Underutilisation of library resources and services among students in selected academic programmes at Kapasa Makasa University, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

The underutilisation of library resources and services remains a persistent challenge in higher education institutions, and Kapasa Makasa University (KMU) is no exception. Although library resources and Services play a critical role in supporting students' academic success, their use remains low. This study investigated the underutilisation of library resources and Services among second, third, and fourth-year students from five (5) selected academic programmes at Kapasa Makasa University. Guided by Information Foraging Theory (IFT) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the study sought to establish the factors contributing to underutilisation of library resources and Services, students' perceptions of these resources and Services, and the challenges students faced in accessing and utilising them. Anchored in an interpretivist research philosophy, the study employed a qualitative exploratory single-case study design to generate in-depth contextual insights. A purposive sample of thirty (30) students and five (5) librarians was selected using heterogeneous and expert sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured interview guide and analysed manually using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that underutilisation is a multifaceted and systemic phenomenon influenced by interrelated factors including inadequate and outdated subject-specific materials, reliance on alternative information sources, insufficient computers and power sockets, unstable internet connectivity, restrictive policies, environmental discomfort, and interruptions in reader Services. The challenges faced by students included an insufficient and outdated physical library collection, noise and high temperatures, strict library rules and regulations, limited operating hours, poor access to digital platforms, limited information literacy skills, and fear of financial liability. The study concluded that improving library utilisation requires a comprehensive, student-centred, and systematic approach. It recommended strengthening collection development policies, information literacy programmes, collaboration between librarians and lecturers, improving infrastructure, reviewing restrictive policies, extending operating hours, simplifying borrowing procedures, restricting non-library activities in library spaces, and providing alternative offices for non-library staff to promote effective use of library resources and Services.

Keywords: Library Resources, Library Services, Student, University Library, Underutilisation

I. INTRODUCTION

Libraries are vital pillars of higher education, playing a transformative role in students' academic, intellectual, and personal development. As centers for learning, research, and knowledge dissemination, libraries contribute significantly to the academic success of University students by offering curated access to scholarly materials, research support services, and opportunities for independent inquiry (Lance & Schwarz, 2012). Through their extensive resources and services, libraries foster information literacy, enhance critical thinking, and cultivate skills necessary for navigating complex academic landscapes (Hafsyah et al., 2023). In the same context Adeoye and Popoola (2011) added that library resources can be in both printed and electronic formats including textbooks, journals, indexes, abstracts, newspapers, magazines, reports, CD-ROM databases, internet, email, video tapes/cassettes, diskettes, computers and microforms. Based on the above information, we can divide library resources into two categories i.e., traditional printed material or resources and non-printed or electronic resources (Lance et al., 2015).

Orera Orera (2007) clarified that "the university library is a service provider of services; their support functions for training, research, and teaching must materialize in services to different users (in-person and remote), and to be oriented based on their informational, documentary, and ergonomic needs." Library services are described as the services offered by a library to its users for the use and dissemination of library materials such as cataloguing, classification, circulation services, reservation, renewal, new arrivals, current contents, current awareness service, selective dissemination of information, reference service, document delivery service, interlibrary loan service, and externally purchased database are some of the most commonly available library services, CD-ROM databases, internet databases, internal newsletters, reports, and journals, bibliographies, indexing and abstracting services, and so on (Chalukya, 2021). Utilization of these resources and services hold significant relevance for students as beneficiaries. As stated by Zimmermann (1951) "Resources Are Not; They Become" which suggests that the recognition or awareness of

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the presence of resources without its utilization is meaningless. In this regard the concept of utilization of library resources is significant to students who are the beneficiaries of the resources. Therefore, utilisation of library resources is not only a choice but inevitable in the era of information technology (Dar et al. 2017 in Yebowaah & Plockey, 2017).

People who are actively involved in learning are known as students, and they are typically enrolled in schools, colleges, or universities. They assist their academic work and personal growth by using the facilities and resources provided by libraries (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Cruz etal (2020) further articulate that inadequate service provision can prevent students or users from accessing the library and utilising its resources effectively and efficiently. This underutilisation can lead to a waste of government investment and resources. As observed by Potnis etal (2020), free access to electronic resources provided by libraries does not necessarily lead to their use by patrons, hence there is an underutilisation of library resources. The underutilisation of resources is mostly attributed to the library patrons' preference of generic search engines like Google and YouTube over paid electronic databases (Mashaba & Pretorius, 2023).

It is for this reason that, Ntsala and Mahlatji (2016) and Adeyemi etal (2025) postulate that the lack of effective service delivery can provoke negative reactions from users, including damaging library property or resources out of frustration. Additionally, poor service quality due to diminishing resources can result in a decline in library usage, as users may not perceive value in the available services. As Gorman (1999) points out, the core product of libraries is service. Without service, libraries may turn into stagnant storage spaces, lacking their fundamental educational significance. Therefore; the trend of declining print book circulation has been evident for at least the last twenty-five years especially in developing countries (Anderson, 2011; Cohen, 2019; Holton, etal, 2008; Linden et al., 2018), although Anderson (2017) claims that the decline may be leveling out when calculations are based on the average number of books circulated per student. The OCLC-OhioLINK Consortium examined circulation data from over 100 academic libraries and found that 80% of the collections did not circulate during the year of the study (Zweibel & Lane, 2012).Fry's (2018) own study of circulation at Bowling Green State University shows about a 25% decline between 2010 and 2014.

