The Roles Academic Libraries Play in Facilitating Post Graduate Research: A case of the University of Zambia (UNZA), and the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) Master's Students

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Abstract: This article examines the role of academic libraries in supporting postgraduate research, with a particular focus on the services provided to master's students, the effectiveness of these services in facilitating research and the challenges faced by both academic libraries and students in their interactions. The study employed a mixed-methods research approach, utilizing both documented and undocumented data. A sample of 56 respondents from the University of Zambia and the National Institute of Public Administration was selected for this study. Findings indicate that academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting master's students' research through various services, including book lending, study spaces, reference services, discussion rooms, internet access, printed journals, books, serials, electronic databases and digital resources such as e-journals and e-books. Among these, electronic resources and study spaces were identified as the most valuable for postgraduate research. While book lending and reference services were less frequently utilized, they remain essential, as students who engaged with reference librarians reported receiving valuable guidance in locating relevant research materials. However, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of library services for master's students, including inadequate funding, limited study spaces, lack of cooperation from academic staff and the absence of master's students during library orientation sessions. To enhance support for postgraduate research, academic libraries should strategically develop services specifically tailored to the unique research needs of master's students.

Keywords: *Academic Libraries, Masters Students, Reference Librarian, Inter-Library Loan Services.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Universities have started paying greater attention to research. Universities do this by developing appropriate policies, making funds and facilities available for research, and encouraging their staff and students to do research. In many masterprograms at Universities, students are required to carry out a research project and submit a report as a pre-requisite for completing their degree. Faculty members are also required to do research themselves, and are assessed based on the outputs of their research. This has led to researchers making greater demands for access to quality information provided (Klain and Shoham, 2017).

Masters students form a significant group of researchers in Universities. Masters students can be defined as students pursuing further studies after completing their undergraduate degree program (Neetha, 2020). These students need to carry out a research in fulfillment of their program and they are assessed based on the output of their research. Therefore, Masters Students are key producers of research in these Universities, and an important element in their research process is the access to information which is provided by academic libraries. These students need information materials like books and journals as they seek to carry out their research. Furthermore, they need guidance from the academic staff and the library staff on how they can best go about their research.

Research in universities requires access to information which is provided by academic libraries.

Academic libraries as defined by Adams et al (2005) refers to libraries that are located and hosted in post-secondary educational institutions such as colleges and

Universities and primarily support the curriculum, provide support in research, resource linkage for students and faculty of the educational institution. Academic libraries within Universities have long been known as gateways to information (Chipembele, 2024). In line with the changing role of Universities, the vision and mission of academic libraries has to alter to meet these new requirements. Therefore, the traditional role of academic libraries to support teaching and learning only is being challenged. Campbell (2006) argued that academic libraries are complex institutions with multiple roles.

There are factors which influences Post graduate students use of academic libraries. To start with, one can only access the services provided by academic libraries once they have knowledge of those services existing. This is echoed by the study carried by Simmonds (2001), who found out that the use of academic libraries is influenced mostly by users' perceived familiarity with the library and its resources. Those who are more familiar with the library are more likely to use academic libraries. To motivate the greater usage of libraries, librarians need to educate users on how to use library resources not only in the confines of the library building, but even when they access the resources remotely (Williams, 2011).

The digital revolution has changed the relationship between libraries and researchers, many of whom do not use the physical library. Researchers have now developed the ability to get more online materials at no or low cost, and are more confident in accessing online resources. The library is no longer seen as the only or even the primary provider of information to scholars (Curl, 2006). This is echoed by the findings of Chiemeke (2007) who conducted a research study on the perceptions of postgraduate students and results showed that post graduate student's visit the Internet more often compared to academic library facilities to fulfill their research needs. Despite, researchers turning to the internet, electronic resources alone are not adequate enough to facilitating post graduate research. This has not only affected their performance but has also affected the quality of research generated by these students. Ameen (2005) carried out a research on the Philosophy and framework of collection management and its application in University libraries of Pakistan. The findings were that; researches which were written by postgraduate students who were only using the internet were poorly written as compared to the researches which were generated by postgraduate student who used both the internet and the library.

