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Exploring Embedded Librarianship Practices in Enhancing Information Literacy and Academic Support at a Private University Library in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Abstract

The study aimed to explore the implementation of embedded librarianship practices at a private University and their potential to enhance information literacy and academic support. Guided by three distinct objectives, the research identified the role of embedded librarians in enhancing information literacy and academic support, the impact of embedded librarianship practices in academic institutions, and the integration of librarians into the academic milieu in the promotion of information literacy skills and support for academic success. A total of 6 librarians, 12 academic staff members, and 28 students from various departments participated in the study, providing insights into various aspects of implementation and impact of embedded librarianship. This research employed a qualitative research approach and a case study design, utilising semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and observations of embedded service implementations. The study revealed that embedded librarianship play a central role in enhancing students' research and information literacy skills, contributing positively to their academic success. Although student satisfaction is high, the challenges related to technology, professional development, institutional support, and faculty collaboration indicate areas where further support and resources could enhance the impact of embedded librarianship on academic achievement. The study recommended curriculum integration, course-specific guidance, and improved learning outcomes. The study also encourages strategic alignment between teaching content and research skill development and notes that well-trained librarians are better equipped to teach information literacy and guide student research.

Key Words: ***Embedded librarianship, Academic support, Librarians, Information literacy skills, Theology***

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INTRODUCTION

Many students in private universities in Zimbabwe struggle to benefit meaningfully from library services due to limited information literacy, poor integration of library resources into teaching, and minimal collaboration between faculty and librarians. These challenges often result in weak research skills, poor-quality assignments, and overreliance on non-academic internet sources, ultimately compromising the quality of education. Contributing factors include a lack of tailored library support within faculties, underutilisation of digital platforms, and weak ICT infrastructure. These systemic gaps highlight the need for a more integrated approach to academic librarianship. Embedded librarianship where librarians work directly with academic departments to provide subject-specific instruction, research support, and real-time engagement offers a proactive solution to address these issues. By embedding librarians within courses and virtual learning environments, institutions can enhance students' academic outcomes, foster deeper engagement with scholarly materials, and reposition the library as a central partner in the teaching and learning process. This approach enhances information literacy, research skills, and collaboration within academic settings (Munshi *et al.*, 2024; Malysheva, 2023). In the context of the private university in Zimbabwe, implementing embedded librarianship can address challenges such as inadequate ICT infrastructure and resource accessibility, while promoting cultural diversity and enhancing cooperation within the institution. By engaging in embedded librarianship, academic libraries can better support students and faculty, especially during times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, by offering virtual instruction and specialised services through learning management systems (Edford, 2022; Kyprianos, 2022). This proactive approach can significantly impact student learning outcomes and the overall academic experience at the university (Bonanni & Vogus, 2022).

The university under study is a private church institution affiliate, offering diverse diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in faculties which include the Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Theology, Culture and Heritage Studies, and the Faculty

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of Commerce. With a strong emphasis on Christian values and academic rigour, the university prepares students for leadership roles across various sectors of Zimbabwean society, prioritising research and community engagement to foster both student growth and societal advancement. The university library supports academic excellence by providing essential services such as information literacy training, orientation programmes for new students, specialised academic support training, and workshops for new staff members, all aimed at enhancing scholarly productivity within a framework of Christian values and leadership development.

According to Tshuma, and Chigada (2018), embedded librarianship practices in Zimbabwean universities are still in the developmental phase, with a lack of coherent policies and skills hindering their implementation. The importance of information literacy (IL) skills in academic libraries is recognised, but there is a need for structured IL programmes and policies at national, consortium, and institutional levels to guide librarians in effectively teaching IL (Tshuma, & Chigada, 2018). Pasipamire and Hoskins (2019) have indicated that research support in Zimbabwean university libraries faces challenges due to incongruences in services, staff deployment, collaboration, and training, leading to librarian ineffectiveness in supporting researchers. Abbas and Mutula (2023) emphasise that to enhance knowledge production and dissemination, Nigerian universities have adopted various forms of embedded librarianship practices, such as faculty-embedded librarianship and information literacy-embedded librarianship, which have proven beneficial in fostering collaboration and improving students' research skills.

