

## Research Article

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## The state of library funding compliance by university libraries in Uganda

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This study examined the extent to which university libraries in Uganda complied with the funding policy by the National Council of Higher Education, which requires institutions to spend not less than 10% of their budgets on libraries. Findings revealed that systemic underfunding exists, with most universities putting in merely 2% to 5%, affecting library collections, staffing levels, and ICT infrastructure standards. This inquiry employed several data-gathering techniques, including a survey of 95 library staff, interviews with 12 heads of libraries, as well as documentary analysis. Findings further revealed systemic reliance on unsustainable donor funding, poor policy enforcement, and dependence on unsustainable alternative revenue streams. Hence, the research concludes that non-compliance threatens the realization of quality in academia and even in the accreditation of the institutions. The study then recommends that to address these challenges, strict enforcement of NCHE funding policies

should be undertaken, and library revenues should be diversified through income-generating activities, capacity building, and concerted lobbying for Uganda university libraries against the national and international library funding standards. The reliable implementation of these strategies would enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Uganda.

**Keywords** – Budget compliance, Library funding, Resource allocation, University libraries

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The state of library funding in Ugandan universities remains a condition bearing grave concern, as there has been continuous underfunding, thereby crippling their ability to support teaching, learning, and research. Academic library systems in the developed world such as introduced in the United States and the United Kingdom have maintained sustainable funding through the diversification of revenue sources-govt. allocations, endowments, and partner funds (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2011). South African universities are better compliant, whereby a formal policy framework requires 8–12% of university-shaped institutional budgets to be set apart for libraries (Zimu-Biyela, 2021; Chisita, 2023). In Uganda, however, the National Council for Higher Education sets a 10% minimum budget allocation for library operation (NCHE, 2014; NCHE, 2005), which is not followed (NCHE, 2021/2022). This shows that a massive gap exists between policy and practice, and this is worsened by competing priorities within institutions that lack enforcing virtues. At the national level, underfunding threatens the quality of higher education and accreditation of institutions, thus, on the global level, dynamics instead deepen the gap

between Ugandan universities and their rich competitors. This study thus assesses compliance with NCHE funding standards, reviews implications of underfunding on library services, and provides actionable recommendations for sustainable financing. In doing so, this well-cast gap in the research will breathe life into policy reform and campaign for stronger library funding toward aligning Uganda's academic libraries to regional and world standards; hence, elites in the help of education and research.

### 1.1. Problem statement

The compliance of university libraries in Uganda with the National Council for Higher Education funding standards has remained an important concern, as many institutions fail to meet the minimum statutory requirement of allocating 10% of their recurrent budgets for library development (NCHE, 2005). Persistent underfunding has been documented, with some universities putting less than 5% of their budgets into libraries, thereby weakening them further to satisfy academic demands (Kasozi, 2017; NCHE, 2021/2022). The results of this neglect, financial-wise, are plainly seen with outdated print collections and insufficient digital resources, accompanied by continuing staff shortages, all of which undermine library service provisions in support of teaching, learning, and research. NCHE further observed that few institutions really comply with the standards; the majority of institutions compound funding of their libraries as second, after funding for other operational costs. This has created huge disparities in academic resources among the universities and thus nurtured systemic inequalities in higher education. Thus, enforcement of compliance with funding standards will greatly benefit in order to expand library services and align them to national and global standards in academic quality.

### 1.2. Research questions

- i. What was the state of adherence to library funding requirements by university libraries in Uganda?
- ii. What strategies could be put in place to ensure sustainable funding to guarantee Ugandan university libraries meet national and international standards?

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The study's literature review is based on its research objectives and theoretical framework, reviewing existing information to position the research and to spot gaps for future investigation.

