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In/gratitude? Library acknowledgement in theses and dissertations at a distinguished African university

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In/gratitude? Library acknowledgement in theses and dissertations at a distinguished African university

Abstract

Giving credit to where it is due is common across cultures. In research, researchers widely express their gratitude to those who would have contributed to their studies in one way or the other under the acknowledgements section. In most cases, the selection of who to acknowledge remains the prerogative of the author. The purpose of this study was to review acknowledgements in Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) with a special focus on the acknowledgement accorded to the library and librarians at the North-West University in South Africa. This was done in order to determine the perceived value of librarians as partners in the research process by postgraduate students. The study followed a two pronged approach in which bibliometrics and survey research methods were used. In the case of the bibliometrics, ETDs completed between 2012 and 2018 were reviewed. Regarding the survey, both print and online questionnaires were used to gather data from postgraduate students. Excel spreadsheets and QuestionPro software were used to analyse the data. The study findings indicate that supervisors of research work topped the list of acknowledgees followed by family, friends and colleagues. The library/librarian acknowledgements, were among the least with only 15% of ETDs giving gratitude to the library/librarians. However, like in previous studies, it was observed that library/librarians were mentioned in other parts of the ETDs, apart from the acknowledgements section. The results further indicate that the majority of the surveyed participants, held acknowledgements in high esteem. The paper will go a long way in adding value to a body of existing literature which is largely from the developed world. It may also stimulate interest for related studies in other developing countries.

Keywords: acknowledgements, theses and dissertations, research, impact; academic libraries, postgraduate students

1. Introduction

Acknowledgements, the practice of recognising the direct and indirect assistance of others in preparing and writing a research document, are often ignored by bibliometricians (Caidi, 1997; Rattan, 2014; Finnell, 2014). There are several reasons why acknowledgements do not appeal as much as citations to bibliometricians. These include the fact that acknowledgements are an informal, benevolent act that some authors choose not to include in their research document. Writing acknowledgements in theses and dissertations remains optional in many universities (Newton Gresham Library, 2019). Unlike citations, acknowledgements do not carry weight in the final assessment of the document itself (Hyland, 2003; Kumar & Sanderson, 2019), they do not have a prescribed structure and content (Beach-Bertin, 2018), and they do not have a cumulative value in that they cannot be reused to further develop scholarship (Caidi, 1997). Acknowledgements give credit to those people who may have assisted to writing a specific document hence they cannot be used on any other document.

For many years, acknowledgement data has been difficult to access for purposes of analysis due to the fact that there was no database that covers them. Since 2008, Web-of-Science (WoS) has been providing information about funding acknowledgements in documents it indexes. This has

made the analysis of funding acknowledgements in WoS indexed publications easier (Costas & Van Leeuwen, 2012). However, there is currently no database that provides data on theses and dissertation acknowledgements although the availability of theses and dissertations in electronic format has made the accessibility and analysis of acknowledgements in these publications somewhat easier (Cheng, 2012). According to Hyland (2003; 2004), acknowledgements in theses and dissertations (TDs) serve three purposes, which are: to demonstrate the students' understanding of the values of modesty, gratitude and appreciation in the academy; to enhance a students' credibility; to establish their sense of recognition of indebtedness to others and to provide closure after a long arduous journey writing a thesis or a dissertation. Mantai & Dowling (2015:106) assert that "acknowledgements provide insights into students' personal and professional development and identification as researchers". Acknowledgements can serve as a reward and recognition for the acknowledgees. They may stimulate the acknowledgees' performance as they feel that their efforts are appreciated by the students. In dissecting acknowledgements, Cronin & Weaver (1995) noticed that they serve six purposes, which are to thank others for moral support, financial support, access to facilities, clerical support, technical support and Peer Interactive Communication (PIC). In Cronin & Weaver (1995), library acknowledgements fell in the general support with access to facilities (and resources) category. However, for purposes of this study, library support is treated as a separate category.

The main aim of this paper is to examine acknowledgements in electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) completed from 2012 to 2018 at the North-West University in South Africa. Costas & Van Leeuwen (2012) realised that the extent and number of acknowledgements in academic literature increased. This, however, has not been accompanied by the increase in the studies covering this genre (Hyland, 2003). There are perceptions that the number of acknowledgements of libraries and librarians have decreased due to limited contact with the postgraduate students who now rely on electronic access for most of their information resources (Beach-Bertin, 2018). There were five reasons, therefore, why this study was conducted. Firstly, this study was motivated by a desire to determine if acknowledgements to libraries decreased or increased at the North-West University over the past seven years. The second reason for this study was to find-out if, as argued elsewhere in library literature (Finnell, 2014; Hubbard, Laddusaw, Kitchens, & Kimball, 2018), acknowledgements can be used to demonstrate the impact of libraries and librarians. Thirdly, this study was motivated by the authors' curiosity to discover how acknowledgements trends and practices in NWU ETDs compare to those of other institutions where other studies were conducted. Fourthly, acknowledgements in ETDs are hardly studied bibliometrically so this paper aims to add value to this area. Fifthly, it appears that no study emanating from the developing world has been conducted in the area of library acknowledgements. As far as the authors are concerned, there is an academic *lacuna* in this area as it remains the exclusive domain of the developed world in literature. This paper, therefore, aims to fill that void. The paper has the following specific objectives:

- To establish the proportion of acknowledgements in ETDs at North-West University.
- To discover the extent of library acknowledgement in those ETDs.
- To identify librarians that get acknowledged in those ETDs.
- To determine the acknowledgement behaviour of masters and doctoral students in ETDs.

