

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF STANDARDS IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

This article sets out to describe the usage of standards in the development of quality library services in universities in Kenya. Standards represent opportunities for librarians to add value as information providers and for the library profession to raise its visibility as an authority on information quality. The mixed research method was used for data collection. A total of 27 (87%) of the 31 respondents from private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) completed and returned the questionnaires. Based on the findings from the questionnaire survey, five heads of university libraries were interviewed. The findings revealed that the majority of the university libraries had used only five out of the ten Commission for Higher Education's *Standards and Guidelines for University Libraries in Kenya* (CHE 2007), namely: vision, mission and objectives; organisation and access of information resources; information resources; ICT resources; and library building. The higher usage of these five standards could have been attributed to the eligibility requirements for licensing of the external quality assurance regulatory body, namely, the CHE. However, the least utilised standards were those that were crucial to demonstrate that students had mastered the specific objectives of education. The CHE standards used for evaluation of university libraries in Kenya only covered inputs. The article concludes with a number of recommendations for improvement. The standards should focus on outputs and outcomes of the library programmes as primary indicators of quality.

## KEYWORDS

library standards, performance measures, quality assurance, libraries, Kenya

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Kenya was the first African country to set up an external quality assurance agency for higher education (Materu 2007:18). Over the last ten years, the demand for higher education has increased in Kenya just like in other developing countries due to the social demand for higher education. This led to the expansion of public higher education institutions (HEIs) from three in 1997 to seven in 2007, with 15 constituent colleges and 13 private universities. To control private HEIs, the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) was established in 1985 through an Act of parliament (Republic of Kenya 1985:144). The Commission for University Education (CUE) was established by the promulgation of the Universities Act (No. 42 of 2012) as the successor to the CHE.

The external quality assurance method used in Kenya is accreditation. Before the enactment of the Universities Act in Kenya, accreditation was compulsory for only private HEIs. The CHE (2007) developed *Standards and Guidelines for University Libraries in Kenya* (hereafter the CHE standards) for external quality evaluation, that is, standards for physical facilities, curriculum, university libraries, validation of diploma programmes and collaboration between HEIs and distance learning.

In Kenya, like in other countries, quality assurance structures in higher education were set up to enhance accountability, compliance with standards or quality improvement. The CHE uses both the standard-based approach and fitness-for-purpose approach in its quality assurance processes and the instruments used for evaluation of universities include rules, guidelines, standards and performance criteria.

The CHE has been conducting quality assurance in university libraries in Kenya since 1985, as part of the accreditation process. In fulfilling its mandate through institutional and programme accreditation, which is compulsory for all private universities, the CHE conducts external quality evaluation (accreditation and re-inspection/audit). The CHE uses standards and peer evaluators for quality assurance and the external evaluation of academic libraries falls within this mandate.

However, Materu (2007:iv) argues that the main reasons for setting up quality assurance agencies in Africa have been regulation of the development sector rather than to enhance accountability and improve quality. The author further states that 'a stronger link between the results of quality assurance processes and funding allocations, as well as learning outcomes (quality of graduates) in order to promote accountability' is needed.

Although Kenya uses the CHE standards for external quality assurance, the evaluation criteria and indicators have not been standardised to facilitate self-assessment and comparison between libraries. The main objective of the current study was to explore the extent of usage of the CHE standards in university libraries in Kenya.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of common global challenges such as growing social demand, privatisation, and commercialisation of higher education and the effects of information communication technology on the provision of higher education have seriously affected higher education systems worldwide. These challenges have also created increased need of improvement of the quality assurance processes and procedures in HEIs and external quality assurance agencies. All over the world, there is increased interest in quality and standards, reflecting the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and the private purse (ENQA 2005:9; Materu 2007:xiii; UNESCO 2006:6, 2010:3).

