



Utilization of the University of the Gambia Main Library

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Abstract

The study assessed the utilization of the University of the Gambia Main Library by various schools of the university. The schools that mostly utilize the library and the average time spent were examined. The data was generated from the Main Library database. The database was appropriate for this study as a useful method for assessing the schools that utilize the library most and the average time spent by students from April to September 2021. From the findings of the study, it was concluded that the School of Business and Public Administration utilized the library most. This is because the library is located in the School's campus. The study also revealed that many students principally used the library as a place to prepare for examinations and to do their assignments. Even though the Internet provides valuable intellectual resources for learners, the study shows that there has not been a drastic reduction in the use of academic libraries by students.

Subject Areas

Information Science, Library, Intelligence and Philology

Keywords

Utilization of Library, Academic Library, Teaching and Learning, Research

1. Introduction

The University of the Gambia was established by an Act of the National Assembly of the Gambia in March 1999. The University of the Gambia admits local and foreign students predominantly from the Sub-Region. In its quest to deliver excellence, the University welcomes students from diverse backgrounds and experiences with far-ranging talents and interests. Therefore, admission requirements are based on internally recognized standards. Prospective candidates ap-

ply through a competitive process. Successful applications are issued with admission letters, student identification cards and a comprehensive academic calendar detailing lecture period, holidays, tuition fee payment modalities and relevant information. University of the Gambia will seek to attain its vision and mission by:

- 1) Promoting equitable and sustainable socio-economic development of communities through relevant, high-quality gender-sensitive teaching, research and outreach programmes.
- 2) Providing higher education to all persons, suitably qualified and capable of benefiting from it.
- 3) Positioning itself as a national asset committed to the promotion of life-long learning.
- 4) Developing its information and communication technologies and infrastructure as a driving force for the education of more people more rapidly and for the improvement of efficiency and academic quality to attain the goals of poverty alleviation and national development

The University of the Gambia has one major library named the University Main Library and three other branch libraries namely: Faculty of Law Library, School of Journalism and Digital Media Library and Medical Library, respectively. This study explored the utilization of the University of the Gambia Main Library by various schools in the University. University libraries exist to serve the teaching and research activities, which are carried out within the universities. A library is an integral part of the university structure used by stakeholders. The University of the Gambia Main library is temporally located in Kanifing at the MDI Campus, while the construction of the University Library is underway at the University of Gambia Main Campus in Faraba Bantang. The Main Library aims to provide educational and teaching materials to the University community. The goal of the University Library is to ensure that all members of the University community have equal access to provisions and services offered. The Library is the nerve center of the University, because it equips users with lifelong learning skills and develops their imagination. The interior of the Library consists of two floors, the ground floor contains well-arranged library shelves that accommodate books and provide free wireless Internet connection while the first floor is devoted to the Electronic Library. The Library also introduced new technology into the electronic library system, which allowed Library users to utilize self-checkout stations for books loaned. All registered students have complete access and borrowing privileges to the materials stored in the Library. As libraries expand and innovative projects are undertaken, so the status of academic libraries as information gateway in the digital age would be strengthened. Academic libraries in the digital age are expanding to satisfy the dynamic need for learning space and storage capacity.

In addition to the already existing journal databases in the Library, the University Library recently subscribed to EBSCO Host Journal Database, which pro-

vides access to millions of peer reviewed journal articles. All registered students and staff can have access to this database through their portals. The Library also has the Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL). The TEEAL is self-contained agricultural research in a library with full-text articles and graphics from major journals. It has a vital component of research in agriculture and related sciences.

With the addition of these journal databases to the Library collection coupled with a free wireless Internet connection, the challenges of library materials have become a thing of the past for the University of the Gambia community. The library renders support to students, staff researchers and other members of the user community.

2. Literature Review

Literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers. The aim of a literature review is to establish the academic and research areas that are relevant to the subject under investigation. According to Creswell (2013) [1], literature review discusses published information in a particular subject area and sometimes information in a particular subject within a certain period. Literature review justifies the reason for your research; it allows you to establish your theoretical framework and methodological focus, which comprises the concepts and theories that your work is based upon and against which its success will be judged.

The ultimate purpose of the literature review is to: define and limit the problem you are working on; place your study in an historical perspective; and avoid unnecessary duplication and evaluate research methods (Creswell, 2013) [1]. This review covers two main areas that are: library in academia and academic library use.