2. Background and context

South Africa is a middle income country with vast socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, high illiteracy levels, inequality, crime and corruption (South Africa, 2012). The National Development Plan of South Africa (the NDP) is a socioeconomic policy blueprint that aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality in the country (South Africa, 2012). According to the NDP, South Africa remains one of the most unequal economies in the world meaning an imbalance between the rich and poor (South Africa, 2012). The country has identified the increase in the number of people with masters and PhDs as one of the key strategies to deal with its numerous socio-economic challenges (South Africa, 2012). The NDP seeks to ensure that 25% of all university students in public universities are masters and doctoral students by 2030 (South Africa, 2012). In addition, the NDP states that the country needs its universities to produce more than 5000 PhDs a year to deal with some of the country's socio-economic challenges and needs. To achieve its targets, the government tasked the country's 26 public universities with producing quality postgraduate students and research output. Public universities in the country, including the NWU, have taken note of the government policy and now identify the increase in the number of postgraduate students as one of their research strategies (NWU, 2016). The University has 8 faculties, which are: Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, Law, Natural and Agricultural Sciences and Theology. The majority of the faculties are duplicated across the three campuses except Engineering which is only based in the Potchefstroom Campus. According to its statistics, NWU had 72, 994 students in 2017 of which 16, 167 (or 22.2%) were postgraduate students at honours, masters and PhD levels (NWU, 2018). Out of the 16, 167 postgraduate students, only 4, 219 (or 5.8% of 72 994) were doing masters and PhDs while the rest were at honours level meaning that the University is way too short of the ambitious government target of 25% of all registered students at masters and PhD level by 2030 in its universities. In order to achieve its research targets, the University has entrusted the three campus libraries (Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal) and five small branch libraries in Potchefstroom with providing research support and dedicated spaces for its postgraduate students. The library does not only assist postgraduate students registered at the NWU. As a member of the Committee of Higher Education Librarians of South Africa (CHELSA), NWU is party to a memorandum of understanding ("The CHELSA Agreement") signed between public university libraries in the country to provide free access to all postgraduate students in South African public universities provided they receive a letter of introduction from their host institution (CHELSA, 2005). Since 2014, dedicated library spaces called research commons have been opened in the three campuses of the University (North-West University Library and Information Service, 2017). It is hoped that these dedicated scholarly spaces will not only assist the University to increase postgraduate uptake, throughput and output but also improve the standing and impact of the library within the university. In the current climate of fiscal austerity, the library, like all other entities, must account for the funds invested to postgraduate support and prove its value to the university. Finnell (2014) and Hubbard et al. (2018) maintains that one way of demonstrating the impact and value of libraries in postgraduate learning, research and throughput is through acknowledgements in TDs.

3. Literature review

The literature review of this study is in three parts, which are a historical overview of acknowledgements, acknowledgements studies in other disciplines and acknowledgement studies in librarianship.

3.1 Historical overview of acknowledgements

Many researchers of acknowledgements literature concede that very little is known or written about their (acknowledgements) early history (Giannoni, 2002; Scrivener, 2009). Giannoni (2002) point out that acknowledgements originated from the time when benevolence and generosity was still expected from writers of published works. Roberts (2003) provides some interesting anecdotes of the early history of acknowledgements and the reasons for them. Roberts point out that by the 16th and 17th centuries, acknowledgements were usually done for strategic reasons, to endear one to the financial benefactors or patrons or printing presses. Therefore, the common practice was not to recognise intellectual contributions to the written work (Roberts, 2003; Atkinson, 1999). Despite the fact that acknowledgements in written monographs and other texts date centuries back, it was not widespread until the mid-20th century. Hyland (2004) and Hubbard et al. (2018) cite Bazerman (1988) as indicating that acknowledgements in journals can be traced back to the 1940's although they only became common in the 1960's. There is even more little knowledge of the origins of acknowledgements in TDs (Hubbard et al., 2018). This practice, however, seems to have existed by 1930 as Scrivener (2009) discovered the existence of at least one book on theses writing providing some guidance on writing theses acknowledgements. In early texts, students who chose to write acknowledgements were advised to ensure that they (acknowledgements) were written in a simple and concise manner as “effusive acknowledgements may be embarrassing to persons to whom they are meant to do honor...” (Reeder, 1930:147). Interestingly, Scrivener (2009) was also able to locate a book, “Historian's handbook: a key to the study and writing of history” by Wood Gray (1964) which advises history researchers not to forget to acknowledge librarians and archivists who assisted them to locate material. Acknowledgement studies started to mushroom in the 1970's although they only became widespread in the 1990's (Hubbard et al., 2018).

