

## **Effectiveness of Library Orientation Programmes on Information Searching Skills of Postgraduate Students: A Case of The Open University of Tanzania**

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### **Abstract**

*The study assessed the effectiveness of library orientation programmes on information searching skills of postgraduate students with reference to the Open University of Tanzania. It employed a descriptive research design; a simple random sampling technique was used to select 150 postgraduate students. A questionnaire was used to collect data and analysed using descriptive statistics techniques through SPSS version 29. The findings indicated that despite the library orientation sessions being conducted to provide students with awareness of library resources and services, their effectiveness in improving information searching skills was inadequate. The majority of respondents reported that they received inadequate training on the use of online databases, referencing and citation and information searching strategies. Additionally, most of the respondents encountered challenges such as limited skills to search for information independently, difficulty in evaluating information sources and poor internet connectivity, short training duration and poor referencing and citation practices. The study concluded that orientation sessions at the Open University of Tanzania are ineffective in developing information literacy skills to postgraduate students. The study therefore recommends integration of information literacy into postgraduate curriculum, enhanced ICT infrastructure and continuous information literacy training to postgraduate students.*

**Keywords:** *Postgraduate, students' orientation, information searching skills, library & open university.*

### **Introduction**

Zhao et al. (2023) library is regarded as the heart of any academic institute, which plays a significant role in satisfying users' information needs by providing them with access to relevant and updated information and knowledge. Due to emerging digital technologies, libraries have changed from information resource stores to information access providers. These changes have created a demand for providing user education to impart to them

with knowledge and skills required for searching information relevant to their information needs efficiently, rapidly and effectively. Thus, academic libraries conduct information literacy programs, including library orientation programs, to enhance their information searching skills (Tandale, 2017).

According to Pelemo et al. (2020), library orientation programs and information literacy skills are vital components of user education programs in academic libraries attached to the academic institution that enable newly admitted students and researchers to familiarise themselves with the available library resources and services in the library. Library orientation is designed to equip students with knowledge and skills to familiarise them with library resources and services (Owuraku Agyeiku et al., 2022). According to Ogunbo et al. (2022), library orientation is usually conducted at the beginning of the academic year to introduce new students to its resources and services. The purpose of library orientation is to educate and increase awareness of users about what services and resources the library has. Lawal et al. (2024) reported that library orientation is an information literacy program which, apart from introducing users to the resources and services the library has, also creates awareness and educates users on how to obtain, search, understand, appraise and effectively use information independently.

Munshi & Nagar (2016) define information literacy as the skill and ability of a person to recognise, find, evaluate and effectively use information in making informed decisions, knowledge creation and problem-solving. Information literacy can be referred to as the ability and capability of locating, evaluating and recognising the information one needs in the digital environment. Fasola & Oso (2021) reported that information literacy and library orientation programs are very important components of user education for postgraduate students organised by academic libraries. Postgraduate students need to use emerging information and communication technologies to obtain information from vast sources by conducting literature searches. Information literacy training is very critical to equip students with necessary skills to use information sources. The primary objective of information literacy programs is to create awareness and educate users on how to obtain,

search, understand, appraise and effectively use information independently (Adeniran & Onuoha, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Fasola & Oso (2021), library orientation programs are a vital activity to any academic institute, which play a crucial role in equipping students with knowledge and skills to familiarise themselves with library resources and services. These programs usually impart postgraduate students with skills on how to use different search engines, how to find and use information and how to use online reference tools like Zotero, EndNote and Mendeley. Postgraduate students need to be information literate, having the abilities and skills to search and use required information through navigating several systems and databases (Olayemi et al., 2022). Despite the efforts made by Tanzanian Universities in providing orientation programs to postgraduate students, there are still low information searching skills among the students (Msoffe et al., 2025). This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the effectiveness of library orientation programmes on information searching skills of postgraduate students, particularly at the Open University of Tanzania.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of library orientation programmes on the information searching skills of postgraduate students at the Open University of Tanzania. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Analyse the issues covered during the library orientation programme for postgraduate students
- ii. Examine students' response to information-searching skills arising from orientation
- iii. Assess challenges faced by postgraduate students in searching for information during and after orientation.

