notes.

In trying to mitigate the above situation, the University established a department in the library in 2016 dedicated to the provision of library services to about 4000 distance learners. So far, only two provincial libraries have been established with a view to establishing 8 more libraries. However, these services are offered with no clear model. Furthermore, since 2016, when UNZA started the process of extending its library services to distance learners, a profile of the distance learners at UNZA has not been done to help determine the type of services suitable for them. Therefore, this survey seeks to establish characteristics of distance learners in order to determine a library model suitable for them. To use this template, you will need to (1) apply the embedded styles to each paragraph-level item in your manuscript or (2) use the specifications shown in Table 1 to format your manuscript, with this template as a visual guide. Information about paper submission is available from the Journal website.

1.3 Objectives

The main objective of the study was to establish a suitable model of providing library and information services to UNZA distance learners. The specific objectives were to:

- i. Describe a profile of UNZA distance learners
- ii. Explore the extent to which UNZA Library information resources and services meet the needs of distance learners;
- iii. Explore the sources of information distance learners use for academic purposes
- iv. Identify a suitable model for provision of library services to distance learners

- v. Recommend a policy framework to guide library operations for distance learners

1.4 Research justification

It was important for researchers to conduct a survey to determine the profile and information needs of distance learners. This helped the researchers to recommend a suitable model of library services that was going to be adopted for UNZA to meet the demands of all users equitably, efficiently and cost-effectively.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Characteristics of distance learners

Knowing the characteristics of the student is an important factor in coming up with library services, resources and policies for the distance learner that will adequately meet their needs. Literature shows that these students are typically older than traditional students with the average age being 25, and they are more likely to be females rather than males. Family and job responsibilities usually prevent them from attending traditional modes of study. Most of them are working while attending studies through distance learning; and, they are often times disadvantaged by geographic remoteness, normally living in cities away from the main campus (Smith, 2001; Ashby, 2002; Halsne and Gatta, 2002; Msuya and Maro, 2002; Chifwepa, 2006; Ramasodi, 2009; Tapfumaneyi and Rupande, 2013). These students generally lack peer group support for their studies and usually have very limited time for going to the library (Gopakumar and Baradol, 2009).

Similarly, Boadi and Letsolo (2004) as cited by Oladokun (2014) in a study on information needs and information seeking behaviour of distance learners at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies, Maseru in Lesotho, reveals that the distance learners live or work long distances from campus where they registered. They note that the distance learners therefore experience uneasy access to on-campus library and information sources and services.

2.2. Library support services to distance learners

For academic libraries caught between serving students on-campus and off, the need to meet the demands of all users equally, efficiently and cost-effectively requires a general mapping of library resources to fit curriculum needs. It further requires the establishment of new guidelines and cost-saving strategies for delivering services, and the restructuring of the delivery system to include full-text access via computer networks (Huwiler, 2015). The technological revolution brought about by the Internet permeates most tertiary institutions and propels the concept of online education in developed and developing countries (Gandhi, 2003). One of the most essential support systems influencing the quality of education offered is the provision of library and information services and resources. Watson (2006) reports that, "distance education has revolutionized and democratized the delivery and accessibility of education and has also changed how critical support services, such

as library and information services are provided by libraries".

Owsu-ansah and Bubuama (2015) in quoting Tait (2003), identify three roles that library services in distance education play: (i) to encourage cognitive development, (ii) to enhance self-esteem and (iii) to help meet required academic standards of students. Hence, there is need to put in place learning support services to aid significantly the distance educational curricula. Among the many learning support services, Cox (2004) further underscored that library services always played a major role in expanding distance learning programmes in higher learning institutions. Significantly, conventional face-to-face students benefit from using research and knowledge common facilities. As such, just as library systems provide services to regular students; it is the task of the university libraries to equally make available equal services to distance learners. Other services include photocopying services, reference services and bibliographic searches (Cann, 2009; ACRL, 2016).