### 2.1. Theoretical framework

The theories of the Compliance Theory (Etienne, 2011) and Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) were used to analyze the issues of library funding in Ugandan universities. Compliance Theory emphasizes the fact that universities still fail to follow the NCHE funding level, which stipulates that the budget should allocate 10 percent to libraries. This is mostly due to the lack of an enforcement mechanism and institutional incentives, which tend to make universities focus on revenue-generating units rather than libraries. In contrast, the Institutional Theory under the perspective of normative isomorphism brings out the differences between the underfunding of the Ugandan and the funding compliance of the South African institutions by citing the presence of professional values shared amongst the practitioners and external pressures that promote financial accountability.

The two theories combine to place the neglect of libraries within the system in the failure of governance (weak structures of compliance) and misalignment of institutions (absence of normative pressures). The above theoretical foundation is based on the recommendation of the enforceability of the funding strategies and the adoption of international best practices to realize sustainable funding strategies in libraries.

## 2.2. Library funding standards in universities

Global standards in library budgeting and finance address sustainable methods of funding to ensure long-term viability for libraries. Countries all over have introduced best practices in library management finances, which comprise revenue diversification techniques, via grants, partnerships, and fundraising (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2011; Committee of Higher Education Libraries of South Africa, 2019). This funding system is for ICT infrastructure, collection development, and user-style services-area funding in line with library international standards (Adekoya, 2023). Also, these standards emphasize an open, accountable budgeting process that guarantees the funds' proper application toward academic aims and library services (Pampel, 2020). Innovative financing mechanisms provided are endowment funds, alumni contributions, etc. These are revenue-generating resources to complement government grants, which encourage investment into new technologies to increase resource accessibility (Okojie & Mattern, 2018). These practices act as a benchmark for many regions worldwide and have valuable lessons for libraries on how to fashion sound financial mechanisms along the lines of international standards, but also subscribe them to an innovation agenda.

African countries such as South Africa have adopted organized budgetary systems that indicate academic intentions for library services. The government in South Africa particularly stipulates that a minimum percentage from the university budgets be set aside for library services use to ensure sustainable finance so that the libraries acquire ICT infrastructure, develop their digital collections, and develop user-oriented services (Committee of Higher Education Libraries of South Africa, 2019). Again, the setting up of national and regional library networks in different parts of Africa seems seemingly targeted toward future sharing and collaboration of resources and hence the mitigation of funding obstacles facing individual institutions (Ocholla & Shongwe, 2021). The problems still remain, hindrances like financial instability, insufficient government support, and competing university interests that African universities face. As a result, most African universities, including those in Uganda itself, fall short of these modern-day financial demands of library services (Agyekum & Filson, 2022). Despite the challenges, South Africa's way of funding libraries will, therefore, provide a typical frame of reference for funding other African countries in regions with similar challenges (Jain, 2020). Regional integration of library funding into national education budgets could thus lead to improved financial sustainability with better access to library services throughout Africa.

In Uganda, funding remains one of the major hindrances faced by university libraries while trying to meet set standards, though NCHE (2014) urges the universities to dedicate 10% of their budgets to library services. Such guidance is simply not followed, the library therefore being underfunded and unable to cater to the rising demands of the student and staffing (Bushman & Ngulube, 2014). Due to this, most libraries grapple with ICT infrastructure inadequacies, less staff training, and meagre acquisition of digital resources that considerably constrain them in attaining the internationally accepted norms (NCHE, 2018/2019). The absence of a more or less viable and reliable funding arrangement common in most African countries, conversely, washes away the importance of libraries in fostering study and research (Irenoa, 2019). Therefore, Ugandan universities must adopt sustainable financial mechanisms aligned with institutional missions as well as international best practices, including external funding through grants and other partnerships (Schiavone, 2020; Pampel, 2022), so as to enhance service delivery and compliance with both national and global library standards.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The pragmatic research paradigm was adopted in the current study to explore the status of compliance with library-funding standards that prevailed in the Uganda university libraries. Since the paradigm of the pragmatic approach chose not to be mistaken, a mixed-methods approach was taken so as to employ both quantitative as well as qualitative methods in order to not only verify how much compliance with the funding occurred, but also determine the contextual issues behind it. The research involved a descriptive study design because it helped to

produce a methodical and overall evaluation of supplying funds, allocating resources, and reacting to the universities.