The explosive growth of both traditional HEIs and new providers raises questions in regard to standards of quality (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009:ix). The authors further state that quality criteria must reflect the overall objectives of higher education, notably the aim of cultivating in students the ability for critical and independent thought and the capacity to learn throughout life. Quality requires both establishing quality assurance systems and patterns of evaluation, as well as promoting a quality culture within institutions (UNESCO 2010:3).

Various authors define the term ‘accreditation’ as the outcome of a process by which a government, parastatal or private body (accreditation agency) evaluates the quality of higher education. This includes the HEI as a whole, or a specific higher education programme, in order to formally recognise it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards and award a quality label (CHEA 2002:1; Harvey 2004:5; Martin & Stella 2007:36; Sanyal & Martin 2007:6). Accreditation ensures quality control (minimum standards) in higher education, quality enhancement and facilitation of student mobility (Sanyal & Martin 2007:6).

Cret (2011:428) argues

that accreditations do not entail organisational changes by themselves. They do not mechanically modify the overall quality of the programs . . . They constitute an external tool that does not impose changes from itself. One might better conceive it as a kind of a catalyst. They provide frameworks; they give opportunities to mobilise management tools more easily.

Standards can be interpreted to mean that they should directly address the quantity, quality, extent, and level of suitability of programmes, services (which include the availability, in a variety of formats, of a collection) and staffing in academic libraries (ALA 1998:5).

Studies on performance measurement have resulted in several sets of performance indicators and standards, including: *ISO 11620:2008 Information and Documentation: Library Performance indicators*, 2nd edition 2008; and Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*, 2012.

Throughout the world, most accrediting bodies are increasing pressure on HEIs to measure what students learn by applying assessment processes and replacing traditional standards with less prescriptive standards that seek outcome measures (Dugan & Hernon 2002:377). Dalrymple (2001:30) also states that technology has prompted librarians to reconsider the basis and rationale for virtually every traditional process and standard. The changes in the role, value and organisational structure of accreditation provided an opportunity for the library community to develop new ways to demonstrate their importance and worth. The first step is to acquire a clear understanding of the goals and process of accreditation and assessment; the second is to establish standards compatible with these goals; and the third is the ability to implement assessment to demonstrate conformity with standards.

In the United States (US), the American Library Association (ALA) developed the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* in 2004 (hereafter the ALA standards), which differed from the Association of College & Research Library's (ACRL) *Standards for University Libraries: Evaluation of Performance* of 1989 (hereafter the ACRL standards). The ACRL standards were prescriptive because the university librarians had to become skilled in the process of examining and redefining the goals set by the standards. In contrast, the ALA standards were not prescriptive, but rather provided a comprehensive outline to methodically examine and analyse all library operations, services, and outcomes in the context of accreditation. The expectation is that these standards embrace key principles that will continue to be espoused by regional accrediting associations as critical elements or core requirements that provide a foundation upon which a library documents its compliance (ALA 2004:1). The ACRL standards differed from previous versions by articulating expectations for library contributions to institutional effectiveness. The ACRL standards differed structurally by providing a comprehensive framework using an outcomes-based approach, with evidence collected in ways most appropriate for each institution (ARCL 2012:5).

In Kenya, standards for academic libraries were first prescribed in the *Universities (Establishment of Universities) (Standardization, Accreditation and Supervision) Rules, 1989* (CHE 2008:111). The rules focused on spatial requirements and the holdings of university libraries. In 2007, the CHE standards were published after consultations with stakeholders (see Table 1). The CHE standards were an attempt to point out specific evaluation mechanisms for university librarians. The standards covered vision, mission and objectives; information resources; information and communications technology (ICT) resources; organisation and access to information resources and services; library facility; staffing; administrative structure; library budget and information literacy. Statements on distance learning libraries were also included (CHE 2007:2).