Shandu (2014) acknowledges that most libraries are under-utilised. Under-utilisation of libraries is often the result of an inadequate collection of books and inconvenient opening hours. Poorly arranged library collections contribute significantly to poor utilisation. If books are not systematically ordered on the shelves, students are not keen on using the library because they know it is very difficult to get the information they need. Another factor which leads to the under-utilisation of libraries is staff that lack suitable training and dedication. As a result they rarely assist students when they seek information (Shandu, 2014). Hart (2012) confesses that the underutilisation of libraries is a problem among African communities. Although they have been given instruction on how to consult the library for all their information needs, they do not make use of them. Hence; this study investigated the underutilisation of library resources and services among students in selected academic programmes in the case of Kapasa Makasa University.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the low utilisation of library resources and Services among students at Kapasa Makasa University. A survey conducted by Mtanga at Kapasa Makasa University cited a 2021 Annual Report that revealed that 25% of students visited the library three times a week, 19% every day, 15% once a week and 14% never visited. In response, the library introduced book exhibitions, conducted information literacy programs and social media campaigns. In addition, between 2022 and 2024, the library invested over K2 million kwacha in furnishing the library with modern chairs and tables, computers and subscriptions to e-resources (MyLoft). Still, MyLoft user report revealed that only 39 (4.2%) students were engaged with the platform against 921 total registered students. These reports reflect low utilisation of the library that necessitated this research.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. To establish the factors contributing to the underutilisation of library resources and Services among students in selected academic programmes at Kapasa Makasa University.
ii. To find out students' perceptions of the availability of library resources and Services in selected academic programmes at Kapasa Makasa University.
iii. To identify the challenges students face in accessing and utilising library resources and Services in selected academic programmes at Kapasa Makasa University.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Information Foraging Theory and Technology Acceptance Model

Information Foraging Theory was introduced by Pirolli and Card (1999) to explain how people look for information in ways that help them get the most benefit with the least amount of effort. The theory is based on the idea that just like animals search for food, people also search for information in places that they believe will give them the best results quickly and easily. The theory focuses on three main points namely; Information patches, where information is found (for example, the library, internet, or group chats). Information scent, the clues that help someone decide whether a source is useful and the Effort or cost referring to the time and energy needed to find and use the information.

Therefore, the theory offers valuable insights into the underutilisation of library resources by highlighting how students' information-seeking behaviors are shaped by their assessment of ease, efficiency, and expected outcomes. IFT, therefore, serves as a relevant and robust theoretical lens for examining students declining engagement with library services at institutions such as Kapasa Makasa University. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), is widely used to explain users' acceptance and use of technology. The model posits that two key factors; perceived usefulness and perceived ease of us to determine an individual's intention to use a system, which ultimately influences actual usage behaviour. Perceived usefuln ess refers to the extent to which a user believes that using a particular system will enhance their performance, while perceived ease of use relates to the degree to which the system is free from effort.

In the context of this study, TAM is highly relevant in explaining students' attitudes towards library resources and services, particularly digital platforms such as online catalogues, databases, and electronic resources. If students perceive library systems as difficult to use, irrelevant to their academic needs, or less efficient compared to alternative information sources, they are less likely to utilise them. Conversely, when library services are perceived as useful, accessible, and user-friendly, students are more likely to engage with them. TAM also provides insight into issues related to awareness, training, and digital literacy. The integration of Information Foraging Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the underutilisation of library resources and services. Information Foraging Theory explains how students search for information and why they prefer certain sources based on effort and efficiency, while the Technology Acceptance Model explains why students accept or reject library systems based on perceptions and attitudes. These theories complement each other by addressing both behavioural and cognitive dimensions of information use

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Factors contributing to the underutilisation of library resources and Services

Various scholars have identified different critical factors influencing the usage of resources. Understanding the factors that shape students' library usage behavior is necessary to address these concerns. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the underutilisation of library resources and services is motivated by interconnected technological, institutional, behavioural, and infrastructural factors (Chu & Du, 2013). Wendo, (2013) revealed that there are personal and institutional factors that are considered when using e-resources. Equally Alison and Baziraake, (2012) specified that various factors can influence usage of e-resources including individual organization, and social influence factors.(Alison et al., (2012) affirmed that utilization of digital content is influenced by human and institutional factors comprising providing information literacy training and internet bandwidth. Both personal and institutional factors are important in the usage of e-resources by users. Provision of adequate bandwidth becomes necessary for libraries, and for network services which assure the availability of electronic resources 24/7 (Eromosele, 2019; Okwilagwe & Ogbomo, 2012).

Wendo (2013) in Kenya, and Alison and Baziraake (2012) in Uganda established that information literacy training, internet connectivity, and institutional support significantly influence students' utilisation of electronic resources. Their findings indicate that library utilisation depends not only on resource provision but also on institutional capacity to support access and user competencies. Additionally, Okwilagwe and Ogbomo (2012), through a comparative study of Nigerian universities, found that students with adequate ICT skills demonstrated higher levels of utilisation of institutional repositories than those with limited digital competencies. This finding reinforces the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which argues that perceived ease of use influences actual system utilisation. The study demonstrates that digital competence acts as a mediating factor between resource availability and actual utilisation.