3.2 Acknowledgements studies in other disciplines

Researchers have recognised that acknowledgements can be used for purposes that they were not intended for, such as to understand the culture of certain disciplines, sub-disciplines and individuals (Afful & Nuokya-Ire Mwinlaaru, 2012; Yang, 2012, Díaz-Faes & Bordons, 2017); determine the structure, use of language, and phraseology (Gesuato, 2008, Mohammadi, 2013; Nguyen, 2017), showcase research collaborations beyond co-authorship (Cronin & Weaver, 1995, Hartley, 2003); identify research funding and funders of research (Jacob & Lefgren, 2011; Tang, Hu, & Liu, 2017; Grassano, Rotolo, Hutton, Lang, & Hopkins, 2017) and lately, their (acknowledgements) influence to theses examiners (Kumar & Sanderson, 2019).

In a study of the variations and use of rhetoric in dissertation acknowledgements written by Education students at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, Afful & Nuokyaa-Ire Mwinlaaru (2012), realised that the structure of the dissertations generally follow three patterns, which are an optional reflection (which occurred in 58% of the theses), followed by an obligatory thanking (which occurred in all theses) and then an optional conclusion (which occurred in 33% of the theses) with very little differences between the Education sub-disciplines. This was in line with Hyland's Model which initially identified these three moves in acknowledgements (Hyland, 2004). According to Afful & Nuokyaa-Ire Mwinlaaru (2012), those who were thanked included God, supervisors and other academics, colleagues, binders, technical support such as formatting and typing, clerical support, financial support, librarians, and family and friends among others. According to Yang (2012), there are also socio-cultural expectations, academic conventions and disciplinary variations in the way acknowledgements are written. Students in the soft sciences, for example, tended to thank their families more than those in the hard sciences while those in the hard sciences thanked the supervisors more than the soft sciences. This reflects the close relationship that those in the hard sciences may have with supervisors than in the soft sciences (Yang, 2012). Yang's (2012) findings agree with those of Mohammadi (2013) who researched whether Persian and English dissertation acknowledgements conform to Hyland's Model. One of the findings was that thanking God was one of the popular acknowledgement steps in Persian theses compared to English ones. Eighty percent of Persian theses thanked God while only 4% of theses thanked God in English theses. Nguyen (2017) on the other hand studied the acknowledgement behaviour of Vietnamese postgraduate students at the Kalasin University and found that like in Afful & Nuokyaa-Ire Mwinlaaru (2012) the masters' theses conform to Hyland's Model but only 0.07% contain a reflective move and 0.98% contained an announcing move while all of them contained the thanking move.

Cronin & Weaver (1995) argue that acknowledgements can be used to study collaborations beyond co-authorship. As if on cue, Hartley (2003) compared the prevalence of acknowledgements in single authored papers versus multi-authored papers and found a slightly higher number of acknowledgements in single authored papers compared to multi-authored papers. This prompted Hartley (2003) to suggest that single authors often receive assistance from others in writing their papers hence the higher number of acknowledgements in these papers.

Eversince WoS started to provide data on funding acknowledgements, studies on funding acknowledgements proliferated (Tang et al., 2017) due to easy access to this readily available acknowledgement data. Admittedly, this has resulted to the skewness of acknowledgement studies with most of them focussing on funding acknowledgements (Tang et al., 2017). Tang et al. (2017) cautioned against using WoS databases for other types of acknowledgements as its coverage is limited to only WoS indexed documents with funding acknowledgements. Grassano et al. (2017) used WoS and MEDLINE/PubMed funding acknowledgements in UK cancer research and found the reporting of funding varied by disciplines with natural sciences reporting more funding than social sciences. Grassano et al. (2017) also found that MEDLINE/PubMed omitted 58% of documents with funding acknowledgements compared to WoS which was able to correctly identify funded documents in more than 90% of the time. There was a high number of incorrectly listed funders in both databases which raises questions about the accuracy of the funding data. The researchers, however, concluded that WoS funding acknowledgements can be a helpful starting point for research on funding.

A study conducted by Kumar & Sanderson (2019) sought to determine whether acknowledgements had any influence or if they affect the examiners in any way. Kumar & Sanderson (2019) found that most examiners out of the 145 interviewed read acknowledgements but 30% of them admitted that they are not influenced by them in any way. The authors conclude that although 70% of the researchers stated that they were not influenced by acknowledgements, evidence shows that they can be affected. Further, Kumar & Sanderson (2019) advise that future studies that canvass the views of students, supervisors and examiners can enrich research on acknowledgements.