Zimbabwean universities are striving to enhance their library services through various means. While the focus in university libraries is primarily on scientific research support, disseminating research output, and copyright activities (Munyoro, Machimbidza and Mutula, 2023), there is a growing recognition of the importance of embedded librarianship in improving user engagement and support (Mushi *et al.*, 2024). In their study, Tapfuma and Hoskins (2021) indicated that the adoption of open-access institutional repositories has been a significant step in increasing publication output and visibility of research from Zimbabwean universities. Additionally, the need for specialised intellectual property (IP) information services in university libraries has been highlighted, emphasising the importance of enhancing librarians' skills and knowledge to

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effectively embed their services in users' activities (Munyoro *et al.*, 2023; Mushi *et al.*, 2024). Ndlovu (2017) observes that the shift towards embedded librarianship not only benefits the users by providing proactive and tailored support but also proves to be a successful collaboration for both librarians and their clientele.

Statement of the Problem

While embedded librarianship is increasingly recognised as an effective approach to enhancing academic support and information literacy, its practical application and impact remain underexplored within African higher education contexts, particularly in Zimbabwe. Much of the existing literature is concentrated in developed countries, where institutional structures, resources, and pedagogical cultures differ significantly. As a result, there is limited understanding of how embedded librarianship can be adapted and implemented effectively in universities operating within the socio-economic and educational realities of the Global South. At the university under study, anecdotal evidence suggests that academic support services, particularly those related to information literacy, are often fragmented, with limited integration between librarians and academic departments. This disconnection may contribute to generic and underutilised literacy programmes, a lack of alignment with course objectives, and gaps in students' research competencies. Moreover, librarians face constraints related to professional development and access to current instructional tools, potentially affecting the relevance and effectiveness of their support. Given this context, there is a pressing need to investigate how embedded librarianship might be operationalised within this institutional setting, and whether it could offer a more tailored, sustainable approach to improving information literacy and academic performance among students.

Research Objectives

- ➔ To examine how embedded librarians support students in developing effective research strategies and locating credible academic sources;
- ➔ To assess the effectiveness of information literacy training provided by embedded librarians in enhancing students' critical thinking and academic independence.

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- ➔ To evaluate the role of faculty-librarian collaboration in integrating research support into course curricula and its influence on student academic performance.

Research Questions

- ➔ How do embedded librarians support students in developing effective research strategies and locating credible academic sources?
- ➔ To what extent does information literacy training provided by embedded librarians enhance students' critical thinking skills and academic independence across various disciplines?
- ➔ How does collaboration between faculty and embedded librarians in course design influence the integration of research skills into coursework and affect students' academic performance?

Literature Review

Embedded Librarianship and its Evolution in Academic Settings

Embedded librarianship in academic settings refers to a practice where librarians are integrated into various aspects of academic activities, such as teaching, research, and information literacy, to provide specialised support and expertise (Munshi *et al.,* 2024; Abbas & Mutula, 2023; Malysheva, 2023). This approach enhances knowledge production and dissemination by fostering collaboration, improving research skills, and teaching information literacy (Abbas and Mutula, 2023). Edford (2022) has indicated that the role of embedded librarians has evolved, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a shift towards virtual instruction and increased use of learning management systems. Munshi *et al.* (2024) state that essential competencies for embedded librarians include communication skills, teaching abilities, research expertise, collaboration, and technological proficiency. Kyprianos (2022) emphasises that despite facing challenges like inadequate infrastructure and resource accessibility, embedded librarianship is seen as the future of academic libraries, offering opportunities to enhance library services and directly contribute to institutional goals.

Embedded librarianship has emerged as a crucial practice in academic settings, facilitating knowledge production,

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dissemination, and enhancing collaboration between librarians and faculty (Abbas and Mutula, 2023). Munshi *et al.*, (2024) highlight that the evolving role of embedded librarians is characterised by competencies such as communication skills, teaching, research support, collaboration, and technological expertise. This practice involves various forms, including faculty-embedded librarianship, research support, and information literacy services (Abbas and Mutula, 2023). Malysheva (2023) explains that the concept of embedded librarianship extends to diverse environments like medical, educational, and scientific research settings, emphasizing information literacy and client orientation as fundamental competencies. Edford (2022) opines that the metaphorical comparison of embedded librarians to embedded journalists highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of their role, reflecting complex power dynamics and the potential for librarians to shape their identity in academia. In his study, Kyprianos (2022) emphasises the engagement of Greek academic librarians with learning management systems and underscores the importance of embedded librarians in the e-classroom, indicating a shift towards a more integrated and collaborative approach in academic libraries.