2.1. Library in Academia

Academic libraries are an important part of higher education institutions that exists to support the curriculum and students' research. According to Whitmire (2002) [2] academic library is considered a good measure of an institution's excellence and quality. Academic Libraries provide the specialize information necessary to supplement lecture and support research by students and lecturers. The aim of an academic library is to complement learning process, the academic library is a full functioning part of the education process which provide users wealth of selected materials, equipment and services not only to facilitate learning but also to promote the continuing development of library users. Academic libraries serve as information centers for all varied users and support the learning program. Learning these days is pupils centered instead of teacher oriented. Educating individuals in an academic institution can be difficult if there is no effective library service. Among the objectives of academic library are:

- To serve the needs of the academic community.

- To provide reference materials at the appropriate level.
- To provide study areas for users.
- To provide a lending service appropriate to the different types of users.
- To provide active information service that may extend beyond the institution to local industry and commerce (Harrison and Beenham 1985).

As Oakleaf (2011) [3] noted that academic librarians are moving to a large scale of assessment to demonstrate library impact on parent institutions. Therefore, the role of library in achieving institutional success is very crucial. For pupil to excel in their learning activities, they need a good library to complement their efforts. Academic libraries serve as learner-oriented laboratories which support, extend and individualize the institution curriculum. Similarly, Onwudinjo, (2015) [4] posted that the main function of academic library is to serve as an auxiliary to its parent institution in carrying out its objectives. He also noted that the library is an important intellectual resource of an academic community as it helps the university to fulfill the curriculum requirements and promote studies and research. Aina, (2004) [5] asserted that the ranking of a university depends, to a large extent on its library, it is the repository of information and knowledge. As a result of this, university libraries are often considered the most important resources center of an academic institution (Oyewusi, F.O and Oyeboada, S.A 2009) [6]. Hufford (2013) [7] stated that while traditional library inputs and outputs measurements remain valuable, libraries are increasingly focusing on institutional priorities and assessing students learning outcomes programmatically, to uncover institutional impacts.

The Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) issued a summary report that describes 19 strategies for demonstrating library value to the academy (Oakleaf, 2010) [8]. With this report, many librarians have been inspired to engage in research that has the potential to persuade administrators that library expenditures are well justified. Abubakarr (2011) [9] also stressed the fact that library is the learning centre to the undergraduates as it provides relevant adequate and up to-date materials that are needed for learning all courses. The library is the life wire of a university system for it performs myriads of functions in assisting the university to achieve the various goals set out in her mission and vision statements.

2.2. Academic Library Use

It is generally believed that students in every university should effectively make best use of the university library to satisfy their information needs. Library user satisfaction is an obligatory segment of the service quality in the academic libraries. Academic libraries contain materials that support both general research and the specific programs and degrees offered at the institution. Ubogu and Okiy (2011) [10] have pointed out that academic libraries are those attached to universities, polytechnics, and college of education and other similar higher institutions of learning. Herson, P., and Altman, E. (2010) [11] noted that “libraries

are now engaged in much more than the preservation and transition of the cultural history and having a nebulous role in meeting the needs of society and the institution they serve". Information is crucial for all our activities people need information for study, research for pursuing their careers, health care, problem solving, recreation and lifelong learning. Other studies have linked student use of library resources, including books, media items, and electronic resources to student success such as higher GPAs, better retention, and higher graduations rates (DeeAnn, Allison 2015) [12]. University libraries also have the function of providing resources for research, especially for postgraduate's students and faculty members. The library provides resources to support each of the teaching staff. It provides resources and serves to support each of the research of whatever kind in every subject offered in the university (Afolabi 2014) [13]. Afolabi (2014) [13] further expressed that the library remains the heart of the activities of every academic environment especially tertiary education.

The rapid advancement in information technology have widen the burden of accessing information as it enables users to retrieve and store information in varied formats. This has the tendency to influence information seeking behavior of users through the options it offers accessing and storing information (Arthur C. *et al.* 2013) [14]. The advent of the internet connectivity has revolutionized work and work activities; thus, the roles of libraries and librarian have changed significantly in terms of creating, receiving and dissemination of information. Libraries are no longer just printed book institutions, but large collection of records, videos, e-books and e-journals, and other electronic files are now acquired by libraries and made available to their users. Academic library which was considered as core of every university, now finds its value and importance deteriorating. This is due to the digitalization and virtualization of libraries. The rapid evolving of technology and innovation has increased the patronage of virtual libraries, electronic library resources and has thereby decreased the library physical functions and presence in the university community. This can be done by regularly assessing the changing needs and accessibility patterns of users using user surveys. [15].