Taking a cue from the above, the ACRL (2016) identifies that "every student, faculty member, administrator, staff member or any other member of an institution of higher education, is entitled to the library services and resources of that institution. This includes direct communication with the appropriate library personnel, regardless of where they are enrolled or where they are located in affiliation with the institution. Academic libraries must therefore, meet the information and research needs of all these constituents, wherever they may be. This principle of access entitlement, as applied to individuals at a distance, is the undergirding and uncompromising conviction of the Standards for Distance Learning Library Services".

In this technological dispensation, a number of IT enthusiasts like Rumajogee (2003), contend that online libraries remain the core of the fourth generation of distance education and allow access to most of the learning resources that the learner may require, including databases, case studies, reports, papers and academic research. We cannot speak of student support services today without speaking of new communication technologies. It is timely to think now of the new technologies which can be harnessed to enhance student support systems. The degree of success of distance education, including programmes using high quality learning materials, depends, in large measure, on the quality of learner support services. These services include access to online learning resources, including online libraries and databases (Rumajogee, 2003).

2.3. Information seeking behavior of distance learners

The findings of the survey by Kelley and Orr (2003) cited by Oladokun (2014) confirm some other studies and observations suggesting that students prefer using online resources to physical library buildings and collections. A study by Miyanda (2010) also confirms that distance learners use the Internet to get information for their studies. Ritterbush (2014) states that distance learners

relied heavily on internet for research purposes. Further Kakana et al. (2020) posits that a good number of distance learners at UNZA access the institutional repository (IR) because it was easy to use and access. They further reveal that despite having access to the IR and e-resources, distance learners did not rely on them completely but instead relied on course modules and lecture notes prepared by their lecturers.

2.4. Models for distance education library and information services

Literature shows that the most common models of library and information services to distance learners are: the dedicated department/centralized model; distributed/branch model and the integrated (distributed and centralised) services model (ACRL, 2016).

The primary factor in designing services for distance learners should be providing a centralised point of contact in the library for all distance learning queries/issues (Kazmer, 2002) and that there is a librarian dedicated to providing services to distance learners, faculty and other staff of the institution (Imasiku, 2016). Therefore, as students interact with the distance librarian, they become aware of the resources available to them and feel more comfortable using them for research purposes.

In the integrated services model, no one person coordinates or is in charge of services to distance learners and staff (Lebowitz, 1997). There is no dedicated individual or department to whom learners or staff can refer their requests for material, information or special needs.

For the branch/distributed model, the library is a mini library with a branch librarian in charge of providing all services, including instruction in the use of information resources and reference assistance.

Abdelraham (2011) as cited by Owusu-Ansah (2019), proposes a hybrid library model which consists of web-based and conventional library services, in which a distance librarian coordinate and manages library education services.

Regardless of the type of model, library and Information services provided to distance learners should include: reference services; computer based bibliographic and informational services; assistance with and instruction in the use of non-print media and equipment; and a programme of library user instruction designed to instill independent and effective information literacy skills while specifically meeting the learner support needs of the distance learning community (Henning, 2005; Maurya and Kumar, 2008; ACRL, 2016)).

2.5. Policy framework for library operations that supports distance learning

Policies on distance learning library services are important to a library in that they act as a framework for all its activities and help ensure that funding, personnel, time, facilities, equipment, and library resources are committed, among others (Ramasodi, 2009; Brooke, 2011; ACRL, 2016). Cardinal to the management of library service for distance learners is documented and updated

policies, regulations and procedures for the development, and management of information resources and services (Maurya and Kumar, 2008).

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method research for the purpose of triangulation of results. This research method allowed for collecting and analyzing both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data. A survey was conducted on characteristics and information needs of distance learners. A semi structured questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was appropriate in that it could be quickly and cheaply distributed to a large number of respondents who are geographically dispersed. The profile, which highlighted the search behavior of UNZA distance learners, determined the recommended type of library services suitable for them.