**Table 1:** Outline of CHE (2007) Standards for University Libraries

| No. | University Library Standard                                   | Operational Definition  |
|-----|---|---|
| 1   | Vision, mission and objectives                                | Explicit statement of its vision, mission and objectives that are aligned to those of the institution   |
| 2   | Information resources   | Provision for all academic programmes, varied, authoritative and up-to-date information resources, which facilitate teaching, learning and research |
| 3   | ICT resources   | Adopt and maintain ICTs in information management and its operations  |
| 4   | Organisation and access to information resources and services | Information resources shall be organised for efficient access, retrieval and quality services   |
| 5   | Library building  | Provide a convenient and conducive adequate facility of study and research for library users  |
| 6   | Staffing  | Appropriate, qualified and adequate staff   |
| 7   | Administrative structure                                      | Library administrative structure that is fully integrated with the institutions organisations structure   |
| 8   | Library budget  | Provision of adequate library budget  |
| 9   | Information literacy and competency                           | Facilitate academic success and encourage lifelong learning   |
| 10  | Distance library services                                     | Provide adequate resources to support distance learning library services  |

However, according to Materu (2007:xvi), the standards being applied by national quality assurance agencies in Africa are mainly input-based, with little attention being paid to process, output and outcomes. The author also states that many standards use terms such as ‘appropriate to’ or ‘suitable conditions for’ or ‘facilities that are adequate for’ the specific needs. The vagueness of these standards leaves them open to subjective interpretation and undoubtedly puts a great deal of pressure on the peer reviewers to make judgments about what is reasonable (Materu 2007:25).

According to Derfert-Wolf, Gorski and Marcinek (2005:4), standards should be based on research into effectiveness, not on conjecture or subjective opinion. Meanwhile, Cullen (2001a:11) states that standards must also be based on benchmarking with comparable institutions and expert opinion. Scheeder (2005:8) points out that standards provide opportunities for librarians to add value as information providers, and they also represent an opportunity for the library profession to raise its visibility as the authority on information quality. The creation of national quality standards and guidelines should take into account local conditions (Derfert-Wolf, Gorski & Marcinek 2005:4). Standards should also be reviewed regularly to ensure that the programmes, services and staffing

practices they treat are germane to the current state of the profession. Standards should be based on evidence of normative practice or programmatic success determined by the measurement of outcomes (ALA 1998:5).

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study triangulated qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000; Matthews & Ross 2010). In the first phase of the study, data was collected using a structured self-administered pretested questionnaire that included structured questions (quantitative data) and one or more open-ended items (qualitative data collection). The mail questionnaires were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the current status of quality assurance in university libraries in Kenya. The population of the study constituted all the HEIs in Kenya recognised by the CHE. The population of the first phase of the study constituted all the 31 recognised public and private HEIs in Kenya. The sample frame was drawn from the list of HEIs authorised to award degrees in Kenya accessible at <http://www.che.or.ke/status.html>. Based on the findings from the questionnaire survey, five purposively selected heads of university libraries were interviewed. They included respondents from two private chartered universities, two private universities with Letters of Interim Authority (LIA) and one public university. A total of 27 (87%) of the 31 respondents completed and returned the questionnaires. All 27 (100%) respondents from 11 private chartered universities, seven private universities with LIA, four private registered universities and five public universities reported that they had used the guidelines

The data from the questionnaires was analysed and the key results that needed explanation identified for a follow-up interview. The data collected during phase one was analysed and key results that needed to be explained were identified for follow-up interviews and a purposeful sampling strategy was applied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:103; Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:123; Johnson, Onwegbuzie & Turner 2007:115). Interviews were used to confirm the results obtained through the use of questionnaires in line with methodological triangulation. The data from the two data collection methods was coded and analysed using SPSS 22.0 (originally, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