It is good for academic libraries to stock with current and relevant materials to position them well to play their role of providing resources for teaching, learning and research. Academic research serve research needs of student and staff. Dennis (2011) [16] suggests that recognition of student needs, as well as justification of libraries more broadly, has translated into library space being reimagined as collaborative learning space, often referred to as an information or learning commons. Matthews (2012) [17] stated that once libraries have a better understanding of specific library services in the lives of their students, Faculty and researchers, library can enhance services that produce positive results and drop services that have no value. This will eventually enable academic libraries to better serve the needs of their users. Engaging and retaining students in higher educational institution are increasingly important criteria for measuring the

success of universities. Success affects influential university rankings and carries funding implication (Haddow Gaby 2013) [18]. Understanding library use is important and a dynamic component where there should be relentless efforts on part of the institutions, library professionals which reinforces the efforts in the direction of rendering better services and making best resources available to users (Adam, R. 2017) [19].

3. Results

The figures below illustrate the number of students who used the Library from April to September 2021, and the average time spent in hours. **Figure 1** illustrates the number of students and the average time per hour spent in the Library. June registered the highest number of students (1035) from the School of Business and Public Administration (SBPA), who spent an average time of 6 hours. While the lowest number of students (181) from SPBA was registered in September with 4 hours average time.

Figure 2 shows the number of students from the School of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (SMAS). The study revealed that, 53 students visited the Library in April and spent an average time of 3 hours. The highest number of students from SMAS was registered in July with an average time of two hours. The lowest turnout was in September with only 7 students using the Library facilities.

Figure 3 states that in June a total number of 102 students from the Faculty of Law spent an average time of 6 hours in the Library while the number decreases in July with a total of 48 students. In **Figure 4**, only 3 students in May from the School of Journalism and Digital Media visited the Library and spent 3 hours average time. While in August and September no student from the School of Journalism used the Library services.

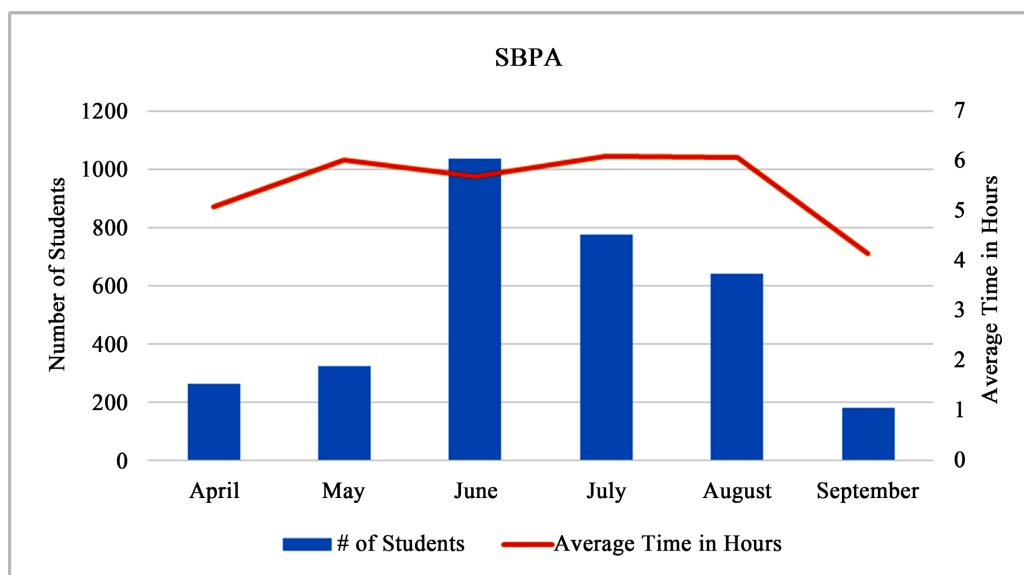


Figure 1. School of business and public administration.