Out of a population of 4,000 registered distance learners (undergraduate and postgraduate) at UNZA, the questionnaires were initially distributed to a sample of 351 at a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which occurred during the period the survey was undertaken, the distribution and collection of questionnaires was disrupted as most offices were closed. Therefore, 4000 questionnaires were also distributed online using google forms to supplement the printed copies. The quantitative data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) while the qualitative data was coded into themes analysed using Excel.

3.1. Ethical considerations

Before data collection, the participants were provided with information showing the purpose of the study and were requested to indicate willingness to take part in the survey. The participants were further assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that the data collected would be used solely for academic purposes.

4. Findings and Discussion

Out of the 4,000 questionnaires distributed online, 979 responses were obtained, giving a response rate of 32.6%.

4.1. Characteristics of respondents

The demographics of the respondents show that the highest number of respondents, 448 (44.8%) were between the ages of 31 and 40 years, 540 (55%) were male and 628 (64%) were married. Further, 931 (95%) were working while studying. Five hundred and fifty-seven (57%) lived in cities away from the main campus in Lusaka (Table 1, Table 2, figure 1 and figure 2).

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
20-30	281	29
31-40	448	46
41-50	205	21

51 and above	46	5
Total	980	100
Gender		
	Frequency	Percent
Female	440	45
Male	540	55
Total	980	100
Marital status		
	Frequency	Percent
Divorced	17	2
Married	628	64
Single	322	33
Widowed	13	1
Total	980	100
Student status		
	Frequency	Percent
Studying only	49	5
Working and studying	931	95
Total	980	100

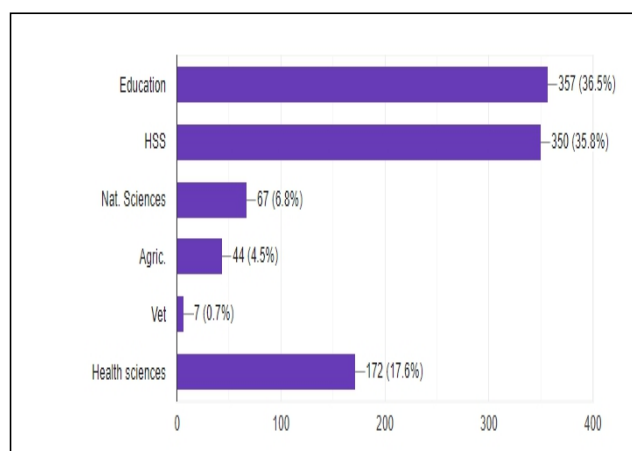
The findings are consistent with Smith (2001), Ashby (2002), Halsne and Gatta (2002), Chifwepa (2006), Ramasodi (2009), Brooke (2011), Tapfumaneyi and Rupande (2013 and Imasiku (2016), who observed that the average age was 25, most of them are working while attending studies; and, they are often times disadvantaged by geographic remoteness, normally living in cities away from the main campus. However, contrary to other literature findings, which indicate that they are more likely to be females rather than males, this study, like that of Chifwepa (2006) which was also done at UNZA, established that the majority of the respondents were male. This could mean that females were unable to enroll because they are seemingly more disadvantaged as compared to their male counterparts due to family commitments.

The above characteristics indicate that family and job responsibilities as well as distance will prevent distance learners from physically accessing library services. In addition, this meant that a suitable library model service for the majority working students should be adopted to ensure maximum access to library resources of these categories of students. Further, knowing the characteristics of distance learners will aid in policy formulation and planning services and resources to cater for them.

4.2. Schools enrolled in

Figure 2 below indicates that more than half of the respondents were students from School of Education and School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Of these two schools, the highest number of respondents came from the School of Education with 357 (37.5%) respondents, followed by Humanities and Social Sciences with a total of 350 (35.8%) respondents, the lowest being 7 (0.7%) from School of Veterinary Medicine. Identifying the schools that students are enrolled in is critical in collection

development as it will help in general mapping of library resources to fit curriculum needs.



