THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE LAW STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT: *The Human Rights and Documentation Centre (HRDC) serves the central mission of creating and cultivating a sustainable culture of human rights and democracy. It is a semi-autonomous component of the Faculty of Law of the University of Namibia (UNAM) and it supports staff and students in terms of their information needs. The purpose of the study was to determine the role of the University of Namibia's HRDC on the academic performance of undergraduate law students at the University of Namibia. The study employed a mixed research approach by using questionnaires and structured interviews to collect data. The target population was the undergraduate law students and staff members of the HRDC. A structured interview was conducted with one of the HRDC staff as the key informant, on the other hand survey questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from students. Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the sample size of 1 key informant from the staff members, and convenience sampling technique to come up with a sample size of 50 undergraduate law students who used the centre. The study findings revealed that the collections found in the centre were relevant, helpful and very supportive in support of the academic performance of students. Students found the collections to be old and the centre's operating hours to be a hindrance for students to fully utilise the centre. The study recommends marketing and user advocacy to raise awareness of the library services. The study further recommends that the centre should update its collections more often and adjust their operating hours to accommodate most students.*

KEYWORDS: *academic libraries, academic performance, undergraduate law students, Human Rights Documentation Centre.*

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

An academic library in any academic setting plays a central role in teaching and learning. Its activities may help or impede the process of learning and teaching. Wong and Webb (2011, 362-363) state that library usage contributes positively to students' academic performance and, therefore, to the university's effectiveness. In addition, Biagini (2012) indicates that students at every grade achieve greater academic success when they have access to a library. The mere fact that a library service is being used does not mean that the service makes a difference or has a positive impact on the user. This has significant implications for Special Library and Information Services for information services, which have to constantly review their added value in line with their needs and wants.

Special libraries have a role to play, especially the Human Rights Documentation Centre (HRDC) which also functions as an academic library. The HRDC as a special library is mandated to process, collect and document human rights issues in Namibia and the whole Southern Africa, in close partnership with the Faculty of Law. As written by Ruppel (2010, 132), the Human Rights Documentation Centre (HRDC) under the University of Namibia is a semi-autonomous documentation centre or library which operates under the Faculty of Law and is mandated to serve the information needs of the Faculty of Law students and staff. The Human Rights Documentation Centre (HRDC) has since its inception supported the Faculty of Law with academic information,

as well as the training of law students in human rights. HRDC plays a major role on the provision of academic and scientific discourse and exchange of ideas Ruppel (2010, 133-134). From this perspective, the HRDC's role as a special library is acknowledged in an academic set up at the University of Namibia (UNAM). Since HRDC is a research centre, students utilise the centre to supplement information on their academic desires such as research projects, assignments, moot court cases and preparation for examinations, etc.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to HRDC (2018), the user services statistics for 2016 showed that 660 (93%) undergraduate law students used the centre. The user service statistics for 2017 also revealed that 580 (80%) of undergraduate law students used the centre, showing a decrease of 80 (12.1%) in the number of students from the Faculty of Law who utilised the centre. The decrease and the downtrend on the user statistics in the number of undergraduate law students who used the centre raised red flags on whether the services and collections offered at the centre were still effective in terms of satisfying the students' academic needs in order to boost their academic performance.

Research objectives

The main objective of the study was to determine the role of the University of Namibia's Human Rights Documentation Centre on the academic performance of undergraduate law students at the University of Namibia. This was however supported by the following sub-objectives:

1. To identify services offered by the HRDC to the undergraduate law students;
2. To examine how the services offered at HRDC related to academic performance of undergraduate law students; and
3. To determine how effective was the collection in terms of improving the academic performance of undergraduate law students.

