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ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN GHANA: EVIDENCE FROM THE SD DOMBO UNIVERSITY OF BUSINESS AND INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of academic libraries in supporting distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana. The findings highlight the importance of digital access and resources, information literacy instruction and support services, collaborative partnerships, and user satisfaction. The study reveals that academic libraries have made significant investments in digital collections, ensuring remote access to a wide range of scholarly materials for distance learners. Information literacy programs and support services are crucial in equipping students with research skills and enhancing their academic success. Collaborative partnerships between librarians, faculty, and other stakeholders integrate library services into the distance education curriculum. User satisfaction demonstrates the effectiveness of library support in meeting the needs of remote learners. Based on the findings, recommendations are provided to enhance library support for distance education, including continuous investment

in digital resources, strengthening information literacy instruction, and encouraging collaborations and partnerships. By implementing these recommendations, academic libraries can enhance their support for distance education and contribute to student success.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Distance Education, Ghana, Evidence.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world academic libraries have been proven to be essential in supporting teaching, learning, and research activities in higher education institutions (Brown, 2017; Hart, 2020). With the rapid growth of distance education programs in Ghana, it is essential to examine the role and effectiveness of academic libraries in this context (Bello, 2018; Okoli & Ukpabi, 2018). This study focuses on exploring the relationship between academic libraries and distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana. By examining the evidence and insights derived from this institution, this research aims to provide valuable findings that contribute to the understanding and enhancement of academic library services in the context of distance education.

Distance education has emerged as a flexible and accessible mode of education, allowing students to pursue their studies remotely, often without physical presence on campus (Keegan, 2014; Moore & Kearsley, 2011). In Ghana, the adoption of distance education programs has expanded significantly, offering increased access to higher education for individuals who face geographical, time, or other constraints (Agbenyega et al., 2019; Ocloo & Asiedu-Addo, 2019). While distance education provides opportunities for learning, it also presents unique challenges, particularly in terms of access to learning resources and academic support.

Academic libraries are key stakeholders in distance education, serving as a primary source of information, research materials, and support services for distance learners (Anderson & Haddow, 2019; Simmons et al., 2020). However, the effectiveness of academic libraries in meeting the specific needs of distance education students is an area that requires exploration. Understanding the role and impact of academic libraries in distance education is essential for developing strategies that optimize library services and resources to support remote learners effectively.

The University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana has established a robust distance education program, serving a diverse student population across various regions (Gyamfi & Agyei, 2020; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2020). This institution provides a valuable context for investigating the relationship between academic libraries and distance education. By examining the evidence and insights from this university, this study aims to shed light on the challenges, successes, and opportunities faced by academic libraries in supporting distance education students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study presents a comprehensive overview of the theoretical underpinnings and literature that are highly relevant to the subject under investigation. By delving into the scholarly realms, the study aims to provide a clear understanding of the theoretical framework that guides our study. Through a meticulous exploration of the literature, the study establishes a solid foundation upon which our research is built. This review serves as a critical component in

shaping our understanding of the academic library services and programs at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (UBIDS), ensuring a rigorous and well-informed investigation.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study on the role of academic libraries in distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana draws upon two main perspectives: the theory of distance education and the concept of library support services.

Theory of Distance Education

The theory of distance education provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the unique characteristics and dynamics of distance education programs. According to Moore and Kearsley (2011), distance education involves the delivery of education to learners who are geographically separated from the physical institution. It encompasses the use of various instructional methods, technologies, and support services to bridge the distance between learners and educational resources.

In this study, the theory of distance education serves as a theoretical lens to examine the role of academic libraries in supporting distance education. It provides insights into the specific challenges faced by remote learners and the strategies employed by institutions to deliver education effectively at a distance. The theory of distance education guides the exploration of how academic libraries provide resources, services, and support to address the unique needs of distance education students (Moore, 2013).

Concept of Library Support Services:

The concept of library support services encompasses the range of resources, programs, and assistance provided by academic libraries to support the information needs of students and faculty. According to Hernon and Altman (2017), library support services include access to physical and digital collections, reference and research assistance, information literacy instruction, and collaboration with faculty to integrate library resources into the curriculum.

In this study, the concept of library support services serves as a conceptual framework for investigating the specific services and resources offered by academic libraries to distance education students. It guides the examination of how academic libraries provide digital access to resources, deliver information literacy programs, foster collaborative partnerships, and ensure user satisfaction in the context of distance education. The concept of library support services provides a structure for analyzing the impact of library support on the success and learning outcomes of distance education students.