The study population comprised 159 library personnel working in 12 universities within Uganda's four regions. By applying the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a sample size of 111 was attained, of which 95 respondents returned filled questionnaires. Multi-stage sampling procedures were followed: systematic sampling was applied in sampling the universities; proportional stratified sampling was applied in determining the number of respondents per institution; simple random sampling was then applied in choosing respondents within each library, both staff and users, while the head librarians together with NCHE officers were purposively selected to weigh in with expert opinions on issues of funding compliance. Data collection was via questionnaires (to capture staff and user perceptions of the sufficiency of funding), interviews (which explored the barriers to financial compliance), observations (to validate some physical indicators such as infrastructure and staffing), and document review (to determine if budgets, financial records, and policy documents confirmed the perceptions drawn in the questionnaires and interviews). Together, these methods provided an adequate basis for the assessment of funding compliance, reflecting both the statistical trend and institutional realities within the university libraries in Uganda.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the findings of the study are reported and explained concerning the compliance with the state of adequate library funding on the part of the universities. The questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews were used to gather data in order to determine whether the institutions adhere to the recommendation by the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE), which states that 10 percent of university budgets should be spent on library services. The section offers quantitative data on the library employees and qualitative data from interviews with the head librarians and NCHE officials explaining the deficits in library funding, institutional limits in terms of financial compliance, and the possibility of sustainable funds to finance libraries. It goes on to examine the situation at present with an eye to the prospects of funding, the perceptions of staff to workable options in this field, and the proposed suggestions, and thus presents to the reader the fiscal viability and opportunities of libraries in the Ugandan philosophy of the world.

##### 4.1. The state of library funding by universities in Uganda

Ugandan university libraries are less funded than national and international standards-diminishing greatly service efficiency and resource quality. Nationally, the NCHE recommends that for any university, at least 10% of its budget must be allocated to libraries, but many never even meet this threshold due to inadequate budgets and competing priorities (NCHE, 2014). The study used interviews and questionnaires to solicit data from respondents below. Interviews were conducted with head librarians of 12 university libraries, as shown below.

**Table 1:** Interview responses from Key Informants on library funding in universities

Responses	Universities
Just 5% of the university's budget have been allocated to the library.	A, B, C, D, E, I, L.
Just 3% of the university's budget have been allocated to the library.	F, G, H.
Just 2% of the university's budget have been allocated to the library.	J, K.
The library's sources of income are somewhat limited.	A, B.
Library life runs on donations. external sources	C, D, E, G, H, I, J, K, L.
Relies on donations but struggling with the sustainability of income.	C, D, E, G, H, I, J, K, L.

Field data 2023

To supplement the interview findings, a questionnaire with a Likert scale was distributed to library staff to seek their opinion on library funding, as seen in Table 2 below.

#### 4.1.1. The opinion of library staff on library funding

The library staff are vital in advocating for higher funding because their frontline experience shows the real-world impact of budget cuts on services, resources, and user access. Having the general staff included in discussions surrounding funding leads to practical, cost-effective solutions, provides stronger advocacy, and improves staff morale through transparency. Staff knowledge helps formulate sustainable strategies that could mesh with operational realities as well as patron needs.

**Table 2:** Opinion of library staff on library funding

Library funding	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean
The library is well-funded to run library services	9(9.5%)	40(42.1%)	13(13.7%)	26(27.4%)	7(7.4%)	2.81
The library receives 10% of the main university budget to run library affairs	8(8.4%)	19(20%)	39(41.1%)	21(22.1%)	8(8.4%)	3.02
The library has another source of income apart from university main budget	21(22.1%)	33(34.7%)	33(34.7%)	6(6.3%)	2(2.1%)	2.32
The library has got other sources of income outside university budget.	24(25.3%)	27(28.4%)	21(22.1%)	22(23.2%)	1(1.1%)	2.46
Average	15.50	29.75	26.50	18.75	4.50	2.65