In short these studies note that lack of awareness as a major determinant of underutilisation. Oni and Ahiauzu (2008) defined 'Awareness' as having knowledge about something existing or understanding a situation or subject based on information or experience. Ojo and Akande (2005) stated that students' level of access, usage and awareness of electronic information resources at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, Nigeria was not high and that the major problem however identified in their study is lack of information retrieval skills for exploiting electronic resources, thus making the level of usage of resources by medical students very low. Equally, Ajuwon (2003) study on ICTs by health science students at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, revealed that students studied could not use a

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computer, and that the use of the database was poor, due to lack of awareness, lack of access to computers, insufficient training and high cost of provision of electronic information resources subscription. These findings claim that ineffective awareness creation and inadequate user orientation contribute significantly to underutilisation even where resources are available.

In addition, Olajide and Gboyega (2017), Mubofu (2019), and Shaibu and Mohammed (2017) revealed that inadequate access to learning materials, poor computer self-efficacy, and limited digital literacy skills contribute significantly to low utilisation of both print and electronic resources. These studies therefore; show that infrastructural limitations and user-related deficiencies are mutually reinforcing. Where internet access, databases, and technological infrastructure are weak, students experience reduced motivation and limited ability to utilise library services effectively. Furthermore, Willy (2013), Mwatela (2013), and Rajasekaran et al. (2023) noted that library staff competency, physical facilities, availability of resources, and quality of service delivery strongly influence utilisation levels. Their findings indicate that supportive staff interactions and conducive learning environments positively shape students' utilisation behaviour. On the contrary, inadequate staffing and poor user support discourage active engagement with library services.

Technological barriers also emerge strongly in the literature. For example, Abdulrahman et al. (2019) identified slow internet speed, inadequate ICT skills, insufficient databases, limited computers, and poor networking systems as key factors affecting utilisation of electronic resources. These challenges can be categorised into infrastructural barriers, skill-related barriers, and system-related barriers, demonstrating that underutilisation of electronic resources is multidimensional. In the past, academic libraries primarily relied on physical collections, but now they are increasingly shifting to the digital realm. Students need to be aware of the availability of such resources to support their academic endeavors. With technological advancements and the emergence of e-publishing, various online resources like full-text databases, e-journals, e-books collections, and major bibliographic databases are accessible on local, national, and international scales (Prangya & Rabindra, 2013 in Akpojotor, 2016). Therefore; awareness is crucial for utilising information resources. Accessibility to closed-access materials is more challenging for users, whereas open-access resources are easily found and utilized by students for their academic needs (Akpojotor, 2016).

Behavioural and academic integration factors were also emphasised by Raja Jaikumar and Saravanan (2018), who found that weak reading culture, reliance on internet search engines, and lack of innovative academic assignments contributed to low library utilisation among undergraduate students. This suggests that teaching practices and academic culture significantly influence students' utilisation patterns. Notably, Miyanda et al (2022) and Banda (2021)) established that lack of awareness, inadequate orientation, poor search skills, outdated collections, and inadequate support services contribute to underutilisation of library resources and services. The studies further revealed that many students lacked sufficient knowledge and competencies required to access both physical and electronic resources effectively.

2.2.2 Students' Perceptions of the Availability of Library Resources and Services

"Perception" encompasses students' evaluations of the accessibility, availability, quality, and relevance of library resources and their experiences with staff assistance, ease of use, and overall satisfaction (Fazli, et al., 2025). Students' perceptions of the usability of the library can help libraries to refine and transform according to students' needs and usage of the library (Datig, 2014). Students' perceptions can also help libraries to come up with strategies which will help students to better make use of the library and to become independent library users.

Literature seems to suggest that students perceive the need for libraries mostly within physical parameters and this perception appears to be shared by numerous universities. Mhinga and Agyei (2012) report that 53.92% of students at Tshwane University of Technology, Polokwane Campus (TUT, PC) use the library mainly for reading and studying their personal notes only. This has led to low rates of borrowing or of using library-based materials. Accordingly, Kim and Shumaker (2015) argue that few studies monitor how the changes in the perceptions of students of library services and systems associate with actual use. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how perceptions of usability and slight changes in this regard in the context of students may be transforming the use of the library. Students in different institutions face varying challenges with regard to the use of the library.

Nkosi et al (2012) report that at the National University of Lesotho, students generally use the library to read lecturers' notes. Moreover, students tend to use the library for other activities, such as social gatherings, rather than for locating, accessing and retrieving information. Furthermore, Yusuf and Iwu (2010) report that 88% students in Covenant University visited the library to read for examination and Online Public Access Catalog is more used than manual cataloging. Likewise, a study conducted by Mostofa and Hossain (2014) reveal that at the University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh 55.6% of students prefer the library as a place of study and 42.86% students visit the library for exam preparation. There seems to be a problem with the usage of libraries in African libraries as shown by literature above.

A study by Fazli et al (2025), investigated the perceptions and utilization of library resources among undergraduate English major students at Kabul University's English Department. The study found mixed perceptions of resource accessibility and availability. While most students appreciated the library's diverse collections, a notable

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minority expressed dissatisfaction with the ease of accessing resources, particularly online databases and print materials. This indicates that while the library offers a range of relevant materials, organizational and technological barriers may limit its usability (Saikia and Gohain, 2013).

