




The Nexus Between Academic Libraries and Students' Academic Achievement

Londolani B Munzhedzi¹ 

University of Johannesburg

Mukovhe Mukhwantheli² 

University of South Africa

Abstract

Academic libraries offer students various services that cater to their academic needs. The use of these libraries goes beyond just fetching a book for research and an assignment; they also encourage the culture of reading. The services provided by academic libraries have a prime impact on students' academic achievements. Libraries amalgamate information resources and technologies to provide students with online resources such as electronic journals, databases, e-books, journal articles, government gazettes and physical books. Educational systems around the world are highly supported by academic libraries. Thus, this study examined the relationship between academic libraries and students' academic achievement in South Africa. While this study is highly theoretical and relies profoundly on journal articles, books, latest case studies and dissertations to present its argument, fifty students from different universities in South Africa were randomly selected for the study from the University of Johannesburg, University of Limpopo, Vhembe Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college, Rosebank College and Richfield Institute of Learning, University of Pretoria, University of Venda, and the University of South Africa. These students were selected through stratified sampling, and the researchers used an online survey developed and distributed through Google Forms. The findings of the study revealed that a relationship exists between academic libraries and students' academic achievement. Lastly, the study recommended that higher institutions of learning provide books, articles, journals, theses, and dissertations that are up-to-date and relevant to all fields of study. Moreover, it is important to provide digital access to library services as South Africa embraces the technological era. A systematic literature review has been

1 Londolani B. Munzhedzi, University of Johannesburg. munzhedzilondolani64@gmail.com

2 Mukovhe. Mukhwantheli, University of South Africa. mukovhemukhwantheli@gmail.com

used to study documented evidence, and data were collected from a stratified sampling using an electronic survey questionnaire.

Keywords: academic libraries, students, academic achievement.

Introduction

Academic libraries play a vital role in providing educational information and resources. Due to changes in information technology, library services are now accessible both online and physically. However, a change in the information technology environment poses a challenge to users of library services and providers of library resources. The wake of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic revealed a need for library services to be online. Institutions of higher learning have facilities which assist in teaching and learning, and the library is one of these facilities. The significance of academic libraries cannot be stressed enough; it is hard to imagine an institution of higher learning without a library. Carvalho e Rodrigues and Mandrekar (2020) reveal that libraries play an important role in providing reliable information to students. Thus, libraries represent the core mission of an educational institution: "Library represents the physical manifestation of the core values and activities of academic life" (Konlan & Yebowaa, 2017).

Academic libraries are viewed as the "heart of any university" (Allison, 2015). An academic library refers to a library that is part of an educational institution such as a college, university or any other postsecondary institution designed to cater for the needs of students, staff and others by agreement (Reitz, 2002). In addition, Gbemi-Ogunleye (2016) defined libraries as a "collection of books, manuscripts, journals and other sources of recorded information". The size of the collection is used as an indicator of academic quality. These collections provide students with efficacious information that is true, factual and reliable through various creative works such as scholarly journals, books, novels, short stories, theses, dissertations, audio tapes and CD-ROMs (Mohammed & Makki, 1997).

Academic libraries provide students with academic resources (both physical and digital), working spaces and opportunities for self-development (Basil, 2012). Librarians offer services such as guidance and tutoring students on assignments and projects with referencing and consultations. Access to learning materials has the potential to bridge the inequality gap and provide all students with an equal opportunity to perform better in their academic activities. This boosts students' confidence in their academic writing and fosters critical thinking and personal growth. Given the importance of access to resources, it is crucial for librarians to have a thorough knowledge of the student's needs (Carvalho e Rodrigues & Mandrekar, 2020).

Library services such as orientations and videos give students, especially first-year students, retention and persistence in their academic activities. De Souza (2010) mentioned parental support, financial aid, mentorship and self-confidence as factors that facilitate academic success for students. While these factors contribute to a student's academic success, library services are often overlooked as a variable enabling academic achievement. Access to library materials and services, either online or physical, boosts students' confidence and bridges the inequality gap between students from rich homes and those from marginalised backgrounds. Subsequently, all students have a fair chance to succeed and excel in their academic activities, be it research, assignments, theses, tests and dissertations.