Source: Field data 2023

In order to determine the status of library funding in Ugandan universities, the study employed mixed methods of data collection, including interviews with head librarians and Likert-scale questionnaires administered to library staff, so as to triangulate methodologically and enhance the validity of the results obtained. Interview data (Table 1) showed that out of the twelve (12) sampled universities, 58.33% (7: A, B, C, D, E, I, and L) actually allocate only 5% of their budget to their libraries against the NCHE recommendation of 10%, thus the sample exhibited a general underfunding. It was further established that funding of libraries in most of these universities depends largely on donations and other external sources, with universities C to L especially finding it hard to maintain such arrangements, as attested to by the head librarians who commented on the instability of these financial sources. The library staff survey (Table 2) supported these findings; only 7.4% strongly agreed that their libraries are adequately funded, and only 8.4% strongly agreed that libraries get the recommended 10% of the university budget. Most of the staff either disagreed or remained undecided, as represented by the low mean scores of 2.81 and 3.02 for these items, respectively. Furthermore, 56.8% disagreed with the statement that there are other sources of income for libraries outside university budgets, with a low mean of 2.32. An overall mean score of 2.65 based on all funding-related items suggested that staff ranked financial support to libraries on the lower side. Taken together, these two data sets present consistent and convergent evidence that Ugandan university libraries face very severe underfunding, relying largely on unstable external donations with an urgent need to diversify incomes for better service delivery and long-term planning.

#### 4.2. Strategies ensure sustainable funding in Uganda university libraries

Sustainable funding is required for setting up and efficiently running university libraries, especially in an economically disadvantaged set-up like Uganda. Though the NCHE directs that at least 10% of a university's recurrent budget be set aside for the library, most universities in Uganda fall short of this requirement, thereby

limiting such resources as staff and infrastructure. India, on the other hand, has been able to put in place several policies for the funding of academic libraries that provide some revenue for these libraries and also encourage some revenue-generating activities. Taking these into account, some consideration will have to be given to ways of sustaining Ugandan university libraries in the long term. The respondents were asked: What strategies do you think can best ensure sustainable funding in university libraries?

**Table 3:** Strategies ensure sustainable funding in university libraries

Strategies	N	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev
University library should establish income generating activities to fund the library services	95	25(5.8%)	9(2.1%)	5(1.2%)	225(52%)	169(39%)	4.16	.990
Increase on library fees paid by students in order to support library service implementation	95	45(10.4%)	119(25.9%)	31(7.2%)	126(29.1%)	112(25.9%)	3.33	1.384
Grand mean	95						3.75	1.187

Source: Field Data, 2023

The respondents consisted of 95 members, from whom the results strongly indicate support for fundraising activities by libraries, such as offering short course training, charging for the provision of information services, or engaging in consultancy work for library budgetary enhancement. This particular option recorded a very high mean of 4.16 (SD = 0.99), showing that most staff moved between “agree” and almost “strongly agree” with very little disagreement. Conversely, the suggestion of raising student fees for library services could only get a mediocre endorsement rating (mean = 3.33; SD = 1.38), indicating a rather split opinion, with quite sizeable minorities against or undecided, probably due to concerns about students' inability to pay and the risk of furthering access inequities. Given a grand mean value of 3.75 (SD = 1.19), it could be inferred that though on an aggregate level, respondents view the suggested funding measures very positively; however, entrepreneurial library initiatives definitely find favour over passing on such financial burdens onto the students as the more practical and sustainable solution for chronic underfunding in Uganda university libraries.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This research reveals glaring noncompliance with NCHE statutory guidelines requiring 10% institutional budgets for university libraries. It shows that, apart from a few specifying universities like J and K with just 2% in library budgets, Ugandan Universities generally allocate about 2-5% of their budgets to libraries, far below the required threshold. This is a chronic situation of underfunding that handicaps the operations of the library, resource acquisition, integration of ICT, employment of staff, and infrastructure development. The noncompliance, under the purview of Compliance Theory (Etienne, 2011), is explained by the lack of enforcement mechanisms and institutional incentives that may make libraries a priority; they are usually looked upon as cost centers and not assets to academics. This is further supported by Bushman's (2021) observation that an increase in enrolment and academic programs is not matched by an increase in library funding, hence compromising service quality. In contrast, Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) explains why some systems, such as South Africa's, have better compliance. South African universities budget for their libraries anywhere between 8 and 12 percent, which is an instance of normative isomorphic behavior, where adherence to professional standards or peer pressures drives funding compliance (Zimu-Biyela & Chisita, 2023). Uganda's failure to emulate such a model reflects weak institutional norms and a lack of shared accountability.