According to Abbas and Mutula (2023), technology has significantly influenced embedded librarianship in academia by shaping the competencies required for librarians to effectively implement embedded practices. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills is crucial for librarians to deploy sophisticated tools and online platforms in embedded librarianship initiatives (Mushi *et al.*, 2024). Abbas and Mutula (2023) observe that the use of various communication channels such as phones, emails, social networking sites, and instant messaging services has facilitated interaction between embedded librarians and their clients, enhancing knowledge production and dissemination in academic settings. Moreover, the adoption of AI-related technologies in academic libraries has redefined the roles of librarians, requiring them to not only utilize AI tools but also become experts in conceptualizing AI-driven services for patrons, emphasizing the importance of promoting AI literacy among librarians (Tzanova, 2024).

Embedded librarianship practices play a crucial role in enhancing information literacy and academic support in university libraries. Studies emphasise the significance of competencies such as communication skills, teaching, research, collaboration, and

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technological expertise for successful implementation (Munshi *et al.,* 2024). In the context of Nigerian universities, embedded librarianship has been shown to enhance knowledge production and dissemination through collaboration, improving research skills, and teaching information literacy (Abbas and Mutula, 2023). Furthermore, during times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, academic libraries have been instrumental in countering information disorder and promoting information resilience through awareness, access to quality sources, and information literacy programs (Hamad, 2023). The concept of embedded librarianship, with its focus on information support in research and academic libraries, offers substantial potential for developing library programmes and services, particularly in scientific research environments (Malysheva, 2023).

Embedded librarianship involves essential principles to effectively integrate library services into various academic environments. Key competencies for embedded librarians include communication and interpersonal skills, teaching, research, collaboration, coordination, and technological expertise (Munshi *et al.,* 2024). Librarians need to possess information literacy and client orientation skills to transition from resource users' agents to full-fledged research group participants (Malysheva, 2023). In Tanzania, successful implementation requires librarians to enhance teaching, research, communication, and interpersonal skills, while also advocating for adequate training and funding support (Mushi *et al.,* 2024). In Nigerian universities, embedded librarianship practices such as faculty-embedded librarianship and information literacy services enhance knowledge production and dissemination through collaboration and improved research skills (Abbas & Mutula, 2023). Overall, embedded librarianship serves as a valuable approach to connecting with students and researchers in diverse academic settings, fostering meaningful interactions and supporting knowledge creation and sharing (Bonanni & Vogus, 2022). This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the implementation of embedded librarianship practices at the university and their potential to enhance information literacy and academic support. The study was guided by three objectives, which are: to explore the role of Embedded Librarians in enhancing information literacy and academic support; to assess the impact of embedded librarianship practices in academic institutions, and; to determine the integration of librarians into the academic

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milieu in promotion of information literacy skills and support for academic success.

Role of Embedded Librarians in Enhancing Information Literacy and Academic Support

Embedded librarians play a crucial role in enhancing information literacy and academic support by providing targeted assistance and building strong relationships with specific academic programs or courses. They assist researchers with data management (Zhang & Westra, 2024), contribute to creating information resilience practices during crises (Hamad, 2023), improve students' information literacy through scaffold modules (Miyaoka, Toolsidass & Magee, (2023), offer highly targeted information literacy skills building and research support within specific courses (Meeking & Meeking, 2022), and engage with learning management systems to provide services and support academic activities (Kyprianos, 2022). By being embedded within academic departments, these librarians increase visibility, offer tailored support, and foster a culture of information literacy, ultimately enhancing students' academic success and research outcomes.

Malysheva (2023) argues that embedded librarians contribute to the development of information literacy skills in various educational settings, such as in-person and online courses, leading to improved student outcomes. Additionally, embedded librarianship offers substantial potential in scientific research information support, enabling librarians to transition from resource users' agents to full-fledged research group participants, thus enhancing research capabilities (Malysheva, 2023). Meeking and Meeking (2022) have shown that embedded library programs in academic institutions significantly increase learners' awareness of library services, expertise, and support available, ultimately breaking down barriers to accessing research resources and building strong research skills. To effectively implement embedded librarianship, librarians need to possess adequate teaching, research, communication, and interpersonal skills, ensuring seamless integration of library services into users' activities and fostering research skill development (Mushi *et al.,* 2024).

Miyaoka *et al.* (2023) contend that embedded librarians in research offer numerous benefits, including enhanced information literacy instruction, personalised support throughout the research process, and

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improved collaboration between librarians and researchers. The model allows for the development of scaffold information literacy modules that can be delivered remotely, leading to significant improvements in students' library literacy skills (Miyaoka, Toolsidass & Magee, 2023). Additionally, Mushi *et al.* (2024) assert that embedded librarians possess key competencies such as strong communication and interpersonal skills, which enable them to effectively integrate their services into users' activities. This integration facilitates a seamless transition from being resource-user agents to full-fledged research group participants, ultimately enhancing the overall research experience and outcomes (Malysheva, 2023). Furthermore, Bonanni & Vogus, (2022) emphasise that embedded librarianship fosters deeper connections with students and researchers, providing tailored support and guidance that goes beyond traditional one-shot instruction sessions, thereby positively impacting student learning and research outcomes.