Academic libraries and students' academic achievements

Undeniably, the habit of reading is fostered from childhood (Cotter, 2002:13). However, the surroundings one is exposed to can influence the habit of reading; thus, it can also emerge. Many students are exposed to libraries when they go to higher institutions of learning. A study by Smith (2013) revealed that students perform better when they use library resources and services as opposed to those who do not visit the library either physically or online. Furthermore, the same study revealed that students who carry out academic research become even more learned in their field of study. Reading develops critical thinking; thus, frequent utilisation of library services and resources will lead to even higher academic achievement (Gbemi-Ogunleye, 2016).

Books available in libraries, coupled with guidance on assessments, help students develop their literacy skills (De Souza, 2010). Libraries have been dispersing knowledge for many years, and in his 1992 study, Elley (1992) discovered a direct link between the ability to perform better in academic activities with the provision of library materials. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have a fair chance at academic success through the provision of learning materials by academic libraries. Gbemi-Ogunleye (2016) posits that such students depend on books from the library to complete their assessments and increase their chances of higher grades. However, it is important to note that other students also performed better without constantly using library resources (Ayodele, 2000).

An educational institution with an effective library preserves high academic achievement (Whitmire, 2017). Successful academic performance supports students with knowledge generation and advances their knowledge (Konlan & Yebowaa, 2017). The world is constantly evolving, and information technology is changing the development process. Therefore, the current and upcoming generation needs to capacitate themselves with skills and knowledge relevant to current global challenges (Konlan, 2020). This means

that libraries need to provide students with timely information through various forms of communication. Academic libraries are now available through different digital platforms. Library resources are readily available to students from anywhere at any time.

A significant correlation exists between students' assessment marks and the use of libraries (Wong & Webb, 2011). However, these authors further suggest that higher marks may also depend on the quantity of citations as opposed to quality. Nonetheless, Whitmire (2017) assessed the link between book loans, Internet visits and academic success. The study revealed a positive relationship and illustrated that students who loaned library books and visited sites performed better than those who did not. Although Wong and Webb (2011) are sceptical about this relationship, they assert that library resources have an unmeasurable effect on students. This includes the development of their thinking capacity that cannot be measured on paper:

Academic libraries have for a very long time existed solely for the purpose of supporting university faculties and departments with their vast collections of recorded knowledge. Through their association with universities and colleges, academic libraries are part of a broader societal knowledge system and influenced by other role players in their traditional core areas of focus, namely organisation and storage, as exemplified in models of society's knowledge system (Molepo, 2018:18)

Students' adoption of information technology has shown active and collaborative learning by accessing library resources online. The world was hit by the unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic, and students had to learn online. At this time, library services had to be readily available online in order to cater for students' academic needs. This supports Whitmire's (2017) statement that information technology fosters high student engagement with library services and resources through its hybrid existence, physically and digitally. For example, the ability to access the university website to search for journals that are relevant to one's study. Beyond students' engagement, library materials also provide support to researchers and lead to positive outcomes for their studies. There are abundant studies on students' academic achievement and on academic libraries; however, there are fewer studies in South Africa, and more concrete and reliable first-hand information is required.

Conceptual framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is derived from the student development theory by Astin in 1988 (Long, 2012:37). This theory suggests that students' developmental stage affects how they think and experience the world. Thus, it can also reveal to institutions their needs and the support they require throughout their academic journeys. "Students' development is closely related to students' involvement with their friends, academicians and academic programs" (Long, 2012:37). This theory presents that students who invest in their studies have a greater chance to perform better (Tinto, 2015:45). Konlan and Yebowaa (2011) argue that students who utilise library services and resources vary systematically with those who do not. Thus, it gives a study to estimate the relationship between academic libraries and students' academic achievement. To attest to this, a study by Marzoli & Papa (2017), titled *School library and students' achievement: a relationship to go into*, revealed a positive relationship between reading comprehension performance and the size of the school library collection. Furthermore, a standardised test by Megan Oakleaf concluded that "the quality of the library is a predictor of academic performance" (Oakleaf, 2020:16).