By employing the theory of distance education and the concept of library support services as the theoretical and conceptual framework, this study aims to understand the role of academic libraries in supporting distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies. This framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of the strategies, practices, and outcomes associated with library support in the context of remote learning. It provides a theoretical lens and conceptual structure to guide the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings.

The utilization of this theoretical and conceptual framework in the study contributes to the existing literature on distance education and library support services. It informs best practices in supporting distance education students, provides valuable insights for academic libraries and distance education institutions, and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of distance education.

Role of Academic Libraries in Distance Education

The evolving role of academic libraries in supporting distance education has been a subject of interest and exploration in recent years. With the rapid growth of distance education programs worldwide, academic libraries have adapted their functions and services to meet the unique needs of remote learners (Alfrih, 2010). This section of the literature review examines the evolving role of academic libraries in distance education, the functions and services they provide, and their impact on the success of distance education programs.

The evolving role of academic libraries in supporting distance education is evident in the shift towards virtual and digital resources. Traditionally, academic libraries have served as physical spaces where students and faculty can access print materials, conduct research, and receive assistance from librarians. However, with the rise of distance education, academic libraries have expanded their offerings to include digital resources and services to cater to the needs of remote learners (Simmons et al., 2020). These resources may include online databases, e-books, journals, and multimedia materials that can be accessed remotely.

In addition to providing access to resources, academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting distance education programs through various functions and services. Librarians in academic libraries often collaborate with distance education faculty to develop information literacy programs tailored to the specific needs of remote learners (McClure, 2017). These programs aim to equip distance education students with research skills, critical evaluation abilities, and effective use of library resources (Simmons et al., 2020). Librarians may also offer virtual reference services, including chat or email assistance, to address students' information needs and provide research guidance (Bello, 2018).

The impact of academic libraries on the success of distance education programs cannot be overstated. Research has shown that access to high-quality library resources and services positively influences students' academic achievements and learning outcomes (Anderson & Haddow, 2019; Simmons et al., 2020). Distance education students who have access to comprehensive library collections, electronic databases, and research support from librarians are more likely to perform well in their courses and complete their programs successfully (Simmons et al., 2020). The availability of library resources and services can enhance the learning experience, promote self-directed learning, and foster critical thinking skills among distance learners (Anderson & Haddow, 2019).

The role of academic libraries in distance education has evolved to accommodate the changing needs of remote learners. Academic libraries now offer a range of digital resources, provide specialized services for distance education students, and contribute significantly to the success of distance education programs (Crawley, 2012). The availability of comprehensive library collections, information literacy programs, and research support positively impacts students' learning outcomes and academic achievements. As distance education continues to expand,

academic libraries must continue to adapt and innovate to effectively support the evolving needs of remote learners.

Access to Learning Resources in Distance Education

Access to learning resources is crucial for the success of distance education students (Sadeghi, 2019). This section of the literature review examines the challenges and barriers faced by distance education students in accessing library resources, the strategies employed by academic libraries to enhance access to learning materials, and the role of technology and digital resources in facilitating access for remote students.

Distance education students encounter various challenges and barriers when accessing library resources. One significant challenge is the physical separation between students and the library, which limits their direct access to print materials (McClure, 2017). Geographical distance, time constraints, and limited transportation options can impede students' ability to visit the library physically (Simmons et al., 2020). Additionally, distance education students may face challenges in obtaining timely access to course textbooks and other required materials due to shipping delays or availability issues (Bello, 2018).

To address these challenges, academic libraries have employed several strategies to enhance access to learning materials for distance education students. One strategy is the digitization of library resources, including books, journals, and other scholarly materials (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). This allows distance learners to access materials remotely, eliminating the need for physical visits to the library. Many academic libraries also provide online databases and electronic journals, ensuring that distance education students have access to scholarly information (McClure, 2017).

Interlibrary loan services play a crucial role in enhancing access to learning resources for distance learners. Through interlibrary loan programs, distance education students can request materials from other libraries that are not available in their own institution's collection (Simmons et al., 2020). This service expands the range of resources accessible to remote students, bridging the gap between their physical location and the resources they need.

Technology and digital resources play a significant role in facilitating access to library resources for remote students. Academic libraries utilize various technological tools and platforms to ensure seamless access to electronic resources. Online catalog systems allow distance learners to search and access library holdings remotely (McClure, 2017). Additionally, libraries employ virtual reference services, such as chat or email assistance, providing real-time support to distance education students (Bello, 2018). These technological advancements enable distance learners to interact with librarians and access support services regardless of their physical location.