3.3 Acknowledgement studies in librarianship

Besides the structure, types, relationship with citations, and identity of acknowledgees, librarians are also concerned about the acknowledgement of the library and librarians in TDs as a way of determining the library impact. A plurality of studies have been conducted to determine the extent of acknowledgement of libraries and librarians in the last ten years or so (Milas, 2008; Scrivener, 2009; Rattan, 2014; Nimale, Khaparde, & Alhamdi, 2015; Stigberg, Guittar, & Morse, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2018). In a study of acknowledgements in Theological dissertations at the Harvard University, Milas (2008) compared library acknowledgement in PhD and Doctorate of Theology (Th.D.) dissertations from 1998 to 2007. The findings were that generally very few acknowledgements of the library could be found in these dissertations at the Harvard University although no exact figures were provided. There were more acknowledgements of the library in Ph.D. dissertations compared to Th.D.'s that tended to highly acknowledge the clergy. This suggests differences by academic programmes in the way that the library is acknowledged meaning that certain academic programmes may acknowledge the library more than others. Scrivener (2009) focussed on 219 History dissertations. In this study acknowledgements ranked second behind the supervisors in terms of being acknowledged further giving credence to differences by academic programmes in the way the library receives acknowledgements. Eight-one and a half percent of all dissertations from 1930 to 2005 acknowledged the library or sections thereof in the Scrivener (2009) study. This confirmed the library as an indispensable resource for historians. Rattan (2014) analysed acknowledgement patterns in the *Annals of Library and Information Studies* from 1999 to 2012 and found that 20.61 of articles in this journal during this period contained acknowledgements. In this study, 42 individuals were acknowledged once while 3 were acknowledged 2 times. Given that this is a library and information science journal, it was not surprising that almost all individuals acknowledged were from libraries. Another study by Nimale et al. (2015) in the *International Journal of Information Management* determined that 22.86% articles contained acknowledgements. The majority of acknowledgements were in the PIC category followed by financial support and access support. Eighty-seven individuals were acknowledged with 86 of them acknowledged only once while only one was acknowledged twice. Other libraries have decided to set-up databases to capture library acknowledgements in TDs for purposes of demonstrating impact. Stigberg et al. (2015) reports that at the Northwestern University a database was set to capture all acknowledgements of the Special Libraries' section for purposes of demonstrating impact of individual librarians. According to the authors, the database has proved to be an effective tool to assess the librarians specifically and the special collection section of the library generally. Hubbard et al. (2018) wanted to show how libraries can use acknowledgements in TDs to demonstrate educational impact. They found that the library at the Texas A&M University (TAMU) Libraries was acknowledged in 67 TDs which represents

less than 1% of these completed at that university from 2004 to 2015. However, the libraries were also mentioned in other sections of the ETDs not just in acknowledgements. There were also mentions of individual librarians. The authors concluded that acknowledgements are useful for demonstrating the impact of libraries to postgraduate students' learning, research, and success.

4. Methodology

This study relied on two research methods, the bibliometrics and survey research method. Bibliometrics is the use of statistical and quantitative methods in documents, including the analysis of citations, acknowledgements (Cronin & Weaver, 1995) and altmetrics indicators, to determine the impact of countries, institutions, organisations and individuals (Thomson Reuters, 2008). On the other hand, survey research method is a method of research that predominantly makes use of self-administered questionnaires or interviews to gather qualitative or quantitative data (Bryman, 2016).

For the bibliometrics study, all ETDs completed between 2012 and 2018 formed the population of the study. There were 5058 ETDs that were listed in the NWU institutional repository when the data for this study was collected although many of them (61 at the time of writing) have since been embargoed at the request of supervisors and students who felt that having these ETDs publicly available online will affect their chances of publishing from them. Table 1 shows the 5058 ETDs by years. An excel spreadsheet was prepared with 7 workbooks each representing a year. Initially the workbooks had seven predefined support functions including the six reflected in Cronin & Weaver (1995) which are moral support, financial support, access to facilities, clerical support, technical support and PIC. Library support, religious support and others were added separately for purposes of easy analysis. The names of librarians were added at the first time of their appearance in the acknowledgements in a thesis or dissertation meaning that only librarians who were acknowledged appeared on the spreadsheet. ETDs were then filtered according to the year and those from 2012 to 2018 identified. All titles of NWU ETDs from 2012 to 2018 were then entered under "title" in the relevant workbook. The ETDs were then opened and evidence of acknowledgements manually checked and where available, dissected. For each ETD, if reference was made to library support, for example, the number "1" would be entered under library support while "0" or blank space would be written or left when a thesis does not acknowledge any library support. This also happened with other categories. Data was analysed using excel sorting functionalities and graphs and tables were also created using excel. Although it was initially thought that the bibliometrics study would take six months it took a year (from June 2018 to July 2019) due to the amount of work that went into dissecting the acknowledgements.