Significance of the study

The study was aimed at highlighting the services offered by the HRDC and their relevance to the academic performance of undergraduate law students. It also projected more light on whether the collections and the services offered had an impact on the academic performance of undergraduate law students. The findings of the study are useful to the management of the centre to take corrective measures and making informed decisions regarding the day to day operations of the HRDC.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The review of literature surrounding the role of HRDC on students' academic performance brings out discussions on various trends which have emerged within the African and global context. Ruppel (2010, 135) states that the HRDC organises and conducts training programmes for the broadest variety of target groups, and prepares and disseminates information on human rights and related issues. Sukla, Singh and Mishra (2013), lament that as information providers, libraries of all types, and documentation and information centres should be the main beneficiaries of the enormous amount of Internet resources that can be used to enhance the quality of services. The library service is tailored to a very specific area and supports that special interest. Although the library staff may have a different view of how students perceive the library, the majority of the students perceive the library as having great value for their education and of having a beneficial impact on their academic pursuits Malatji (2017, 3). Basheer and Razzaq (2012, 15) posit that a good library that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded could lead to higher students' achievement regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the parents. Information services in special libraries are often tailor made, and they are dependent on the needs of the parent organisation Special Library (n.d.).

Malatji (2017, 75) reported that lack of resources, non-attendance of information literacy programmes by students, lack of research support, and an inadequate infrastructure, hinder the library's contribution to students' achievement outcomes. Zhong and Alexander (2007, 419) articulated that academic improvement in schools should be regarded as a shared responsibility and therefore the proactive approach in considering libraries as key stakeholders towards academic improvement is definitely a move in the right direction.

The HRDC makes contributions to legal education in respect of human rights in Namibia through its academic programmes and project outputs. The HRDC aims to foster academic exchange towards excellence in research with various renowned institutions of tertiary education around the globe Ruppel (2010, 134). However, the framing literature supports the idea that students' perception towards the collections and services offered in many academic libraries impact their academic performance Alhabi and Middelton (2011); Zhong and Alexander (2007); Valenza (2010).

In any tertiary institution, the library is considered as the nerve centre, and as such a very crucial facility of the institution Jubb and Green (2007). They further note that, user satisfaction of the library resources therefore becomes very pivotal in the achievement of the institutional goals. Adeniran (2011, 210) argues that the existence of an academic library is justified by its level of user satisfaction with its resources and services. Malatji (2017, 64) study revealed that students at the Tshwane University of Technology, Polokwane Campus, have positive perceptions of the library and that they are satisfied with library services. The study further concluded that lack of research support and an inadequate infrastructure hinders the library's contribution to students' achievement outcomes. Meanwhile, Alhabi and Middelton (2011, 87) conducted a study on the relationship between academic library usage and educational performance in Kuwait. The study aimed in examining perceptions of University library usage to consider facts that influence education achievement of academic library users. The study findings showed that only a minority of library users' educational achievement improved through library usage.

The constructivist learning theory provides a sound theoretical framework for this study. According to Ertmer and Newby (2013, 60), constructivism is a theory that equates learning with creating meaning from experience. Learning environments like the library play a fundamental role in students' learning. For this reason, this study adopted to use the constructivist learning theory to investigate students' perceptions of the role of the library in their studies. Academic libraries have the potential to contribute to students' academic achievements. However, this can be clearly uncovered through students' perceptions of the role of the library in their studies. The application of the theory in the study helped in determining the subjective and shared ideas that students have with regards to the HRDC, the constructed ideas, and how they influence their use of the library.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods research approach by using questionnaires and structured interviews to collect data. Creswell (2014) defines mixed methods research as an approach to inquiry involving collecting data from both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone (Creswell 2014). The study, therefore, used both approaches to gather detailed and comprehensive data. The population of the study included all undergraduate law students and the HRDC staff. Undergraduate law students were chosen because they were active users of the centre as opposed to post graduate students who used other libraries by virtue of being not full-time students in the Faculty of Law. Library staff members were chosen as they had experience in providing library services to the Faculty of Law students.