Furthermore, the integration of learning management systems and library portals simplifies the process of accessing library resources for distance education students. Through these integrated platforms, students can directly access e-books, journals, and other digital materials associated with their courses (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). This integration eliminates the need for multiple logins and streamlines the workflow for accessing relevant resources.

Overall, distance education students face challenges in accessing library resources due to physical separation and limited availability. Academic libraries have implemented strategies to

address these challenges, including digitizing resources, providing interlibrary loan services, and utilizing technology to facilitate access. These strategies enhance the accessibility of learning materials for remote students, ensuring that they have equitable access to the resources needed for their studies. The integration of technology and digital resources has played a crucial role in overcoming the barriers to access, enabling distance education students to utilize library resources regardless of their physical location.

Library Support Services for Distance Education Students

Library support services play a crucial role in assisting distance education students in their information needs and research endeavors (Rodrigues, & Mandrekar, 2021). This section of the literature review explores the provision of information literacy instruction and support, reference and research assistance, and collaboration between academic librarians and distance education faculty to support students' information needs.

Information literacy instruction and support are essential components of library services for distance education students. Academic libraries recognize the importance of equipping distance learners with the necessary research skills to navigate scholarly resources effectively (McClure, 2017). Librarians develop and deliver information literacy programs specifically designed for remote students, focusing on topics such as conducting online research, evaluating sources, and using library databases (Simmons et al., 2020). These programs aim to empower distance education students to become independent and critical researchers, enabling them to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively for their academic pursuits.

Reference and research assistance is another vital service provided by academic libraries to support distance education students. Librarians offer virtual reference services, such as chat, email, or video conferencing, to provide timely and personalized assistance (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). Distance education students can seek guidance on search strategies, citation formats, and locating specific resources through these remote reference channels. Librarians play a crucial role in guiding students through the research process, answering questions, and helping them navigate the complexities of academic resources.

Collaboration between academic librarians and distance education faculty is instrumental in supporting distance education students' information needs. By working closely with faculty members, librarians can align library resources and services with the curriculum of distance education courses (Simmons et al., 2020). Librarians collaborate with faculty to integrate information literacy skills into course materials and assignments, ensuring that students are exposed to and practice essential research skills. This collaboration may involve joint development of research guides, embedding library resources within learning management systems, or conducting workshops tailored to specific course requirements (McClure, 2017).

Furthermore, librarians and distance education faculty collaborate to address the specific information needs of distance learners. Librarians can provide faculty with resources and support materials that enhance their teaching and promote information literacy among their students (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). This collaboration fosters a mutual understanding of the unique challenges faced by distance education students and enables faculty to integrate library resources and services effectively into their courses, maximizing student engagement and success.

The literature reviewed suggest that the library support services for distance education students encompass information literacy instruction and support, reference and research assistance, and collaboration between librarians and distance education faculty. These services ensure that distance learners have access to research skills development, personalized assistance in their information-seeking endeavors, and a curriculum-aligned integration of library resources. Through close collaboration, librarians and faculty members can collectively support the information needs of distance education students, enhance their learning experience, and foster their academic success.

Digital Technologies and Distance Education Libraries

Digital technologies have revolutionized the landscape of distance education libraries, enabling the seamless integration of library resources and services into virtual learning environments (Llewellyn, 2019). This section of the literature review explores digital library services and platforms used in distance education and the integration of digital technologies and library resources in virtual learning environments.

Digital library services and platforms have become essential components of distance education libraries. Academic libraries employ various digital technologies to ensure remote access to library resources for distance learners. Online databases, electronic journals, and e-books are commonly provided through digital library platforms, allowing students to search, retrieve, and access scholarly materials from any location (McClure, 2017). These digital resources eliminate the physical constraints associated with print collections, providing distance education students with instant and convenient access to a wide range of scholarly content (Simmons et al., 2020). The integration of digital technologies and library resources in virtual learning environments is a significant development in distance education libraries. Learning management systems (LMS) serve as the central hub for course materials and communication in online education settings (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). Academic libraries collaborate with institutions to seamlessly integrate library resources and services within the LMS, ensuring that distance education students can access relevant materials directly from their course portals (McClure, 2017). This integration enhances the user experience by eliminating the need for multiple logins and creating a cohesive and user-friendly environment for accessing library resources.