From such a study, one must urgently call for systemic reforms to provide for enforceable minimum levels of library allocations, to diversify revenues, and to create an advocacy thrust that recognizes libraries as key to academic excellence. Without interventions, the Ugandan university sector will risk institutional stagnation, thereby becoming a drain on the quality of education and on national development. These findings should trigger in the stakeholders a drive to incorporate best practices from successful models such as those in South Africa, where, among other things, budget ring-fencing has become accepted and normative institutional pressure supports sustainable library funding. Resolving funding gaps is indeed a fundamental ingredient upon which to build the transformation of university libraries in Uganda to be at par with NCHE standards and internationally recognized standards for academic support services.

## 6. SUMMARY OF STUDY FINDINGS

The study showed that most university libraries in Uganda were grossly underfunded, receiving only between 2% and 5.5% of their respective institutional budgets. This is far less than the 10% recommended by the NCHE. The study evidenced that a budget of 5% is awarded to libraries in Universities A, B, C, D, E, I, and L, whereas Universities F, G, and H allocate just about 3%, and Universities J and K assign 2%, thus creating vast disparities and general underinvestment in library services.

The study revealed that many university libraries are financially dependent on donor organizations and mostly engaged in short-term donor-funded projects in various universities, such as C, D, E, G, H, I, J, K, and L. This, therefore, creates an unstable financial base that cannot be sustained over the long run.

The study findings revealed that 34.8% of library staff considered their libraries to be sufficiently funded, whereas 51.6% did not, with an average score of 2.81, thus showing a general dissatisfaction with funding levels.

The study showed that 41.1% of library staff were unaware of the guideline by NCHE that a library should receive at least 10% of university budgets, evidence revealing gaps in communication and policy awareness in institutions.

The study findings revealed overwhelming support for income-generating activities like consultancy, training, and paid services, with a mean rating of 4.16 and 91% respondents' agreement. Consequently, the preferences sway towards sustainable management.

The study findings indicated a totally opposite stand of opinion on the matter of increasing fees for library services. Some 25.9% strongly agree with the idea, yet 36.3% are opposed to it for reasons of student equity.

## 7. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Drawing from policy analysis, institutional governance, library management, and future research, the results generated great interest in institutional governance and future research, particularly within the context of Uganda's higher education system.

### Policy implications

Since uncompromising noncompliance with the 10% funding for libraries recommended by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) exists, thus, enforcement of a policy needs to be put in place urgently. A number of mechanisms worthy of consideration by these regulatory bodies could be a monitoring framework, penalties, and/or incentives to ensure the libraries are well-financed. On top of that, the study found that library staff did not know about the 10% policy; hence, opportunities must be created for awareness and dissemination of such policies across institutions.

### Institutional implications

At an institutional level, university management needs to review internal budget priorities so that libraries remain strategic academic partners and not just cost centers. Institutional development should move to ring-fence library

budgets, a trend that is gradually being accepted worldwide in countries such as South Africa. The study suggests that institutions should train for income diversification.

### **Social and equity implications**

The mixed reaction to the increase in library fees and the accompanying access concern implies that any funding strategy must carefully weigh student affordability and fairness. Policymakers and university officials must ensure that generating additional revenue does not further social inequalities, particularly for the disadvantaged student group.