Methodology

This study used the quantitative research design and followed a survey search design. A survey was developed and distributed to students from various universities in South Africa. The target population consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students in all fields of study. The participants were selected through a stratified sampling technique, ensuring that the selection of students was not biased. Through stratified sampling, students were sampled as per faculty to accommodate all fields of study and various institutions in South Africa, be it TVET colleges or public and private universities. As questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms, the response rate was 100%.

Research findings

The findings of this study are presented in a graphical and grammatical format of all the questions probed. The survey had ten questions that probed participants, with eight questions with predetermined responses.

In your own words, what is an academic library?

The first question asked participants (students) to define an academic library in their own words. This question probed to see if the respondent understood an academic library. Amongst other definitions, many respondents showed

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an understanding of what an academic library is, and some of the definitions were:

A library found within a university to help students with research.

A library with a plethora of accredited information that is academia related.

It is a building whereby students find information, either digital or books, to assist in their studies.

From the first question, which required respondents to define an academic library in their own words, this study draws that some respondents understand the library as a “building” while others understand that a library can also operate digitally. Thus, this study concludes that an academic library is housed in an educational institution, which can serve two additional purposes: to support education and research by university faculty and students.

Academic libraries are helpful to students.

The second statement was, “Academic libraries are helpful to students”. This question was posed to find out if students find academic libraries within their institutions of learning useful to them as they pursue their studies. It provided participants with options to agree, strongly agree, stay neutral, disagree and strongly disagree, and the responses from the fifty participants are illustrated in the Figure 11.1.

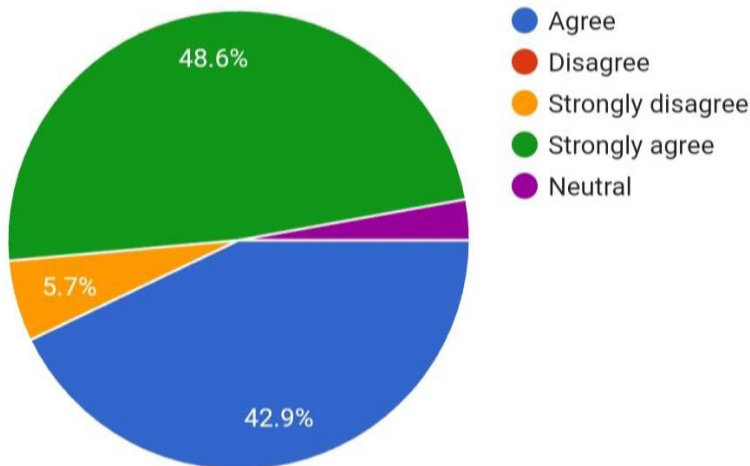


Figure 11.1: The manner in which academic libraries are useful to students

Based on the percentages acquired and depicted in Figure 11.1, academic libraries are helpful to students as 48.6% strongly agree with this statement, followed by 42.9% that just agree. This brings the study to the conclusion that academic libraries are helpful to students. On the contrary, 5.7% disagree; and the researcher observed that from those who disagreed, many of them do not understand that online journals are sometimes also provided by libraries.

Academic libraries helped to ease my academic journey.

The third statement on the survey was “Academic libraries helped to ease my academic journey”, and the results are as depicted in Figure 11.2. The purpose of this statement or question was to understand from students’ responses if academic libraries have eliminated difficulties in their academic journey. Remember that many academic libraries often have services, such as the Turnitin program, to help better academics. Of fifty students, 42,9% strongly agree that academic libraries helped ease their academic journey, followed by 31,4% who just agree. On the contrary, 22,9% were just neutral, 2,8% strongly disagreed, and none disagreed. From the results, this study concludes that academic libraries ease students’ academic journey.