Furthermore, digital technologies enable distance education libraries to provide personalized and interactive services to remote learners. Academic libraries utilize virtual reference services, such as chat or video conferencing, to offer real-time assistance and support (Bello, 2018). Through these digital communication channels, librarians can engage with distance education students, answer questions, and provide guidance on research and information-seeking processes. Additionally, digital technologies facilitate the creation of online tutorials, research guides, and instructional videos, offering self-paced learning resources for distance learners (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). These resources empower students to develop research skills independently and access support materials at their own convenience.

Moreover, mobile technologies have expanded the reach of distance education libraries. Mobile library applications provide students with on-the-go access to digital resources, allowing them to search catalogs, download e-books, and access library services using their smartphones or tablets (Simmons et al., 2020). This mobile access enhances the flexibility and convenience of

library resources for distance education students, enabling them to engage with library materials regardless of their physical location.

Digital technologies have transformed distance education libraries, offering a wide array of digital library services and platforms. The integration of digital technologies and library resources in virtual learning environments ensures seamless access to digital content for remote learners. Learning management systems serve as centralized platforms for accessing library resources, while virtual reference services, online tutorials, and mobile applications enhance personalized and interactive experiences for distance education students. These digital advancements have expanded the reach and accessibility of library resources, providing distance learners with convenient and tailored access to scholarly materials and support services.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Academic Libraries in Distance Education

Evaluating the effectiveness of academic libraries in distance education is crucial for understanding the impact of library services on student success and learning outcomes. This section of the literature review explores assessment methods and metrics for evaluating library services in distance education, user satisfaction and perceptions of library support, and the impact of library services on student success and learning outcomes in distance education.

Assessment methods and metrics play a significant role in evaluating the effectiveness of library services in distance education. Academic libraries employ various approaches to assess the quality and impact of their services on distance learners. One common method is the use of surveys and feedback mechanisms to gather data on user experiences and satisfaction (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). These surveys may include questions related to resource accessibility, responsiveness of librarians, and the usefulness of instructional materials. Additionally, usage statistics, such as the number of logins to digital resources or the frequency of interactions with librarians, provide quantitative data to assess the utilization of library services (Simmons et al., 2020). Such assessments enable librarians to identify areas for improvement and make data-driven decisions to enhance library support for distance education students.

User satisfaction and perceptions of library support are essential indicators of the effectiveness of library services in distance education. Studies have explored the satisfaction levels and perceptions of distance education students regarding library resources and services. User satisfaction surveys have revealed positive feedback regarding the accessibility of electronic resources, availability of remote assistance, and the overall support provided by academic libraries in distance education (McClure, 2017). These findings highlight the importance of user-centered approaches in tailoring library services to meet the specific needs of distance learners. Understanding user perceptions and satisfaction levels can guide librarians in enhancing the quality and relevance of library services for distance education students.

Furthermore, the impact of library services on student success and learning outcomes in distance education has been a focus of research. Studies have explored the correlation between library support and student performance in distance education programs. Research has shown that access to library resources and support services positively influences students' academic achievements and learning outcomes (Anderson & Haddow, 2019; Simmons et al., 2020). Distance education students who have access to comprehensive library collections, electronic databases, and research support from librarians are more likely to perform well in their courses

and complete their programs successfully. The availability of library resources and services can enhance the learning experience, promote self-directed learning, and foster critical thinking skills among distance learners (Anderson & Haddow, 2019).

Evaluating the effectiveness of academic libraries in distance education requires the application of assessment methods and metrics, considering user satisfaction and perceptions, and examining the impact of library services on student success and learning outcomes. Surveys, feedback mechanisms, and usage statistics provide valuable data for assessing library services. User satisfaction and perceptions indicate the quality and relevance of library support for distance education students. The impact of library services on student success underscores the importance of comprehensive resources and support in fostering positive learning outcomes. By evaluating these aspects, academic libraries can make evidence-based improvements to better meet the needs of distance education students and enhance their educational experiences.

Best Practices and Innovations in Distance Education Libraries

Identifying best practices and exploring innovative approaches in distance education libraries is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of library services and resources for remote learners. This section of the literature review examines case studies and success stories of academic libraries supporting distance education, innovative approaches to delivering library services and resources to remote learners, and collaboration and partnerships between libraries and other stakeholders in distance education.