## **Literature Review**

Pelemo et al. (2020) reported that library orientation programs are a vital activity to any academic institute, designed to equip students with knowledge and skills to familiarise them with library resources and services. The study further revealed that during the orientation session, several issues are usually covered, such issues include how to locate library resources, how to use the library catalogue and teaching them how to search and navigate in different databases. Another study carried out by Fasola & Oso (2021) indicated that during orientation time, postgraduate students were taught how to use different search engines, how to find and use information and how to use online reference tools like Zotero, EndNote and Mendeley.

According to Olayemi et al. (2022), postgraduate students need to be information literate, having the abilities and skills to search and use required information through navigating several systems and databases. Olayemi further reported that the orientation session for postgraduate students covers different issues, including referencing and citation, evaluation of information sources, information searching strategies, and information searching skills. This training equips postgraduate students with the skills necessary for writing their assignments, term papers, theses and dissertations.

A study carried out by Karaoğlan Yılmaz (2016) argued that after the orientation training, postgraduate students increased their frequency of searching for information from never to several times. They generated the information-seeking habit and started navigating different databases to find information. These findings corroborate those of Mi & Riley-Doucet (2016), who reported that before the orientation session, students were unable to search, locate, utilise and appraise information. The library orientation program improved the ability to evaluate and use information. Furthermore, the findings indicated that after the orientation session, postgraduate students gained awareness of how to avoid plagiarism in their academic writing. Another study by Ay & Erdem (2020) argued that library orientation assisted postgraduate students in understanding how to reference and cite sources in their assignment and their research proposals.

Another study by Dahlqvist, (2021) found that library orientation is very critical in imparting newly admitted postgraduate students with knowledge and skills on understanding online resources and information search strategies. The findings further insisted that after receiving training in the orientation session on information searching skills, students started to frequently search for information, navigating different online sources and databases. Moreover, postgraduate students started to employ information searching skills in conducting literature searches for their assignments and research proposals and effectively use referencing software in citing the sources used in their work.

Fasola & Oso (2021) reported that postgraduate students encounter several challenges in searching for information from various online sources. The study findings indicated that the majority of postgraduate students do not know how to search information required due to a lack of knowledge and awareness of information searching skills. Moreover, the results suggest that students require information literacy skills to navigate various technologies and online resources. These findings correspond with Ndou & Zimu-Biyela (2023), who found that postgraduate students faced challenges and obstacles during and after orientation on information searching skills. Such challenges include a lack of skills to understand which information and when is required, how to find relevant information, how to identify and evaluate the appropriate information sources and how to share and utilise information effectively.

According to Pelemo et al. (2020), postgraduate students faced several challenges that hindered them from searching for information. These challenges include a lack of knowledge of using search engines, inadequate knowledge of emerging research trends such as the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and the use of referencing and citation software. All these challenges resulted from poor information search skills among the students. Appiah (2023) pointed out the challenges faced by postgraduate students in searching for information to include poor internet connectivity, which

required the students to access the network within the university premises. Another challenge mentioned is that other resources were controlled by passwords.

## **Methods**

The present study adopted a descriptive design to assess the effectiveness of library orientation programmes on the information searching skills of postgraduate students at the Open University of Tanzania. The target population of this study was postgraduate students. Simple random sampling was employed to select 150 postgraduate students by ensuring that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. The main data collection method was a questionnaire, which was employed to collect quantitative data from postgraduate students. SPSS version 29 was used to analyse quantitative data using descriptive analysis techniques.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Library Orientation Content and Training***

In this objective, the study examined the contents of library orientation training. The results reveal that the majority, 59 (39%) of respondents strongly disagreed that they were not provided with a clear introduction to the available library resources and services. On the other hand, respondents were required to indicate whether they were taught how to use OPAC. The results suggest that the majority, 88 (59%), strongly agreed. Additionally, most of the respondents, 77 (51), revealed that they were not trained on how to search for information and navigate electronic databases. On whether respondents were trained on referencing and citation, the majority of them, 58 (39%), disagreed. The findings further report that many respondents, 57 (38%), were not trained on the effective information searching strategies (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2:** *Library Orientation Content and Training*