Province	Frequency	Percent
Central	74	8
Copperbelt	152	16
Eastern	41	4
Luapula	30	3
Lusaka	432	44
Muchinga	31	3
North Western	53	5
Northern	40	4
Other	4	0
Southern	83	9
Western	37	4
Total	980	100

Table 2: Distribution by Province

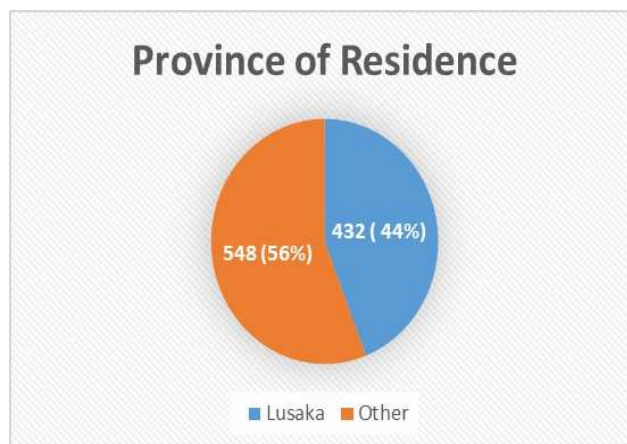


Figure 2: Province of residence

The results in table 1 above show that 95% were studying while working. This is likely to have had an effect on their

information seeking behavior as they would have limited time to visit the library.

4.3. User satisfaction with library services.

The respondents were asked whether they used the UNZA libraries. Out of 980 respondents, 616 (62%) responded in the affirmative (figure 3 below).

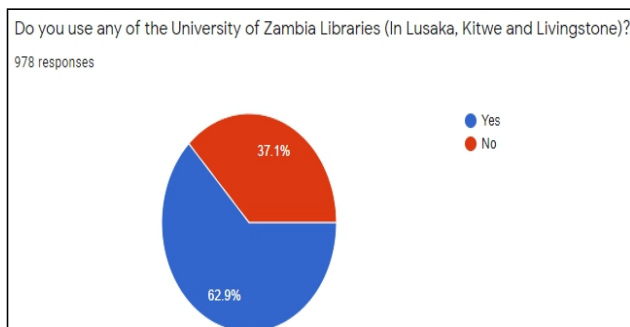


Figure 3: If used UNZA libraries

Further, the frequency of use, which may be an indicator of satisfaction, was to be determined. As such, we asked the respondents how often they used the libraries. Eight hundred and twenty-four (84%) indicated that they rarely used the libraries (see figures 3 and 4). This number is above the 616 respondents that indicated they used the Library. It may seem that even those that had earlier indicated that they did not use the library, were also among those who indicated that they rarely used it. Rare usage may indicate the challenges distance learners face in terms of time limitation, distance and travel cost, which limit the learners to access the few relevant reference materials at UNZA’s Main campus. This is in agreement with Gopakumar and Baradol (2009) who state that these students generally lack peer group support for their studies and usually have very limited time for going to the library. This shortage of time often arises from other commitments such as job and family commitment (Brooke, 2011).

If your answer to 9 above is Yes, how often do you use library?

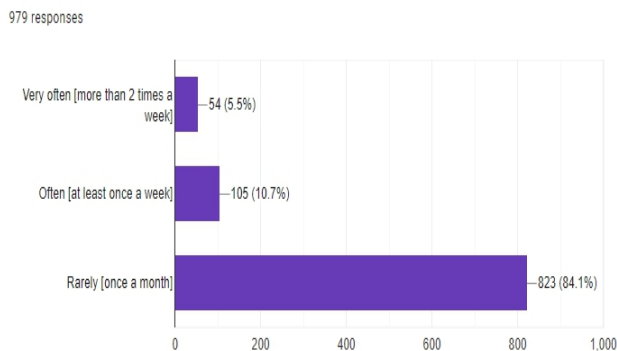


Figure 4: How often library is used

The study further sought to establish whether the status of student influenced the frequency of library use. Out of the