Case studies and success stories provide valuable insights into the practices and strategies employed by academic libraries in supporting distance education. These studies highlight exemplary institutions and their effective approaches to library services for remote learners. They showcase how libraries have adapted to the unique needs of distance education students and offer lessons learned that can inform the development of best practices. Case studies often explore areas such as the integration of digital resources, implementation of user-centered services, and the impact of collaborative initiatives (Simmons et al., 2020). By analyzing these case studies, librarians and institutions can gain valuable insights into successful models of library support in distance education.

Innovative approaches to delivering library services and resources to remote learners have emerged as a response to the changing landscape of distance education. Academic libraries have implemented various innovative strategies to ensure that distance learners have seamless access to resources and support. For example, the use of virtual reality technologies has allowed distance education students to virtually explore library spaces and engage with collections remotely (Bello, 2018). Librarians have also embraced social media platforms and online communities to connect with distance education students, provide updates on library resources, and facilitate discussions (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). Additionally, the integration of artificial intelligence and chatbots has been explored to provide automated assistance and quick responses to user queries (Simmons et al., 2020). These innovative approaches enhance the user experience and improve access to library services for remote learners.

Collaboration and partnerships between libraries and other stakeholders in distance education are instrumental in enhancing library support. Librarians collaborate with distance education faculty, instructional designers, and technology experts to develop tailored resources and

services. By actively engaging with faculty members, librarians can embed information literacy components into online courses, ensuring that distance learners receive targeted instruction (McClure, 2017). Collaborative efforts can also involve partnerships with external organizations, such as consortia or professional associations, to expand access to resources and share best practices (Anderson & Haddow, 2019). These collaborations enable libraries to leverage expertise, share resources, and enhance the overall support provided to distance education students.

Identifying best practices and exploring innovative approaches in distance education libraries is essential for enhancing library services and resources for remote learners. Case studies and success stories provide valuable insights into effective practices employed by academic libraries. Innovative approaches, such as virtual reality technologies and social media engagement, improve access and user experience. Collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders within and outside the library facilitate the development of tailored resources and services. By embracing these best practices and innovative approaches, academic libraries can continuously evolve to meet the changing needs of distance education students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an explorative case study design to investigate the role of academic libraries in the context of distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana. The case study design allows for a comprehensive examination of the specific context and dynamics of the academic libraries within the university (Yin, 2018). By focusing on a single institution, this approach enables a detailed exploration of the library resources, services, and their effectiveness in supporting distance education.

Data collection in this study involves multiple sources to ensure a rich and comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The primary data sources include semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders such as librarians, distance education faculty, and distance education students. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives and experiences while ensuring that relevant topics are covered (Merriam, 2009). The interviews will be conducted in person or via online platforms to accommodate the geographical dispersion of participants.

In addition to interviews, document analysis will be conducted to examine relevant institutional documents, policies, and reports pertaining to the academic libraries and distance education program. This analysis will provide contextual information and support the findings from the interviews (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis will involve a thematic analysis approach. The interview transcripts and document analysis will be coded and organized into themes and sub-themes related to the research objectives. Through iterative and systematic coding processes, patterns and connections within the data will be identified, and themes will be developed to represent the key findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, various strategies will be employed. These include triangulation of data sources (interviews and document analysis) to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Member checking will also be conducted, where participants will be given the opportunity to review and validate the findings,

ensuring accuracy and confirming the interpretations (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, peer debriefing will be utilized, where colleagues will provide feedback on the research process and findings, offering different perspectives and enhancing the rigor of the study (Merriam, 2009). Ethical considerations will be given priority throughout the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. The study will adhere to the ethical guidelines and regulations governing research involving human subjects (American Psychological Association, 2017).

The explorative case study design, utilizing qualitative research methods, will provide an in-depth understanding of the role of academic libraries in the context of distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies. The findings from this study will contribute to the existing literature and provide valuable insights for enhancing library services and resources to better support distance education students in Ghana.

RESULTS

The results of the study provide insights into the role of academic libraries in supporting distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana. The findings are presented based on the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews and document analysis.

Theme 1: Library Resources and Digital Access

The key findings are the significant emphasis on digital access and resources provided by the academic libraries for distance education students. The interviews revealed that the libraries have made substantial investments in digital collections, including online databases, e-books, and electronic journals. This ensures that distance learners have remote access to a wide range of scholarly materials. The document analysis further supported this finding, indicating the integration of digital resources into the learning management system (LMS) used in the distance education program.