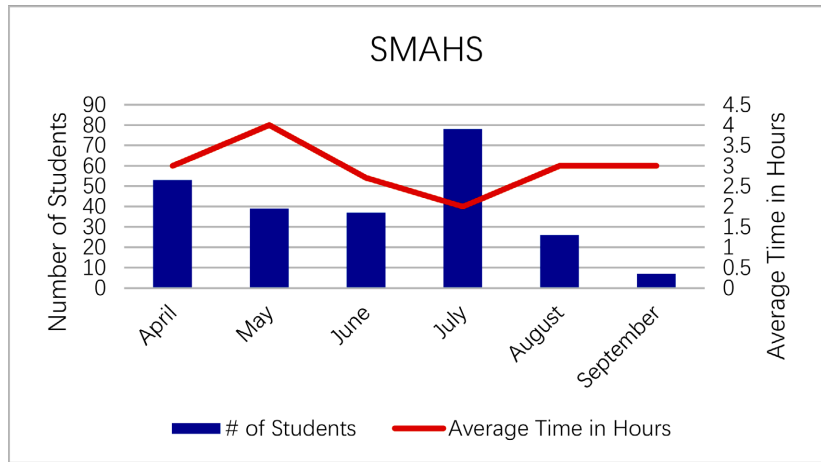


Figure 2. School of medicine and allied health sciences.

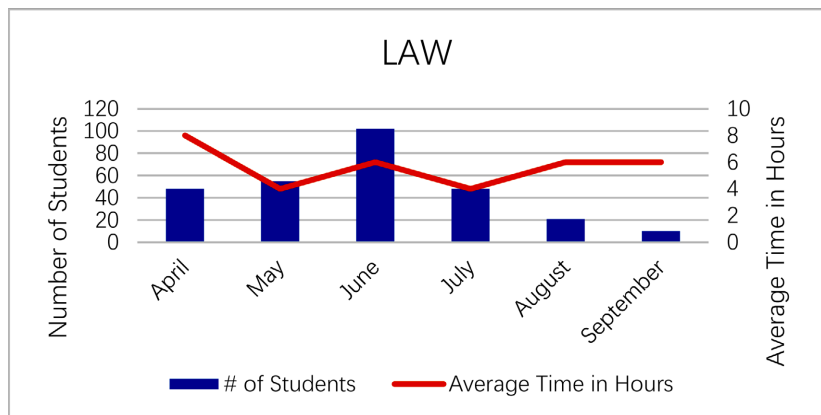


Figure 3. Faculty of law.

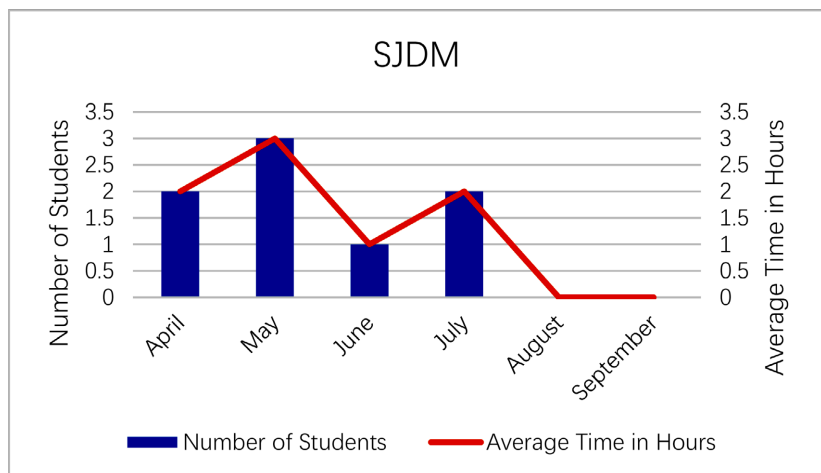


Figure 4. School of journalism and digital media.

The School of Information Communication and Technology as illustrated in **Figure 5** recorded a total number of 30 students in April with an average time of 3 hours, while the number of students' increases to 88 in June with an average time of 4 hours. However, September registered the lowest with only 8 students

with an average time of 4 hours 30 minutes. The School of Arts and Science as shown in **Figure 6**, demonstrated that 81 students utilized the Library in April while the number increases to 226 in June. August also registered a total of 88 students who spent an average time of 3 hours. In **Figure 7** as shown below indicated

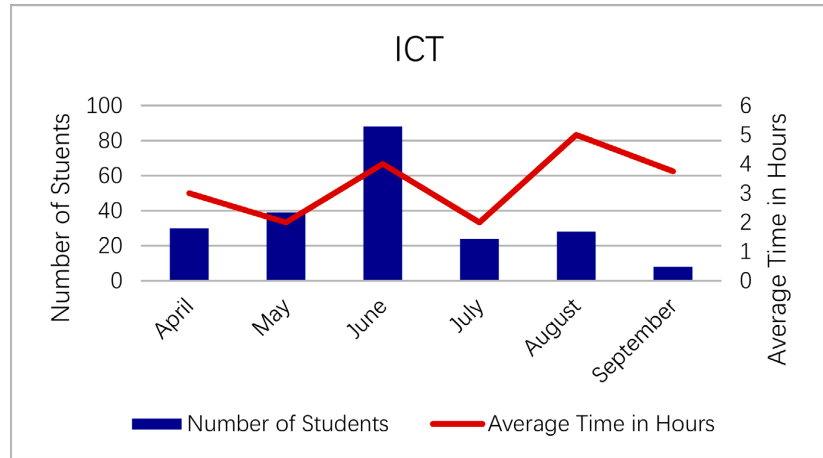


Figure 5. School of information communication and technology.