931 respondents who indicated that they were working while studying, 790 rarely used the library (See the cross tabulation in table 3 below). This confirms the assumption that the work commitments may hinder them from visiting the physical Library. There is therefore need to find innovative ways of ensuring that library and information services are accessible to the learners wherever and whenever needed.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of status of student and frequency of library use

Status of student	Frequency of library use				Total
	Rarely	Often	Very often	Other	
Studying only	35	9	6	1	5
Work/study	790	94	45	2	931
Total	825	103	51	3	982

4.4 Adequacy of library services received by distance learners

We further found out the perception of respondents regarding adequacy of resources and services the library offered. As such, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they found the information they needed when they visited the library, and if they were satisfied with what they found. Five hundred and fifty-eight (57%) said they did find the information they wanted. Of these, 334 (60%) indicated that they were not satisfied with the kind of information they retrieved. The reasons cited were as follows:

- i. Library books in stock were outdated
- ii. Most of the books in the library were irrelevant
- iii. Limited access for those living out of Lusaka where the main library is located.
- iv. Could not access electronic resources
- v. Because services at UNZA library were poor

One further went on to say that:

“Most of the books reflecting in OPAC were not found when searched”.

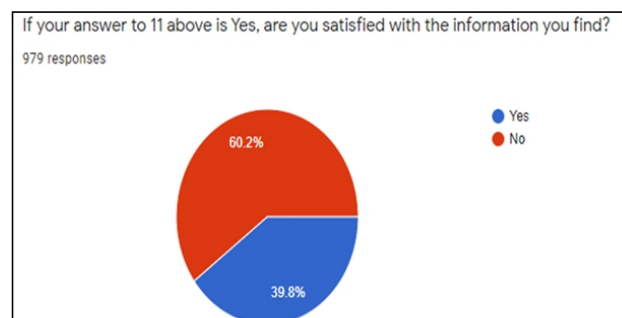


Figure 5: If satisfied with information found

The library provides a number of services to its users such as search and retrieval assistance, library instruction, and study space. Despite them being aware of such services, as figure 6 indicates, they may not have access to these services.

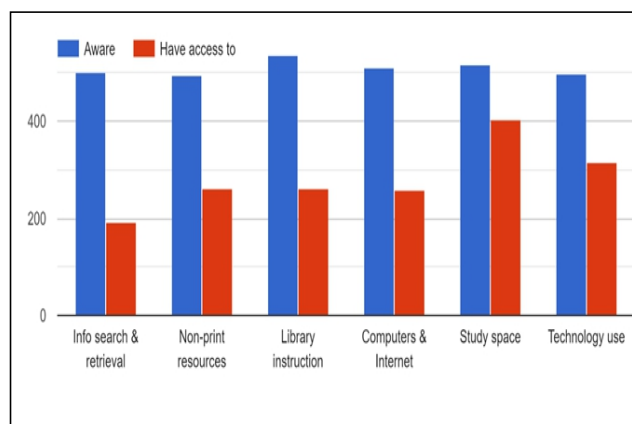


Figure 6: Awareness and access to services

This could mean that although the librarians provided information literacy services to some distant learners during the face-to face session, these services were not accessible to the students due to lack of adequate library facilities and time on the part of students. As ACRL (2016) emphasizes, “access to appropriate library services and resources is essential for the attainment of superior academic skills in post-secondary education, regardless of where students, faculty, staff, and programs are located.”

4.4. Information seeking behavior

The respondents were then asked to indicate the sources of information they used in their coursework, apart from UNZA library. The results indicate that 955 (98%) respondents used other sources of information and of these, the Internet made up 69.7%, followed by study modules at 20% as shown in figure 8 below.