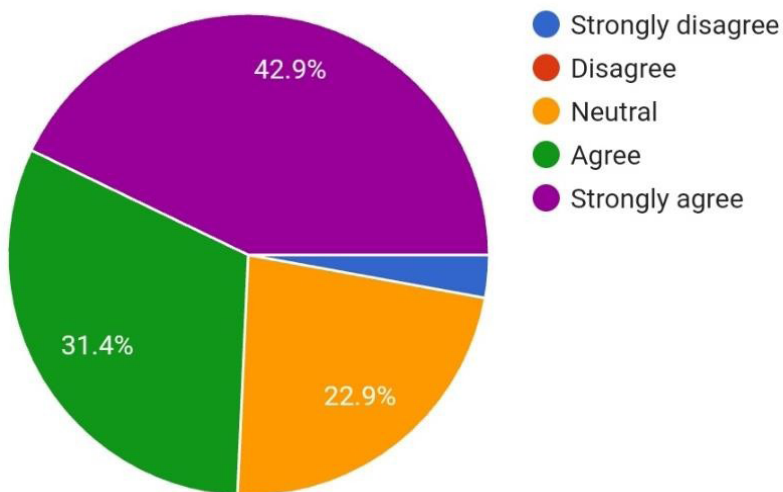


Figure 11.2: The ability of academic libraries to ease academic journey

When I used library services and resources (including online journals, Turnitin, etc.) I felt confident about my work.

Participants were required to indicate if they felt confident using library resources and services such as electronic journals and Turnitin. The responses

indicated that the majority of students feel confident (48.6%), some agree (34.3%), and some are neutral (17.1%). As there are no students who disagree, this study confidently concludes and presents that academic libraries give students confidence in their work. Figure 11.3 depicts the responses of fifty students:

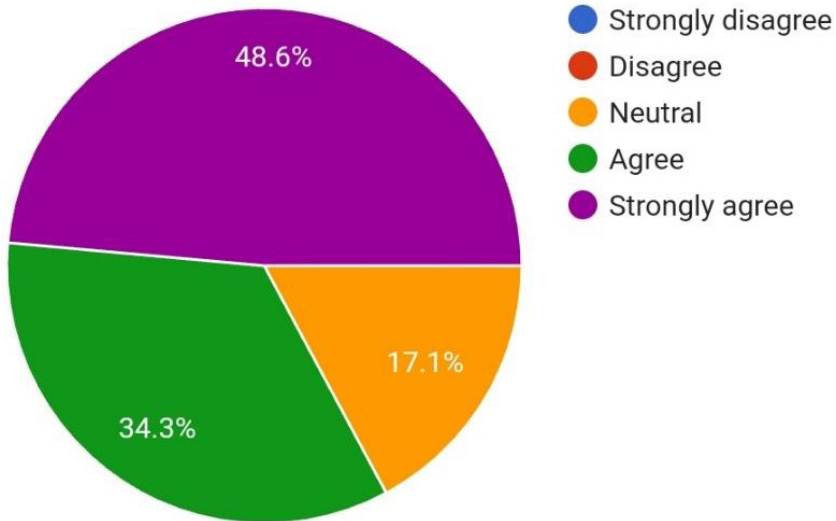


Figure 11.3: Academic libraries boost the confidence of students in their work

My academic performance is/was influenced by the provision of library services.

On a scale from one to ten, participants were required to scale if their academic performance was influenced by the provision of services. The results, as shown in Figure 11.4, bring this study to the conclusion that students' academic performance is/was influenced by the provision of library services. However, very few respondents scaled one and two. This leads the study to show the need to popularise library services in all academic institutions.

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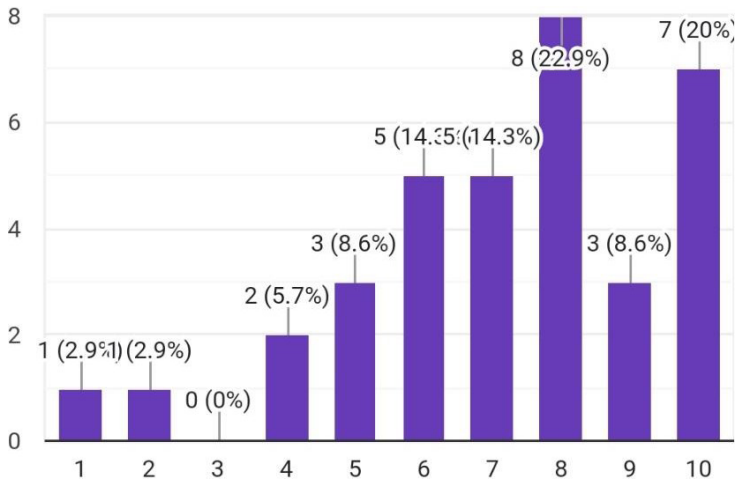


Figure 11.4: The influence of library services to students' academic performance

Library services and resources have guided me in my assessments, which developed my literacy skills.