<b>Library Orientation Content and Training</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>
The library orientation provided a clear introduction to available resources and services	38	25	34	23	59	39	19	13
Trained on the Online Public Access Catalogue	88	59	35	23	16	11	11	7
Trained on Information Searching and how to Navigate Electronic Databases	22	15	39	26	12	8	77	51
Trained on Referencing and Citation	28	19	44	29	58	39	20	13
Trained on the Effective Information Searching Strategies	5	3	38	25	57	38	50	34

**Sources:** *Field Data (2025)*

These results imply that an orientation program on information searching skills is provided to postgraduate students; however, its effectiveness is doubtful and questionable. These findings corroborate those of Ndou & Zimu-Biyela (2023), who argued that a library orientation programme is essential to equip postgraduate students with information literacy skills; however, the findings suggest that it is not effective, but many information literacy trainings and seminars should be provided to postgraduate students with knowledge and skills after orientation. Additionally, the results of this study comply with those of Pelemo et al., (2020) on Library Orientation and Information Literacy Skills as Correlates of Scholarly Research of Postgraduate Students, who reported that orientation programmes to postgraduate students is ineffective, and that most of them lack skills to understand which information and when is required, how to find relevant information, how to identify and evaluate the appropriate information sources and how to share and utilise information effectively.

**Skills Application and Impact on Postgraduate Students**

The researcher asked respondents to indicate their ability to apply information literacy skills learned during the library orientation and their impact on them. The study used a Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) to solicit information from respondents. On the frequent use of online databases to search for academic information after attending the orientation. The results show that the majority, 54 (36%) of respondents, agreed that they frequently use online databases to search for academic information. Additionally, the majority, 47 (31%), argued that their ability to evaluate the quality of information was not improved but stagnant. On the other hand, 52 (59%) respondents were not confident in applying proper referencing and citation in their works after receiving orientation. The majority, 62 (41%) of respondents reported that they are unable to avoid plagiarism by applying skills learned during orientation. Moreover, 52 (35%) respondents were unable to search for information independently. The results are presented in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3:** Skills Application and Impact on Postgraduate Students

<b>Skills Application and Impact on Postgraduate Students</b>	<b>SA %</b>	<b>A %</b>	<b>D %</b>	<b>SD %</b>
I now frequently use online databases to search for academic information after attending the orientation	37 25	54 36	50 33	9 6
Orientation has improved my ability to evaluate the quality and credibility of information sources	21 14	47 31	42 28	40 27
I am confident in applying proper referencing and citations in my academic work after orientation	17 11	39 15	52 59	22 15

I feel able to avoid plagiarism by applying skills learned during orientation	36	24	28	19	62	41	24	16
The orientation has increased my confidence and motivation to search for information independently	40	27	38	25	52	35	20	13

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**Source:** *Field Data (2025)*

The study findings imply that despite attending library orientation programmes, still majority of postgraduate students have limited information searching skills. The results further reveal that most postgraduate students are not confident in searching for information independently, not confident in applying proper referencing and citation in their works and unable to evaluate the quality and credibility of the information. Although the study findings correspond to those of Fasola & Oso (2021), who reported that library orientation sessions are provided for quite a short period of time, which is not enough for postgraduates to learn everything about information searching skills. However, the study findings contradict those of Dahlqvist (2021), who reported that before the orientation session, students were unable to search, locate, utilise and appraise information. The library orientation program enhanced the ability to evaluate and use information effectively.

### ***Challenges Faced by Postgraduate Students in Searching for Information.***

In this objective, the researcher asked respondents about the challenges faced in searching for information. The study used a Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) to solicit information from respondents. The results indicate that 68 (45%) respondents strongly disagreed that they have limited skills in using OPAC, which makes it difficult to locate information resources. 60 (40%) respondents strongly agreed that they find it difficult to identify which information resources are relevant to their research. Additionally, 72 (48%) respondents strongly agreed that they struggle to evaluate the credibility of online information resources. On the other hand, 50 (33%) respondents disagreed with the statement that they find it hard to use online databases,

while 58 (39%) strongly agreed that poor internet connectivity makes it difficult for them to access online resources effectively. Moreover, 57 (38%) respondents agreed that they find it challenging to avoid plagiarism due to inadequate knowledge of citation and referencing style, while 65 (43%) respondents strongly agreed that, despite attending the orientation, they still face difficulties in independently searching for and retrieving relevant academic information. See Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4:** *Challenges Faced by Postgraduate Students in Searching for Information.*