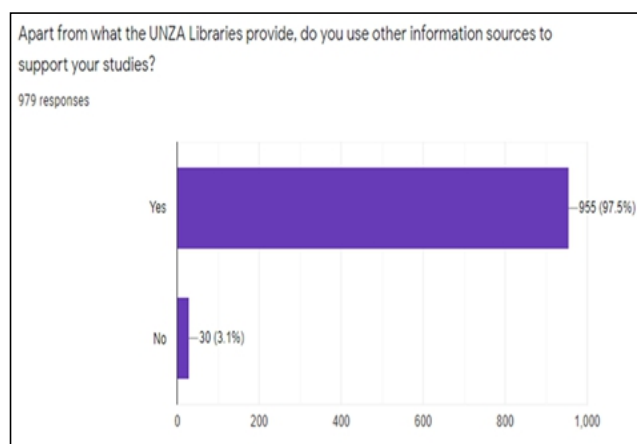


Figure 7: If used other information sources apart from UNZA library

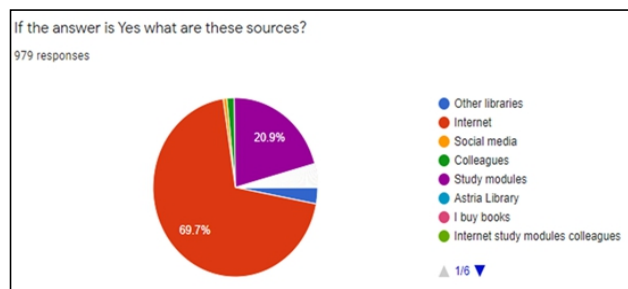


Figure 8: Alternative sources respondents used

In establishing alternative sources of information used by distance learners, the study attempted to fill the gap by aligning the library services to suit learners’ information seeking behavior. The results confirm the findings by Kelley and Orr (2003) cited by Oladokun (2014) and Miyanda (2010) who indicate that distance learners use the Internet to get information for their studies. In addition, Ritterbush (2014) states that distance learners relied heavily on Internet for research purposes. Further Kakana et al. (2020) posits that a good number of distance learners at UNZA access the institutional repository (IR) because it was easy to use and access.

Second to the Internet, study modules were the most used source of information during course work. Similarly, Kakana et al. (2020) reveals that despite having access to the IR and e-resources, distance learners did not rely on them completely but instead relied on course modules and lecture notes prepared by their lecturers. The dependence on study modules may have implications on student’s ability to be critical thinkers. Owsu-ansa and Bubuama (2015) in quoting Tait (2000) identify three roles that library services in distance education play, which are; to encourage cognitive development, enhance self-esteem and help meet required academic standards of students. All things being equal, Astria Digital Library would have come second if students were not entirely dependent on lecture notes to study. This brings into question, the study habits of the distance learners.

4.5. Identifying a suitable model for provision of library services to distance learners

To help the researchers identify an appropriate service model, the respondents were asked to suggest ways in which the library could extend its services to distance learners. The majority of them (57.6%) indicated that the university library needed to open more satellite libraries in the provinces as well as improve access to electronic resources and services as indicated by 23% of the respondents. When respondents were further asked to propose ways in which library service for distance learners could be improved, one respondent proposed that:

“UNZA should extend the library services to off campus users”

The other respondents proposed that:

- i. Online or reference librarians should be working 24/7;

- ii. UNZA library should collaborate with other institutions of higher learning for students to access library materials from these institutions;
- iii. Make the online library user friendly; and
- iv. Provide study space

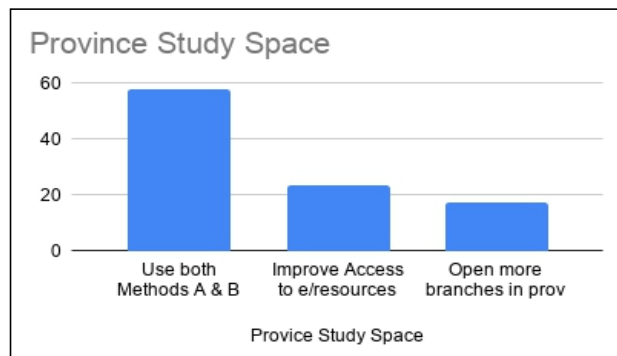


Figure 9: Ways in which library could extend services

The ACRL (2016) states that all students, faculty members, administrators, and any other members of an institution of higher education are entitled to the library services and resources of that institution, including direct communication with the appropriate library personnel, regardless of where they are physically located.