In order to complement the bibliometrics study, a survey method that employed questionnaires to gather data was used. Both online and print self-administered questionnaires were distributed in June and July 2018 to willing postgraduate students. The questions were in multiple choice format wherein students could select one option in certain questions and multiple options in other questions. The last section of the questionnaire was an open ended question which allowed students to make any comments or suggestions they could have had. The questionnaire elicited 110 responses

from the postgraduate students. A software called QuestionPro was then used to analyse the data obtained through the questionnaire. The results of this study are reported in aggregates. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A of this study.

Table 1: ETDs that form the population of the study (2012 – 2018)

| Year | Health Sciences | Humanities | Education | Economic & Management Science | Engineering | Natural & Agricultural Sciences | Theology | Law | Total |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------|-----|-------|
| 2012 | 119 | 86 | 54 | 203 | 63 | 105 | 27 | 40 | 697 |
| 2013 | 72 | 96 | 50 | 145 | 42 | 65 | 21 | 22 | 513 |
| 2014 | 131 | 167 | 54 | 260 | 96 | 117 | 34 | 72 | 931 |
| 2015 | 93 | 110 | 46 | 281 | 89 | 128 | 36 | 40 | 823 |
| 2016 | 102 | 115 | 44 | 270 | 86 | 123 | 38 | 63 | 841 |
| 2017 | 37 | 48 | 30 | 107 | 59 | 109 | 30 | 23 | 443 |
| 2018 | 167 | 64 | 37 | 239 | 70 | 161 | 39 | 33 | 810 |
| Total | 721 | 686 | 315 | 1505 | 505 | 808 | 225 | 293 | 5058 |

5. Findings and discussions

The bibliometrics study was used to respond to the first three objectives of the study while the questionnaire responded to the last objective. The findings and results reported in this section are in accordance with the objectives.

5.1 Proportion of ETDs with acknowledgements at NWU

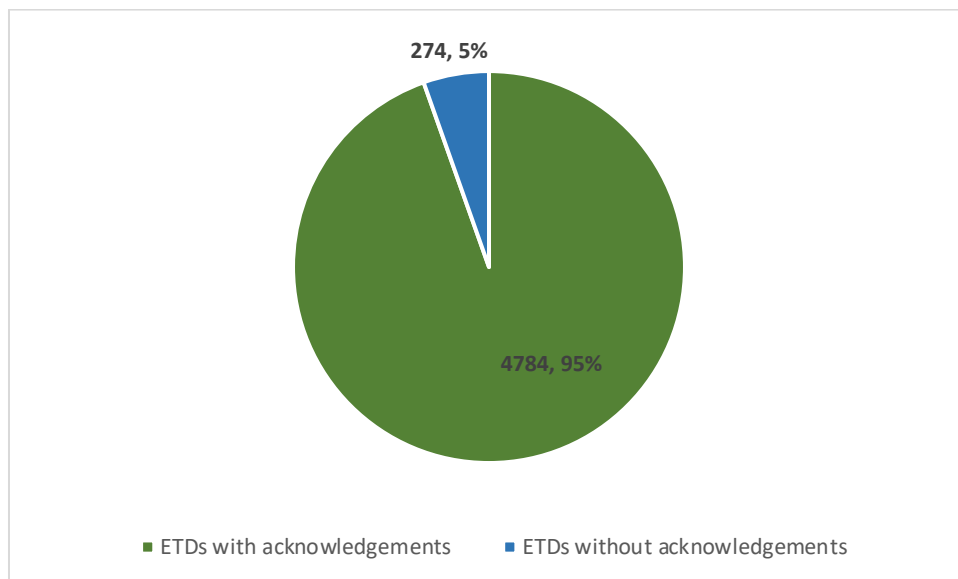
Figure 1 reflects the proportion of ETDs with acknowledgements and those that do not have acknowledgements at all. Out of the 5058 ETDs, 4784 (or 95%) contained acknowledgements while 274 (or 5%) did not have the acknowledgements section. Supervisors and co-supervisors were acknowledged in 4733 (close to 93.6% of 5058) of those ETDs, followed by family, friends and colleagues who were acknowledged in 4721

ETDs, religious support and inspiration such as God, Heavenly Father, Allah (in very few instances), Jesus, prayer groups, pastors, reverends, priests and other religious figures were acknowledged in 3330 ETDs (or 65.8% of 5058). Technical support which includes granting access to laboratories and other services, data providers, data analysts, data collectors, participants, those who granted permission for research, language editors, translators and transcribers were acknowledged in 3312 ETDs (65.5% of 5058), followed by clerical support which stood at 2054 (40.6% of 5058), financial support with 1728 (34.2% of 5058) acknowledgements followed. Library/librarian support was acknowledged in 761 (15% of 5058) ETDs followed by a category called “others” that included pets, and named individuals and organisations without certain roles at 465 (9.2% of 5058). Generally, it was observed that the ETDs followed Hyland’s Model in the way they are structured (Hyland, 2004; Afful & Nuokya-Ire Mwinlaaru ; 2012; Yang, 2012). In this study, lack of acknowledgements was prevalent in ETDs completed in the Faculties of Law (91 or 31.1% of 293), Economics and Management Sciences (60 or 4% of 1505) and Natural and Agricultural Sciences (53 or 6.6% of 808). Theology followed with 21 (or 9.3% of 225) ETDs with no acknowledgements then Health Sciences (14 or 1.9% of 721), Education (12 or 3.8% of 315), Engineering (12 or 2.4% of 505) and Humanities (11 or 1.6% of 686).