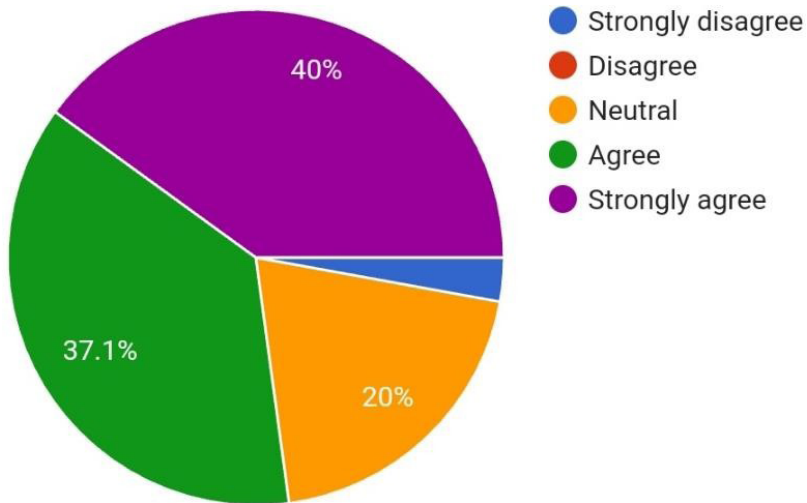


Figure 11.5: The role of academic library services in guiding students in their assessments and developing their literacy skills

According to Figure 11.5, 40% of the respondents strongly agree with the probed statement, while 37.1% agree and 20% are neutral. Based on the

results, the study concludes that library services help students develop their literacy skills through assessment guidance.

Academic libraries fostered my habit of reading.

The literature review above revealed that the habit of reading is fostered from childhood. Other authors argued that surroundings can influence the habit of reading. This statement was to figure out a stand point from these two statements. The results reveal that 45.7% of students agree with this statement, with 22.9% strongly agreeing, 14.3% neutral, 8.6% disagreeing, as well as strongly disagreeing. The conclusion of the study is that libraries have fostered the habit of reading for many students, while for some, it was perhaps fostered from childhood. The results are:

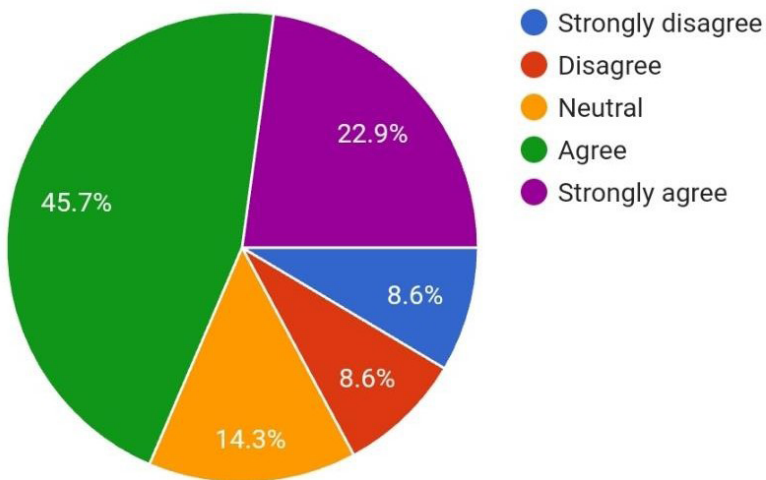


Figure 11.6: The impact of academic libraries in fostering the habit of reading

Academic libraries are redundant in higher institutions of learning.