To obtain a representative sample of the target population of undergraduate law students who use the HRDC, a convenience or accidental sampling technique was used to select 50 undergraduate law students. Purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling was used to select one library staff from the population of 2 library staff members. Questionnaires were distributed to the undergraduate law students that use the centre. In this study, the information was collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed personally to the respondents by the researcher. A structured interview was conducted with one of the HRDC staff as key a informant. Data collected through interviews was used to validate and ensure trustworthiness of data collected through questionnaires. Moreover, the researcher ensured the validity of the consistency of the data by checking that the questions asked were derived from themes emanating from the objectives of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
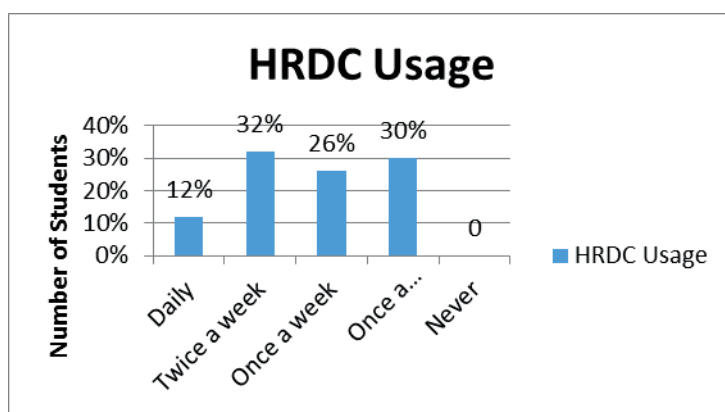
Frequency of using the centre

Fig 1: Frequency of usage

With regards to the usage of the centre, Figure 1 shows that none of the respondents indicated that they do not use the centre, whereas 6 (12%) of the respondents used the library every day and 16 (32%) used the centre twice per week. Moreover, 13 (26%) respondents used the centre once a week and 15 (30%) used the centre once a month. The key informant also mentioned that the majority of students used the centre twice a week, some students come to visit the centre once a week while a least number a small number of student came to the centre daily. The literature shows that however, until a larger percentage of students become aware of these services, the role of these factors in academic success cannot be fully evaluated Zhong and Alexander (2007).

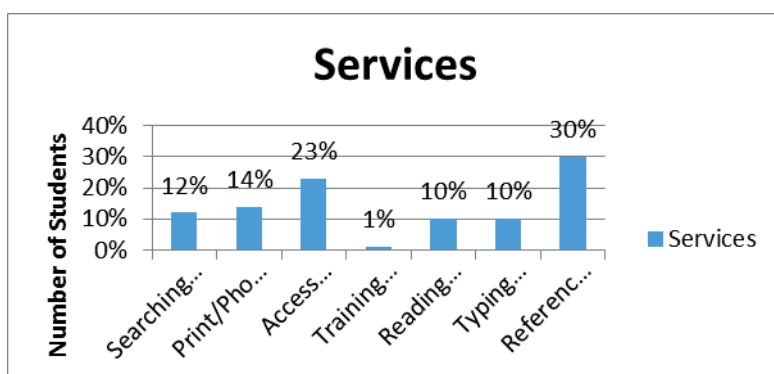### Service offered at HRDC and academic performance

Fig 2: Services

The results indicate that 22 (12%) of the respondents when visiting the centre come to search the library databases and, 24 (14%) uses the photocopying and printing services while 43 (23%) of the respondents come to access internet, whereas 1 (2%) respondent comes to the centre to attend training services (e.g. orientation). The results further reveal that 10 (20%) of the respondents visit the centre to read daily newspapers, 10 (20%) for typing services and 30 (30%) respondents visit the centre to use reference services. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that students value the centre's reference services and accessing internet as the majority of the students visit the library to read their personal notes.
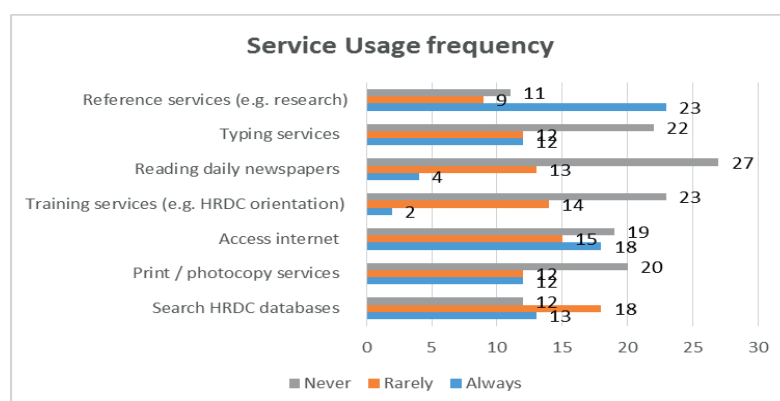
Services usage