Possible reasons why students decide not to include an acknowledgement section may include the perceived lack of support from the important stakeholders such as a supervisor/s, a feeling that acknowledgements do not add value to their document, or influence from previous TDs within a field. Exclusion of acknowledgements in ETDs and who to acknowledge may develop into a culture as students mimic peers before them. This means that not only are acknowledgements influenced by the culture and religion (Mohammadi, 2013) but they can also develop into a culture. Thus a university, department or discipline may have a culture of lack of acknowledgements or the acknowledgement culture can determine who is acknowledged. These results confirm the importance that students attach to acknowledgements (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Even though they are not compulsory or part of the assessment for a Masters or PhD (Kumar & Sanderson, 2019), the overwhelming majority of students still preferred to have an acknowledgements section in their studies. The results of this study vindicate previous studies of TD acknowledgements (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Scrivener, 2009). Scrivener (2009), for example, found that more than 93% of History dissertations from 1930 to 2005 at the University of Oklahoma contained acknowledgements. In the case of Hyland & Tse (2004), 90% of TDs completed by non-native speakers of English in five Hong Kong universities had acknowledgements. Christian religion featured prominently in the acknowledgements of students at NWU. This may be attributed to the dominance of this religion in South Africa but more so in the North-West Province where the two bigger campuses of NWU (Potchefstroom and Mafikeng) are based. According to Statistics South Africa, close to 93% of the North-West Province population indicated that they are Christians by 2001 (Statistics South Africa, 2004). Although religion was not included in censuses subsequent to 2001, the community survey of 2016 confirmed that more than 78% of the population of South Africa were Christians followed by Islam at 1.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The Potchefstroom Campus of NWU was also a Christian university prior to the merger with the University of North West in 2004, spirituality (Christianity), therefore, still occupy a central place in the culture of the university. The presence of five theses with acknowledgements of Allah spread over three years from 2016 to 2018 may point to the changing religious dynamics of the university at large or alternatively they

may indicate the growing assertiveness of religious minorities at the University. Previous studies also confirmed the prominent role that religion plays in acknowledgements (Afful & Nuokya-Ire Mwinlaaru, 2012; Mohammadi, 2013). This study, therefore, points to the possible use of ETD acknowledgements as a yardstick to measure the religious landscape within an institution or university.

Figure 1: ETDs with acknowledgements vs ETDs without acknowledgements (n=5058)



5.2 The extent of library acknowledgement in ETDs at NWU

The second objective of this study sought to determine the extent of library acknowledgement in ETDs at NWU. Figure 2 reflects that 4297 (85% of 5058) documents had no library acknowledgements, whereas only 761 (15% of 5058) had a library acknowledgement/s. These included both NWU and external libraries and their respective staff members. In some instances, several libraries or librarians would be acknowledged in one thesis or dissertation. Although library mentions in other sections of theses and dissertations did not form part of a systematic study, the authors observed that the library was also mentioned in the literature review and methodologies of the ETDs. Hubbard and others (2018) also noticed this

in their study. This means that library acknowledgements can either be explicit or implicit. The results of this study rebut those of Scrivener (2009) and Hubbard et al. (2018). At the University of Oklahoma, Scrivener (2009) found that 81.5% of History dissertations acknowledge a library or librarians or an archives. History ETDs, however, are generally known to contain a high percentage of library acknowledgements (Gray; 1964; Scrivener, 2009; Hubbard et al., 2018). Hubbard and others' (2018) on the other hand determined that only 0.8% of Civil Engineering, Geography and History theses and dissertations at the TAMU Libraries contained an acknowledgement of the library. The results of this study compared to those of the two studies mentioned above predict variations in the extent of acknowledgement of the library by discipline, country and even by period (Beach-Bertin, 2018). Overall, this study validates Beach-Bertin (2018) who hypothesised that library and librarians are rarely mentioned in ETD acknowledgements. This may be interpreted as both a good and a bad thing. On a positive, this may reflect improved literacy levels of postgraduate students and more access to open resources. Students, therefore, may be less dependent on the librarians who would be free to focus on other activities (Beach-Bertin, 2018). On the negative, this may mean a disconnect between postgraduate students and the library. It may be that postgraduate students no longer consider libraries as the centre of intellectual activity. Alternatively, students may simply be conforming to the Cumulative Advantage Theory which postulates the existence of a "Matthew Effect" in citations (Price, 1976:292). In citation theory the "Matthew Effect" refers to the theory that prior citation of a document is likely to attract more citations in future. Conversely, non-citation may lead to the document being ignored by other scientists. According to Caidi (1997) there are signs that acknowledgements may follow similar principles and patterns as citations meaning that a lack of a culture of acknowledging the library may permeate the whole institution, discipline or campus.