Abbas & Mutula (2023) note that embedded librarianship practices play a crucial role in academic institutions by enhancing knowledge production, dissemination, and collaboration between librarians and faculty members. However, challenges such as inadequate ICT skills among librarians hinder the effective implementation of embedded librarianship, emphasizing the need for comprehensive training programs (Mushi *et al.,* 2024). Academic librarians require competencies in communication, teaching, research, collaboration, and technology to successfully embed their services in the academic environment (Munshi *et al.,* 2024). Malysheva (2023) asserts that the concept of embedded librarianship extends beyond traditional library roles, enabling librarians to actively participate in research activities and provide specialised information services to support academic programs and research endeavours. Therefore, to maximise the impact of embedded librarianship, it is essential to address skill gaps, promote collaboration, and invest in continuous professional development for librarians in academic settings.

Embedded librarians play a crucial role in enhancing student research skills in Zimbabwe by providing direct support and guidance within the academic environment. DaLomba *et al.* (2020) established that embedded librarians offer in-person instruction, online presence, and extensive office hours to assist students in identifying needed information, developing search

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strategies, and utilizing retrieved information effectively. Additionally, Makhafola (2018) indicates that embedding librarians in online courses allows for the integration of library resources directly into the Virtual Learning Environment, meeting students' needs at their point of requirement. Furthermore, Chigwada and Kasiroori (2021) stste that the awareness of big data among librarians in Zimbabwe highlights the importance of capacity building to equip librarians with the necessary skills to utilise tools and techniques for data mining and analysis, thus enhancing their ability to support student research endeavours. This collaborative approach, as seen in the integration of research and writing support in university courses, demonstrates the effectiveness of embedding librarians throughout the curriculum to enhance student research and writing skills (Hoffman *et al.,* 2017).

The Integration of Librarians into the Academic Milieu in the Promotion of Information Literacy Skills and Support for Academic Success

The integration of librarians into the academic environment significantly enhances information literacy skills and supports academic success. Their evolving roles encompass various dimensions that contribute to student learning and research collaboration. Gašo (2023) states that academic librarians actively engage in teaching information literacy, helping students navigate complex information landscapes. Similarly, Kotur (2024) emphasises that librarians facilitate interdisciplinary research by curating resources and managing information, thus enhancing collaboration among researchers. They also play a crucial role in combating plagiarism by providing education and support, and fostering a culture of academic integrity (Giannakouli *et al.,* 2023). Collaboration with writing experts is essential for a comprehensive understanding of information literacy, yet current efforts reveal a need for improved communication and shared frameworks (Yu, 2024). While the integration of librarians is beneficial, challenges remain in fully realizing their potential, particularly in fostering deeper collaborations across academic disciplines.

Gašo (2023) indicates that librarians assist postgraduate students in navigating complex information landscapes and addressing challenges in information-seeking processes. Rania and Sayekti (2022) contend that embedded librarians are pivotal in developing information literacy programs, which are essential for students to critically

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evaluate and utilize diverse information sources. Wiggil (2022) says effective collaboration between librarians and academic staff is vital for delivering comprehensive information literacy training. Despite the potential benefits, there are barriers such as inadequate communication and understanding of librarians' roles, which hinder effective partnerships (Wiggil, 2022). Librarians increasingly align their goals with institutional definitions of student success, adapting their services to meet evolving academic needs (Simms and Paschke-Wood, 2022). By actively participating in curriculum development and teaching, librarians can significantly enhance students' academic performance and lifelong learning skills (Rania and Sayekti 2022).

According to Corrall (2008), many institutions lack a coherent strategy for embedding IL across disciplines, which hinders its effectiveness and relevance to students' academic needs. The decentralisation of IL efforts, coupled with varied interpretations of what constitutes "information literacy", often leads to inconsistent implementation and evaluation. Similarly, Bruce (1995) emphasises that curriculum design frequently underestimates the complexity of IL and fails to position it as a critical academic skill, reducing it to isolated workshops rather than a sustained, embedded practice. This disconnect poses a significant challenge to student engagement and limits the long-term effectiveness of IL interventions.