To better meet these challenges, academic libraries need to keep the connection with researchers and further develop the functions and remain viable and competitive in this new information environment so that researchers could effectively learn and apply the full capabilities of resources and services offered (Moyo, 2004).

➢ *Statement of the Problem*
In academic institutions both academicians as well researchers mostly depend on the library resources and facilities. No doubt a quick and easy access to such

resources accelerates both academic and research activities more effectively (Klain and Shoham, 2017). Despite the Purported benefits of the role that academic libraries play in the education circles, a review of the literature found that efforts made in understanding these roles has concentrated on undergraduates (Davis and Bowers, 2013). There has been little concentration on masters students (Williams, 2011). Due to this gap in knowledge, very little is known about the role that academic libraries play in facilitating master's research. Therefore, this research sought to bridge the above knowledge gap.

➢ *General Objective.*
To explore theacademic libraries play in facilitating post graduate research: A case of master's students.

➢ *Specific Objectives*

- To find out the services provided by theacademic libraries to MastersStudents.
- To access the usefulness ofacademic libraries services to MastersStudents in research.
- To establish the challenges influencing Masters Students access of library services.

➢ *Theoretical Framework*
The theoretical framework for this study is built around a social constructivist theory and the information behavior theory. These two theories provide a foundation for understanding how academic libraries play significant roles in facilitating post graduate research, particularly for master's students. Social constructivism, primarily introduced by Lev , who argued that learning occurs through engagement and interaction within the social contexts and that knowledge is constructed through social interactions, communication, and collaboration (Clough, 2014).

Based on the social constructivism theory, it is assumed that academic libraries do not just offer books; but also interaction, learning and knowledge sharing. This aligns with library services, such as databases, research materials, information literacy workshops, and study groups, which fosters collaborative among masters students. In the context of academic libraries, social constructivism highlights the importance of collaborative environments and resources that foster knowledge development. For master's students, academic libraries are spaces that support both independent research and collaborative work, allowing the co-construction of knowledge.

On the other hand, the Information behavior theory prosed by Wilson in 2000, focuses on how individuals seek, process, and use information. According to this theory, people behavior and decisions about information are influenced by various factors such as their information needs, the environment, and the social or psychological context. Based on the information behavior theory, it is assumed that the usefulness of library services can be evaluated by understanding how student seek, access, and use information for research for the master's program studies. The information behavior theory states that various

factors may pose as barriers in accessing valuable information (Wilson, 2000). Based on this assumption, it is believed that more than one factor possess as a barrier to academic student accessing these library services.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The reviewed literature isbased on the following issues; Services provided by the libraries to post graduate students, Usefulness of library services and finally the Challenges influencing post graduate student's access of library services. Campbell (2006) argued that academic libraries are complex institutions with multiple roles. They provide not only books and space for students to study, but also provide services for facilitating research activities. Similarly, Ka (2005) stated that university libraries do not just store books and journals and offer space for student learning, but they also provide systematically digitized information. The findings also revealed that post graduate students use online public access catalogue (OPAC) to locate necessary materials for their research on the shelves.

Duodu (2005) argued that internet services have played an important role in offering the greater support Service for postgraduate students. The results of the study indicated that the internet services were time saving, easy to use, more informative and more preferred. Simmonds (2001) opined that the use of academic library services is influenced mostly by users' perceived familiarity with the library and its resources. Those who are more familiar with the library are more likely to use academic library services. To motivate the greater usage of libraries, librarians need to educate users on how to use library resources not only in the confines of the library building, but even when they access the resources remotely. Tsafe, (2004) study revealed that three quarters of the masters students were informed of the library services through the reference services available in the library. However, OCLC (2005) study went on to reveal that postgraduate student identified their friends as the main source of identifying electronic resources relevant for their research.