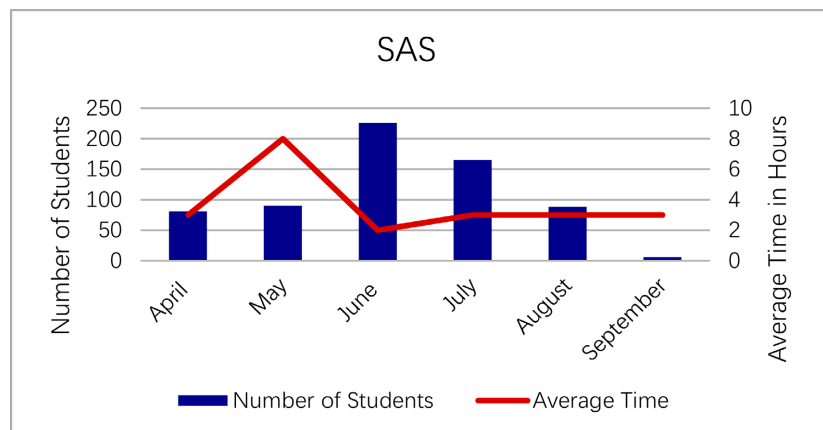


Figure 6. School of arts and science.

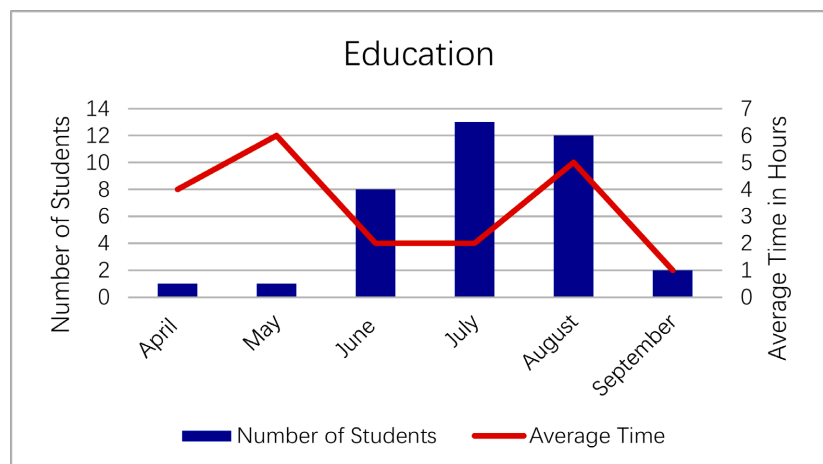


Figure 7. School of education.

a total number of 13 students in July from the School of Education with an average time of 2 hours while in August 12 students spent an average time of 5 hours. However, both April and May registered 1 student each with average time of 4 and 6 hours respectively.

4. Discussion of the Findings

The study established that, the School of Business and Public Administration (SBPA) has the largest number of students that often use the library, followed by the School of Arts and Sciences and the Faculty of Law respectively. The Library is located at the School of Business and Public Administration's campus thus, the reason for the high utilization of library facilities by the School. The SBPA has the largest student's population in the University, followed by the School of Arts and sciences. The School of Journalism and Digital Media recorded the lowest number of students that used the Library from April to September 2021. The study further revealed that, students mostly utilized the Library during examination period that is between June and July. September is often the beginning of new semester; thus, it registered the lowest turnout. According to Nagata *et al.* (2004) [20], it is generally agreed that most students use libraries for educational purpose. Some students go to libraries to spend their time and use computers, but others go to the libraries for study purpose, borrow books, used reference books or search for study materials, as revealed by the study.