Figure 3: Service usage frequency

The graph reveals that 13 (30.9%) always search the HRDC database while 18 (42.8%) rarely use search the HDRC databases and 12 (28.5%) never searched the HDRC database. The results also revealed that 12 (27.2%) always use the Print/ photocopying services while 12 (27.2%) rarely use the service and 20(45.5%) never use the service. In terms of accessing the internet, 18 (34.6%) respondents always come to access internet, 15 (28.8%) rarely come to access the internet, while 19 (36.5%) never visit to access internet. In terms of training services, 2 (5.2%) of the respondents always come for training services, 14 (35.8%) rarely come for training services and 23 (58.9%) never come for training services. In terms of reading daily newspapers, 4 (9.2%) respondents come for daily newspapers always, 13 (29.5%) rarely use daily newspapers, and 27 (61.3%) never use the daily newspapers. Meanwhile, in terms of typing services, 12 (26.1%) respondents always come for typing services, 12 (26.1%) rarely come for typing services, and 22 (47.8%) never come for typing services. In terms of reference services, 23 (53%) respondents always use the reference services, 9 (21%) of respondents rarely use the reference services, and 11 (26%) never use the reference services.

Results from the key informant revealed that most of the students come to consult reference materials that are found in the library. Students also greatly visit to come access the internet, to search HRDC databases, and to use photocopy and print services. Student turn up in small numbers for the following services, typing services, daily newspapers and the least services to be used by students was training services.
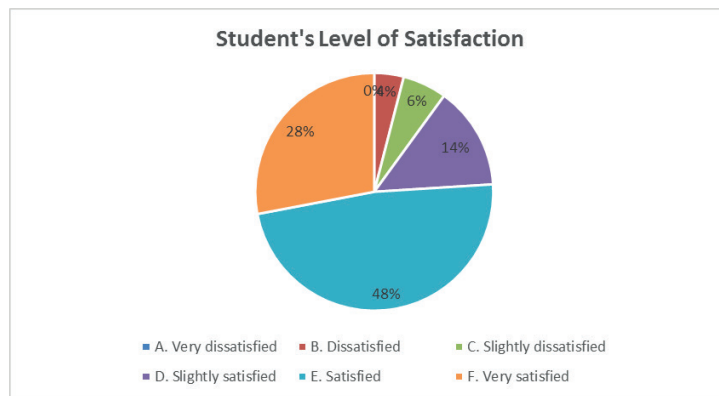
Figure 4: Student's level of satisfaction

The results presented in Figure 4 reveal that 14 (28%) respondents were very satisfied by the services offered by the HRDC, 24 (48%) respondents were satisfied, 7 (14%) were slightly satisfied, 2 (4%) respondents were dissatisfied, while 3 (6%) respondents were dissatisfied. Meanwhile, there was no record of a respondent who was very dissatisfied by the services offered by the HRDC. The key informant revealed that the services offered to the undergraduate law students has a great influence on their academic performance because it helps them finish their assignments and to find resources pertaining to their research. Services such as typing, printing and photocopying help students to prepare their work in advance because not all students have their person laptops to do their assignment at home, hence helping to boost the academic performance of students. The findings also revealed that students have indicated their satisfaction with the services offered by the HRDC in adding value to their academic performance hence giving the correlation between the two variables.