Fazli et al (2025), observed that many students reported improvements in their research, writing skills, and course understanding due to library use, consistent with studies linking regular library engagement to academic success (De Groote and Scoulas, 2022). However, many students did not perceive these benefits, suggesting that barriers such as inadequate guidance or unfamiliarity with resources may limit the library's effectiveness (Connaway et al., 2017). The positive experiences of students who utilized library resources effectively highlight the potential of well-supported library services to enhance learning outcomes, particularly for English majors with complex research and writing assignments (Fister, 2015). In the same study by Fazli et al (2025), library services, staff support, and study facilities, received moderate approval but also revealed areas for improvement. While some students praised the staff's helpfulness, others found support lacking, particularly in online services and training. This echoes findings from other studies, where practical staff guidance significantly enhances user satisfaction and resource utilization (Kim & Yang, 2016). The conducive study spaces were appreciated, aligning with research indicating that well-designed library environments boost student productivity and focus (Walton, 2016). However, dissatisfaction with facilities and online support suggests that investments in infrastructure and digital services are needed to meet student expectations (Chu & Du, 2013). Regarding quality and relevance of library resources, Fazli et al (2025), also elicited varied responses. Students generally viewed the library's materials as reliable, but concerns about their timeliness and comprehensiveness indicate a need for more current and diverse collections. This aligns with research highlighting the importance of up-to-date resources for supporting academic needs in rapidly evolving fields like English literature and linguistics (Julien et al., 2018). The dissatisfaction expressed by some students may reflect gaps in acquisitions or a lack of alignment between library holdings and curriculum demands, a common issue in underfunded academic libraries (Ekere & Omekwu, 2021).

In other contexts, Malatji (2023), in South Africa, found that students perceived libraries positively as conducive spaces for studying, accessing the internet, and borrowing materials. However, the study also established that students lacked awareness regarding additional services offered by libraries. This implies that positive perceptions of physical library spaces do not necessarily translate into awareness or utilisation of all available services. Frimpong and Addo (2020), studying public university libraries in Ghana, found that students positively perceived the availability of OPAC systems, e-journals, and electronic databases. Nevertheless, students expressed dissatisfaction with unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate computers, and difficulties identifying relevant electronic resources. These findings suggest that students may appreciate the existence of digital resources while simultaneously perceiving access mechanisms as ineffective. Equally, Ng'ambi (2024) found that many students at Copperbelt University perceived the OPAC system as beneficial for academic success and information access. However, a significant proportion of respondents remained neutral regarding its effectiveness, while others expressed dissatisfaction with the system. Analytically, the findings indicate that students' perceptions are strongly influenced by actual experiences, usability levels, and awareness of system functions.

2.2.3 Challenges Students Face in Accessing and Utilising Library Resources and Services

While libraries play a significant role in enhancing different aspects of education, many students face challenges in accessing and effectively using information resources. For example, Ojo and Akande (2005) stated that students' level of access, usage and awareness of electronic information resources at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, Nigeria was not high due to lack of information retrieval skills for exploiting electronic resources, thus making the level of usage of resources by medical students very low. Hence; insufficient information literacy skills hinder students from accessing and utilizing relevant and accurate information, thereby impacting their academic success. Okello-Obura and Ikoja-Odongo (2010) reiterated that the lack of the relevant computer knowledge and retrieval methods is what causes the challenges in most students to search and retrieve information from these electronic sources. For students to be able to effectively use the e-resources they need to undergo computer trainings in which the skills relevant to accessing electronic information resources in the library are emphasized. It is also essential to identify the computer competences that students lack to retrieve electronic information resources in the library.

According toAraba and Michelle (2009), the shortcomings in the utilisation of computer-generated libraries extends from infrastructural limitations to a person's competence to transform access to information and communication technology (ICTs) into noticeable advantages in light of other environmental constraints. Training programs through libraries can help students develop the necessary abilities to access and use electronic resources. Ajuwon (2003) study on ICTs by health science students at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, revealed that students studied could not use a computer, and that the use of the database was poor, due to lack of awareness, lack of access to computers, insufficient training and high cost of provision of electronic information resources subscription. These findings are similar to Abinew and Vuda (2013) in Akpojotor (2016) who found that the majority of the respondents (57.97%) had limited awareness about the existence of e-libraries resources. 20.65% of respondents did not know anything about the existence of the e-library services at all. Only 21.38% of the respondents were well aware of the existence of the e-

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library services. Such challenges prevent users from accessing and utilising library resources fully. This demonstrates that underutilisation is partly a consequence of limited user preparedness and inadequate orientation programmes.

In addition, Popoola (2008) conducted a study at the College of Education, Delta State, Nigeria and Ntaga (2022) at Busitema University, observed that the inability of university libraries to meet the information requirements of some library users might have forced them to use personal collections when conducting research. Lack of time is the main reason given for not using electronic resources. Similarly, Chisenga (2004) in Oni et al (2016) carried out a survey of the use of ICTs in ten African Public Library Services. The survey found that, although most libraries had internet connectivity, very few were offering web-based information services to their users. The study however, identifies four barriers to the effective provision of electronic resources in those libraries, namely: lack of strategic planning: lack of adequate or reliable funding; lack of use of Internet to provide information services to users and a lack of consistent training for users in new ICT services.

According to Yebowaah and Plockey (2017) some factors were identified as challenges associated with the use of e-resources in the Library. From the results, 42 respondents representing 52.5% of the sample population indicated that they always have problems with the password. Low internet speed as a challenge has been encountered by 31 respondents representing 38.8% of the study. Other challenges such as inadequate staff in the Library and lack of assistance from the librarians were mentioned by 10 respondents each representing 12.5%. About 9 respondents denoting 11.3% said inadequate computers in the Library was a barrier to their effective usage of the Library. Five (5) representing 6.3% indicated that there was no or low bandwidth while the remaining 2 respondents amounting to 2.5% maintain that the attitude of staff in the library was also challenge.