Another growing concern is the technological divide and digital literacy gap, particularly in institutions or regions where access to updated infrastructure and tools is limited. Odularu and Bokwe (2025) found that in African higher education institutions, outdated technologies and lack of digital learning environments undermine the effectiveness of IL programmes, especially when students are expected to conduct research online or use specialized databases. Similarly, Murray *et al.* (2022) argue that digital literacy is foundational to academic success in today's learning environment, and without adequate institutional support, students may struggle to navigate online resources effectively. These digital challenges are compounded when faculty themselves are not sufficiently trained or engaged in promoting IL, creating systemic weaknesses in how information competencies are developed across the institution.

Lastly, student attitudes and motivational barriers also present significant obstacles.

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Research by Jeffrey *et al.* (2011) highlights that many students lack intrinsic motivation to engage with IL instruction unless it is directly tied to their assessments or perceived as immediately useful. Furthermore, Ellis, Johnson and Rowley (2017) found that students often view IL as a peripheral skill rather than an essential academic competency, especially in non-humanities disciplines, where it is less explicitly taught or assessed. This disconnect between student perceptions and institutional goals highlights the importance of designing IL programs that are relevant, contextualised, and embedded within academic disciplines. Without addressing these attitudinal and engagement challenges, IL promotion efforts risk being superficial and ineffective in cultivating independent, critical thinkers.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilising a case study to explore embedded librarianship practices in depth at the Reformed Church University Library. The target population included librarians, theology students, and academic staff. A census sampling technique was used to select all 5 librarians and 26 theology students, ensuring comprehensive representation within those groups. Additionally, 15 academic staff members from three different faculties were selected using purposive sampling, based on their involvement with or exposure to embedded librarianship initiatives. Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and direct observations of embedded librarianship practices. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the integration and effectiveness of embedded librarianship in supporting academic activities. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed to mitigate bias. Triangulation of data sources (interviews, questionnaires, and observations) ensured a more balanced and comprehensive perspective. Member checking was conducted with selected participants to validate the interpretations of the data. Furthermore, the use of census sampling for librarians and theology students minimised sampling bias, while purposive selection of academic staff ensured the inclusion of key informants with relevant experience. This methodological rigor contributed to the reliability and contextual richness of the study's findings.

FINDINGS

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Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes in the data collected, allowing for an in-depth understanding of embedded librarianship practices at a private university in Zimbabwe. Through this analysis, four main themes emerged: the roles of embedded librarians in academic support, student satisfaction with embedded librarian services, challenges faced by embedded librarians, and the positive impact on student academic success.

Theme 1: Roles of Embedded Librarians in Academic Support

The study found that embedded librarians at the private university provided three key types of academic support: research assistance, information literacy training, and course integration. In terms of research assistance, students and faculty alike reported that librarians played a crucial role in developing effective search strategies, locating academic resources, and organising research material.

One student shared, *"Before, I used to just search Google and hope for the best. Now I can use the university databases to get scholarly sources because the librarian taught me how."*

Another student echoed this, saying, *"The librarian helped me break down my topic and choose better keywords. That made everything easier."*

A faculty member added, *"Students who consult with the librarian tend to submit better researched and better organized assignments."*

These voices collectively affirm the transformative value of hands-on librarian support in demystifying the research process.

Embedded librarians also dedicate a substantial portion of their work approximately 40% to information literacy training through workshops, one-on-one tutorials, and embedded classroom sessions. Many students emphasised how these sessions boosted both their confidence and competence.

One student said, *"I never knew how to tell which sources were credible. The librarian showed us how to check for peer-reviewed articles and evaluate websites."*

Another commented, *"The plagiarism session was an eye-opener. I realised I had been citing things wrong, but now I'm more careful and confident."*

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A third reflected, *"The skills I gained from those workshops are not just for one assignment, they are for everything I will do in university and beyond."*

These direct quotes underscore the workshops' lasting impact on students' academic independence and critical thinking abilities.

Another significant role identified was the integration of librarians into course-specific teaching, also referred to as *faculty librarianship*. Embedded librarians collaborated with academic staff to align information literacy instruction with the objectives and assessments of specific courses.

One faculty member stated, *"Having the librarian involved from the beginning of the course planning made a big difference. She helped us shape assignments that required real research skills."*

Another said, *"Students understand the material better when they see how research supports what they are learning in lectures."*

A third faculty voice added, *"I have seen a clear improvement in the quality of student submissions in courses where librarians were actively involved."*

These statements reflect the strategic importance of librarian-faculty collaboration, demonstrating how embedded librarianship contributes directly to curriculum enrichment and student learning outcomes.