Adeyemi (2013) carried out a research on the Scholarly use of information for research by students. The findings were that, respondents were satisfied with opening hours during the semester for their research activities as well as the newly 24 hour service. On the other hand, respondents were not satisfied with Reference services, Internet facilities; Printing, Photocopying and Scanning, Opening hours during semester break and study room carrels, as well as the online catalogue. This was due to slow internet services, constant breakdowns of the photocopying machines and they normally opened late and closed early during semester breaks in other words they did not follow the opening and closing schedule.

According to Fadekemi, (2009) for faculty staff and students are to make maximum use of library information products and services and derive greater benefits therefrom, they must be informed of their availability and how these may be useful to their teaching and research activities. Khan

et al (2014) argued that lack of electronic resources in the library was a major problem encountered by the respondent followed by inadequate collection and insufficient physical facilities, as well as inadequate opening hours. The study went on to reveal that most students faced difficulties understanding unfamiliar classification systems and confusing library terminology, such as the library catalogue (OPAC). Constant, (2010) identified slow Internet connectivity, inadequate networked computers, and lack of access to low cost printers in the library and, lack of awareness of most of the e-resources as the main challenge facing students in accessing library services.Climah and Nwokocha (2013) revealed that most academic libraries have inadequate library infrastructure. Language barrier was also identified by Jackson (2005), as one of the main challenges facing international students when to trying to access library materials. Bwalya (2014) highlighted lack of adequate funding to academic libraries as a huge barrier to services provision. In their study, OCLC (2005) revealed that in many libraries in developing countries, there is under-utilizing information sources and services, partly due to inadequacies in relation to user needs and partly due to the lack of or poor information marketing and user education efforts.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a mixed approach focusing on the master's students at the University of Zambia and the National Institute of Public Administration, Lusaka, Zambia. The mixed research approach was adopted because it helps collect detailed information about a particular problem, in that it combines both the qualitative and quantitative approach, the weaknesses of one method is countered by the strengths of another (Cresswel, 2014). The University of Zambia academic library is chosen because it is the oldest and largest academic library in Zambia, with the sitting capacity of 1,650 readers and has a holding of over 300,000 volumes (Bwalya, 2014). The National Institute of Public Administration academic library has been chosen because it is a modern academic libraries, equipped with modern audiovisual technology, high-speed internet connectivity, and ergonomic furnishings, it caters to the diverse needs of its patrons, ensuring a Seamless and enriching experience for all (NIPA News, 2024).

Both documented and undocumented dates were collected. Onone hand, documented data were collected from journal articles, texts books, research reports, working papers, dissertations and Newsletters, on the other hand, undocumented data was collected from 56 respondents, comprising of 50 masters students, and 6 key informants. 50 Masters Students comprised of the 40 UNZA master's students in the 2016/17 academic year and, 10 NIPA masters students in the 2025, January intake. While the information from UNZA masters student was collected in 2017, the Information from NIPA masters student was collected in 2025. The 6 key informants comprised 3 library staff from each academic library. Snowball sampling method was used in selecting master's students, it leveraged on existing social networks to access participants. This method was useful as it

facilitated the inclusion of only master's students who possessed deep insights / knowledge on the topic under study. Purposive sampling was used to select academic library staff. According to Creswell (2014), Purposive sampling is useful, as it provides valuable information from only individuals deemed to have the valuable information on the subject under study.Semi-structured Interview guides were used to collect data from key informants, while questionnaires were used to collect data from master's students. Questionnaires contained both open ended and closed ended questions, while the interview guides contained only open ended questions. The inclusion of open ended questions meant to elicit detailed responses (Maxwell, 2013).

> *Services Academic Libraries Provide to Masters Students*

The findings indicated that academic libraries provide the following services; study space, internet, reading materials such as books and serials, printing, electronic databases, discussion rooms, library reference services, interlibrary loan services, electronic resources such as e-journals and E-Books. The advantage of the library providing these services is that master's students will find it easy to access a lot of services in one place without them having to go to other places outside the library (Lynch, 2003). For example while using the study space services within the library; master's students at both the University of Zambia Library and National Institute of Public Administration Library can also access the internet service which enables them to search for e-journals and e-books as

well as going through electronic databases that have useful information to facilitate their research (Unza website cite, Nipa website cite).