Equally, Chibini (2017), Shikali and Muneja (2024), and Ntaga (2022) established that poor internet connectivity, unreliable electronic systems, limited access to databases, and inadequate ICT infrastructure negatively affect utilisation of electronic resources. Chibini (2017) further found that students underutilised available electronic resources because of poor digital competencies and difficulties navigating online systems. These findings reinforce the argument that technological availability alone does not guarantee effective access and utilisation. However, the International Journal of Education Administration and Policy Studies (2012) and Lasig (2025) found that restrictive operating hours, inadequate staffing, rigid policies, and insufficient user support negatively affected students' access to library services.

These findings reveal that institutional practices significantly influence accessibility and utilisation of library resources and services. Sullivan-Windle (2013), Gensler (2016), and Cengage Learning (2018) also found that overcrowding, noise, poor lighting, inadequate furniture, and limited study spaces negatively affected students' library experiences. Conversely, conducive learning environments positively encouraged utilisation. It is therefore, easier to deduce that students face multifaceted challenges in accessing and utilising library resources and services in academic institutions that demands attention to improve the usage.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory single-case study design. According to Yin (2014), a single-case study design is appropriate when the researcher seeks an in-depth exploration of a specific and bounded context particularly where the phenomenon under investigation is unique, insufficiently understood or requires detailed contextual analysis.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted at Kapasa Makasa University in Chinsali, Muchinga Province, Zambia. The university is situated at coordinates (32.222, -10.606) along the Great North Road in Mulakupikwa Village, north of Chinsali. The institution was selected purposively, as it is the only public university serving the Northern region of Zambia and, historically, was under the administrative oversight of Copperbelt University, with the transfer of second- and third-year students directly from Copperbelt University.

3.3 Target Population

For this study, the target population consisted of students who are the primary users of the library, as this category of users interacts with library resources and services on a daily basis. Librarians were also involved as secondary participants, particularly those who met the inclusion criteria of the study. The students included second, third and fourth-year students with ample exposure and experience, while librarians were required to have at least five years of experience to provide insightful professional perspectives, as they are directly involved in the implementation of library policies.

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3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

The students' sample size was drawn from the Library Log Sheet, the KOHA Library Management System, and MyLoft. A total of thirty (30) students were selected using heterogeneous purposive sampling from five (5) academic programmes. In addition, five (5) librarians were selected using expert purposive sampling from the 2025 Higher Education Authority list obtained from its official website, which consisted of nine (9) public universities, with one librarian selected from each of the five (5) selected universities, as shown in Table 1. According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), for a qualitative study, a small number of cases facilitates the researcher's close association with the respondents and enhances the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings. Therefore, due to the relatively small sample size of the study, the intention was not to generalize the findings but rather to understand and gain insight into the factors contributing to the underutilisation of library resources and services.

Table 1

Distribution of Sampled Students by Year of Study and Academic Programmes

Year of study	Animal Science	Fisheries/ Aquaculture	Sustainable Agriculture	ICT-Education	Cyber Security	Total
2nd Year	2	2	2	2	2	10
3rd Year	2	2	2	2	2	10
4th Year	2	2	2	2	2	10
Total	6	6	6	6	6	30

Table 2

Sampled Librarians by University and Professional Characteristics

University	Qualification	Position	Experience	Sample Size
University of Zambia	Master's (LIS)	Librarian	5-10	1
Copperbelt University	Master's (IM)	Sub-Librarian	15+	1
Mulungushi University	Master's(LIS)	Librarian	5+	1
Mukuba University	Master's (LIS)	Librarian	6-10	1
Chalimbana University	Master's (LIS)	Librarian	5+	1
Total				**5**

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Structured interview guides were administered to all 30 students and 5 librarians, of whom 23 students returned completed instruments, yielding a response rate of 77%t and 100% librarians. This response rate meets the threshold considered acceptable for a case study research (Creswell, 2014). A structured interview guide was the sole data collection instrument. The instruments were organised around four thematic dimensions corresponding to the study's research objectives: demographic profile of students and librarians; factors contributing to underutilisation of library resources and services; students' perceptions; and challenges students faced in accessing and utilising library resources and services. The interview guides were pre-tested prior to the main data collection to ensure clarity, completeness, and face validity.

The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the students and phone-interviews with the librarians due to the geographical locations of the selected universities. Horsfall, et al (2021) notes that, in face-to-face settings, research data are obtained by means of a verbal interaction between the interviewer and respondent, and Bryman (2016), maintains that in a qualitative study, the researcher may conduct telephone interviews that involve open-ended questions to elicit the participants' views and opinions.

3.6 Data Analysis

To analyse the data, thematic analysis, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed without the aid of any software. The data were manually analysed, and an open coding approach was used. The researchers immersed themselves in the data to become familiar with the content. Initial codes were generated, after which the data supporting the codes were searched and the themes reviewed. Coding was done by aggregating the text into small categories of information, seeking evidence for each code from the data. Then, the data were carefully read to identify clusters of concepts, and important concepts were labeled to formulate categories and themes.