Figure 2: Number and Percentage of Library/Librarian Acknowledgements (n=5058)

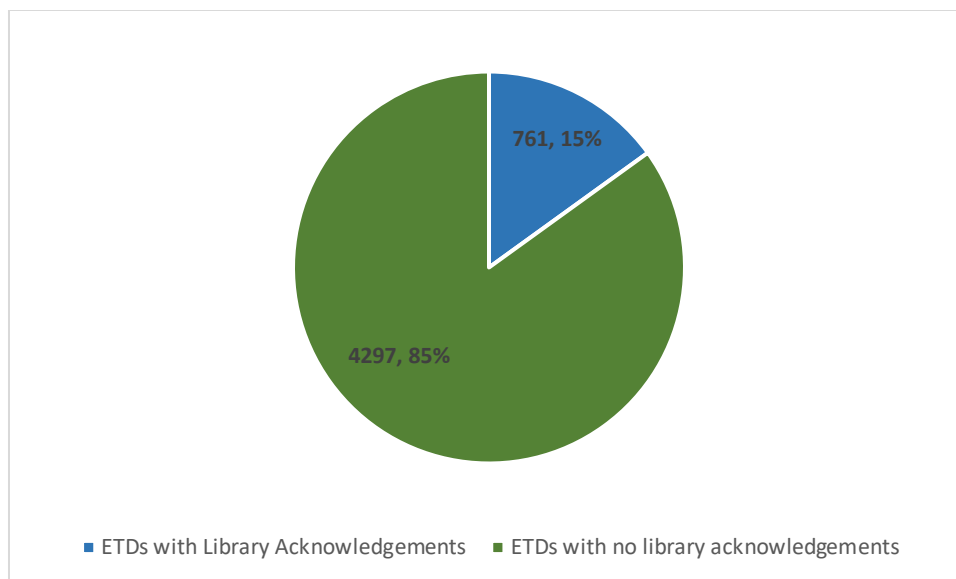


Figure 3 outlines library acknowledgements in ETDs at NWU (2018). It is interesting to note that not only did postgraduate students credit the NWU library and its library staff, but similar to Hubbard et al. (2018) they went beyond to appreciate external libraries and librarians. The acknowledgement of other libraries attests to the value of academic libraries as information sources beyond their host institutions. The NWU LIS and its librarians had 726 mentions, whereas only 35 were bestowed to external libraries and librarians for an overall total of 761 for acknowledgements of library and librarian support. As a holding institution of the ETDs under study, it is not surprising that NWU LIS is well represented. Library acknowledgements seem not to follow any discernible pattern. Beach-Bertin's (2018) hypothesis that library/librarian acknowledgements may have decreased due to electronic access to open resources is disproved by the results of this study. The year with the most acknowledgements of the library was 2018 with a peak of 148 credits, followed by 142 in 2012. The year 2014 had 134 acknowledgements, whereas 2016 had 119. The number slightly dropped in 2015 with only 82 acknowledgements, followed by 64 in 2013 and reached its lowest of 37 in 2017. External libraries never reached double figures since 2012 although there were 9 acknowledgements of these libraries and their librarians in 2013. The library/librarians were acknowledged for various types of support including provision of resources, providing access to resources, access to library space, assistance with references, assistance with reference managers such as EndNote, Zotero and RefWorks, assistance with statistics softwares such as SPSS and Atlas Ti and assistance with documents formatting. Hubbard et al.'s (2018) results agreed

with these results in as far as what the librarians were acknowledged for. At TAMU Libraries, Hubbard et al.'s (2018) found that the libraries/librarians were acknowledged for services, resources, general assistance, and facilities.

Figure 3: NWU LIS vs. External Library/Librarian Acknowledgements



Individual librarians acknowledged in NWU ETDs.

Linked to the third objective of the study, Table 2 reflects NWU librarians who have been acknowledged between the years 2012 to 2018. These included library staff in various ranks from directors to library assistants meaning that librarians at different levels have had an educational impact to the students (Hubbard et al., 2018). A total of forty-six librarians were acknowledged for their support by students during this period. There were 404 acknowledgements of individual NWU librarians across eight faculties of the University. Hubbard et al. (2018) also found that most library acknowledgements were to individual librarians. Hyland & Tse (2004) found somewhat differently from this study. In Hyland & Tse (2004), 1276 different individuals and 138 institutions were acknowledged in six different disciplines (Applied Linguistics, Biology, Business Studies, Computer Science, Electronic Engineering and Public Administration). In this study, some librarians were acknowledged by students in faculties which they were not attached to. When considering the campuses of NWU, the Mafikeng Campus does not seem to have a culture of