In instances where the master's students have challenges in finding some materials, they can use the reference service which is the one on one interaction between the reference librarian and the student. Alternatively master's students can use bibliographies which are simply materials that provide bibliographical details about a publication such as; author, title and imprint information. Bibliographies help them to locate information sources (Kettle, 2010). The study also found out the library offers interlibrary loan services. From the above information, it can be seen that both UNZA and NIPA libraries are striving so hard to meet the needs of master's students. These findings are similar with Campbell (2006) study which revealed that academic libraries are complex institutions with multiple roles.

Despite the reference services and orientation provided by academic libraries, it was found that the majority of the Masters students knew about the library services through their course mates and lecturers, instead of the library staff. This can be attributed to the fact that master's students rarely attend the library orientations. Most of the master's students are employed; hence they spend most of their time at their work places, as a result of missing the library orientation which provides primary sources of information about library services. This is shown in figure 1 below:
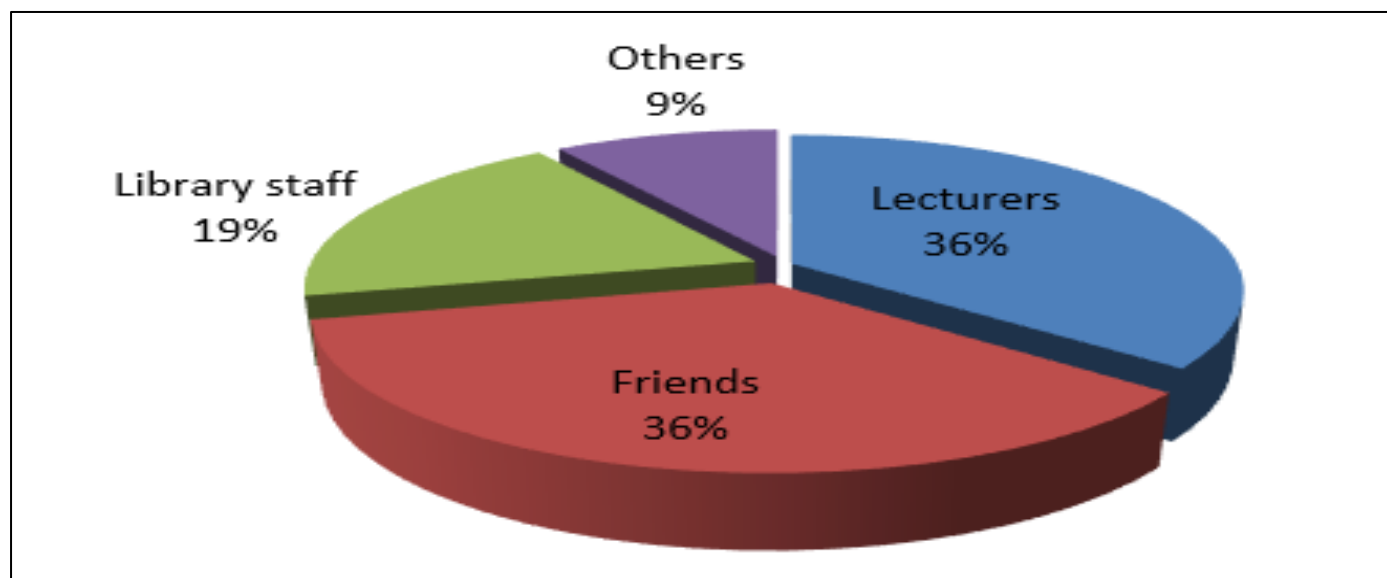

Fig 1 Source of Information about Academic Library Services.

The negative impact of knowing the services through course mates and lectures is that lectures provide secondary sources of information which normally leaves out key information about the library services. These findings were different from those of Tsafe (2004), study which revealed indicated that three quarters of the Masters students were informed of the library services through the reference services available in the library.

