
**QUALITY OF LIBRARY RESOURCES AT ZIMBABWE
OPEN UNIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY OF MASHONALAND
EAST REGIONAL CENTRE.**

Nyenywa Trust, Kandira Nobbie

Zimbabwe Open University Senior Lecturer and Regional Quality Assurance
Coordinator and Loss Control Officer- Mashonaland East Region

ABSTRACT

This descriptive research was conducted to describe the quality of library resources at the Zimbabwe Open University. The method provided the opportunity to gather both quantitative and qualitative data so as to describe (Glass and Hopkins 1984) the quality of library resources in the most effective manner. The questionnaire to elicit data from a sample of 40 out of 100. The sample consisted of 6 RPCs, 1 library assistant and 33 students. The targeted population was stratified into three main sub-groups; registered students, library assistants and RPCs. Then, selection of the sample from each sub-group was subjected to simple random sampling. It can be concluded that the major constraints affecting the use of library resources were: inadequate reading materials and lack of current library materials, and convenience of the library location to the users. It can be also concluded that most of the open and distance learning students use electronic resources than hard copies. On account of the above conclusions, the researcher recommends the following: There is need to improve on provision of current and adequate library resources such as journals, textbooks, reference materials, and newspapers, longer opening hours for readers without closing library on weekends and public holidays to enable library users to use the library efficiently. The region should ensure that electronic resources are readily accessible. The region should train new students in accessing electronic resources as they are the most commonly used resources by students. The University should also ensure that new students access communication tools that enable them to access electronic resources.

Keywords: *library resources, quality*

INTRODUCTION

The provision of quality library resources to those who learn at a distance is undoubtedly one of the most exciting and challenging developments that have occurred in contemporary librarianship. It is the quality of library resources that makes the library a hub of all information in a teaching and learning institution, in that the materials stocked are meant to be a source of knowledge, pleasure and assistance for the maximum utilisation by clientele they are meant for. However, a proactive approach and re-engineering of library and information resources are required, as the learner is not only separated from the institution but also from the library of that institution.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The provision of quality library resources has been fundamental to the success of Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) since its inception in 1993. ZOU is the only state university which exclusively offers open and distance learning in Zimbabwe. In terms of operations, it is decentralised in ten regional centres based in each of the ten provincial capital cities of the country and the virtual region catering for students beyond the borders of Zimbabwe. ZOU further decentralized to district centres in order to be closer to its clients. In Mashonaland East Region ZOU is based in Marondera with district centres at Murehwa, Wedza and Chivhu. This mode of delivery is preferred because it enables faculty and students to communicate with one another through prepared course materials (ZOU General Information and Regulations, 2007). However, the numbers of students taking part in these courses have been increasing every year. The institution is expected to respond in a similar fashion whereby resource provision also becomes robust. Das et al (2009) lament that,

There is little recognition of the central role that library plays in support of the quality of education or in the development of lifelong learning skills. Although many consider the library to be the heart of the university, the use of the library is often not incorporated into courses being prepared for distance delivery.

In light of these revelations it is prudent to carry out this study with an ultimate aim to establish the quality of library resources at ZOU ME.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The library is the hub of all information in a teaching and learning institution which means there is need for ZOU ME Library to provide quality library resources in order to meet its institutional objective. However, the question that needs to be explored is: “what is the quality of library resources at ZOU ME?”

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How accessible in terms of quantity are the ZOU ME library resources?

What is the level of quality of library resources at ZOU ME?

How convenient is the library location to the users?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Quality is a measure of excellence to satisfy specific customer or "meeting the requirements of the customer (<http://www.businessdictionary.com>). This view is also shared by Mutongi (2014) who also defines quality as associated with any systematic process for ensuring quality during the successive steps in developing a product or service. Quality of library resources can be viewed as the degree to which reading material soft or hard satisfy library meet the basic reading needs of students in their academic pursuit.