Satellite libraries

Automated satellite libraries in all the 10 provinces would to a larger extent help distance education students and indeed other categories of students living in these provinces access resources required in their studies. This has already been demonstrated by the positive comments the library has received from students accessing services from Kitwe and Livingstone satellite libraries about how useful and convenient these two satellite libraries are to them. Most of the respondents in the survey supported the idea of providing library services through satellite libraries at provincial level as indicated in figure 9 above.

4.6. Collaborating with local institutions

The fact that distance learning is a decentralized form of access to higher education, its success is dependent upon wide community support and cooperation. This implies that in order to ensure efficient and effective delivery of information resources and services to a dispersed student population, the library's own distance delivery system must include the active participation of libraries at all levels including universities, community colleges, schools, public libraries, etc. In this case, areas where infrastructure becomes a challenge, collaborating with local institutions would be one of the alternatives. This collaboration would be on various levels for instance using Internet facilities, buildings etc.

4.7. Access to online library resources and services

Online access to library resources and services has blurred the distinctions between on and off campus users. The users based at the main campus have more access to the library resources and services than their off campus counterparts. Collection development should therefore put

more emphasis on more e-content than physical collections. Library presence must be more online rather than behind the desk. Tait (2015) also agrees with the above statement as he states that, academic libraries caught between serving students on-campus and off, need to meet the demands of all users equally, efficiently and cost-effectively. In addition, there is need to restructure the delivery system to include full-text access via computer networks

4.8. Proposed library service model for University of Zambia distance education

Based on the findings of this study, including the review of existing models of conventional and virtual support to distance learners around the world and taking into account the unique needs of our users, we propose a library model where the services are distributed. In this model, a librarian based at the main campus will coordinate the services that are physically dispersed, while satellite librarians will maintain a physical presence in the provinces. These will provide a blended service, which will include both face-to-face and online support services.

Although, in the last decade, many institutions have moved away from designating one person as distance learning librarian, campuses do need a designated person to bring focus, to function as an advocate, and to coordinate distance learning library services. At the same time, Librarians need to be out there where the learners are, hence the distributed model. This way, Librarians will not be perceived as just content providers but as significant agents of transformative change. Moreover, the on campus student will also benefit from this model because the new trend in university education is leaning more towards online learning. The technological revolution brought about by the Internet permeates most tertiary institutions and propels the concept of online education. Taking advantage of ICTs as an enabler, the most important features in this service model will include:

- i. Web based library services: this service will involve creating a web-page that addresses distance learners' information needs, by providing course specific databases and Internet resources tailored to the needs of distance learners.
- ii. Availability of digital reference services: This will take the form of users sending emails to the library or using a web form to specify their information requirements, or make use of real time communication services such as live chats, telephone calls and social media. This way, remote communication with distance learners will be achieved.
- iii. Information skill instruction: This will involve providing synchronous or asynchronous forms of education specifically on information literacy to distance learners in order to boost their confidence in the use of e-resources.
- iv. Inter-library cooperation or consortia: This will involve the development of cooperative agreements with other institutions (Owusu-Ansah, 2019). In this case, areas where infrastructure

becomes a challenge, cooperating with existing library facilities in the localities will be one of the alternatives. This cooperation would be on various levels for instance using Internet facilities and buildings.

Further, we shall adopt the ACRL (2016) standards for library services to distance learners in formulating our policy framework; however, they shall be adapted to suit our local conditions.

5. Conclusion

Having identified the characteristics of distance learners at UNZA and their information seeking behavior, it has been established that the library service model in which services, infrastructure as well as staff are distributed providing a blended service (face to face and online) would be the best for UNZA. In order to effectively provide these services, there is need for investment in ICT infrastructure. This will enable learners access resources and services wherever they are. We are of the view that a policy framework is formulated in order to guide the implementation of the model.

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