Theme 2: Student Satisfaction with Embedded Librarian Services

The study revealed that students were generally satisfied with the support provided by embedded librarians, especially in the areas of research assistance and information literacy. Approximately 60% of students expressed that they found librarians' guidance extremely beneficial in helping them navigate complex academic tasks.

One student said, *"The librarian did not just give me sources, she showed me how to find them myself, which I did not know how to do before."*

Another echoed this sentiment, stating, *"I used to get overwhelmed by research, but now I can search databases confidently after one session with the librarian."*

A third participant shared, *"Thanks to the librarian, I now know how to narrow my topic, choose relevant sources, and reference them correctly."*

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These comments reflect students' appreciation for research support and its positive impact on their ability to find and use credible sources effectively.

Students also reported positive experiences with information literacy workshops, with about 50% describing them as very helpful in improving their understanding of academic content. One student reflected, *"The workshop on evaluating sources changed how I look at information, I do not just accept what I read anymore."*

Another said, *"We learned how to use citation tools, avoid plagiarism, and critically analyse articles. That's not something I was taught before."*

A third participant shared, *"Now I feel like I can handle assignments on my own because I know where to look and how to judge the quality of information."* These voices highlight the workshops' effectiveness in cultivating independent learning and critical thinking skills, both of which are foundational to academic success.

However, satisfaction with digital support and learning management system assistance was lower, with only 45% of students strongly satisfied. While students acknowledged the value of digital support, they also pointed out gaps. One student mentioned that, *"I struggled with uploading files and navigating the e-learning portal, and there was not always someone available to help."*

Another shared that, *"The librarians helped with finding online resources, but I wish they could also assist with technical issues like formatting and using Turnitin."*

A third student stated: *"There's support, yes, but it's not enough for someone who's not tech-savvy."*

These responses suggest that although digital support is appreciated, students expect a more comprehensive and proactive approach to meet their evolving academic and technological needs.

Theme 3: Challenges Faced by Embedded Librarians

Under this theme, the study identified several challenges that limit the effectiveness of embedded librarianship, particularly regarding technology, training, institutional support, and faculty collaboration. Outdated technology emerged as the most commonly cited obstacle, with 60% of librarians stating that limited access to current tools restricts

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their ability to deliver digital academic support.

One librarian shared: *"We are expected to offer digital support, but the systems we use are outdated. Sometimes, even accessing basic academic databases is a struggle."*

Another explained, *"We do not have licenses for essential software, so we end up improvising, which compromises quality."*

A third voice noted, *"Students come to us expecting digital expertise, but we're working with tools that are almost a decade old."*

These testimonies underscore the persistent gap between institutional expectations and infrastructural reality, which hinders effective digital service delivery.

Another significant challenge was the lack of professional development opportunities, with 25% of librarians reporting they needed more training to stay relevant.

One librarian commented: *"There's no structured professional development plan. We are left to figure it out ourselves."*

Another added, *"I have not attended a single training workshop in over a year, yet the tools we are expected to use keep evolving."*

A third participant stated that, *"Sometimes I feel like I'm falling behind. Students ask about platforms I have never been trained on."*

This shortage of developmental support impedes librarians' ability to adapt to emerging academic trends, thereby reducing their effectiveness in supporting both students and faculty.

Institutional support and faculty collaboration were also reported as critical concerns. Around 50% of librarians expressed feeling under-resourced and underappreciated.

As one participant stated: *"We do so much behind the scenes, but it's like we do nott exist in the university's strategic vision."*

Another voiced frustration, saying, *"Budget constraints are always cited, but when you look at priorities, the library is consistently last."*

A third librarian reflected, *"Our impact is rarely acknowledged in academic meetings. It's discouraging."*

Compounding this was the difficulty of collaborating with faculty, with 30% of librarians indicating strained or minimal interaction. One shared: *"Some faculty*

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members don't understand our role and see us as optional rather than essential."

Another stated: *"I have offered to co-teach research skills in several courses, but very few lecturers take it up."*

A final voice emphasised that, *"When we were left out of course planning, our support becomes reactive rather than strategic."*

These combined challenges highlight systemic barriers that constrain the full integration and recognition of embedded librarianship in the academic ecosystem.