Library resources are materials in the library that make services possible or are the materials which the users come to consult, read or borrow. Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2009) notes that academic libraries are stocked with both "printed and non-printed library resources" Mlanga (2015) asserts that these information materials are the library resources that libraries acquire, catalogue, stock, and make available to their patrons, as well as use to provide various services.

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study (Nengomasha, 2013). This study was guided by Ranganathan's five laws of library science. Mlanga (2015) lists the Ranganathan's five laws of library science as;

- "Books are for use"
- "Every reader his or her book."
- "Every book its reader"
- "Save the time of the reader"
- "The library is a growing organism"

It is noted that Ranganathan identified the first law as "books are for use" which means that it is imperative to ensure library users use the materials selected and purchased for them. In this law, it is argued that libraries are not just about storing books, but they are about people having access to books.

In the second law of Ranganathan argues that there is need for every reader to get his or her book and the book should to satisfy each of the library users. Thus, the library collection should be a mix of old and rare material as well as of the latest material reflecting advances in various fields.

In the third law: “every book its reader” Ranganathan advocates for easy access to materials, and one way to do so is by taking the library resources closer to the users. Thus, these are exciting developments, focused on expanding services to where and when users may need them.

The fourth law is "save the time of the reader" (Mlanga, 2015). Nengomasha (2013) argues that libraries must have the objective of saving the time of the reader. It is further noted that the acceptance and adoption of information communication technology (ICT) has saved thousands of hours of the reader's time when compared to manual systems. In this case there is need to consolidate and repackage information into an appropriate form, making information available when it is needed, ensuring the quality of services and offerings, taking user benefits and preferences into account. Thus, libraries must ensure that users' valuable time is not wasted in searching for resources.

The fifth law, that “the library is a growing organism” (Nengomasha, 2013) means that libraries will continue to grow in the future. In this case even the presence of e-resources does not stop the acquisition of new print material and the pace at which they grow.

The accessibility of library resources in terms of quantity in an ODL environment

The university library as the academic heart of the university system should be stocked with both “printed and non-printed library resources” (Popoola and Haliso, 2009). Popoola (2008) further notes that printed library resources are books, pamphlets periodicals, newspapers and reference resources, while non-printed library resources are often referred to as audio-visual resources. Toner (2008) asserts that these information materials are the library materials that libraries acquire, catalogue, stock, and make available to their patrons, as well as use to provide various services. However, Jubb and Green’s (2007) found that most university libraries houses different types of library resources which include print and electronic but most of the library students prefer print materials.

In a study on adequacy of physical library resources at the University of Wisconsin, USA Koohang (2001) found that most academic libraries are failing to provide relevant collection of textbooks; journals, reference and bibliographic sources to a greater extent to support research in all subjects and disciplines within their host institutions. It can be further noted that an academic environment without a well adequately resourced library is tantamount to a person without a brain. Furthermore, ODL libraries in developing countries (including Zimbabwe) are failing to improve on their library collections due to financial constraints (Popoola, 2008).

Over the past decade, most state university libraries in Nigeria have been experiencing much difficulty in providing materials to the users due to the alarming rate of rising prices of books and journals as well as the fall of the Nigerian economy (Ugah, 2008). Toner (2008) posits that university students in developing countries are not using their institutional libraries because they have not been able to acquire collections comprehensive enough to meet the needs of their users due to inadequate funding. This may clearly show that inadequate library resources are a barrier to library use.

The quality of library resources in an ODL environment

The provision of quality library resources to those who learn at a distance is undoubtedly one of the most exciting and challenging development that has occurred in contemporary librarianship, (Oyewusi and Oyeboade, 2009). Popoola and Haliso (2009) further argues that library resources are considered as a good measure of an institution's excellence if they meet the quality standards required. Sacchanand (2002) also adds that library resources should be sufficient in quality, depth, diversity, and currency to support the institution curriculum. As a result of this, university libraries are often considered as the most important resource centre of an academic institution in an ODL environment.

The library should provide varied, authoritative, and up-to-date library resources, which supports its mission (Kenya Commission for Higher Education, 2007). Calvet (2000) in a study on quality standards of university library found that the university library in an ODL environment should establish, promote and maintain a wide variety of quality library resources in the most useable form and that information should be provided for the benefit of the students.