Effectiveness of the collection in support of academic performance

The HRDC has collections emanating from the human rights discipline which are not limited to books, journals, law reports, DVD collections, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, reports and cases. The centre also has electronic collections such as e-books, cases and journals. Collections are updated whenever there are new collections received or acquired by the centre. Students find the collections within the centre to be relevant. Complimented by the results from the key informant, collections within the HRDC are relevant to those that are doing human rights related modules or researching about human right resources because the collections are special and focused to the human rights field only.
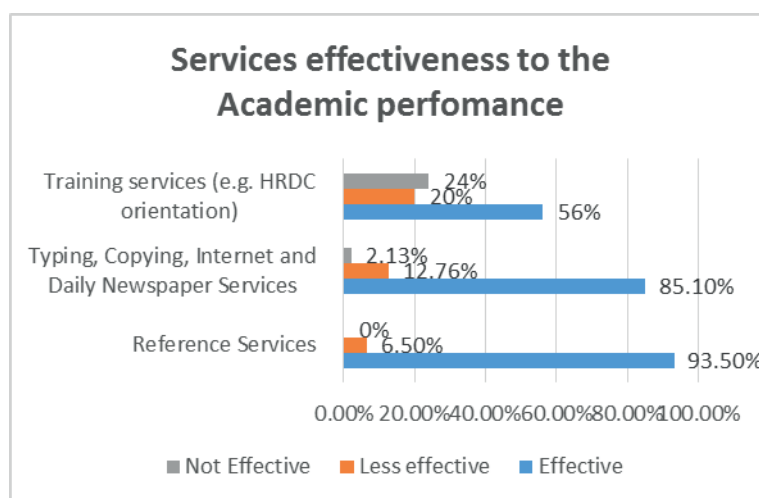

Fig 5: Services effectiveness to the academic performance

Figure 5 shows that in terms of reference services, 93.50% of users indicated that the service is effective, 6.50% have indicated that the service is less effective. In terms of typing, printing and daily newspaper services, 85.10% respondents indicated that the service was effective, 12.76% of respondents indicated that the service was less effective, while 2.13% respondents indicated that the service was not effective. In terms of training services, 56% respondents indicated that the service was effective, 20% of the respondents indicated that the service was less effective and 24% of the respondents indicated that the service was not effective. To determine whether the collections in the HRDC supports the academic performance of students, respondents revealed that the collections offered by the HRDC support their academic performance. Students further justified their options on whether the collections are in support of their academic performance or not. Most of the responses from the respondents who indicated with a yes were that the HRDC provides relevant materials towards their courses and research projects. This was further acknowledged in Ruppel's (2010, 133) report that the HRDC made contributions to legal education in respect of human rights in Namibia through its academic programmes and project outputs as well as foster academic exchange towards excellence in research with various renowned institutions of tertiary education around the globe.

Table 1: The extent to which the HRDC meets the information needs of students

(Scale: 0 = Not at all, 1 = To a small extent, 2 = To some extent, 3 = To a moderate extent, 4 = To a great extent, 5 = To a very great extent) (n = median)

	Service	0	1	2	3	4	5	Median
1	Search HRDC databases	7	1	3	15	9	6	n=3
2	Print / photocopy services	5	3	5	4	12	12	n=4
3	Access internet	2	1	5	6	13	16	n=4
4	Training services (e.g. HRDC orientation)	14	0	9	4	4	3	n=2
5	Reading daily newspapers	9	2	9	9	5	6	n=2
6	Typing services	13	0	2	3	11	11	n=4
7	Reference services (e.g. research)	7	0	5	6	9	17	n=4