> *Usefulness of Library Service to Master's Student.*

The majority of master's students used the study space mainly to write their reports as well as to browse through the library collection. While using the studying spaces in the library, most master's students use the internet, to access the e-resources. Clough (2014) argues that e-resources are mostly used by master's student or their research because information is readily available and easy to access. Not only is it readily available and easy to access the internet service

reduces on the time in which Masters Students carry out their researches, this in turn enables them to strike a balance between their studies and their work. However, over reliance on the internet might lead to obtaining of unreliable and irrelevant information which affects the quality of their research. These results were similar to a study done by Fadekemi (2009) which revealed that, most master's students use the e-resources for their research because e-resources are easily accessed at work, campus and from their respective homes.

Besides the study space and the internet service, other services which mostly used by masters students are the library reference services and lending services. The library lending service enables the Masters Students to continue writing their proposals and dissertation even when they are outside the library. However, when a book is borrowed by a student, other students, are disadvantaged as they are denied access to such materials. Where Masters Students are not sure about certain services, they use the reference service for guidance. The implication of using this service is that it enables Masters Students to carry out good quality researches in that they will have the full knowledge of what services will be of benefit to them, through guidance from a qualified librarian. These findings prove that volunteers cannot substitute reference librarians, since they likely do not possess the time or the requisite skills for the role (Klenke, 2012).

The rate at which these services are used by masters students differ. The findings from the data collected indicated that the majority of the respondents rarely used the library lending service and the reference service. This was mainly due to the fact that some of the book materials are out-dated. There is need for management to invest more in purchasing recently published materials for the library. The references services are underutilised by master's students, as they only visit the reference librarian when they have a query. Figure 2 below shows the frequency to which the library services have been used by the Masters Students.
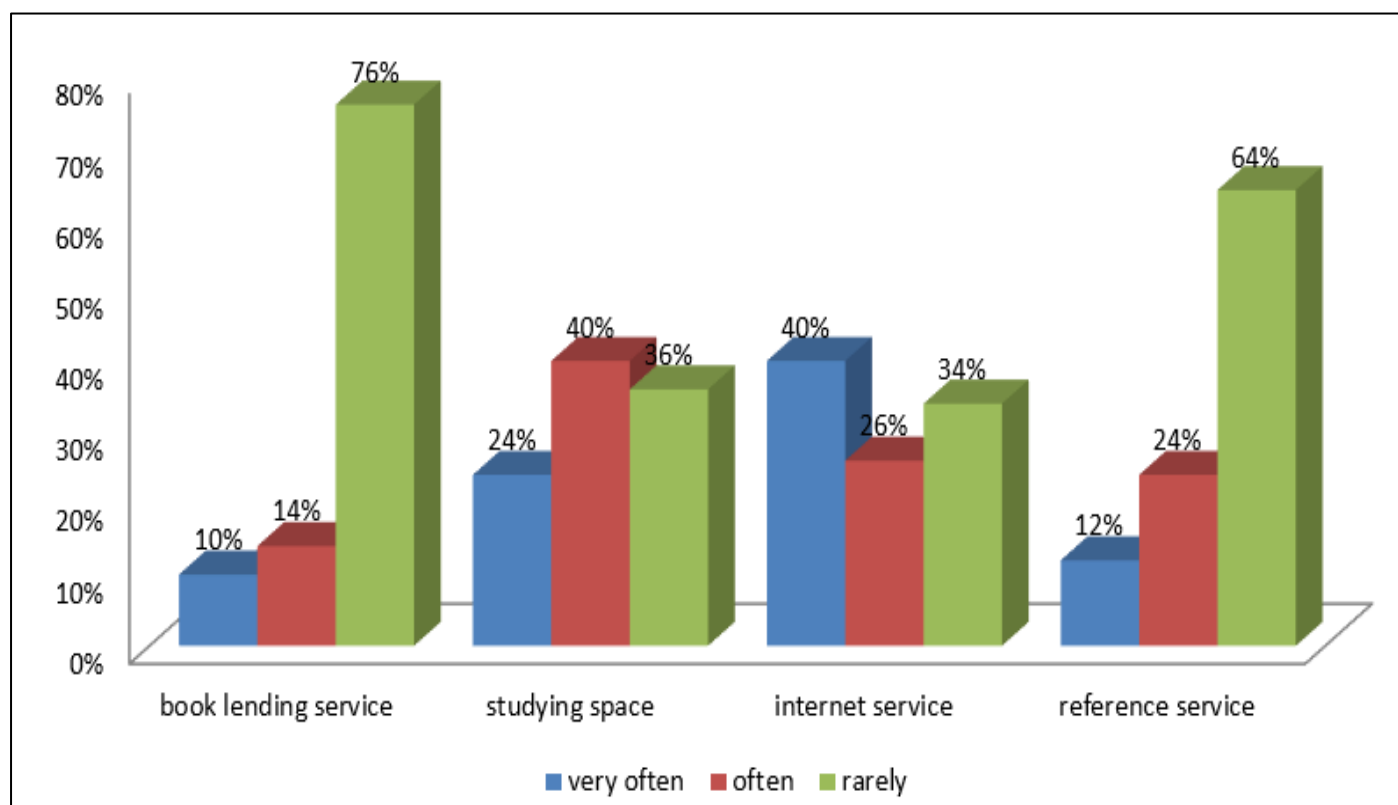

