

An assessment of the use of library information resources by medical students at MUHAS and HKMU academic libraries in Tanzania

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to assess the use of library information resources by medical students in selected academic medical libraries. The study was conducted at MUHAS and HKMU libraries. Specifically, the study sought to; examine the patterns of access and use of library resources by medical students; identify library resources utilized by medical students; examine methods/techniques medical students use to locate library resources; find out medical students' perceptions of library resources and services and solicit views on strategies for enhancing use of information resources among medical students in academic libraries in Tanzania. The study employed a survey research design and involved 131 respondents including 10 library staff, 79 undergraduate, and 42 postgraduate students, who were conveniently and purposively selected. Empirical data for this study were collected using a standardized questionnaire and interviews. Key findings revealed that the majority of medical students visit the library for general reading, borrowing books, and consulting research materials. The study also revealed that the majority of students preferred textbooks as their main source of information frequently used to meet their information needs. The study found that many medical students lacked appropriate search skills since the majority browsed through shelves and required guidance from library staff and colleagues as a means to locate library information resources, OPAC system was used less as a tool installed to assist students in accessing the library resources. This study also found that available library resources within academic libraries in Tanzania did not fully meet students' information needs, the reasons being the inadequacy, irrelevancy, and outdatedness of library resources. The study found that various challenges impeding medical students' effective use of library information resources and services, included insufficient internet access points, lack of relevant library information resources, inadequate reading space, constant breakdown of internet facilities, related subjects not properly linked, power the outage, obsolete library facilities, poor customer services, and inadequate search skills. Given the above, the study recommends the development of effective user-centered library information services to determine users' information resource requirements and to strengthen customer care service to enhance library staff cooperation with library users. The study also recommends strengthening ICT infrastructure to improve internet connectivity and facilities in the library and marketing library information resources to create awareness of the library services. The study concludes that medical libraries must be adequately resourced with current and relevant library information resources and IT facilities, in order to meet students' information needs and curriculum requirements in all disciplines taught in the university.