Table 1 shows that the respondents' information needs were met to a great extent by the services such as print / photocopy services (n=4), accessing the internet (n=4), typing services (m=4), and reference services (n=4). The respondents in terms of their information needs were only met to a moderate extent by searching HRDC databases (n=3). However, the respondents were only met to some extent when it comes to the training services (n=2) as well as reading daily newspapers (n=2). The key informant revealed that the HRDC also provides adequate materials that are of great usefulness to research and student purposes in terms of learning skills. In terms of certain modules such as Human rights, Customary law etc., it is the best place to come and search for relevant materials for their studies, hence boosting the academic performance. Results from students also revealed that they use the collections to gain much information and sometimes the collections are the only sources they have access to, and they cannot be found in other places such as the Main UNAM library.
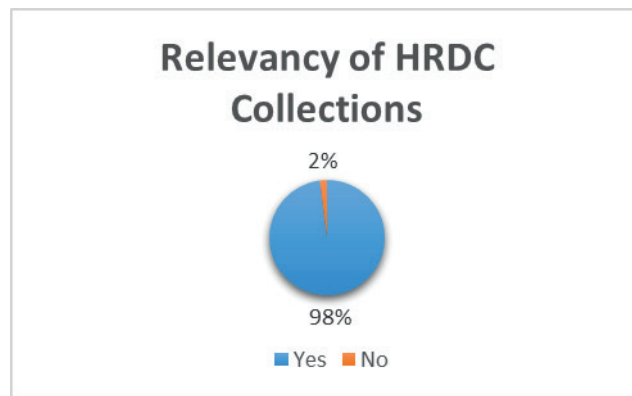
Figure 6: Relevancy of HRDC collections

Figure 6 indicates that 49 (98%) of the respondents indicated that the collections found in the HRDC are relevant, while 1 (2%) of the respondents indicated that the collections are not relevant. On the other side, some respondents justified that most students are not aware of the collections that the HRDC offers, thus they do not use it often and it only favours some. The study findings therefore suggest that marketing and advocacy of the centre need to be done thoroughly for all students to be aware of the services and collections that the centre offers. The study also found out that the collections in the HRDC are effective in adding value to the academic performance of those students that are looking for information in the field of human rights. Students find the collections helpful in adding value to their academic performance with only a few that did not find the collection helpful to their academic performance. Furthermore, more students find the collection to be old and fairly adequate for their utilisation.
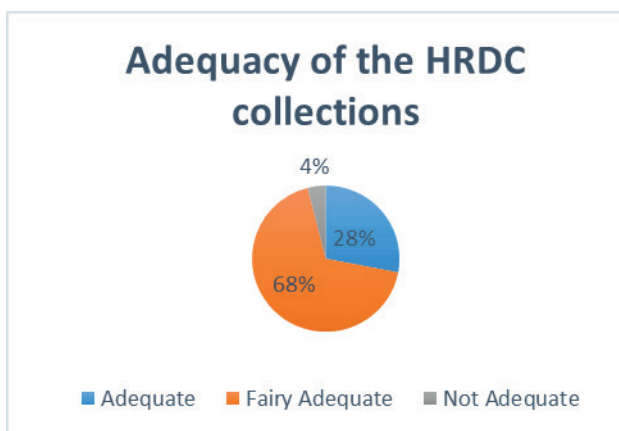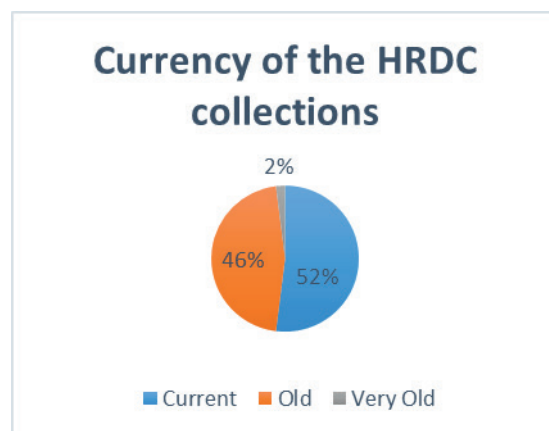