Fig 2 Frequency usage of Library Services

The implication of not fully utilising the library lending service and reference service respectively is that, masters Students tend to be over dependent on the internet which does not always have reliable information for student who do not know how to search for reliable information on the internet. Less utilisation of the reference service leads to the production of poor researches by Masters Students as there is no guidance in the way the researches should be conducted. The results were similar to the study which was done by Fadekemi's (2009), which indicated that very few Masters students borrowed books and used bibliographic materials to aid their research.

The majority of the respondents indicated that the library internet services and the study space were very useful to their master's research. This is because the internet is time saving, user friendly and easy to access and search for desired materials. Duodu (2005) argued that internet services were time saving, easy to use, more informative and provided quality, reliable and relevant information for masters their research. Figure 3 below shows the extent to which the library services have been useful to masters Research.
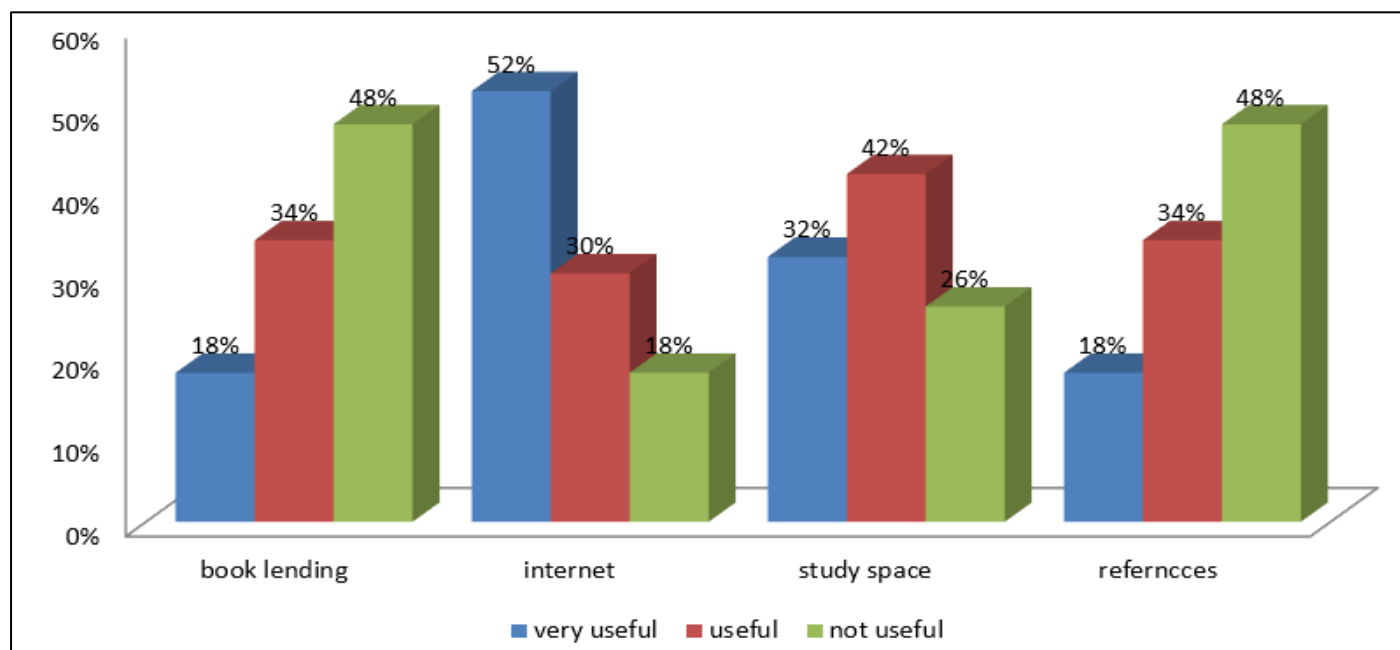
Fig 3 Extent of to which Library Services have been useful