An ODL university library should be responsible for providing or securing convenient, direct, physical and electronic access to library resources for distance learning programs, equivalent to those provided in traditional settings and in sufficient quality, depth, number, scope and formats (Ugah, 2008). Thus, the library collection should be live, balanced and up-to-date also covered in depth.

The convenience of library location to the users in an ODL environment

A major problem that ODL students face is accessibility to library resources (Seth and Parida, 2006). Oladokum and Aina (2009) assert that although access can be measured in many ways, geographic access is of primary concern in many rural areas. Chikuya (2007) also notes that open and distance students who live in isolated places, relatively far from metropolitan areas often find it very difficult to have access to facilities. In comparison with urban students, open and distance students who reside in rural areas have to travel further to have access and face other problems such as poor quality roads and lack of public transport.

Ismail (2009) in studying whether geographical location of students has an effect on accessibility to library resources discovered that 71% of the respondents complained of the distance between the library and where they live as a hindrance to accessing the library.

Das, et al. (2009) asserts that in Nigeria students come from remote areas where accessibility to library resources and internet connectivity is almost non-existent. Furthermore, they are affected by high cost of transport which is a challenge to most students making them fail to use university libraries. However, it was noted that only students residing within a distance of less than 15km can have access to library resources regularly as compared to those residing in other places away.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research does not fit neatly into either the qualitative nor the quantitative research methodologies but a mixed methods (Knupfer and McLellan (undated). They go on to explain that descriptive studies are concerned with “what is”. This method was appropriate as the research seeks to describe the quality of library resources at the ZOU. The method provided the opportunity to gather both quantitative and qualitative data organise, tabulate, depict and describe (Glass and Hopkins 1984) the quality of library resources in the most effective manner.

The instrument which was used to solicit data from the respondents was the questionnaire, which was used due to its numerous advantages in descriptive surveys, among which is the fact that they can gather lots of data from a large sample in a short space of time.

The Population and sample

The population for the study was 115. This comprised 100 registered students drawn from all faculties, two (2) library assistants and thirteen (13) Regional Programme Coordinators (RPCs). From the population of 115, a sample of 40 was drawn. The sample consisted of 6 RPCs, 1 library assistant and 33 students. The targeted population was stratified into three main sub-groups; registered students, library assistants and RPCs. Then, selection of the sample from each sub-group was subjected to simple random sampling.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Response Rate

Table 4.1 Summary of Questionnaire Response Rate

Number of questionnaires distributed to respondents	80
Number of questionnaires returned	40
Total response rate	50%

Table 4.1 above represents the summary of questionnaire response rate. The response rate was calculated by comparing the number of questionnaires returned with the number distributed to students. The table shows that 80(100%) questionnaires were distributed but only 40(50%) questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 50%. It remains, that the overall response rate of 50% was disappointing. The reason for the low response rate is that the questionnaires were distributed out in mid-July, which coincided with the off semester break.

