

# The degree of importance that Built Environment Postgraduate students attaches to specific library services: A South Africa higher education case study

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**Abstract.** Over 10, 000 students register each year for various postgraduate (PG) degrees across institutions in South Africa with majority of the students relying on the resources that the host universities libraries offers. This paper assesses the degree of importance that the Built Environment Postgraduate Students in a South African higher education attach to specific library services when undertaking their Postgraduate studies. The data used in this research were derived from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected via an online questionnaire that was sent out to Built Environment Postgraduate students who include: Postgraduate diploma degrees, Masters, doctoral and post-doctoral students). Out of the 500 questionnaires that were sent out, an 82% response rate was achieved, representing a total of 410 collected questionnaires. The questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistic procedures. Findings from the questionnaire survey revealed that research commons, learning commons, archives and the online databases were what the PG students attached the most importance as contributory to their studies. The study does not only contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the degree of importance that built environment students attaches to library services but also assist with an understanding of the factors that higher institutions need to focus on when updating services in their Postgraduate Learning Centers; the library.

**Keywords:** Libraries · Library Resources · Library Services · Postgraduate Research · Research Productivity

## 1 Introduction

Universities worldwide have been acknowledged as places where knowledge generation, scholarship and innovation are advanced. Postgraduate research are considered conduits through which universities develop research capacity and also generate high skills needed for a functional economy and in addressing complex issues such as global financial recessions, climate change, poverty alleviation and more [1]. In general, post graduate research are not intended to yield ground breaking results, discovery or innovation [2] [3]. It is actually an apprenticeship into mastering

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systematic research process. Hence, Toncich [2] points out that the objective of postgraduate research is not to make a breakthrough invention or indeed a major scientific discovery, but rather a mechanism by which graduate students learn how to undertake a systematic investigation, founded upon work built by peers in the field and then to extend the current state of knowledge. Emphasis is placed on systematic investigation than the level of extending current state of knowledge.

A library is considered the nucleus for any research activity and an essential ingredient for a viable research system. It provides an account of previous intellectual works and functions as a breeding ground for new concepts and ideas. Library resources and facilities can be used as one of the parameters for measuring the capabilities and sophistication of postgraduate research output and productivity at the University of Johannesburg. Well-stocked and efficient libraries act as eyes or pathfinders for postgraduate researchers and provide an inspiration to venture into new areas of research. Thus, an ineffective library, on the other hand, may lead to low quality or duplication of research thus resulting in waste of financial, material and human resources and lack of motivation for postgraduate students' to become researchers and drop in productivity. Academic libraries have for centuries played critically-important roles in supporting research in all subjects and disciplines within their host universities and colleges. But the last decade has brought a sea-change in relationships between postgraduate's students and libraries. The standard practice of having libraries in universities is to provide effective information services that would enhance teaching, learning and research within the university community. Research is specifically important within the university environment because it constitutes a major determinant of the educational quality of an institution. Also, it has been stated that strong research profile adds to institutional reputation, visibility, and recognition [4].

Despite the emphasis on research, several postgraduate students' who are enrolled on dissertation based (research only) masters' or doctoral studies only use the library for research activities that relate mostly to gathering of data for their study. Most others do not engage in research activities such as journal article publication or writing of conference papers for presentation to the academic community. In as much as the university library cannot be held responsible for the attitude of most students towards research, it is worthwhile to access the role of the that PG students attached to specific university library services in aiding research especially at the postgraduate level. Hence, Poll [5], asserts that the best testimony for an academic library's quality is the impact of the library's services on the educational process and the research results in the university. Therefore, this paper assesses the degree of importance that the Built Environment Postgraduate Students in a South African higher education attach to specific library services when undertaking their Postgraduate studies.

According to Powell [6], library use are those activities which occur primarily within the library and which reflects rather traditional library functions such as circulating books and answering reference questions. However, a robust definition of libraries use was given by Reitz, [7] who described library use as the extent to which the facilities and resources of a library are actually used by its intended users'; which forms the main thesis of this study. This definition seems more acceptable considering the fact that users now make use of the library resources without stepping into the physical library space with the aid of technology.

Library physical space according to Luzius & Web [8], provide access to technology, instructions to library use, a place to study among others. Also, Oluwatobi & Ehioghae [9] also sees it as a vital and important channel where information is acquired, processes and disseminated through the provision of appropriate information resources in its various formats either being printed or not. These considerations are no doubt important to postgraduate students even though

postgraduate students may not necessarily be frequent visitors to the physical library itself as indicated in a number of studies. Hence, Greer [10] reported that “if you talk to a college admissions officer or a high school guidance counselor about things to do when you visit a college campus, one of the first things they say is to visit the libraries on campus. Bring a book or some schoolwork, sit down, and soak up the environment. Can you see yourself there for four years?” this shows the level of importance placed on the library as the centre of all academic learning. Therefore, this paper assesses the degree of importance that the Built Environment Postgraduate Students in a South African higher education attach to specific library services when undertaking their Postgraduate studies.

## 2 Research Methodology

The data used in this paper were derived from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through the survey method, while the second was derived from the review of literature and archival records. The primary data were obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire survey distributed online to the respondents. The questionnaire was developed based on the reviewed literature and is not part of an existing research survey instrument. However, the pattern the services measured where used in previous studies were adopted for the development of the questionnaire. Out of the 500 questionnaires that were sent out, an 82% response rate was achieved, representing a total of 410 collected questionnaires. The collected questionnaires were analysed through descriptive statistics in order to meet the research objective for the study. The analysed data were presented through the of frequency distributions table.