### **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the respondents' implementation of the CHE standards in their libraries are arranged from highest to lowest in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Implementation of CHE (2007) Standards for University Libraries

| No. | University Library Standard                                   | Implemented | Not implemented |
|-----|---|-------------|-----------------|
| 1   | Vision, mission and objectives                                | 93%         | 7%              |
| 4   | Organisation and access to information resources and services | 93%         | 7%              |
| 2   | Information resources   | 89%         | 11%             |
| 3   | ICT resources   | 89%         | 11%             |
| 5   | Library building  | 81%         | 19%             |
| 9   | Information literacy and competency                           | 74%         | 26%             |
| 7   | Administrative structure                                      | 67%         | 32%             |
| 6   | Staffing  | 56%         | 44%             |
| 8   | Library budget  | 48%         | 52%             |
| 10  | Distance library services                                     | 26%         | 74%             |

The results from Table 2 showed that:

- The majority, that is, 25 of the 27 (93%) respondents, indicated that they had implemented the vision, mission and objectives standard in their libraries.
- The majority, that is, 25 of the 27 (93%) university librarians had used the standard on organisation and access to information resources and services. In response to an open-ended question, one university librarian noted that the standards on organisation and access ‘are okay, only that they are biased in some areas like use of Library of Congress instead of allowing usage of other schemes’.
- Both the Information and ICT resources standards had been implemented by 24 of the 27 (89%) university librarians. In response to an open-ended question, ‘Any other comment?’ one university librarian reported that ‘the use of figures, for example 60 titles per programme, was not a practical measure because in some instances, the size of the population does not warrant it. The use of percentages would be a fairer measure and some measures do not account for electronic resources’. Another university librarian noted that the ‘guidelines on information resources are not clear; a collection of 60 titles per programme is not clear, so there is a need to define what programme means, does it mean a course. A determining formula for ascertaining the adequacy of multiple copies should also be specifically stipulated’. One other university librarian suggested that, ‘There was need to expand the standards on electronic resources’.
- The library building standard had been implemented by 22 of the 27 (81%) respondents.

- Three quarters, that is, 20 of the 27 (74%) university librarians had utilised the information literacy standard.
- The administrative structure standard had been implemented by only 16 of the 27 (67%) university librarians. In response to an open-ended question, one university librarian noted, ‘The library is fully represented in the major senior management organs of the university’. Another university librarian reported, ‘The guidelines on administrative structure should be amended so that the university librarian reports to the Vice Chancellor’.
- The library staffing standard had been implemented by only a few, that is, 15 of the 27 (56%) respondents.
- Less than half, that is, 13 of the 27 (48%) university librarians had utilised the library budget standard.
- The least of the university librarians, that is, 7 of the 27 (26%) from all the categories of universities had utilised the distance library standard.

The frequencies of the respondents’ implementation of the standards on vision/mission, information resources and organisation/access in their libraries are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Frequencies of implementation of standards on vision/mission, information resources and organisation/access

| Universities       | Standards and guidelines for university libraries |      |                       |      |  |      |
|--------------------|---|------|-----------------------|------|--|------|
|                    | Vision, mission and objectives standard           |      | Information resources |      | Organisation and access to information resources |      |
|                    | N   | %    | N                     | %    | N  | %    |
| Private Chartered  | 11  | 100% | 11                    | 100% | 11   | 100% |
| Private with LIA   | 7   | 100% | 7                     | 100% | 6  | 86%  |
| Private Registered | 4   | 100% | 4                     | 100% | 4  | 100% |
| Public             | 3   | 60%  | 3                     | 60%  | 4  | 80%  |
| Total              | 25  | 93%  | 24                    | 89%  | 25   | 93%  |

Table 3 shows that all the private chartered universities, private universities with LIA and private registered universities, but only three public universities, in the study indicated that they had implemented the vision, mission and objectives standard.

It was also confirmed during the follow up-interview with the four respondents from private registered universities that they had, indeed, formulated the mission statements for their university libraries. The mission statements were also aligned to the HEIs’



mission statements. All four respondents further reported that all their library staff were involved in the development of their vision and mission statement.