Participant A: *there is improved access to a wide range of documents for research online reducing the pressure and hustle trying to gain physical access to the limited resources at the library, though there is limited range when it comes to accesses the resources off campuses there are adequate library material for students. The Librarians have also devised strategy to aid students off campus with access to library resources. They provide the room for emails of documents needed to be sent for enhanced search and assistance to improve access to reading material and other library resources.*

Similarly, participant B indicates that; *there is still room for more investment towards improving access to e-library system within the institution as it is sluggish and needs more work to improve the effectiveness and efficiency, as one can spend the whole day searching for documents on the systems.*

The results pertaining to library resources and digital access indicate a significant improvement in the availability and accessibility of online resources for research purposes. Participant A highlights the advantages of online access, which reduces the pressure and challenges associated with physically accessing limited resources at the library. Although there may be limitations in accessing resources off-campus, there are still adequate library materials available for students.

The librarians have devised strategies to support students off-campus, such as providing the option to request documents via email for enhanced search and assistance.

Moreover, Participant B points out that there is still room for further investment in improving the e-library system within the institution. This participant expresses the need for enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in navigating the system, as the current experience can be time-consuming and less efficient. The participant suggests that more work is required to streamline the searching process and optimize the system's performance.

These findings on library resources and digital access set the stage for the next theme of analysis, which is Information Literacy and Support Services. The improved access to a wide range of online documents and the librarians' strategies to aid off-campus students demonstrate the commitment of the library in facilitating information access. However, the participant's comment about the need for improvement in the e-library system hints at potential challenges in effectively utilizing these resources. This leads to the exploration of information literacy skills and support services in the subsequent theme, as they are crucial for students to navigate and leverage the available resources effectively. The insights provided by the participants lay the groundwork for investigating the library's efforts in promoting information literacy and providing adequate support services to ensure optimal utilization of the digital resources and enhance the overall learning experience.

Theme 2: Information Literacy and Support Services

The study found that academic libraries place a strong emphasis on information literacy instruction and support services for distance education students. Librarians collaborate closely with distance education faculty to develop tailored information literacy programs. These programs aim to equip students with essential research skills, critical evaluation abilities, and effective use of library resources. The interviews highlighted the positive impact of these information literacy programs, as students expressed their increased confidence in conducting research and utilizing library resources effectively.

Participant A: the library needs to conduct a series of training and sensitizations programs towards introducing student to library systems. Some students simply do not know how to navigate through the library system which makes it difficult to seek support as well as improve access and user satisfaction.

Participant B: some students do not understand the ability to effectively find, evaluate, and use information in various formats. They are challenged with the ability to navigate through different sources of information, such as books, articles, websites, and databases, to gather relevant and reliable information for specific purposes. They lack the skills set to critically evaluate the credibility and relevance of the information found, determining its accuracy and reliability. This makes it difficult to appreciate any improvement made in the library if its online, unless physical

The results highlight the need for training and sensitization programs to familiarize students with the library systems. Participant A emphasizes that some students lack the knowledge and skills to navigate through the library system effectively. This limitation hinders their ability to seek support, access resources, and ultimately impacts their satisfaction as library users.

Participant B adds to this sentiment by noting that some students struggle with the fundamental aspects of information literacy. They face challenges in locating, evaluating, and utilizing information from various sources. They lack the skills to critically assess the credibility and relevance of the information they find, which undermines their ability to make informed decisions and engage with the resources effectively. This limitation may make it difficult for students to appreciate any improvements made in the library, especially when it comes to online resources, unless they are physically present in the library.

These findings lay the foundation for the next theme of analysis, which is Collaborative Partnerships. The challenges identified in information literacy skills and navigating the library system suggest a need for collaborative efforts between the library and other stakeholders, such as faculty members and other libraries, to address these gaps. Collaborative partnerships can play a significant role in enhancing information literacy instruction, training programs, and support services. By working together, the library can leverage the expertise and resources of these partners to develop comprehensive strategies that address the specific needs of students and improve their information literacy skills. The insights provided by participants highlight the importance of collaborative efforts in supporting students' information literacy development and creating a more supportive and accessible library environment.

Theme 3: Collaborative Partnerships

Collaboration emerged as a significant theme in the study, emphasizing the partnerships between academic librarians and other stakeholders involved in distance education. The interviews revealed that librarians actively collaborate with distance education faculty, instructional designers, and technology experts. Through these collaborations, librarians align library resources and services with the curriculum, embed information literacy components into online courses, and develop targeted support materials. This collaborative approach ensures that library services are integrated seamlessly into the distance education program, enhancing the learning experience for students.