<b>Challenges Faced by Postgraduate Students in Searching for Information.</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>
Limited skills in using the OPAC make it difficult to locate information resources	13	9	13	9	56	37	68	45
I find it difficult to identify which information resources are relevant to my research	60	40	31	21	32	21	27	18
I struggle to evaluate the credibility of online information resources	72	48	33	22	24	16	21	14
I find it hard to use online databases	28	19	42	28	50	33	30	20
Poor internet connectivity makes it difficult for me to access online resources effectively	58	39	42	28	27	18	23	15
I find it challenging to avoid plagiarism due to inadequate knowledge of citation and referencing style	57	38	39	26	32	21	22	15
Despite attending the orientation, I still face difficulties in independently searching for and retrieving relevant academic information	65	43	41	27	23	16	21	14

**Sources:** *Field Data (2025)*

The findings imply that despite attending orientation programmes, postgraduate students still face a number of challenges in searching for information. These challenges include

poor internet connectivity, limited skills in referencing and citation, lack of knowledge and skills to evaluate the quality and credibility of information sources, limited skills to identify relevant information resources and difficulties in using online databases. The results of this study conform to those of Appiah (2023), Pelemo et al. (2020), who reported that postgraduate students encounter many obstacles that hamper them from searching for information. The majority of postgraduate students are not aware search information required due to a lack of knowledge and awareness of information searching skills. These obstacles include poor internet connectivity, which required the students to access the network within the university premises, an inability to design an efficient search strategy to locate, a lack of knowledge of using search engines, inadequate knowledge of emerging research trends such as the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and the use of referencing and citation software. Additionally, a lack of skills to understand which information and when is required, how to find relevant information, how to identify and evaluate the appropriate information sources and how to share and utilise information effectively (Ngcongolo & Oyelana, 2017).

### **Conclusions**

The current study investigated the effectiveness of library orientation programmes on the information searching skills of postgraduate students at the Open University of Tanzania. Based on the study findings, the researcher concludes that despite the University conducting library orientation sessions to postgraduate students designed to provide them with awareness of information searching skills and strategies, their effectiveness in improving postgraduate students' information searching skills remains limited. Additionally, the study findings revealed that the library orientation programmes covered significant issues such as the use of the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Nevertheless, there was inadequate training on referencing and citation, information searching strategies and navigation of online databases. However, some students revealed to have improved ability to access electronic databases, the majority encountered challenges in appraising the quality and credibility of information

sources, proper citing and referencing, as well as searching for information independently. Therefore, the persistence of these obstacles shows that the current library orientation programmes are inadequate in addressing the practical information literacy needs of postgraduate students.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the current study provides the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of library orientation programmes on the information searching skills of postgraduate students at the Open University of Tanzania;

Embed information literacy instruction into postgraduate curriculum. The University should integrate information literacy skills into a postgraduate curriculum to ensure that all students can acquire knowledge and skills on how to effectively search, understand, apply and evaluate information.

Enhance internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure. The University should invest in strengthening internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure at the University premises to ensure that students can access online and electronic databases on and off campus.

Improve training on citation and referencing to avoid plagiarism. Postgraduate students should regularly be trained on referencing and citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago) as well as the use of referencing software like EndNote, Zotero and Mendeley.

The University should continuously provide information literacy training instead of only relying on one-time orientation. Develop online information literacy tutorials. The University, through the library, should create tutorials and videos on information literacy. These tutorials can provide postgraduate students with knowledge and skills on information search strategies, navigate online resources, citation and referencing techniques and eventually have the ability to independently search for information.

Review orientation contents regularly. The University library should regularly review and update its contents to ensure that the contents align with the emerging issues in scholarly communication.

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