Braun and Clarke (2021) further noted that a reflexive thematic analysis approach is where themes are understood as patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept. Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe the essence of a theme as an idea or concept that captures and summarizes the core point of a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical Considerations reflection on ethical issues in any research undertaking is vital throughout the research

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process as it eliminates potential collisions likely to occur between the researcher and the study participants (Gravetter and Forzano, 2006). This study complied with the University (University of Zambia) Research Ethics Protocols. In line with Miller and Bell (2012), each respondent was provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits and participants' rights prior to participation. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all collected data were anonymised by removing identifying details and were stored on a password-protected computer. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and participants were informed that they could skip any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Profile of Respondents

The background data collected characterised the participants, including year of study and programme of study, as shown in Table 1. The respondents comprised 17 (57%) male and 13 (43%) female students, indicating that the majority were male. All five librarians had Master's qualifications and 5 or more years of professional experience, as shown in Table 2, comprising 2 (40%) males and 3 (60%) females. The profile presented a mature group of participants, providing credible findings from both students and librarians, with a well-balanced gender representation.

4.1.1 Factors Contributing to the Underutilisation of Library Resources and Services

Respondents were asked to state the reasons for their infrequent use of library resources and services. Multiple responses were permitted. Table 3 presents the responses from students and librarians. From the students' perspective, the most frequently cited factors were inadequacy and outdated library collections (n=5) and unfavourable library environment (n=5), followed by limited access to digital platforms (n=3). The least cited factors included restrictive library policies (n=2), alternative sources of information (n=1), lack of awareness and user training (n=1), tight academic schedules (n=1), fear of theft of borrowed library materials (n=1), disruption of services (n=1), discomfort with library environment (n=1), negative perception of the library (n=1), and deferred use of the library (n=1).

From the librarians' perspective, the most cited factor was lack of awareness of library services (n=3), followed by lack of ICT infrastructure (n=2). The least cited factors were alternative sources of information (n=1), emergence of artificial intelligence (n=1), personal attitude/behaviour (n=1), and inadequate study/reading space (n=1). However, fear of financial liability, restrictive policies, and service disruptions are unique to literature where is fear is central for students not borrowing materials due to replacement charges. Oyesiku et at (2012) identified mutilation, hiding of materials, failure to return overdue items as the most common occurrences in academic settings. Though Banda and Chewe (2021), and Owolabi et al. (2015) note that library rules, including circulation policies and penalties, influence students' use, compliance, and participation in library activities. According to Jan et al (2016) some of the students might be fearful, uneasy and anxious while using the library resources and services. Such negative feelings stop them from exploiting library resources fully because it keeps them away from using the library.

Contrary, Mason (2010) states that some of the reasons which may hinder students from making effective use of the library may be that students come to university unprepared and unequipped to handle the demands of their course work primarily because they do not have experience with large research library. It might also be that they do not understand how library work and are yet to acquire the skills needed to do meaningful research. Agboola and Bamigboye (2011) claim that students use the library for class preparation nonetheless; there are various reasons, such as, students' lack of knowledge result in them using the wrong approach when using the library. Tenopir et al. (2012) support the finding that inadequate user training limits effective use of electronic resources. Nkechi et al. (2018), Soltani and Nikou (2020), and Boakye (1998) claim that ineffective awareness creation and inadequate user orientation contribute significantly to underutilisation even where resources are available.

Therefore, usability challenges such as limited digital access, inefficient catalog systems, and lack of staff support can create psychological and practical barriers to effective use. These factors reduce the frequency of library visits and diminish students' motivation to rely on library resources for academic tasks such as essay writing, project development, or exam preparation (Anjaline & Priskkillal, 2020). Though, Bennett (2020), clarified that physical elements including lighting, ventilation, noise reduction, space, and furnishings are all part of the library environment. A tidy, peaceful, and cosy library encourages learning and draws more patrons. According to Lawson and Potter (2021), well-maintained facilities increase student satisfaction. According to Hernandez and Murphy (2019), crowding and loudness might irritate consumers and lower their level of happiness.

Furthermore, the findings from Kapasa Makasa University and the selected universities revealed that reliance on alternative sources of information particularly Google and artificial Intelligence, highly contributed to the underutilisation of library resources and services. Another study by Baruchson- Arbib and Schor, (2002) found that students prefer general search engines and it seems that they have difficulties distinguishing between internet resources and library resources. Teachers' recommendations and how they put forward requirements and demands are very important for the students' use of information.

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Table 3

Factors Contributing to Underutilisation of Library Resources and Services

Student Perspectives	Frequency (n)	Librarian Perspectives	Frequency (n)
Inadequacy and outdated Library collections	5	Lack of awareness of library services	3
Unfavourable Library Environment	5	Lack of ICT Infrastructure	2
Limited access to digital platform	3	Alternative sources of information	1
Restrictive Library Policies	2	Emergency of artificial intelligence	1
Alternative sources of information	1	Personal Attitude/behavior	1
Lack of awareness and user training	1	Inadequate study/Reading Space	1
Tight Academic Schedules	1		
Fear of Theft of Borrowed Library Materials	1		
Disruption of services	1		
Discomfort with Library Environment	1		
Negative Perception of the Library	1		
Deferred Use of Library	1		

4.1.2 Perceptions of the Availability of Library Resources and Services

This study examined students' perceptions of the availability of library resources and services at Kapasa Makasa University, and librarians' perceptions at their respective selected universities. The findings revealed variations between the two groups. Among students, positive perceptions were the most prevalent, with the largest number of responses acknowledging that library resources support their academic activities. However, an equal number expressed moderate and negative perceptions, indicating a divided student body between those who valued the library and those who perceived limitations in availability. At the selected universities, positive and moderate perceptions were equally reported by two (2) universities each. Only one (1) university reported a negative perception, which was the least prevalent among the selected universities.