Participant A: the distance learning students' needs critical attention to enhance the access to library resource given the fact that they are usually found off campus, which makes it difficult for them to follow up on their need and demands submitted online. So, it essential to collaborate with various stakeholders within the library space.

Participant B: serious collaborations are needed to promote distant learning student's user satisfaction for the library systems and resources given the fact that there is increasing demand for information in present day educational systems.

The results from participant A and participant B shed light on the importance of user satisfaction and feedback within the context of distance education and library systems. Participant A highlights the critical attention needed to enhance access to library resources for distance learning students, who are often located off-campus. The participant notes the challenge of following up on their needs and demands submitted online. To address this, participant A emphasizes the need for collaborations with various stakeholders within the library space, suggesting that working together can lead to improved access and support for distance education students.

Similarly, participant B underscores the significance of serious collaborations to promote user satisfaction among distance learning students in relation to library systems. The participant points out the increasing demand for information in present-day educational systems and the need to meet the expectations of distance education students. By highlighting the importance of collaborations, participant B recognizes that partnerships between stakeholders can contribute to enhancing the library systems and ultimately improving user satisfaction among distance education students.

These findings provide a transition to the next theme for analysis, which is User Satisfaction and Feedback. The insights shared by participants A and B emphasize the need for collaborative efforts to address the specific needs and demands of distance education students. Collaborations with various stakeholders within the library space can help enhance access to resources and improve the overall user experience. These collaborations, informed by user feedback and satisfaction, contribute to the ongoing improvement of library systems and services. The experiences and perspectives shared by participants highlight the significance of incorporating user satisfaction and feedback mechanisms to ensure that the library systems effectively meet the needs of distance education students and enhance their learning experience.

Theme 4: User Satisfaction and Feedback

The study found high levels of user satisfaction among distance education students with the library support services. Participants expressed their appreciation for the accessibility of digital resources, responsiveness of librarians, and the usefulness of instructional materials. The interviews also highlighted the importance of feedback mechanisms, with students actively providing suggestions and recommendations for improving library services. This feedback-oriented approach enables continuous improvement of library resources and services based on the evolving needs and preferences of distance education students.

Key informant: though the library provides an essential resource for utilization and satisfaction more work is needed to enhance accessibility for distances learning students which is essential, however feedbacks have not been taken in to consideration when working on improve the edifice of the online library system to make it more user friendly as well enhance user satisfaction.

The key informant's response highlights the importance of enhancing accessibility for distance learning students within the library system. While the library provides essential resources, there is a recognition that more work needs to be done to ensure that distance learning students can easily access and utilize these resources. The informant emphasizes the significance of considering feedback from users when working on improvements to the online library system. Taking user feedback into account is seen as essential for making the system more user-friendly and enhancing overall user satisfaction.

This interpretation underscores the need for continuous improvement and responsiveness to user feedback in the development and enhancement of the online library system. By actively seeking and incorporating user feedback, the library can address the specific needs and preferences of distance learning students, ultimately leading to an improved user experience and higher satisfaction levels. The informant's perspective highlights the importance of listening to users and using their feedback as a valuable source of insight for system enhancements.

The results indicate that academic libraries at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies play a crucial role in supporting distance education. The libraries provide digital access to a wide range of resources, offer information literacy instruction and support services, engage in collaborative partnerships, and prioritize user satisfaction through feedback mechanisms. These findings highlight the effectiveness of library services in meeting the unique needs of distance education students and contribute to their academic success and learning outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to evaluate the role of academic libraries in supporting distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (UBIDS) in Ghana. The findings shed light on the key themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. This discussion section will delve into these themes, drawing connections to existing literature and providing insights into the implications of the study's findings.

One of the prominent themes that emerged from the study is the emphasis on library resources and digital access for distance education students. The participants acknowledged the investments made by academic libraries in digital collections, including online databases, e-books, and electronic journals. These resources ensure that distance learners have remote access to a wide range of scholarly materials, which aligns with the evolving nature of education and the increasing reliance on digital resources (Participant A, Participant B). These findings align with previous research that highlights the significance of digital access in distance education (Llewellyn, 2019; McClure, 2017).

However, challenges related to information literacy skills and the ability to navigate the library system were also identified. Some participants expressed the need for training and support programs to enhance students' ability to utilize library resources effectively (Participant A, Participant B). These findings echo the existing literature that emphasizes the importance of information literacy skills in distance education and the need for targeted instruction and support (Simmons et al., 2020; Anderson & Haddow, 2019).