### **Theoretical implications**

The application of Compliance Theory and Institutional Theory in this study confirms that weak institutional norms coupled with a lack of enforcement mechanisms are the core causes of non-compliance with funding. Strengthening normative pressures and sharing an institutional culture around the value of libraries will help in increased compliance.

## **8. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study offers several contributions to the scientific and scholarly community in the spheres of library and information science, higher education policy, and institutional management in the first place. First, it gives an empirical indication of the discontinuity between library funding standards set by the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) and the financial practices of universities in Uganda. The study closes a major gap in scholarly literature on library funding in developing countries and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular because the study logically documents this noncompliance and its impact on the delivery of library services.

Second, the study has a theoretical contribution due to applying the Compliance Theory and Institutional Theory in academic libraries. It reveals how the institutional action, low normative pressures, and lack of effective enforcement procedures cause systematic underfunding. The theoretical applications provide a basis in which the dynamics of policy implementation in resource-limited contexts may be further investigated. In addition, this paper incorporates the insights of librarians, university administrators, and the regulatory agencies to provide a multi-stakeholder approach that is deeper in analysis and has academic credibility.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

This research study concluded that the funding status of university libraries in Uganda is at a critically low level, where most institutions allocate from as little as 2% to 5% for library services. This is in stark contrast to an NCHE (National Council for Higher Education) recommendation of 10%. The long-term impacts have been the continuing underfunding, outdated collection, poor infrastructure, an inadequate number of staff, and complete reliance on donor-based support that is not sustainable. Both the staff and administration showed a very low level of confidence regarding the sufficiency and diversity of library funds, indicated by a mean score of 2.65. Slight improvements were also observed in the incorporation of ICT, but non-compliance to NCHE standards is serious in key areas such as staffing ratios, physical infrastructure, and accessibility of learning facilities. These are typical underfunding trends seen all over the world, but these mechanisms to ensure sustainable finance for library systems are lacking in Ugandan universities. Unless there is sudden intervention to save it both financially and in policy, this trend will degenerate further and will put both the academic quality and research output at heavy risk, and also compromise the institutional accreditation.

## 10. RECOMMENDATION

To solve the underfunding problem of university libraries in Uganda, the NCHE and the Ministry of Education can impose stringent enforcement mechanisms by requiring universities to commit at least 10% of their income to library services, with such institutions failing to comply denied accreditation. Audits of actual libraries should be carried out to monitor transparency in the use of library funds. Sustainable funding regimes may comprise ring-fenced grants for libraries from national education funds and further encourage public-private partnerships. Library associations ought to therefore promote vigorous advocacy to facilitate policy reforms, sensitize stakeholders on the importance of libraries, and publish annual compliance reports on the funding performance of institutions with regard to NCHE requirements.

The study further recommends that underfunding be tripled by university administrators who should continue to prioritize libraries in their financial planning and/or strategic planning processes. Institutions could raise funding for the libraries so as to reach NCHE's minimum level in such important areas as resource acquisition, human capital, and infrastructure improvement. The needs of the library should be incorporated into the institutional strategic plan itself for long-term sustainability. Besides the traditional approaches, the institutions could look at other, more innovative sources of income, such as through establishment of endowment funds, a share of research grants, some small user charges for library services from non-students, and advertisement of library facilities for publishers and other partners. The institution must promote transparency in budgeting by registering library staff with the institutional budget committees to relate allocation to actual operational needs, while annual library financial reports should be published to foster accountability and thus internal trust.

In addition, the study recommends that university libraries should take a more proactive stance in lobbying and advocacy through both internal and external fronts. Creating ad hoc advocacy committees may allow library leadership to actively engage university councils, NCHE, and other stakeholders to paint a vivid picture of the funding gaps and libraries' effects on academic performance. Libraries should save costs by reallocating and sharing resources, for example, consortium subscriptions for journals, and enhancing digital services to lessen dependence on expensive print materials. Under external fund-securing processes, it was equally important for libraries to explore and apply for international grants from bodies such as UNESCO and the Carnegie Corporation, as well as develop partnerships with NGOs and alumni associations to secure donations and build long-term endowment funds.

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