

The Impact of Library Services and Resources in Enhancing the Research Productivity of a Catholic University in Northern Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of library services and resources on enhancing research productivity at a Catholic University in Northern Philippines. As academic institutions increasingly recognize the critical role libraries play in supporting scholarly activities, understanding their contribution to research outcomes is essential. The study utilized a basic qualitative research approach, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2015). The research involved 35 faculty members and students who had completed research either published in peer-reviewed journals or presented at conferences over the past three years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically to explore the impact of library services on their research activities. The analysis revealed several key themes. First, participants noted that enhanced access to specialized databases and digital resources significantly facilitated their research processes, providing essential information and literature necessary for producing high-quality research outputs. Second, personalized research support from library staff was identified as a crucial factor in improving research efficiency and effectiveness. Third, information literacy training through workshops and sessions was seen as instrumental in developing skills for effective literature search, data management, and scholarly writing. Additionally, the study highlighted the library's role in fostering academic collaboration by providing seminars, workshops, and networking opportunities, which were viewed as valuable for enhancing research productivity. However, participants also discussed challenges, including limited access to certain high-cost resources and a need for more extensive training programs tailored to specific research needs.

KEYWORDS: Library Services and Support, Research Presentation, Research Productivity, Research Publication, University Libraries

1. Introduction

Research is one of the pillars for academic and intellectual growth and a driver of innovation, creation of knowledge, and societal growth. It is a fundamental mechanism through which new insights are generated, tried, and shared to contribute to the overall understanding in any particular field. Given that universities are of such institutions in terms of fostering research activity, so their roles do not stop at teaching but extend themselves to offer immense input on research productivity and hence to academic excellence.

As far as higher education is concerned, on top of being an indicator of academic excellence for any particular institution, it has become one of the drivers of reputation and influence (Adam, 2023). This should be supported by a university through the creation of an enabling environment with the necessary infrastructure, support, and resources for growth in research. Effective research activities enhance the ability of the university to attract funding, publish high-impact publications related to knowledge transfer, and so on (McKelvey & Rake, 2020). Consequently, institutional success and scholarly impact are frequently judged by productivity and quality of research output (Miotto, et al., 2020).

The University of Saint Louis (USL), a premier higher education institution in Northern Philippines, has witnessed a notable surge in research activities and productivity. Since 2017, USL has experienced a remarkable 200% increase in research publications among both faculty and student researchers. This significant growth reflects a broader commitment to advancing scholarly work and contributing to the academic community. In addition to the increase in publication output, USL researchers have demonstrated their growing influence and engagement in the research field through active participation in conferences. Over the past five school years, more than 200 papers have been presented at various local, national, and international research conferences. This prolific participation highlights USL's role in fostering a vibrant research culture and underscores the impact of its research initiatives on a broader academic stage.

In these regards, the role that library services can play within the university takes greater significance. From just being viewed as book and periodical libraries, the libraries have evolved into dynamic units that enable and amplify the productivity of research (Khan, et al., 2022). Thus, contribution goes much beyond mere provisioning of resources; they remain engaged in facilitating the research process through to successful academic outcomes. Academic libraries provide a long list of indispensable resources at the core of research activities (Wani, et al., 2022). A listing includes access to specialized databases, digital resources, and comprehensive collections of academic literature. Such resources provide a base for conducting dependable and quality research work. Specialized databases, for instance, give access to special journals and data unavailable through general sources that help researchers get the most relevant and up-to-date information in their fields. Beyond this resource provision, libraries provide a level of research support that greatly enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of a researcher. This includes one-on-one consultations, workshops in research, and tailored help in navigating complex information landscapes. In giving customized assistance, many librarians now team up with researchers to enable them to identify and use the best tools and strategies in conducting their research. Librarians can assist in managing references, organizing data, and developing search techniques relevant to producing quality research output. The new role that an academic library can adopt in participating in facilitating research processes reflects a broader movement that is taking place within higher education; the library itself is being recognized as a partner in the research enterprise and not just a provider of materials. This shift is also supported by research pointing out the changing role of libraries in terms of the creation of an environment for academic success (Winata, et al., 2020). In addition, libraries are now actively involved in the provision of training programs that enhance information literacy, hence offering researchers skills in conducting and managing their research effectively (Deja, et al., 2021; Wickramarachchi, 2021).