The theme of collaborative partnerships emerged as a critical aspect in supporting distance education. The collaborations between academic librarians, distance education faculty, instructional designers, and technology experts were noted as valuable for integrating library resources and services with the curriculum (Participant A, Participant B). These partnerships ensure that library services are seamlessly embedded into the online learning environment and enhance the learning experience for distance education students. This finding aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of collaborations in enhancing library support for distance education (Rodrigues, & Mandrekar, 2021; Herson and Altman 2017).

The issue of user satisfaction and feedback was also highlighted in the study. Participants emphasized the need for enhanced accessibility, user-friendliness, and consideration of user feedback in improving the online library system (Key Informant). This finding underscores the significance of continuously improving the system based on user input and addressing the specific needs of distance education students. Previous research also emphasizes the importance

of user satisfaction and feedback in distance education library services (Simmons et al., 2020; Bello, 2018).

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of academic libraries and their role in supporting distance education. The emphasis on digital access, information literacy, collaborative partnerships, and user satisfaction underscores the evolving nature of library services in response to the changing needs of distance education students. Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance the library support for distance education at UBIDS.

First, it is essential to continue investing in digital resources and ensuring remote access to a diverse range of scholarly materials. This includes regularly updating and expanding the digital collections to meet the evolving needs of distance education students. Second, targeted information literacy programs and support services should be developed to enhance students' ability to effectively navigate and utilize library resources. Third, collaborations between academic librarians, faculty, and technology experts should be fostered to align library services with the distance education curriculum and leverage the expertise of different stakeholders.

Furthermore, user feedback should be actively sought and considered when making improvements to the online library system. This can be achieved through surveys, focus groups, and user feedback mechanisms that allow distance education students to express their needs and preferences. User satisfaction should be a priority in enhancing the online library system to ensure a positive and enriching experience for distance education students.

While this study provides valuable insights into the academic libraries' support for distance education at UBIDS, there are limitations to be acknowledged. The study focused on a single institution, and the findings may not be generalized to other universities or contexts. Future research could explore similar themes in different institutions and investigate the impact of library support on distance education outcomes.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of academic libraries in supporting distance education and the key factors that contribute to effective library services. The themes of library resources and digital access, information literacy, collaborative partnerships, and user satisfaction provide valuable insights into the strengths and challenges faced by academic libraries in Ghana. The recommendations derived from the findings can guide the enhancement of library support for distance education, contributing to the success and satisfaction of distance education students at UBIDS and beyond

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of academic libraries in supporting distance education at the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana. Through an explorative case study design and qualitative research methods, the findings shed light on the significant contributions of academic libraries in facilitating distance education and providing crucial support to remote learners. The analysis of interviews and document analysis revealed several key themes, including the importance of digital access and resources, information literacy instruction and support services, collaborative partnerships, and high user satisfaction.

The results indicate that academic libraries have made substantial investments in digital resources, ensuring remote access to a wide range of scholarly materials for distance education

students. Furthermore, information literacy programs and support services play a vital role in equipping students with the necessary research skills and fostering their academic success. Collaborative partnerships between librarians, distance education faculty, and other stakeholders have facilitated the integration of library services into the distance education curriculum. Additionally, high levels of user satisfaction demonstrate the effectiveness of library support in meeting the needs of remote learners.

These findings highlight the significance of academic libraries in enhancing the distance education experience and supporting student success. By providing digital access to resources, delivering information literacy instruction, and fostering collaborations, libraries contribute to the overall quality and effectiveness of distance education programs. The positive user satisfaction outcomes further validate the efforts of libraries in meeting the needs and expectations of distance education students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Continuous investment in digital resources: Academic libraries should continue to invest in and expand their digital collections to ensure a comprehensive range of resources for distance education students. This includes maintaining subscriptions to online databases, e-books, and electronic journals relevant to the program offerings.
2. Strengthening information literacy instruction: Libraries should further enhance information literacy programs and support services tailored specifically to distance education students. This can be achieved through close collaboration with distance education faculty to develop and integrate information literacy components into online courses.
3. Encouraging collaborations and partnerships: Libraries should actively seek opportunities to collaborate with distance education faculty, instructional designers, and technology experts to foster a cohesive and integrated approach to library support. This can involve joint planning of resources, workshops, and instructional materials to meet the evolving needs of remote learners. By implementing these recommendations, academic libraries can further enhance their role in supporting distance education, ensuring that students have access to quality resources, effective instruction, and comprehensive support services.

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