



Enhancing access and efficiency: The role of library research guides in supporting academic success at Busitema University

Fredrick Kiwuwa Lugya

The Library, Busitema University, Jinja - Malaba Road, P.O. BOX 236, Tororo, Uganda

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Library research guides
Subject guides
Information literacy
Academic libraries
Open access
Digital divide
Uganda
Busitema University
Mixed-methods research

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study evaluates the implementation, perceived impact, and systemic barriers of standardized research guides at Busitema University, a multi-campus institution in Uganda. Through concurrent qualitative and quantitative data collection—including in-depth interviews with 30 students and 15 lecturers, open-ended surveys ($n = 142$), and document analysis—the research identifies both the transformative potential and critical limitations of the discipline-specific guides.

Findings reveal a significant awareness gap, with 55 % of interviewed students unaware of the guides' existence. Among regular users (40 % of interviewed students), concentrated in Engineering and Health Sciences, self-reported data indicated perceived time savings and enhanced research efficiency. The study highlights the pivotal role of lecturer-librarian collaboration, with successful partnerships in 8 of 15 cases correlating with higher reported guide engagement. However, institutional constraints—such as lack of recognition for collaborative work, cited by 73 % of non-adopting lecturers—and infrastructural challenges, including weekly internet outages faced by 75 % of rural students, significantly hindered scalability and consistent access.

The research demonstrates how localized content curation, incorporating 336 Ugandan policies and 524 scholar profiles, enhanced contextual relevance and addressed decolonial pedagogical aims. Persistent issues with content currency, including broken links reported by 23 % of users, underscored sustainability challenges.

Based on these findings, we propose an integrated intervention framework grounded in library and pedagogical scholarship: (1) LMS integration for seamless curricular embedding, (2) incentive structures to formalize faculty collaboration, and (3) participatory update cycles to maintain resource relevance. These evidence-based recommendations contribute to global conversations on equitable resource access, offering a replicable model for balancing standardization with contextual flexibility in resource-constrained academic environments.

Introduction

In the digital age, academic libraries are evolving from passive repositories into dynamic hubs for participatory learning and research. This evolution is particularly critical in resource-constrained higher education contexts, where systemic challenges—including fragmented digital infrastructure, limited access to scholarly materials, and uneven information literacy—persistently hinder academic achievement and research productivity (Lwoga & Sife, 2018; Owusu-Ansah et al., 2018). In response, libraries are increasingly deploying curated online research guides as strategic, low-cost interventions designed to streamline access to vetted resources and scaffold essential research competencies (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2019; Nedelina Tchangelova & Feigley, 2020).

This study investigates the implementation and impact of such an initiative at Busitema University, a multi-campus public institution in

Eastern Uganda. Confronting the dual challenges of resource scarcity and digital literacy gaps, the University Library adopted SubjectsPlus, an open-source platform, to develop a suite of standardized, discipline-specific research guides beginning in 2020. These guides were conceptualized as curated portals integrating global open-access scholarship with locally relevant Ugandan content—including policies, datasets, and faculty profiles—to bridge the gap between available resources and user needs (Alcock & Rose, 2016; Willinsky, 2006).

Despite the recognized potential of research guides to enhance academic success (Crenshaw & Johnson, 2024; Nguzo & Kuboja, 2023), their effective adoption is not guaranteed. Prior studies indicate that success hinges on alignment with curricular needs, user-centered design, and active faculty-librarian collaboration—factors often complicated by institutional constraints (Gonzalez & Westbrook, 2010; Moukhliiss, 2024; Raven, 2012). Preliminary observations at Busitema University

E-mail address: flugya@busitema.ac.ug.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2025.103189>

Received 4 May 2025; Received in revised form 1 December 2025; Accepted 18 December 2025

Available online 30 December 2025

0099-1333/© 2025 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.