At USL, understanding how the library's services and resources contribute to this remarkable increase in research output is crucial for further optimizing these supports. Currently, USL Libraries provide different services to cater to the research needs of the Louisian community such as the following: (1) Digitization Project which is an option to make information available online upon request, subject to copyright law provisions; (2) Library Instruction Program in which slides (e.g. Use of Online Resources, Source Documentation) are utilized in coordination with English/Research faculty and to be sent through LMS or other means available; (3) Project RRL wherein requests for sources for Review of Related Literature are continued but will be sent through e-mail; and (4) Library monthly activities in which virtual training or forums are conducted. This includes online human library, and other activities/events that are conducted online. Hence, this study was conducted to explore how USL library services impact increased research productivity, particularly how their resources facilitate and support faculty and student academic endeavors. The findings of these dynamics could, therefore, offer insights into how library services could be further tailored and improved to sustain and amplify the university's achievements in research.

2. Objective

This study was conducted to explore the impact of library services and resources on enhancing research productivity at the University of Saint Louis (USL), a Catholic higher education institution in Northern Philippines.

3. Scope and Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative type of research employing basic qualitative research by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of faculty members and students regarding the impact of library services on their research productivity. Through in-depth interviews, the study aimed to capture

the richness of participants' narratives and identify common themes that reflect the role of the university library in supporting scholarly activities.

The research was conducted at the University of Saint Louis (USL), a higher education institution known for its growing emphasis on research productivity. The university's library, equipped with various digital resources and support services, served as the focal point of the study. The choice of USL as the study's locale was driven by its recent increase in research publications and presentations at national and international levels, making it an ideal setting to investigate the library's contribution to research success. The study involved 35 informants, comprising faculty members and students from USL who had completed research projects over the past three years. These informants were selected based on their active involvement in research activities, specifically those whose work had been published in peer-reviewed journals or presented at conferences. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure the selection of individuals who could provide rich, relevant insights into the research topic. They were coded based on the following: F01-F20 for faculty members and S01-S15 for students.

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide, designed to facilitate open-ended discussions while covering key areas of interest, such as the use of library resources, the support received from library staff, and the challenges encountered during the research process. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and was reviewed by experts to ensure its relevance and clarity. Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with the selected informants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a quiet, private setting to ensure confidentiality and comfort. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and additional observations.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, following the six-phase approach recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with familiarization, where transcripts were read multiple times to immerse in the data. This was followed by generating initial codes to identify significant patterns and themes. These codes were then reviewed and refined, leading to the development of broader themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. The themes were further analyzed and interpreted to draw conclusions about the impact of library services on research productivity.

Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they fully understood the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participants' identities and securely storing all data. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the university's ethics committee to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

To enhance the rigor of the study, strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data across different sources (faculty and students) to validate findings. Member checking involved sharing the preliminary findings with participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations. Peer debriefing was conducted with colleagues to review and challenge the analysis process, ensuring that the findings were credible. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was maintained to document the research process, providing transparency and allowing for replication in future studies.

4. Result and Discussion

This study aimed to explore the impact of library services and resources on research productivity at the University of Saint Louis (USL). As the university has seen a notable increase in research outputs, including publications in ISI, Scopus, and other international peer-reviewed journals, understanding the contribution of library services to this trend is essential. Through in-depth interviews with 35 faculty members and students who have successfully published or presented their research in the past three years, the study sought to identify the key factors within the library's offerings that enhance or hinder research activities.

The findings reveal several themes that illustrate the significant role of the university library in supporting research endeavors. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of access to specialized databases, the value of personalized research support from library staff, and the critical role of information literacy training. Additionally, the library's contribution to fostering academic collaboration emerged as a key factor in enhancing research productivity. However, the study also identified challenges, such as limited access to high-cost resources and the need for more tailored training programs, which present opportunities for improvement.

A. Enhanced Access to Specialized Databases and Digital Resources

Participants consistently highlighted the critical role that access to specialized databases and digital resources played in their research productivity. Faculty members and students reported that these resources provided the necessary literature and data to support their research. These resources were seen as foundational to the research process, providing both faculty members and students with the necessary literature and data to support their academic work. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

F10: As a faculty researcher, I need a lot of resources and data for my research. It's good that the USL libraries have many subscriptions. The digital resources of the USL libraries are a big help to me. I frequently use Wiley and Gale References.

F11: What is good in our Library is our online subscription to different research services such as Grammarly and Turnitin.

F18: Having access to databases like EBSCO allowed me to find relevant articles that I couldn't access otherwise, which significantly improved the quality of my work. This access not only facilitated the discovery of up-to-date research but also allowed for a more comprehensive literature review, which is essential for producing high-quality publications.

S03: It's great that our library is subscribed to various databases we need for research. Having EBSCO is a big help because I use it to find the literature needed for my studies.