The frequencies of the respondents’ implementation of the standards on information literacy and competency, distance library services and library building standards in their libraries are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Frequencies of implementation of information literacy and competency, distance library services and library building standards

| Universities       | Standards and guidelines for university libraries |      |                                    |     |                           |     |
|--------------------|---|------|------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|
|                    | Information literacy and competency standard      |      | Distance library services standard |     | Library building standard |     |
|                    | N   | %    | N                                  | %   | N                         | %   |
| Private Chartered  | 7   | 64%  | 3                                  | 27% | 9                         | 64% |
| Private with LIA   | 6   | 86%  | 1                                  | 14% | 6                         | 86% |
| Private Registered | 2   | 50%  | 1                                  | 25% | 3                         | 75% |
| Public             | 5   | 100% | 2                                  | 40% | 4                         | 80% |
| Total              | 20  | 74%  | 7                                  | 26% | 22                        | 81% |

Table 4 shows that seven of the 11 private chartered universities, six of the seven universities with LIA, two of the four private registered universities and all the four public universities, had implemented the information literacy and competency standard.

The findings also showed that only 7 of the 27 (26%) university librarians from all the categories of universities had utilised the distance library standard.

The university librarians who indicated that they had implemented the library building standard included nine from the 11 private chartered universities, six from the seven private universities with LIA, three from the four registered universities and four from the five public universities.

However, further investigations during the interviews revealed that the information literacy competency (ILC) standard had not been fully implemented as expected. This is investigated further in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Information literacy competency (ILC)

| Universities interviewed | Implementation of ILC programmes in university |             |                    |   |   |
|--------------------------|--|-------------|--------------------|---|---|
|                          | How do you conduct ILC Programmes?             |             | Course examinable? | Course designed by the university library | Is course taught as a unit and in which department?   |
|                          | Courses  | Orientation |                    |   |   |
| Private LIA (1)          | Yes  | Yes         | Yes                | Yes                                       | Information literacy course/ library department       |
| Private LIA (2)          | No   | Yes         | N/A                | N/A                                       | N/A   |
| Private Chartered (3)    | No   | Yes         | N/A                | N/A                                       | N/A   |
| Private Chartered (4)    | Yes  | Yes         | Yes                | Yes                                       | Communications course/ Communications department      |
| Public (5)               | Yes  | Yes         | Yes                | Yes                                       | Communication Skills course/Communications department |

The results revealed that only three of the five (60%) university librarians interviewed supported learning by teaching ILC while the remaining conducted library orientations, as shown in Table 5. Three interviewees also reported that they assessed students at the end of the course by examination. The findings also showed that the information literacy competency course was designed by three of the university librarians and offered in different department. Only one respondent from a private university with LIA reported that the course was offered by the library department. In the other two universities, the ILC course was offered from the communications department. Two interviewees reported that they offered and information literacy through orientation to new students and by having sessions with individual users, as shown in Table 5. Information literacy has been recognised by accrediting bodies as an integral component of higher education learning outcomes such as critical thinking and the capacity for lifelong learning skills (Lindauer 2002:15; Saunders 2008:312; Weiner 2005:433).

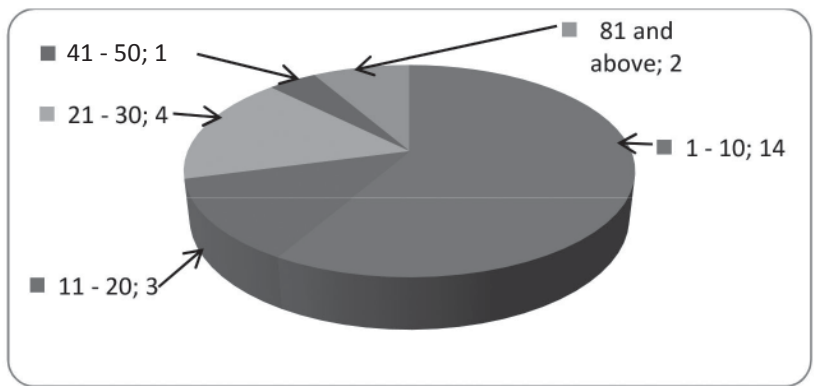
The frequencies of the respondents' implementation of the standards on administrative structure, staffing and library budget standards in their libraries are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Frequencies of implementation of standards on administrative structure, library staffing and library budget