The library e-resources and study spaces were more useful were established to be more useful to master student research. The university of Zambia, library has an online repository which has housed thousands of dissertations for the university of Zambia alumni. The university of Zambia library repository has proven to be useful for master's student writing their literature review. Through the repository, master's students are able to identify research gaps in their area of study. The National institute of public administration houses the American corner, which has advanced technological equipment meant for research, and staff that provide relevant advice to master students who use these materials. There is need for academic libraries to have updated print materials such as books, journal articles, and Newspapers .e.t.c. The implication of having outdated books in the library is that master's student will find it difficult to write their dissertations.

➢ *Challenges Influencing Post Graduate Research.*

One major challenge facing academic libraries in this modern age is lack of adequate funding (Tsafe,2022). This has made it very difficult for libraries to purchase recently published materials, subscribe to good journals, newspapers and, conduct regular infrastructure maintenance. Khan et al (2014) revealed that lack of adequate funding among academic libraries has not only hindered these libraries from providing desired services, but also demotivated personnel working in these institutions. Khan et al (2014) argues that libraries should be adequately funded by their parent institutions so as to enable them acquire relevant materials that can facilities masters' research. For public Universities, most of the finances come from central government, however, the grants are not enough to carter for all university activities (Sililo, 2021)

During the examination period, the academic libraries are usually full to an extent that some students do not find studying spaces. Despite the university of Zambia library

having the sitting capacity of 1,650 readers (Bwalya, 2014), these study space are not enough for a student population of more than 23,000 (UNZA,2021). The fact that academic libraries are open to people who subscribe to their services, the number of library users has increased over the years. Lack of study and research space can be attributed to the fact that most times the library is crowded with undergraduate students. Lack of enough space therefore makes it very difficult for Masters Students to fully utilize the services provided to them by the library. This can stop Masters Students from using the library as a consequence settle for unreliable sources of information which leads to the production of poor quality research. This finding is in line with the study by Rin and Rluk, (2011) who found out that academic pressures such as continues assessments, presentations and examinations normally led to an increased number of undergraduate usages of the library which usually results in fights between the undergraduate and master's Students for the few spaces available for studying and research.