Gender of the Respondents

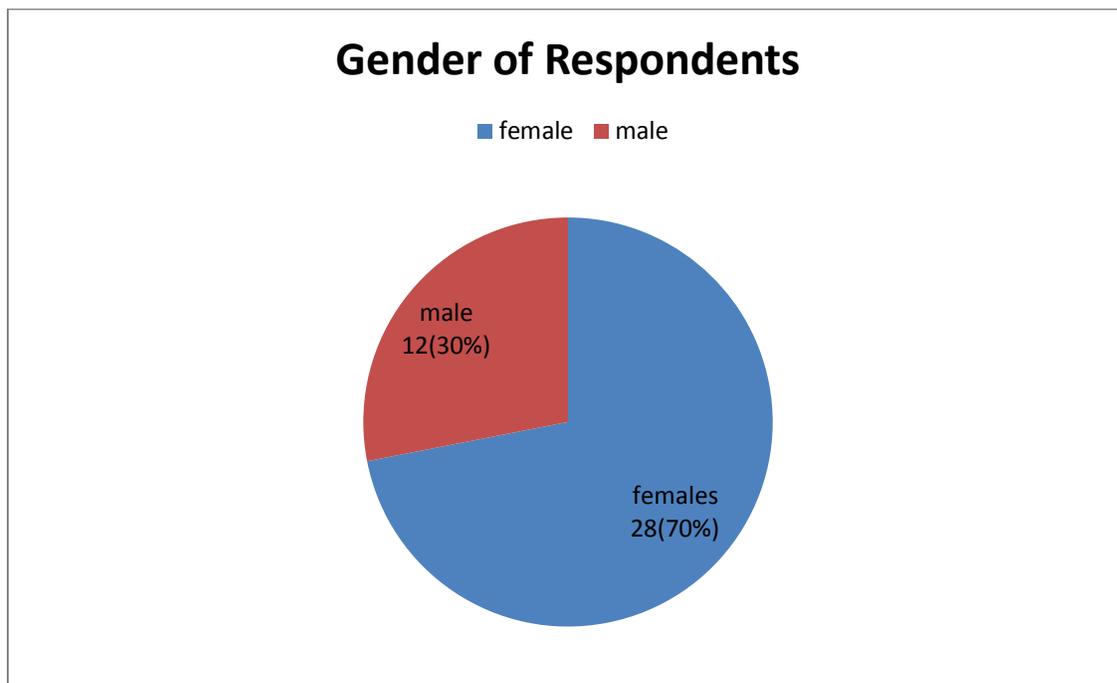


Figure 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Figure 4.1 represented the distribution of respondents according to their sex. A total of forty respondents responded and comprised 12 (30%) male and 28 (70%) females. There were more female respondents than male. This showed that female students used the library more than male

students at ZOU ME regional library. This can also be attributed to the regional enrolment which may suggest that female students are dominating the region.

Adequacy of library resources at the ZOU Mashonaland East Regional library

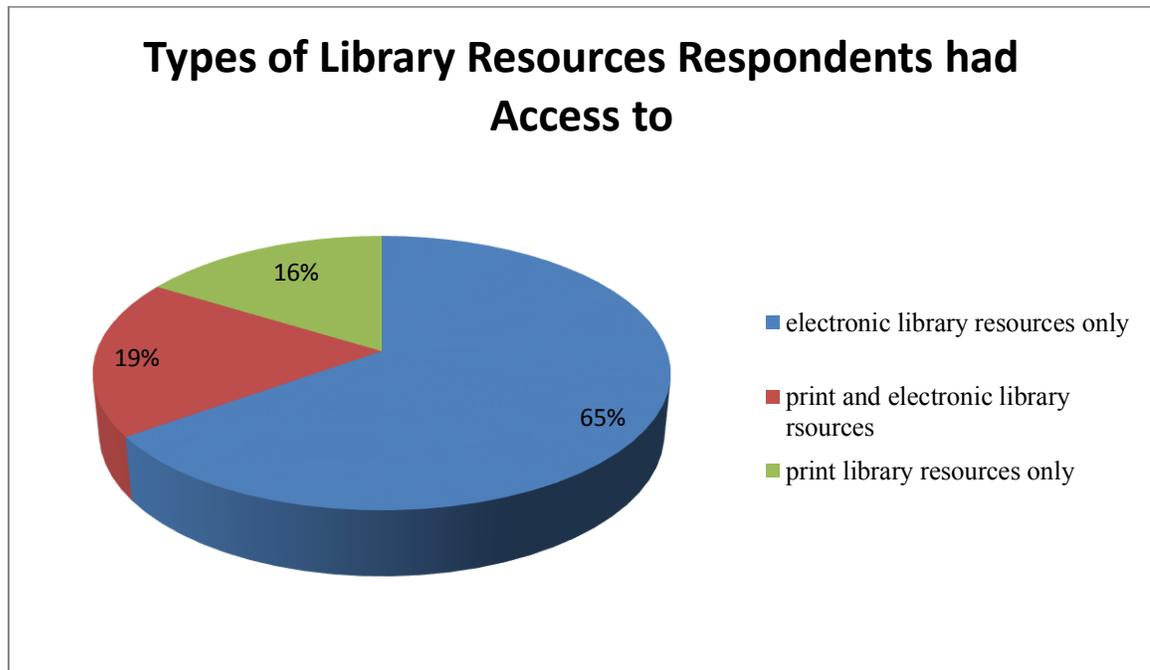


Figure 4.3: Types of library resources the respondents had access to in the ZOU, ME regional library