The positive perceptions are consistent with Abubakar et al (2025), who reported that students at the University of Ilorin viewed library services positively, particularly in relation to resource adequacy, staff helpfulness, and the learning environment. The moderate perceptions are also consistent with Okello-Obura and Ikoja-Odongo (2010), who observed that users may hold moderate views when libraries provide some, but not all, resources required to meet academic needs. Equally, Fazli et al (2025), investigated the perceptions and utilization of library resources among undergraduate English major students at Kabul University', findings revealed that library services and support, including staff assistance and study facilities, received moderate approval but also indicated areas for improvement. While some students praised the staff's helpfulness, others found support lacking, particularly in online services and training.

This echoes findings from other studies, where practical staff guidance significantly enhances user satisfaction and resource utilization (Kim & Yang, 2016).The conducive study spaces were also appreciated, aligning with research indicating that well-designed library environments boost student productivity and focus (Walton, 2016). However, dissatisfaction with facilities and online support suggests that investments in infrastructure and digital services are needed to meet student expectations (Chu & Du, 2013). Furthermore, the negative perceptions identified among some students correspond with Kekana and Kheswa (2020), who associated dissatisfaction and reduced library use with inadequate computer workstations and ineffective technology. Kim et al (2016) noted that negative perceptions may be shaped by previous unsatisfactory experiences, inadequate support from staff, or a lack of integration of library resources into classroom instruction. These unaddressed perceptions can lead to long-term disengagement and missed educational opportunities. Table 4 presents selected verbatim from students and librarians illustrating their perceptions of the availability of library resources and services.

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Table 4

Perceptions of the Availability of Library Resources and Services

Perception Category	Selected Student Perceptions	Frequency (n)
Positive perceptions	*R1"They are great services they support my learning."* *R2"They are great services really helpful for my studies, especially when I need information for assignments and exam preparation."* *R3"Past Examination papers are there usually guide me how to study and how a certain Lecturer phrase questions."*	8
Moderate perceptions	*R1"Some services are excellent others are just fair."* *R2"Resources are there especially for natural sciences and cyber security. I feel resources are only limited for new programs."* *R3"Study space is there but need more charging ports for laptops."*	5
Negative perceptions	*R1"Library is not up to par, computers are few and Wi-Fi is unstable."* *R2"Textbooks are outdated we need recent published books."* *R3"According to my field of study, I only benefit 3% from the library."*	5
Total		**18**
Librarian Perceptions		
Positive perceptions	*R1"The library resources and services are good and support students in their academic work."* *R2"We have good resources and services that help students with their studies."*	2
Moderate perceptions	*R1"The resources are moderate; we have some materials, but there is still a need to improve the collection."* *R2"The services are fairly available, although we still have gaps in some areas."*	2
Negative perceptions	*R1"The resources are poor and we do not have enough materials to meet the needs of all students."*	1
Total		**5**

4.1.3 Challenges Students face in Accessing and Utilising Library Resources and Services

Students at Kapasa Makasa University (KMU) were asked to identify the challenges they faced in accessing and utilising library resources, while librarians were asked to share their perspectives on the challenges encountered by students in their respective universities. Table 5 shows that the challenges affecting library utilisation were largely shared across institutions, although their specific manifestations differed. Both Kapasa Makasa University students' and librarians from selected universities highlighted weaknesses in awareness and information literacy, digital access, and ICT infrastructure, indicating that effective utilisation of library resources was constrained not only by resource availability but also by students' ability to discover and access them. This is consistent with Shaibu and Mohammed (2017), who found that limited computer self-efficacy hindered students' effective use of electronic library resources.

Equally, Ukonu et al. (2012) emphasised the major challenge affecting knowledge and use of the library such as students are not aware of the facilities on offer and the library staff do little to inform them about them. Berk et al. (2007) stressed the importance of marketing of resources and services to make students aware of the facilities they have in the library that they can use to access information effectively. However, Kapasa Makasa University students reported a broader range of institutional and user-experience challenges, including outdated collections, restrictive policies, limited operating hours, tight academic schedules, unfavourable study conditions, and interruptions to reader services. Concerns about the misuse or loss of library materials also reflect broader circulation challenges identified by Oyesiku, Buraimo, and Olusanya (2012), while the Kapasa Makasa University findings further revealed that fear of financial consequences may itself discourage library use.

This complements Banda and Chewe's (2021) observation that circulation regulations and access restrictions can influence students' library-use behaviour. In contrast, librarians from selected universities additionally emphasised inadequate reading space and weak marketing of electronic resources and theses, highlighting how differences in institutional infrastructure and service provision shape the nature of utilisation barriers. The reported unfavourable study environment is further supported by Aremu et al (2025), who found that excessive indoor noise disrupted students' cognitive engagement and study activities. It is for this reason that, Bennett (2020), clarified that physical elements including lighting, ventilation, noise reduction, space, and furnishings are all part of the library environment. A tidy, peaceful, and cosy library encourages learning and draws more patrons. According to Lawson and Potter (2021), well-maintained facilities increase student satisfaction. According to Hernandez and Murphy (2019), crowding and loudness might irritate consumers and lower their level of happiness.