Theme 4: Positive Impact on Student Academic Success

The study found that embedded librarianship has a notable positive impact on students' academic success, especially in terms of enhancing research skills and fostering academic confidence. Students frequently credited embedded librarians with helping them improve the quality and organisation of their assignments. One student remarked: *"Before the librarian's session, I did not know how to search for peer-reviewed articles. Now I can find what I need in minutes."*

Another student shared that, *"The librarian helped me structure my assignment by showing me how to organize sources logically. That made a big difference in my grade."*

A third added: *"I used to just Google everything, but now I understand how to use academic databases properly, and my writing has improved a lot."*

These statements illustrate how librarian support translates directly into enhanced research practices and academic performance, especially in research-intensive courses.

Another key finding was the long-term value of information literacy skills, which students perceived as extending far beyond individual assignments. Participants emphasised that the training they received helped them become more independent learners and better prepared for future academic demands.

One student explained, *"The workshop on avoiding plagiarism and evaluating sources really opened my eyes. I feel like I'm ready for any academic task now."*

Another said, *"What I learned from the librarian sessions has stayed with me, I now use these skills in all my courses."*

A third student reflected: *"Even outside university, I know I will need these skills for*

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my career. The librarians did not just help me pass; they prepared me for life."

These reflections underscore the enduring impact of embedded librarianship in developing students' research autonomy and lifelong information literacy.

DISCUSSION

The study explored embedded librarianship practices at a private university in Zimbabwe, identifying the roles, student satisfaction, challenges, and impact of these services on student academic success. By employing thematic analysis, key insights were drawn, and these findings were interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing literature.

Roles of Embedded Librarians in Academic Support

The findings from this study highlight that embedded librarians at the private university provided substantial support in three key areas: research assistance, information literacy training, and course integration. These roles are consistent with the broader literature on embedded librarianship, which emphasizes the integration of library services into the academic curriculum (Abbas & Mutula, 2023; Malysheva, 2023). Research assistance, particularly in helping students develop search strategies and locate credible academic resources, aligns with the established understanding of embedded librarians as facilitators of research success (Meeking and Meeking, 2022; Zhang and Westra, 2024).

Moreover, the findings indicate that embedded librarians dedicated a significant portion of their time to information literacy training, an area shown to be vital for student success (Miyaoka *et al.,* 2023). The students' feedback on how the workshops equipped them with skills for independent academic work further supports the assertion that embedded librarians are essential in fostering long-term information literacy skills (Mushi *et al.,* 2024). The practice of integrating librarians directly into course-specific activities was also highlighted, a finding that resonates with the work of Kyprianos (2022), who emphasises the importance of librarians' collaboration with faculty to enhance the relevance and quality of coursework. This integration, referred to as Faculty Librarianship, not only supports curriculum development but also helps students gain deeper insights into course materials (Malysheva, 2023).

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Student Satisfaction with Embedded Librarian Services

The study found a high level of student satisfaction with the research assistance and information literacy services provided by embedded librarians, which aligns with the literature supporting the positive impact of embedded librarianship on student satisfaction (Bonanni and Vogus, 2022). Over 60% of students reported benefiting from the research guidance provided, a finding that supports the view of embedded librarians as crucial to students' research skills development (Meeking and Meeking, 2022). Similarly, the high levels of satisfaction expressed by students regarding information literacy workshops are consistent with findings from similar studies by Miyaoka *et al.* (2023), which highlight that tailored information literacy training significantly enhances students' academic independence and confidence in managing scholarly tasks.

However, the slightly lower satisfaction with digital support and learning management systems assistance indicates that there is still room for growth in the digital integration of library services. While Abbas and Mutula (2023) notes the growing importance of ICT skills for embedded librarians, this study's findings suggest that there may be gaps in the current digital offerings, especially in light of the increasing reliance on online resources for academic work. This suggests a need for librarians to expand their expertise in digital platforms to better meet the evolving needs of students in an increasingly online learning environment (Edford, 2022).

Challenges Faced by Embedded Librarians

The study identified several challenges faced by embedded librarians, including outdated technology, lack of professional development opportunities, limited institutional support, and collaboration issues with faculty. These challenges are consistent with the findings of Abbas and Mutula (2023) and Mushi *et al.* (2024), who highlight that inadequate infrastructure and lack of professional development hinder the effective implementation of embedded librarianship. The reported technological constraints, such as outdated tools, directly impact librarians' ability to provide comprehensive digital support, which is especially critical in the modern, technology-driven academic landscape (Kyprianos, 2022).