The advancement in technological development has called for a modification in information services provision by libraries. In order to satisfactorily meet the information needs of its users, University of the Gambia Library have inculcated electronic resources into their collection as stated by Pandey and Mishra (2014) [21], "Academic libraries are digitalizing materials because they know the continuing value of library resources for learning, teaching, research, scholarship documentation and public accountability". This study shows that some of the students from the various schools used the Library for the aforementioned activities cited above. Even though information resources are widely available on the Internet, the library is still relevant in the selection, acquisition, provision, and evaluation of scholarly information resources as well as creating a conducive environment that supports teaching, learning and research in the University (Shelburne, W.A 2009) [22]. University students need various kind of services for research, developed themselves and to better perform in their area of study. Adam (2017) [19] reveals various services and functions of university library which include providing access to information resources that enhance lifelong learning. The study established that not only students at the University, but Government officials also utilized the library. Given that some officials from Government departments used the library for continual learning, thus buttressed the foregoing of enhance lifelong learning.

Effective library service will promote user satisfaction (IFLA 2013) [23]. The effectiveness of libraries as an instrument of learning is determined by the suc-

cess with which it can provide the user with the information, he/she seeks. The library can fulfill its function best by pursuing a policy of constant self-evaluation in order to be alert to the changing needs of users (N.A. Ajayi and J.O. Adetayo (2005) [24]). Simmonds and Andalee (2001) [25] opined that when library service quality is poor, the utilization of library resources and services by users will also be negatively affected. Tella and Ojo (2012) [26] stated that University libraries need to assist the parent institutions in the dissemination of information for them to achieve their vision and mission. The rapid growth of student's enrolment over the pass years has greatly increased the client group of academics' libraries. Academic libraries should expedite the transfer of knowledge by providing the resources for all who work and study in the institution. This study shows that knowledge is transferred by the used of both physical and digital library. In order to render effective library service to the University community, the study established that University of the Gambia is investing hugely in the acquisition of electronic information resources such as e. books; e. journals and subscription to scholarly database to facilitate teaching and learning.

According to Agyen-Gyasi, Lamptey and Frempong (2010) [27], Academic Libraries are essential contributors to knowledge generation and served as wide spectrum to knowledge of knowledge seekers. Similarly Adeniran (2011) [28] also stated that academic libraries serve research needs of students and staff. The rapid growth of Information Communication technology has widened the borders of accessing information, thus the role of libraries and librarian have change significantly in terms of creating, storing and dissemination of information. The University of the Gambia Library recognizes the role of student engagement and retention as well as the opportunity to demonstrate their contribution to institutional objectives.

5. Conclusions

Academic librarians over several decades have been interested in understanding more on how and why students use libraries. Academic libraries are fundamental when looking to deliver a unique university experience, offering users all the services they need to enhance their learning process. This study revealed that among all the schools investigated, the School of Business and Public Administration utilized the Library most. This is because the Library is located in the School campus and the School has the largest student population. The study further established that June and July are often the exam period, thus students used the library mostly during this period. However, September registered the lowest turnout in all schools. This is because September is often the beginning of a new semester, and most students used this period to register for their new courses and other transactions required for the academic year.

Despite the rapid growth of technology, traditional library for academics' process has not been discouraging. The study revealed that not only do students from the University of the Gambia benefit from the Library but also academics.

In fact, librarians can work in partnership with lecturers to help them create engaging programmes, adapt curricula and plan learning activities. The University Main Library continues to fulfil its role as a central part of University of the Gambia, despite the move away from print and towards electronic resources. The library contributes directly to the University's academic mission and to equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge they need to achieve, despite the move to e-resource students are using the Library facilities more often. A Library is a genuine source of knowledge, and no university can be considered complete in the absence of libraries. The University of the Gambia management should ensure that necessary facilities that ensure a high level of utilization of library services are adequately provided. This would enable users most specifically students to better utilize the library. As Libraries expand and innovative projects are undertaken, so the status of academic libraries as information gateways in the digital age is strengthened.

6. Recommendation

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

- Training of library staff especially in the area of Digital Librarianship should be encouraged.
- The Library should embark on an awareness and information literacy programme to attract more users.
- Libraries should continuously carry out periodic appraisals for their collection to determine relevance and usefulness of the books on the shelves.
- The Library should subscribe to more online peer review journals. This will enhance the ability to acquire a good number of current materials to support teaching, learning and research work in the University.
- Electronic resources, no matter how convenient, cannot replace the function of academic libraries, thus University Management should ensure that the library is well equipped with relevant and up to date materials needed to provide effective services to the University community. With this, the Library would be able to better serve its users.
- Provisions of adequate funding are required.
- The need to adopt more strategic approaches besides the initial once used in order to know their user' perceptions since libraries exist purposely to serve users.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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