| Universities       | Standards and guidelines for university libraries |     |          |     |                |      |
|--------------------|---|-----|----------|-----|----------------|------|
|                    | Administrative structure                          |     | Staffing |     | Library budget |      |
|                    | N   | %   | N        | %   | N              | %    |
| Private Chartered  | 9   | 64% | 7        | 64% | 8              | 73%  |
| Private with LIA   | 4   | 57% | 3        | 43% | 3              | 43%  |
| Private Registered | 1   | 25% | 2        | 50% | 2              | 50%  |
| Public             | 4   | 80% | 3        | 60% | -              | 100% |
| Total              | 18  | 67% | 15       | 56% | 13             | 48%  |

The university librarians who had implemented the standard on staffing included seven from the 11 private chartered universities, three of the seven universities with LIA, two of the four registered universities and three of the five public universities as shown in Table 6.

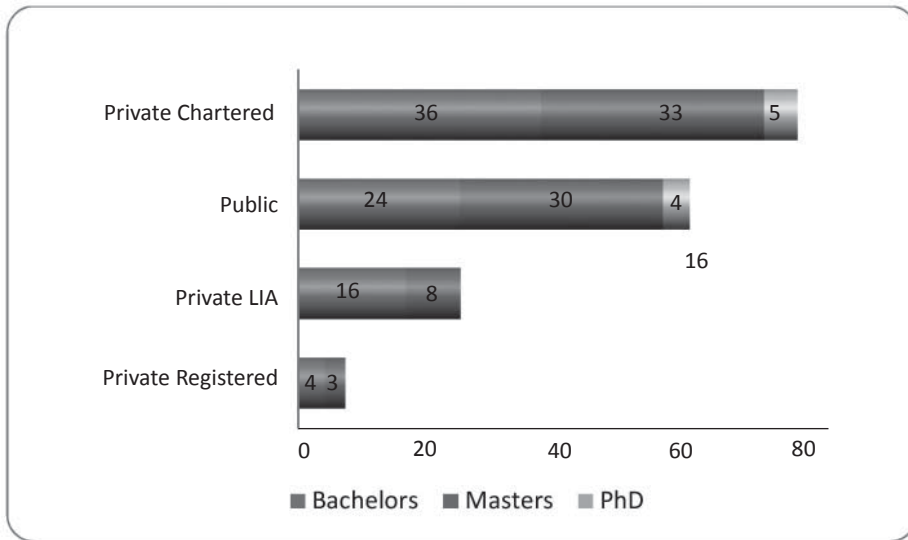
Charts 1 and 2 give details of the number of library staff and their qualifications at the different universities.



**Chart 1:** Number of university library staff

Chart 1 illustrates that two of the 24 (8%) libraries from public universities had a staff complement of 81 and above. A public university librarian indicated that they had between 41 and 50 staff members. Chart 1 also shows that 14 of the 24 (58%) respondents from private university libraries had fewer than 10 staff members. These included four private chartered universities, six private universities with LIA and four registered universities. Chart 1 also shows that four of the 24 (17%) private chartered

universities had between 21 and 30. Chart 1 also indicates that three out of the 24 (13%) universities had library staff of between 11 and 20.



**Chart 2:** Qualifications of university library staff

Chart 2 shows that 19 of the 24 (70.4%) university libraries indicated that the number of library staff with Master’s degrees stood at 74. Of these, 33 were from nine private chartered universities, 30 from three public universities and eight from four private universities with LIA. Three were from three private registered universities, as shown in Chart 2. Only nine out of the 22 respondents held doctorates. They were from four private chartered universities and two public university libraries, as shown in Chart 2.