Figure 4.3 shows the types of library resources the respondents had access to in the ZOU ME regional library. According to the figure, 28 (65%) said they had access to electronic library resources only, 8(19%) who said they had access to print and electronic library resources only and the majority 4(16%) said they had access to print library resources only. This shows that the greatest number of students use electronic resources. This may be due to the fact that most students are embracing technology especially that the student demographics are changing with the influx of those who are coming from conventional universities who are generally young. This concurs with Ranganathan’s first law “books are for use” which means that it is imperative to ensure library users use the materials selected and purchased for them. In that vein, resource investments must be in line with the user preference. In this law, it is argued that libraries are not just about storing books, but they are about people having access to library resources`.

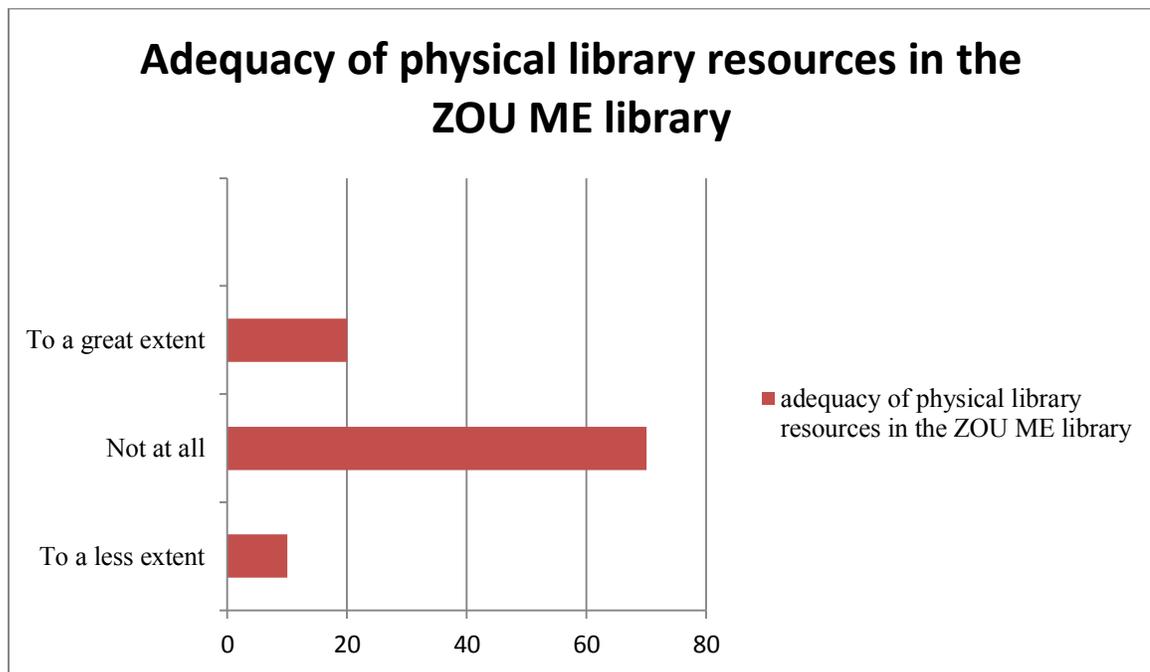


Figure 4.4: The adequacy of physical library resources

Figure 4.4 shows the adequacy of physical library resources in the ZOU ME library. Ten percent (10%) said the library had adequate library resources to a less extent, followed by 20% who said the library had adequate library resources to a great extent and the majority 70% said not at all. The findings do not corroborate those of Ranganathan who argues in his second law that there is need for every reader to get his or her book and the book should to satisfy each of the library users. Thus, the library collection should be a mix of old and rare material as well as of the latest material reflecting advances in various fields.