S06: Another that I found very impressive is the freedom to get access to journals and publications that can rarely be accessed through the web through EBSCO and Gale which helped me include the latest research findings in my project and hence increasing the credibility of my work.

S10: Denial of the access to these databases would have made it difficult for me to locate the articles required in the development of this thesis. With the help of the library resources, I was able to do my literature review and this was important to my study.

The results show that access to specialized databases and digital resources plays a key role in enhancing research productivity at USL. This had been underscored by participants, which include faculty members and students, as an integral part in their academic work. It treats the possibility of accessing a large number of specialized databases and electronic resources as the ground base in the process of research, very important in influencing its quality and efficiency of scholarly activity. At present USL libraries provide digital resources to cater to the research needs of faculty and students such as EBSCOHost, Gale Reference Complete, Gale eBooks, McGraw-Hill's Access Engineering, Grammarly, Turnitin, PHL CHED Connect, Wiley Online Library, and other online repositories. Access to specialized databases provided researchers with the necessary literature and data essential for their studies. For faculty members, these resources were crucial in obtaining up-to-date and comprehensive information relevant to their fields. This is consistent with previous research indicating that access to high-quality academic resources is fundamental to successful research outcomes (Baas, et al., 2020; Christensen, et al., 2018). Students, similarly, reported that specialized databases played a vital role in their research activities. Access to these resources enabled them to conduct thorough literature reviews and gather relevant data, which is crucial for developing strong research projects. This feedback aligns with studies that have shown the positive impact of specialized library resources on student research productivity and academic success (Shintia, et al., 2021; Cox, 2021; Heng, et al., 2022).

These sources are critical because of their nature as the root of the research process. Systematic access to literature and data through specialized databases goes a long way in helping a researcher develop well-informed and evidence-based scholarly work. These resources not only enable the immediate faculty and student needs in current research, but also aid in their future academic development. This supports the contention that libraries serve as a springboard in advancing research productivity and academic excellence (Appleton, 2020). These findings are also in line with the larger literature on the role of digital resources in academic research. The use of

specialized databases and other digital tools has been observed to increase the likelihood of researchers finding relevant information time and again—a critical condition for high-quality research outputs. The positive impact observed at USL underlines the need for investment and maintenance of robust collections of digital resources within a comprehensive strategy for supporting academics.

B. Personalized Research Support from Library Staff

Another key finding of the study was the significant impact of personalized research support provided by library staff. Participants, both faculty members and students, consistently praised the tailored assistance they received from librarians, which played a crucial role in enhancing their research efficiency and effectiveness. This personalized support was not just a service, but a collaborative partnership that many researchers found invaluable. This personalized support was particularly valued by those who were less familiar with advanced research tools, highlighting the library's role in enhancing research efficiency and effectiveness. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

F06: The librarians were extremely can, they would always come straight to my assistance if I required help, whether it was to locate an article, or learning me on how to use a particular tool. This is because they assisted me in covering a number of areas that I would otherwise have devoted time and resources to research.

F09: The Project RRL of the USL Libraries is helpful to us as teacher-researchers, with librarians searching for the relevant literature needed for our studies.

F10: The librarian's help was instrumental in my research on a niche topic. They not only helped me find rare sources but also guided me on how to use advanced search techniques to uncover relevant literature. This kind of personalized support allowed me to focus more on my analysis rather than spending excessive time searching for materials.

S04: At the beginning of my search, I was amazed by the large number of the sources that are produced. I remember once I went to the librarian who took her time, probably asking me on the topic that I was researching on, then proceeded to show me on the screen exactly where the database that I could use on my topic was. I don't know how I could have done my thesis without their help.

S05: I used few of the academic research tools before this assignment, and the directions given to us by the librarian on the use of these tools was very useful. They also did not rush me when answering my questions and went through the procedure slowly to enable me gain more confidence in conducting my own research.

The key point that comes out of this research is the high impact of the personalized research support provided by library staff. Faculty members and students time and again praised the individualized help they received from librarians, indicating that such support played a critical role in increasing their efficiency and effectiveness in researching. That is to say, it was not perceived just as a service; it was collaboration—something many researchers found extremely helpful (Bernacki, et al., 2021; Martzoukou, 2020). The sort of personal research support provided by librarians does not only involve providing help for resource accessibility; rather, it also includes a whole array of services tailored to meet specific, individual research requirements. Such services include special searching assistance, reference management, and problem-solving in complex databases. Previous studies have highlighted that such support is likely to increase substantially the productivity of research. Previous research by Biddiscombe et al. (2018) stresses the role of individual librarian support in facilitating researchers' use of library resources to enhance overall research outputs.