### 2.1 Mean Item Score (MIS)

A five-point Likert scale was used to determine the degree of importance that Built Environment Postgraduate students attaches to specific library services in the South Africa higher education with regards to the identified factors from the reviewed literature. The adopted scales were as follows:

- 1 = Very Low (VL)
- 2 = Low (L)
- 3 = Neutral (N)
- 4 = High (H)
- 5 = Very High (VH)

The five-point scale was transformed to mean item score for each library services as assessed by the respondents. The indices were then used to determine the rank of each item. The ranking made it possible to cross compare the relative importance of the items as perceived by the respondents. This method was used to analyse the data collected from the questionnaires survey. The mean item score was calculated for each item as follows;

$$\text{MIS} = \frac{1n_1 + 2n_2 + 3n_3 + 4n_4 + 5n_5}{\sum N} \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 1.0}$$

Where;

n1	=	Number of respondents for factor number 1;
n2	=	Number of respondents for factor number 2;
n3	=	Number of respondents for factor number 3;
n4	=	Number of respondents for factor number 4;
n5	=	Number of respondents for factor number 5;
N	=	Total number of respondents

After mathematical computations, the factors were then ranked in descending order of their mean item score (from the highest to the lowest).

### 3 Findings and discussions

Findings from the usable questionnaires revealed that 80.5% of the respondents were male, 14.6% were female, while 4.90% respondents choose not to respond. Findings relating to the respondents' age group revealed that 67.5% of the respondents were in the age group of 25-34 years old, 20% of the respondents were 35-44 years old, 7.5% were in the age group 18-24 and 2.4% of the respondents were in the age group of 45-54 years old. Further results showed that 34.2% have a Diploma as the highest qualification, 26.8% hold a Bachelor's Degree, 22% hold a Masters, 9.7% have a Postgraduate Degree, 4.9% have and Honours' Degree and 2.4% have a Doctorate as the highest qualification. Further results revealed that 61% of the postgraduate students have not undertaken the use of library training since becoming students of the higher institution, 34% of the postgraduate students had undertaken the library training since becoming students of the university, and 5% of the postgraduate students are not sure if they did take the training or not. However, 61% of the postgraduates students revealed that they understand the library's shelving system, 24% of the postgraduates do not understand the shelving System, while 16.0% have never used the shelving system for an reference document search. Based on the ranking (R) using the calculated standard deviation (SD) and mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ ) for the listed importance of library services (see Table 1), it was observed that the most used library service were the research commons (SD=4.92,  $\bar{x}$ =4.25, R=1), information gathering centre (SD=6.19,  $\bar{x}$ =4.19, R=2), learning commons (SD=0.45,  $\bar{x}$ =4.15, R=3), archives (SD=6.54,  $\bar{x}$ =4.06, R=4), circulation desk (SD=5.97,  $\bar{x}$ =4.03, R=5). The findings support previous studies; revealing that research skills that the researches gain from being part of the library environment also helps them with being able to know the library archives to see where books could be located and the relationship that is built between the researches and librarians during the physical space in the library may help in the long run. To some research students, being able to leave the private space to the library is another form of research as meeting with students that meet similar interests can change the way the research world is seen as informed in 2011, by the Research Information Network & Research Libraries UK. Overall, in other studies, the research common is one of the most used facility in the library. With the South African higher education having PG research centers, it proves that the university make sure that the PG students are in an area that will make them perform better with their endeavours; while easy access to the information ensures that they complete their studies in time.

**Table 2.** Library service

Library services	MIS	SD	R
Research Commons	4.25	4.92	1
Information gathering centre	4.19	6.19	2
Learning Commons	4.15	0.45	3
Archives	4.06	6.54	4
Circulations desk	4.03	5.97	5
RefWorks	4.00	5,81	6
Library Workshops	4.00	5,77	7
Team-Teach (Class session with Librarian)	3.91	7,83	8
One-on-one Library tour	3.79	4,88	9
WI-FI Access	3.69	6,66	10
Online Database	3.67	6,15	11
Dictionary	3.66	4,85	12
Encyclopaedias	3.64	3,05	13
Print Journals	3.63	5,50	14
Thesis or dissertations	3.59	5,27	15
Indexes and Abstracts	3.55	5,64	16
Bibliography	3.53	6,43	17
CD-ROM Database	3.47	6,73	18
Books (print)	3.45	5,50	19
Internet provision	3.41	6,06	20
Electronic journals	3.41	5,86	21
Opening hours	3.38	5,94	22
Reading spaces	3.38	5,18	23
Print journals	3.37	0,45	24
Online public access catalogue	3.34	5,08	25
Library website	3.31	6,84	26
User education/training in library use	3.16	6,95	27
Referrals	3.16	5,86	28
Photocopying	3.06	5,93	29
Personal assistance of library staff	3.03	5,59	30
Inter library loan	2.94	5,50	31
Intra library loan	2.88	4,34	32

#### 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to assess the degree of importance that the Built Environment Post-graduate Students in a South African higher education attach to specific library services when undertaking their Postgraduate studies. The literature review shown that the library resources of universities contribute immensely to the timely completion of PG studies and even in the choice of PG schools selection. The empirical results for the study revealed that built environment PG students attached high degree of importance to the following library services: research commons, information gathering centre, learning commons, archives, and the circulation desk. Other equally important services were: the library online databases, WI-FI service, printed books and referrals service. However, inter and intra library loan service were consider less important as most students rarely make use of these

services. The result revealed that library resources are not just materials that are placed to help figure out what the researcher's next step is, but also a building block towards the material that is factual and also understandable. From the findings, it is recommended that the higher education should have a section that is dedicated to each department and makes it easier for the PG to know where to go to when help is needed and to find the suitable materials for their studies but also toward the specific research project.

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