The other challenge facing academic libraries is lack of cooperation from academic staff such as the Lecturers. When called upon to recommend books for their respected discipline, some lecturers delay, while others do not even provide feedback to library staff. This makes it very difficult for libraries to identify appropriate/ up-to-date materials required for student research. Most students normally fail to generate good research because the library does not provide them with current and relevant information for their research. If most of the materials in the library are out-dated, the implication of Masters Students using out-dated materials is that they will generate researches which will not be applicable in solving modern problems (Randolph, 2013). Heagney, and Thomas (2009) argue that academic libraries might have the adequate finances to purchase required materials but without proper guidance from specialized lecturers, academic libraries have ended up acquiring

outdated materials. Post graduate particularly those at master level, often require access to more advanced research materials, including journals, databases, and e-books that are specific to their field of study, and this can only be achieved if lecturers are willing to provide that kind of specialized advice to academic libraries.

Furthermore, as technology evolves, libraries must continually update their systems to ensure compatibly with new tools and platforms. For instance, changes to software, database management systems, or digital formats can disrupt the seamless delivery of services. Libraries must also stay abreast of changes in digital publishing, open –acces resources, and data- sharing protocols to ensure that their resources remain up-to-date (Bawden and Robinson, 2012). The rapidly changing technological landscape presents both a challenge and an opportunity for libraries to improve their services, but it requires ongoing investment in staff and technological infrastructure

While the general library staff can provide basic information retrieval services, master's students require more specialized support in areas such as research methodology, advanced database searching, and citation management (Marginson, 2017). However, many academic staff faces staff shortages or insufficient training in advanced research techniques, leaving student without the guidance they need for their complex projects (Kaluba and Kapapa, 2024). As noted by Mvula and Muchinga (2024) without access to expert librarians who understand the nuances of their discipline, students may struggle to identify relevant resources and navigate the research process effectively.

As highlighted by Sutherland-smith (2008), master's students often come from diverse academic, cultural, and social economic background. The diversity poses a unique set of challenges for academic libraries in meeting the varying needs of these students. Some international students may face additional hurdles in adapting to new research norms, accessing library services, or understanding the academic expectation in their host institution. This hinders master's students from producing high quality research.

The time constraints associated with postgraduate research are another challenge frequently highlighted in the literature reviewed. As noted by Deuchar (2010), many postgraduate students struggle to juggle their academic commitments with family, social, and work responsibilities. This balancing act can lead to stress, burnout, and delays in research progress. Academic libraries find it very difficult to assist these ever busy masters' students. Failure to seek help from librarians due to busy work schedules, as emphasized by wisker et al (200) can result in procrastination and diminishing research productivity.

IV. CONCLUSION

It can be deduced that academic libraries play a key role in facilitating Master 'student's research. This is evidenced from a number of services offered to Masters

Students, such as; book lending, study space, reference services, discussion rooms, internet, Printed Journal articles, books and serials, ,electronic databases, electronic resources such as e-journals and E-Books. The implication of having various services is that master's students will have a variety of services to choose from which will help them meet their research needs. The study space service and the library online services have been very useful in facilitating Masters Students research. Whilst study in the library masters students have access to library online services, for instance the library online repository, which has journals, newspapers, journal articles. These library online services are time saving, user friendly and easy to access relevant and useful information for research purposes.

Although the book lending and the reference library services have rarely been used by Masters Students, they still play a significant role in facilitating Master's research. Masters students who have used the reference library have attested of being guided to relevant information for their research by professional reference librarians. Lack of adequate finances, study spaces, co-operation from academic staff, and unavailability of masters students have posed to be challenges in helping master's students. Libraries must develop strategies for higher level of personalized support and direct access to resources, such as using technology to offer virtual consultations, providing self-service research tools, or enhancing library spaces to accommodate collaborative work. Academic libraries must provide tailored support for master's students that from diverse academic, culture, and social economic background. These may involve, offering language support services, providing orientation programs, or creating culturally sensitive resources and materials (Brophy,2017). Reference librarians should do more to help master students access certain services and, the library management should improve its orientation program to fully advertise its services and teach Masters Students how to use them. There is also need for libraries to stay abreast of changes in digital publishing, open –access resources, and data- sharing protocols to ensure that their resources remain up-to-date. However, developing and maintaining these services require significant effort and resources, making it a continues challenge for libraries to remain responsive to the evolving needs of masters students.

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