C. Importance of Information Literacy Training

Information literacy training emerged as a vital component of the library's contribution to research productivity. Workshops and training sessions offered by the library were seen as instrumental in developing essential skills

for conducting research. These training programs not only improved participants' ability to find and manage information but also enhanced their overall research skills, leading to better research outcomes. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

F07: The training on information literacy became a crucial element of the library's support for the research output. The library's workshops and training were perceived to be 'useful for the acquisition of key competencies that are essential in producing research.

F14: The workshops done by the library such as the one on the advanced searching and citation tools were extremely helpful. They were applied in training me on how I could better search for and sort out my resources – something very important in my recent publication. The training helped me make my research much more efficient and make a much better and professional final paper.

S02: The information literacy workshops were tremendously helpful in my presentations of my research. Besides, I got to know how to systematize the information and build a consistent and reasoned argument as well as provide straightforward and easy to comprehend results. These skills proved useful when I had to present my research at a national level conference and I got accolades from my peers as well as my seniors.

Information literacy training emerged as the most imperative contribution the library makes towards improving research productivity. The results indicated that the library's workshops and skills training contributed significantly to developing critical skills in research. These programs were perceived to play a key role consistently in enhancing participants' capability in finding, managing, and using information effectively towards the betterment of output. The literature on the role of information literacy training in academic research is enormous. Those participants who attended library-organized workshops and sessions considered the library to have offered some very important skills for undertaking effective research. This is in agreement with available literature, which stresses the positive effect of information literacy training on research productivity. Guo and Huang (2021) confirmed that students who participated in information literacy programs developed improved capabilities for conducting research and producing quality academic work.

D. Library's Role in Fostering Academic Collaboration

The study also revealed that the library played a significant role in fostering academic collaboration through seminars, workshops, and networking opportunities. Participants expressed that these events provided platforms to connect with other researchers, share ideas, and develop collaborative projects. This finding underscores the library's function not only as a resource center but also as a hub for academic interaction and collaboration. Some of the responses of the informants are as follows:

F01: This was particularly evident in the seminars that were organized in the library whereby one was able to consult with other researchers in the same field. So, it came to the point at which I was meeting a fellow author at one of such points and we worked together to produce something.

F09: Those workshops in the library on emerging trends in research provided a very valuable space for idea exchange and discussion of new methodologies with other faculty members. These interactions not only enriched my own research perspective but have also let me contribute to collaborative papers and projects. The library is important as a platform for sharing ideas, and that is what helps to foster a collaborative culture of research.

F11: It is in the aspects of organizing networking events and hosting workshops in professional development that the role of the library cannot be understated. Such activities have exposed me to important external experts who have turned out to be potential collaborators, thus widening the scope of my research. One word: it has increased my research productivity much through its proactive approach toward academic networking.

The research identified that the library, through seminars, workshops, and networking events, makes a valid contribution towards increased academic collaboration. All participants indicated that forums and meetings had been most useful in order to be in contact with other researchers, discussing ideas and formulating collaborative projects. It is thus a realization about the library's function as an active platform and node of academic interaction and collaboration, not a resource center in its own right. Libraries' roles in enhancing this kind of collaboration are increasingly being documented by literature. Clear from the findings of the study is how the efforts made by the library in organizing seminars and workshops facilitate interactions among researchers from different disciplines. The study is in agreement with research by Kine and Davidsone (2021) which indicated that library-organized activities enhance chances for academic networking or collaboration. The provision of networking opportunities through library-sponsored events helps break down disciplinary silos and encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration. According to Einarsson (2021), libraries that actively facilitate networking opportunities contribute to a more collaborative research environment by bringing together individuals with complementary expertise.

The research also tends to bring out the role of the library in promoting academic collaboration beyond just provision. Events that facilitate interaction and sharing ideas make the library central in the academic community. Garoufali and Garoufallou (2024) indicate that libraries are gradually becoming centers of academic engagement where researchers can share knowledge and come up with meaningful collaboration.

E. Challenges in Accessing High-Cost Resources and Need for Tailored Training

Despite the positive impacts, participants identified several challenges that hindered their research productivity. The most frequently mentioned issue was the limited access to high-cost resources, such as certain specialized journals and databases. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

F06: This was sometimes the case, where I couldn't access certain articles because our library didn't subscribe to that journal, thus slowing down my research.

F07: While USL libraries do grant access to a great deal of resources, there are still key journals and databases we just can't get because they are too expensive. This has really hampered my research at times, whereby I had to address certain aspects by sourcing alternatives that most probably will not be up-to-date or as detailed.

F11: There are certain high-cost databases that offer valuable niche information, but the university's subscription does not cover them. This lack of access can be a significant barrier when working on advanced research projects.