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Table 5

Challenges Students face in Accessing and Utilising Library Resources and Services

Theme	**Students' Reported Challenges (Verbatim)**
Insufficient and outdated physical library collection	*R1"Update the book collections by acquiring books recommended in the course outlines."* *R2"Most of the physical library resources available are outdated. We need the latest resources."*
Poor access to digital platforms	*R1"All your digital platforms are poor, difficult to login not very easy to access resources."* *R2"Some of the platforms are too complex and others not that friendly."*
Limited knowledge and information literacy skills	*R1"I have never used library, I am not familiar with it, you have to explain to me maybe."* *R2"I don't know how to access past papers."*
Fear of financial liability	*R1"I am always worried to borrow books because if it gets lost I will be forced to pay For it."*
Limited computers, sockets, and poor Internet/Wi-Fi	*R1"Few Computers and sockets in the library and computers are few and forever occupied."*
Noise and high temperatures in the library	*R1"No silence in the library, there is always some sort of noise, even from the staff members sometimes."* *R2"The place is hot. The air-con works but doesn't have gas in it, so it doesn't cool the place."*
Strict Library policies	*R1"The rules are too many, sometimes you are sent away for small issues, even restrictions entering with small bottle of water."*
Limited library operating hours	*R1"The time at which it operates doesn't correspond with my preferred study time."*
Tight Class Schedule	*R1"My classes are too many in a day and we barely have time to go to the library."*
Interruptions of reader services	*R1"Avoid writing exams and tests from the library; it disturbs us when studying, yet that is when we need the library the most."*
Theme	**Librarians' Reported Challenges (Verbatim)**
Limited Awareness and Information Literacy Skills.	*R1"Lack of awareness and exposure on available library services."* *R2"Lack of marketing of theses and e-resources."* *R3"Lack of knowledge and training on how to access services electronically."*
Inadequate ICT Infrastructure and Equipment	*R1"No computers in the Cybrary."* *R2"Lack of equipment the library for electronic resources."*
Inadequate Reading Space	*R1 "Student reading space is inadequate."*

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the underutilisation of library resources and services at Kapasa Makasa University stems from a complex interplay of institutional, infrastructural, technological, behavioural, environmental, and programme-specific factors, rather than any single deficiency. While the library is widely recognised by students as a valuable academic support tool, its effectiveness is severely undermined by inadequate and outdated collections, unreliable ICT infrastructure and internet access, limited computers and study spaces, poor digital platform usability, insufficient information literacy and user awareness, restrictive borrowing policies and limited operating hours, and unconducive study environments marked by noise and heat. These challenges are compounded by students' growing preference for alternative internet-based sources and by programme-specific needs that shape differential usage patterns.

These barriers are mutually reinforcing, forming a systemic constraint that transcends the individual factors often treated separately in existing literature. By integrating these dimensions within a developing-country university context, the study offers a more holistic empirical account of library underutilisation. Accordingly, meaningful improvement requires a comprehensive institutional response that concurrently enhances resource relevance and accessibility, upgrades ICT infrastructure, expands user education programmes, revises restrictive policies, and improves the physical library environment. Only such an integrated approach can reposition the library as a responsive and indispensable pillar of academic success.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to Kapasa Makasa University Management, Library Management, academic staff (lecturers), and other stakeholders concerned with improving the

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utilisation of library resources and services.

The University Management should provide adequate financial support to the Library to enable it to acquire current and programme-relevant print and electronic resources and improve ICT infrastructure. Adequate and sustained financial investment is essential for ensuring that the Library has resources that meet students' academic needs and that these resources are effectively utilised.

The University Management should also consider improving university infrastructure, particularly staff offices and other facilities that can support academic staff in conducting examinations, tests, meetings, and other activities. Such activities should not take place in the Library, as they generate noise, disrupt students' study, and force the students to leave the Library. Furthermore, the Library Management should develop and implement a comprehensive Collection Development Policy to guide the systematic selection, acquisition, evaluation, and weeding of library materials. The policy will help to procure resources based on regular assessments of user needs and reviews of academic programmes and curricula. The Library should also strengthen information literacy and user awareness programmes through regular orientation sessions, class-based awareness activities, practical workshops, and the integration of information literacy into academic programmes. Weekly class-based awareness activities could be conducted across programmes and levels to encourage students to engage with the Library from the beginning of their studies and to sustain that engagement throughout their academic programmes.

Library Managers should also introduce Library Digital Day, and to be offered both physically and virtually, to give students practical training in using digital resources and platforms such as MyLoft and the Astria Digital Library. These activities should be supported by simple user guides and continued technical assistance so that students can confidently access and use electronic resources.

Library Managers should also work closely with academic staff in delivering information literacy activities. Lecturers can further support this effort by encouraging students to use credible Library resources when completing assignments, conducting research, and preparing for examinations, rather than relying mainly on easily accessible online sources of varying reliability. Such collaboration would help make Library use a more regular part of students' academic work.

Library Managers should review library policies and procedures that affect the students to promote utilisation. Library operating hours should, where human resource permits, be extended to midnight throughout the academic year rather than only during examination periods. Fine payment procedures should also be reviewed to allowing students to settle Library-related charges directly within the Library instead with Finance; this will reduce on the distance that students cover to pay library fines. Lastly, the Library Management should strengthen partnerships with other libraries, information networks, professional associations, and database providers. Such partnerships can support resource sharing, staff professional development, access to additional information resources, and opportunities to learn from good practices in academic library service delivery.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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