Further investigations showed that the professional staff available was very limiting in private universities, as shown in Chart 2. The findings also showed that the public universities and private chartered universities had the highest number of professional librarians, as shown in Chart 2. The results implied that there was a shortage of qualified staff in the private universities. In order to meet the programme and service needs of university libraries it is suggested that the universities employ adequate qualified staff.

The findings also revealed that most of the private universities had not used the library budget standard, as compared to the public universities. The results showed that university libraries received inadequate funding. These findings on library staffing and budget are in agreement with a study on library quality and impact by Weiner (2005:436), which found that library staffing, budget, the number of students and faculty at an institution affect the level or volume of certain services that a library provides.

The results showed that large populations of library users were not getting quality library services. It is suggested that the CHE ensures that the distance library services standard is implemented.

The findings showed that the CHE should place emphasis on the information literacy standard, administrative structure standard, library staffing standard, library budget standard and distance library standard during the revision of the CHE standards. This would be similar to the outcome of studies discussed by Lindauer (2002:14), which showed that the draft standards and relevant supporting documentation of the regional accreditation commissions in the US placed emphasis on outcomes assessment, distance education, and information literacy.

The findings have shown that the CHE standards should be subjected to regular review, consistent with international best practice.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed that the majority of the university libraries had used only five out of the ten standards as shown in Table 2. The majority had used the mission and vision standard (93%); the organisation and access to information resources standard (93%); the ICT resources standard (89%); the information resources standard (89%); and the library-building standard (81%). The results suggested that these standards have been greatly utilised by the libraries. The high usage of these aspects could be attributed to the eligibility requirements for licensing by the CHE.

Higher usage of the five standards could be attributed to the prescriptive nature of the CHE standards. This was the reason why the ALA advocated for the revision of the ACRL standards in the US because it found that the main reason for the earlier standards was for university librarians to become skilled in the process of examining and redefining necessary missions and assessing coherent goals. The attainment and redefining of these goals must be measured continually and effectively by assessing the needs of users, and identifying and applying measures that would reveal the extent to which an institution has successfully fulfilled its mission (ALA 2004:2).

The findings also showed that the less utilised standards were information literacy (74%); administrative structure (67%); library staffing (56%); library budget (48%); and the distance library (26%), as shown in Table 2. The low usage of these standards suggested that the CHE should ensure that they are complied with.

The majority of university libraries conducted library orientations and not information literacy programmes. Information literacy has been recognised as an integral component of assessment of student learning. To offer quality library and information services, there must be adequate qualified staff. The result of low implementation of the administrative structure and library staffing standards led to inadequate numbers of qualified librarians

to offer quality services. The public and private university libraries had the majority of qualified staff while private universities with LIA and registered universities had inadequate staff.

The revised CHE standards are mainly input-focused and prescriptive in nature. The standards do not include the measurement of outputs and outcomes in the assessment of the impact of university libraries. The existing standards have encouraged university libraries to meet minimum requirements as set out by CHE but they have not adequately addressed the teaching role of the library at universities. The CHE should place emphasis on the information literacy, administrative structure, library staffing, library budget and distance library standards during the evaluation of university libraries. It is imperative that the CHE ensure that the private universities implement the administrative structure and library staff standards.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that, in order to meet the programme and service needs of university libraries, universities should ensure that they have adequate numbers of qualified staff. The CHE should evaluate university libraries based on evidence of normative practice, hence the need to revise the standards. The standards should reflect the rapid changes brought about by different formats of information. The standards should also provide a comprehensive outline for methodologically examining and analysing the library operations, services and outcomes in the context of accreditation. The study further recommends that the CHE standards focus on outputs and outcomes of the library programmes as primary indicators of quality. The CHE should also focus on continuous improvement of optimal quality standards rather than just compliance with minimum standards.

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