S03: When working on my thesis, I encountered several high-cost journals that were crucial for my research. Unfortunately, the library's access didn't cover them, which made it challenging to gather all the necessary information.

S05: I found it hard to access the most recent studies about my research topic because the library does not subscribe to a few of the journals that are key. This lack of access sometimes meant missing the newest research findings not incorporated into my project.

This challenge reflects a significant barrier to conducting comprehensive and effective research, as the availability of specialized resources is crucial for accessing the most relevant and up-to-date information in various fields. The issue of limited access to high-cost resources is well-documented in the literature and affects many academic institutions. Participants expressed frustration with the inability to access certain journals and databases that are essential for their research. This concern aligns with findings from other studies, which highlight that restricted access to critical resources can significantly hinder researchers' ability to conduct thorough and high-quality research (Elgamri, et al., 2024; Kengia, et al., 2023). Students also voiced similar concerns, emphasizing how the lack of access to specific databases impacted their research capabilities. This reflects broader issues identified in research by Heng, et al. (2020), who found that limited access to essential academic resources can adversely affect

students' ability to complete comprehensive research projects. The challenges associated with accessing high-cost resources also highlight the need for academic institutions to explore alternative solutions.

In addition to the challenges related to limited access to high-cost resources, participants expressed a significant need for more tailored training programs that address the specific research needs of different academic disciplines. This feedback highlights the importance of customizing library training and support to better align with the diverse requirements of various fields of study. Participants noted that while general information literacy training provided by the library is valuable, it often lacks the specificity needed for different academic disciplines. Faculty members pointed out that the standard workshops do not always cover the unique research methods and resources relevant to their particular fields. Some of the verbalizations of the faculty are as follows:

F03: Although these workshops that the library offers in general are very useful, most of the time, they relate very little to the kind of research methods and resources that would be relevant for my field. More specialized training attuned to the needs of specific disciplines would be greatly useful.

F09: Workshops on how to tap specialized databases and research methodologies relevant to my field would therefore make it possible for me to exploit the resources available at the library better and enhance the quality of my research output.

Students echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing that generalized training often does not meet the specific needs of their research. They also stressed the importance of incorporating discipline-specific tools into training programs. Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

S08: While this was useful to some extent with the standard library workshops, they did not always address specific databases or research techniques which would have been more relevant within the sphere of study. I would much prefer to have had tailored sessions focused on my discipline which helped to address my research challenges.

S10: There is specific software and databases related to my field that are not within the general training. Thus, if such sessions were specifically offered by the library, it would definitely help a lot in how effectively one can carry out research.

Both teachers and students indicated a need for more personalized training programs related to the research needs of various academic disciplines. This response represents how important it is that library trainings and support be tailored to be more congruent with the different needs from different fields of study. This implies that while the participants value the general information literacy training provided by the library, many of them felt that such training often lacked specificity for their particular academic disciplines. This mirrors the literature, which shows discipline-specific training raises researchers' competence in applying library tools and resources specifically oriented toward special research needs. It is such a critical call, which brings out the critical opportunity of libraries to put more effort into enhancing the support services. It is tailored workshops and training sessions, developed for different academic disciplines, that will ensure more relevant and practical support is rendered to users. In a way, this would not only enable the effective program for training, as it would also have had the effect of empowering researchers with the intensity of their respective fields. According to Padayachee (2023), it is the case that any training program into which discipline-based content is interwoven will significantly enhance the proficiency of researchers and overall research outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that access to specialized databases, personalized research support, and information literacy training are important in enabling faculty and students to produce high-quality research outputs. The library's initiatives in fostering academic collaboration through seminars and workshops also contribute positively to research activities. Despite these strengths, challenges such as limited access to high-cost resources and the need for more tailored training programs were identified, suggesting areas for improvement. Overall, the study highlights the essential contribution of library services in supporting and advancing research productivity within

academic institutions like USL.

In view, USL should consider increasing investment in high-cost databases and digital resources to ensure that researchers have access to the latest and most comprehensive information. Furthermore, USL Libraries may develop more specialized training programs that cater to the specific research needs of different academic disciplines, enhancing the effectiveness of research support. Additionally, USL Libraries may strengthen and expand its role in facilitating academic collaboration by offering more frequent and diverse networking opportunities, workshops, and seminars focused on interdisciplinary research.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of library services on research productivity across different academic disciplines. Comparative studies between institutions with varying levels of library resources could provide insights into best practices and the most effective strategies for supporting research. Additionally, investigating the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, in enhancing library services could offer new perspectives on how libraries can further contribute to research productivity..

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