Fig 7: Adequacy of the HRDC collections

Fig 8: Currency of the HRDC collections

Figure 7 shows that 68% of the respondents find the collection to be fairly adequate, 28% find the collection to be adequate and 4% of the respondents find the collections not to be adequate. Results from Figure 8 present the currency of the HRDC collection and it reveals that 52% respondents find the collection to be current, 46% find the collection to be old and 2% find the collections to be old. Overall, most of the respondents gave their view that the HRDC adds to the academic performance. The respondents also suggested that since it's a research centre, it should provide updated materials on human rights, journals, and other relevant materials that will be helpful for students to do their researches effectively. Furthermore, respondents indicated their dismay on the materials that are old, and that more training is needed for students to know how to use the database and to search the OPAC as well as marketing of the centre to the whole population of the student in the faculty because some don't know anything about the services the centre offers. The framing literature supports the idea that students' perceptions towards the collections and services offered in many

academic libraries impact their academic performance Alhabi and Middelton (2011); Zhong and Alexander (2007); Valenza (2010).

Theoretical application to findings

The outcomes of the role of the HRDC on the academic performance of students can relate to the constructivist learning theory. The findings of the study showed that the students used the HRDC. The collections and services offered by the centre have positively affected their academic performance. With the few challenges that the students are facing in accessing the services and collections at the centre which are inadequate operating hours, old collections and inadequate resources, there is still a room to change. This will help students in structuring their own learning experiences and thus the importance of how students relate their new experiences to existing knowledge becomes vital.

Summary of findings

The study revealed that the students utilised the services differently; some services are being used more often such as reference services, access to the internet and searching the HRDC databases, while some services are utilised less by students which are typing, printing, copying and daily newspaper services as well as training services. Most students were satisfied with the service with only a few that were not satisfied with the services offered. The study points out that most of the students don't know the existence of some services offered at the HRDC such as the e- resources (HRDC databases, Juta Online).

The study revealed that the student information needs were met to a moderate extent by a few services such as reference services, accessing the internet and searching HRDC databases. The study showed that only a few services that are offered by the HRDC are effective in adding value to their academic performance such as the reference services, accessing the internet and searching the HRDC databases. Students were not satisfied with the working hours of the centre, which are hindering them in utilising the services as they are supposed to.

The study revealed that the collections found in the centre were relevant and helpful in support of the academic performance of students. In addition, the study revealed that the students find the collection to be very supportive when it comes to their academic performance because it helps them to find relevant information for their academic work. It was also revealed that the HRDC provides adequate collections that are of great usefulness to students, and this is in terms of certain modules such as human rights, customary law, etc. However, the study revealed that the collections within the centre were old and fairy adequate for students' utilisation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, most students were satisfied with the service with only a few that were not satisfied with the services offered. Students were not satisfied with the working hours of the centre that are hindering them from utilising the services as they are supposed to. Collections found in the centre were relevant and helpful in support of the academic performance of students. In addition, the study revealed that the students find the collection to be very supportive when it comes to their academic performance because it helps them to find relevant information for their academic work. The collections and services offered by the centre have positively affected their academic performance. With the few challenges the students are facing in accessing the services and collections at the centre which are inadequate operating hours, old collections and inadequate resources, there is still a room to change. This will help students in structuring their own learning experiences and thus the importance of how students relate new experiences to existing knowledge becomes vital. The HRDC has done much to play a major role in the student academic success but still a lot needs to be done in order to provide quality services that can have positive effects to the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

- Marketing of online services and other low utilised services should be done extensively and this might improve their usage and the use of other services in the centre.
- Since the majority of students have not attended any training session and library orientation, training should be done each semester rather than once in a year, to ensure that students attain the necessary skills to enable them to make effective use of the centre and its services rather than only using the library for printing, photocopying, typing and internet services.
- Opening hours should be extended to the weekend or late hours for students to have a lot of time to work on their academic work by fully utilising the services.
- The center must update it's collections on human rights, journals, and other relevant materials that will be helpful for students to do their researches effectively.
- The library collection needs to be developed, extended and kept current to allow students to have a variety of choices in their use of centre collections. Furthermore, this will also help in keeping students abreast of developments taking place in the field of human rights.

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