Table 4.4: Adequacy of electronic library resources (N=40)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	4	10
Disagree	5	12,5
Agree	6	15
Strongly agree	25	62,5
Total	40	100

Table 4.4 shows the level of adequacy of electronic library resources in meeting the information needs of respondents. Six (15%) said they agreed and the majority 25 (62.5%) strongly agreed that electronic resources met the information needs of the library students. Four (10%) respondents strongly disagreed that electronic resources met the information needs followed by 5 (12.5%) who said they disagreed that electronic resources met the information needs. This corroborates findings by Oyewusi and Oyeboade, (2009) who argues that in order to provide quality library and information services for distance learning students, it is imperative for any institution offering open and distance learning to institute a philosophy that recognises the provision of quality library services to their students as a primary responsibility.

The quality of resources at ZOU ME regional library

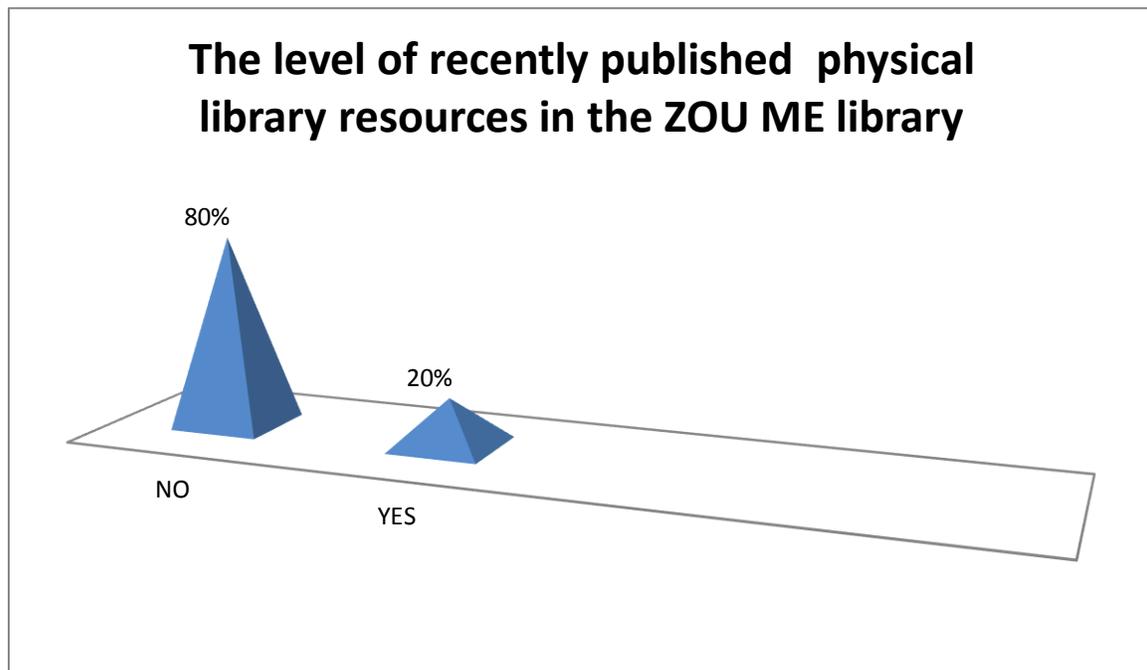


Figure 4.5: level of recently published physical library resources in the ZOU ME library

Eight (20%) of the respondents said there were recently published hard copies or physical library resources in the ZOU ME library while 32 (80%) said there were no recently published hard copies or physical library resources. This corroborates findings by Nengomasha's (2013) that students did not use the library because of old resources that do not reflect advances in various fields.