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The lack of adequate training for librarians, noted by 25% of the participants, underscores the need for continuous professional development, a need also emphasized by Munshi et al. (2024) and Tzanova (2024). Moreover, institutional support emerged as a significant issue, with many librarians feeling underfunded and undervalued. This finding resonates with the challenges highlighted by Abbas and Mutula (2023), who point to institutional reluctance to invest in embedded librarianship. The difficulties faced in collaborating with faculty were also concerning, as these challenges hinder the seamless integration of library services into the academic curriculum (Malysheva, 2023). Such challenges underline the importance of improving faculty-librarian relationships to fully realize the potential of embedded librarianship.

Positive Impact on Student Academic Success

The study's findings indicate that embedded librarians have a positive impact on students' academic success, particularly through enhanced research skills and information literacy. This outcome is in keeping with the existing literature that highlights the role of embedded librarians in improving students' research capabilities and academic performance (Meeking and Meeking, 2022; DaLomba *et al.*, 2020). Students reported improvements in assignment quality, increased confidence in managing academic resources, and better organisation of research materials, all of which contribute to academic success.

Furthermore, the long-term benefits of information literacy training, where students reported feeling more prepared to handle future academic and professional research tasks, reflect the transformative role of embedded librarianship in fostering lifelong learning and critical thinking skills (Hamad, 2023; Miyaoka *et al.*, 2023). These findings confirm that embedded librarianship is not just about meeting immediate academic needs but also about equipping students with the skills they need for future success.

Implications for Information Literacy Programmes and Academic Support Services

The findings suggest several key implications for information literacy programs and academic support services. First, the importance of continuing to integrate information literacy training into the curriculum cannot be overstated. The study highlights how embedded librarians

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play a crucial role in improving students' research skills, which,, in turn contributes to their academic success. This suggests that universities should prioritise the development and expansion of embedded librarian programmes to ensure that students receive the necessary support in navigating the complex information landscape (Mushi *et al.*, 2024).

Additionally, the challenges faced by librarians in terms of technology and professional development suggest that universities should invest in more robust training programs for librarians, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills to support students effectively in the digital age as also suggested by Edford, (2022). Furthermore, similar to Kyprianos (2022), the study suggests fostering stronger collaborations between librarians and faculty can enhance the integration of library services into academic courses, making these services more relevant and impactful.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. One limitation was the study's reliance on self-reported data, which may have introduced bias in the participants' perceptions of their experiences and satisfaction levels. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single private university in Zimbabwe, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other academic settings or institutions in different regions. Future research could benefit from a broader sample of institutions to explore the consistency of these findings across diverse educational contexts.

Another challenge was the limited availability of certain technological resources, which affected the librarians' ability to fully implement digital support services. This limitation, as noted by the study's participants, is likely to be a common issue in many academic libraries, especially in developing regions, and underscores the need for ongoing investment in library technology infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

Roles of Embedded Librarians in Academic Support

The study concludes that embedded librarians primarily support academic work through research assistance, information literacy training, and course integration. Students and faculty highlighted librarians' role in guiding research processes, while

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course collaboration improved assignment quality.

Student Satisfaction with Embedded Librarian Services

The study concludes that most students are satisfied with embedded librarian support, particularly in research guidance and information literacy workshops. However, students noted that digital support through learning platforms needs improvement.

Challenges Faced by Embedded Librarians

The study identified key challenges, including outdated technology, limited professional development, and insufficient institutional support. Difficulties in faculty collaboration also limited the integration of library services into course curricula.

Positive Impact on Student Academic Success

The study concludes that embedded librarianship positively influences students' academic success by improving research quality and fostering long-term information literacy skills.

Significance of Embedded Librarianship at University Library

The study highlights that embedded librarianship enhances the academicLibrary's academic role by providing course-aligned, personalised support that helps students develop essential research and critical thinking skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The study recommends a focus on strengthening the collaboration between librarians and faculty members. This can be achieved by establishing regular communication channels to ensure that librarians are more effectively integrated into the curriculum.
- Based on the finding that outdated technology restricts librarians' ability to offer effective digital academic support, the study recommends that the Library modernize its technology infrastructure. Upgrading library systems, acquiring more student workstations, and equipping librarians with up-to-date digital tools.

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- Given that librarians reported limited institutional support and a lack of recognition for their academic contributions, the study recommends that the university increase resource allocation to the Library. Providing adequate staffing, access to advanced research tools, and pathways for professional growth to improve the effectiveness of embedded librarian services and align with the university's academic mission.

- The university should promote faculty engagement in embedded librarianship through initiatives such as joint curriculum design workshops, co-teaching opportunities, and faculty training in information literacy integration.

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