Chapter 4
Accessibility of Research Data at Academic Institutions in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the findings of an online survey that was carried out to assess research data accessibility at research and academic institutions in Zimbabwe. The study primarily sought to ascertain the custodianship, storage and accessibility of research data at these institutions. The chapter also highlights the challenges associated with accessing research data in Zimbabwe and proposes mechanisms that can be put in place to address these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Research data is “any information collected, stored, and processed to produce and validate original research results” (Macalester College 2018). Research data is therefore critical to the research process. Research data can be in the form of text, figures, audio, video, graphs, specimens, software etc. DePaul University Library (2018) defines research data management (RDM) as the “care and maintenance of the data that is produced during the course of a research cycle”. RDM involves file naming, data access, data documentation, metadata creation and controlled
vocabularies, data storage, data archiving and preservation, data sharing and reuse, data privacy, data rights and data publishing (Henderson 2017). RDM is a key component of the research process as it helps to ensure that data is properly organized, described, preserved and shared (DePaul University Library 2018). This chapter presents findings of an online survey that was carried out to assess research data accessibility at academic institutions in Zimbabwe. The academic institutions surveyed included universities, polytechnics, research institutions, libraries, records centres and archival institutions. Sixty-one responses were received from participating institutions and respondents included librarians, researchers, record managers, archivists, information technology experts and research officers. The study was aimed at ascertaining the custodianship, storage and accessibility of research data at these institutions and highlighting the challenges associated with accessing research data at academic institutions in Zimbabwe.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study sought to specifically answer the following research questions:

1. Who is responsible for managing the data?
2. Where is the research data stored?
3. Who can access the research data?
4. What are the challenges associated with accessing the research data?

**Research Data Custodianship**

Whyte, Jones and Pryor (2014) and Corrall (2012) observe that although roles and responsibilities in RDM have not yet been clearly spelt out, libraries and librarians are taking a leading role in assuming responsibility for research data. She points out that university librarians are participating in activities that assist researchers in accessing research data. Corrall (2012), however, notes that apart from librarians, there are other key players who have been involved in RDM; information and computer scientists, database and software engineers and programmers, disciplinary experts, curators and expert annotators and archivists. In the context of RDM, these professionals are collectively referred to as ‘data scientists’ and the same study also confirms collaboration amongst the various professionals in RDM (Corrall 2012:106). Some researchers however, continue to prefer keep research data themselves on their desktops, laptops and other devices at their disposal (Procter, Halfpenny and Voss 2012).
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[www.igi-global.com/article/social-media-and-library-services/188342?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/social-media-and-library-services/188342?camid=4v1a)

Development and Practice of Research Support Services in Peking University Library
[www.igi-global.com/article/development-and-practice-of-research-support-services-in-peking-university-library/228176?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/development-and-practice-of-research-support-services-in-peking-university-library/228176?camid=4v1a)