Table 4.5: Current level of the Regional Library Resources (N= 40)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Five years or less old	3	7,5
Five to ten years old	12	30
More than ten years old	25	62.5
Total	40	100

As evidenced in the Table 4.5 above, the majority of the respondents 25 (62.5%), said the resources were more than ten years old, 12 (30%) said the library resources were five to ten years old while 3 (7.5%) said the library resources were five years or less old. This suggests that the users did not use the library because the current levels of library resources were not good.



Figure 4.6: Level of satisfaction with library resources

Figure 4.6 shows the level of satisfaction with services and resources available in the ZOU Mashonaland East library. Twenty-eight(65%) percent said they were satisfied with the library resources, 3% said they were unsatisfied with the library resources while 39% said they were just satisfied with the library resources. There seems to be a discrepancy between satisfaction and hard copy provision. Even though there not enough hard copies, patrons are satisfied with library services due to abundance of electronic resources. This corroborates the findings by

Nengomasha (2013) who discovered that libraries are not just about storing books, they are about users having the right book that answers his or her information need and this view is shared by Ranganathan in his third law of library science. Thus, the library collection should be efficient, ideal and satisfies the needs of the readers.

Convenience of the library location to the users

Table 4.6: The location of the students versus the library (N=40)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Within 15km radius	5	12,5
30km radius	12	30
50km radius	23	57,5
Total	40	100

An analysis was carried out to determine the location of students to that of the library. 12.5% of the respondents indicated that they reside within 15km radius of Marondera where the library is located. 30% reside at a distance of 30km radius out of Marondera. 57.5% were at a radius of 50km; and the majority of these students were not using the library. As expected, people living around Marondera urban showed they were less likely to have problems accessing a range of services than those living in other areas. This means that the library was mostly accessible to those who live in Marondera urban than those from outside which suggest that the library location was not convenient to the users.

Table 4.7: Frequency of Library Use (N=40)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	4	10%
Weekly	10	25%
Monthly	6	15%
Occasionally	20	50%
Total	40	100

Table 4.7 above shows the frequency of the regional library use by the respondents. The findings show that 4 (10%) of respondents visited the library daily followed by 6(15%) who visited the library monthly. Only 10 (25%) respondents visited the library weekly while 20 (50%) visited the library occasionally. The findings suggest that most of the respondents visited the library occasionally which suggests that the convenience of the library to the users was affecting the use

of library resources. Even though the frequency is low, there seems to be satisfaction in use due to the extensive use of the electronic resources.

Table 4.8: Level of financial expense to visit the library (N=40)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Not so expensive	6	15
Expensive	14	35
Very expensive	20	50
Total	40	100

Data on how expensive it is in terms of money to visit the library from where the students reside is shown in Table 4.8 above. The analysis of the results show that 15% said it was not so expensive, followed by 35% who said it was expensive and 50% argued that it was very expensive. Asked on the major cost drivers of library use, respondents further indicated that transport costs for hard copy users and internet charges for those using electronic resources were the major drivers.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the major constraints affecting the use of library resources were: inadequate reading materials and lack of current library materials, and convenience of the library location to the users. It can be also concluded that most of the open and distance learning students use electronic resources than hard copies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On account of the above conclusions, the researcher recommends the following:

- There is need to improve on provision of current and adequate library resources such as journals, textbooks, reference materials, and newspapers, longer opening hours for readers without closing library on weekends and public holidays to enable library users to use the library efficiently.
- The region should ensure that electronic resources are readily accessible.
- The region should train new students in accessing electronic resources as they are the most commonly used resources by students.
- The University should also ensure that new students access communication tools that enable them to access electronic resources.
- There is need for ZOU ME to decentralise the library operations to district centers such as: Mutoko, Kotwa, Goromonzi, Macheke and Mutawatawa in order to reach its

geographically dispersed students. This will improve convenience, thus improving quality.

- There is also need for the ZOU ME library department to introduce post document delivery. This is when the library as providers of information, posts library books or resources to its patrons.
- The ZOU ME regional library staff and regional lecturers should work together and put additional efforts on the quality and timely availability of library resources.

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