

Development of Intellectual Property Information Services in Zimbabwe's University Libraries: Assessing the Current Status and Mapping the Future Direction

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Abstract : The study investigates the current status of Intellectual Property (IP) information services in Zimbabwe's university libraries. Specifically, the study assesses the current IP information services offered in Zimbabwe's university libraries, identifies challenges to the development of comprehensive IP information services in Zimbabwe's university libraries, and suggests solutions for the development of IP information services in Zimbabwe's university libraries. The study is born out of a realisation that research on IP information services in university libraries has received little attention, especially in developing country contexts, despite the fact that there are calls for heightened participation of university libraries in IP information services. In Zimbabwe, the launch of the National Intellectual Property Policy and Implementation Strategy 2018-2022 and the introduction of the Education 5.0 concept are set to significantly change the IP landscape in the country. Education 5.0 places more emphasis on innovation and industrialisation (in addition to teaching, community service, and research), and has the potential to shift the focus and level of IP output produced in higher and tertiary education institutions beyond copyrights and more towards commercially exploited patents, utility models, and industrial designs. The growing importance of IP commercialisation in universities creates a need for appropriate IP information services to assist students, academics, researchers, administrators, start-ups, entrepreneurs, and inventors. The critical challenge for university libraries is to reposition themselves and remain relevant in the new trajectory. Designing specialised information services to support increased IP generation and commercialisation appears to be an opportunity for university libraries to stay relevant in the knowledge economy. However, IP information services in Zimbabwe's universities appear to be incomplete and focused mostly on assisting with research publications and copyright-related activities. Research on the existing status of IP services in university libraries in Zimbabwe is therefore necessary to help identify gaps and provide solutions in order to stimulate the growth of new forms of such services. The study employed a quantitative approach. An online questionnaire was administered to 57 academic librarians from 15 university libraries. Findings show that the current focus of the surveyed institutions is on providing scientific research support services (15); disseminating/sharing university research output (14); and copyright activities (12). More specialised IP information services such as IP education and training, patent information services, IP consulting services, IP online service platforms, and web-based IP information services are largely unavailable in Zimbabwean university libraries. Results reveal that the underlying challenge in the development of IP information services in Zimbabwe's university libraries is insufficient IP knowledge among academic librarians, which is exacerbated by inadequate IP management frameworks in university institutions. The study proposes a framework for the entrenchment of IP information services in Zimbabwe's university libraries.

Keywords : academic libraries, information services, intellectual property, IP knowledge, university libraries, Zimbabwe

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