The main purpose of this statement was to find out if students across South Africa found libraries useful or redundant in their universities and colleges. The findings of this study show that students find libraries useful as opposed to being redundant. This is shown in Figure 11.7, with 22.9% of students disagreeing, 20% strongly disagreeing, and 28.6% neutral. With the 25.7% who agreed, the researcher later found that using the word “redundant” on the question confused some participants. This is because, on the last question that they were offered the chance to comment on, they opposed their response to this response.

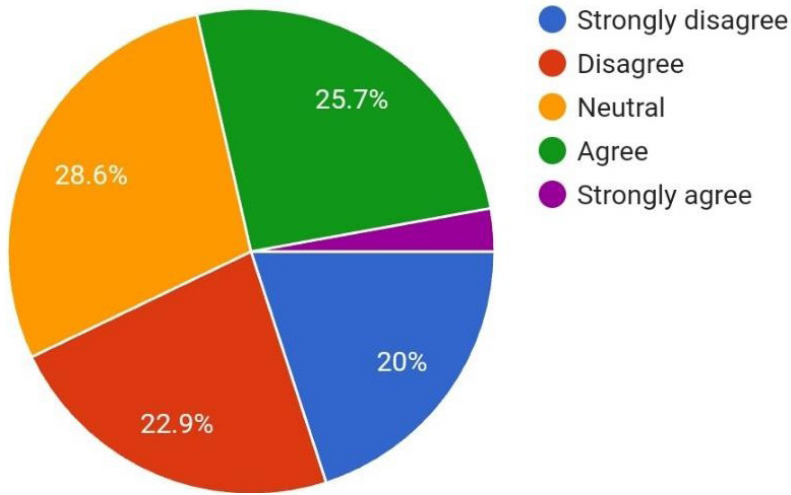


Figure 11.7: The redundancy of academic libraries in higher institutions of learning

Academic libraries are important to any higher institution of learning.

Based on the results illustrated in Figure 11.8, academic libraries and all institutions of higher learning are important. To illustrate, 73.5% of students firmly agree that academic libraries are important for higher institutions of learning.

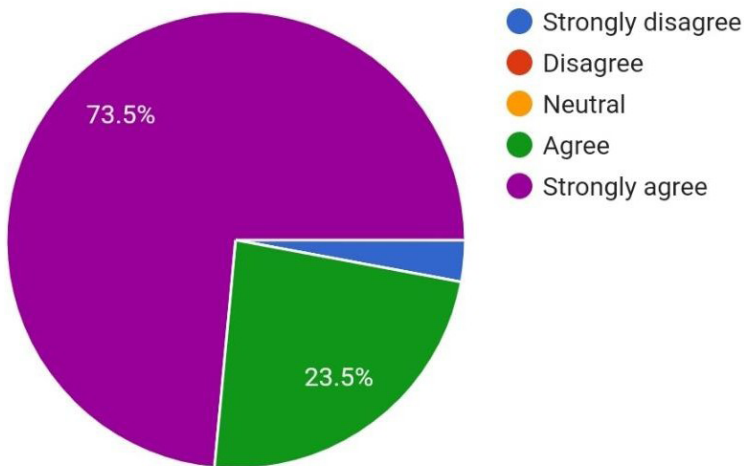


Figure 11.8: The importance of academic libraries to any higher institutions of learning

Conclusion

This study revealed that academic libraries have a greater impact on students' academic achievement. The findings of the study reveal that students' academic achievement is twofold: one result is that frequent use of library resources results in high academic achievement. Another result is that some students do not use the library services because they feel that they do not cater for them through the provision of updated information and the latest books.

There are a number of limitations to the use of libraries, including the inability to provide up-to-date books and other learning resources. This makes libraries ineffective, and they need to be improved.

Recommendations

This study draws multiple recommendations from the comments of students who participated in the study:

- ◆ Learning materials provided by academic libraries are limited to certain knowledge; thus, they should be expanded to more materials to assist all students.
- ◆ Moreover, libraries need to transform the experience of the students from just being a building to accessing learning material online as the world becomes faceless.
- ◆ The culture of libraries needs to be reinstalled into the current generation, and this can be achieved by providing more information on how they can access library services online, calling for library orientation programmes which must be conducted more often for first-year students, to educate them about the services offered by libraries.
- ◆ Librarians should also be educated in a certain field.

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