acknowledging individual librarians. Five librarians at the Mafikeng Campus received only 7 acknowledgements while the library received 19 acknowledgements. Overall, the most acknowledged librarian at NWU was Christine Bronkhorst (56) followed by Hester Lombard (45) and Martie Esterhuizen (39). Those acknowledged across many faculties included Anneke Coetzee (6), Anriëtte Pretorius (6) and Elsa Esterhuizen (6). The authors believe the fact that the list of most acknowledged librarians is dominated by librarians based in the smaller branch libraries of NWU is not a coincidence. Branch librarians tend to focus on a smaller group of students and this allows them to develop closer relationships with the users. Over time users may feel at ease to ask assistance from their librarians in a small branch library than a bigger branch. The results confirm that not only do librarians have an impact to the faculties allocated to them but they may have an impact across different faculties of the university. The EMS (99) faculty had the largest number of library/librarian acknowledgements, followed by Humanities (97) and Health Sciences (80). Other faculties received less than 50 acknowledgements with Theology at 44 and Education at 43. The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences had 21 acknowledgements followed by Law with 13 and lastly Engineering with 7. It was not a surprise that Engineering had the lowest number of ETD acknowledgements of the library as it is the smallest faculty at NWU offered in one campus. These results confirm Hubbard et al.'s (2018) findings who also found variation in acknowledgements by discipline with History accumulating considerable more acknowledgements than Civil Engineering and Geography. The three top acknowledged librarians were responsible for close to 35% of all acknowledgements to individual librarians at NWU. These results support Caidi's (1997) observation that acknowledgements seems to follow Bradford's Law of citations with a small group of librarians receiving considerable more acknowledgements than other librarians. These results also point to a possibility that some institutions or campuses may have a more developed culture of acknowledging the library/librarians than others. This is probable why less than 1% of theses and dissertations at TAMU Libraries acknowledged the libraries (Hubbard et al., 2018) compared to a quarter in this study and 81.5% for History dissertations in Scrivener (2009).

Table 3 gives an indication of external library acknowledgements. A total of 35 documents extended appreciation to external libraries with 20 for libraries in general and 15 for individual librarians. Hubbard et al. (2018) also noticed that external libraries and librarians were acknowledged at the TAMU Libraries. In this study, these included mentions for libraries and staff members on a national and international level. In terms of faculty representation, almost half of the acknowledgements are bestowed to the Faculty of Theology (14) followed by Humanities (7), Law (6), EMS (3), Natural and Agricultural Sciences (2), Health Sciences (2), and lastly Education (1). There were no external library/librarian mentions in the Engineering Faculty. Interestingly, Hubbard et al. (2018) also found no mentions of external librarians in Civil Engineering ETDs at TAMU Libraries. The domination of the Theology Faculty could be attributed to its international character. The Potchefstroom Campus of NWU was a Christian higher education institution before 2004. This Faculty is still regarded as one of the best in the country and internationally. Its student population therefore comes from different national and international institutions. The majority of external librarians/libraries were acknowledged once in NWU students' ETDs, except three, which are: University of Pretoria (with 4 mentions in the Faculties of, Humanities, Natural &

Agricultural Sciences, and Theology respectively), the Gauteng Department of Education Library with 2 acknowledgements in Education and EMS, and George Whitefield College Library in Theology with 2 mentions.

Table 2: NWU Librarian acknowledgements per faculty

| Librarian | Faculty acknowledgements | | | | | | | | Total acknowledgements |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|------------|------|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| | Economics & Management Sciences | Law | Humanities | FNAS | Education | Theology | Engineering | Health Sciences | |
| C. Bronkhorst | 42 | 11 | | | 4 | | | | 56 |
| H. Lombard | 9 | 1 | 5 | | | 30 | | | 45 |
| M. Esterhuizen | 16 | | 11 | 4 | 7 | 1 | | | 39 |
| A. Coetzee | 3 | | 9 | 1 | 4 | 2 | | 16 | 35 |
| L. Vos | | | 6 | | 1 | | | 23 | 30 |
| A. Pretorius | 2 | | 2 | 2 | 2 | | 5 | 10 | 23 |
| E. Roodt | 3 | | 4 | 6 | | | 1 | 5 | 19 |
| L. Snyman | 5 | | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | 9 | 18 |
| N. Venter | | | 13 | | 1 | | | 1 | 15 |
| G. Beukman | 1 | | 5 | 1 | | | | 6 | 13 |
| E. Esterhuizen | 1 | | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | 3 | 13 |
| M. van der Walt | 1 | | 2 | 2 | 6 | | | 1 | 12 |
| Z. Sapula | | | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | | 8 |
| S. Letsosa | | | 3 | | 1 | | | 3 | 7 |
| M. Buys | 2 | | 4 | | | | 1 | | 7 |
| M. Makhanikhe | 4 | | 3 | | | | | | 7 |
| I. Blom | 1 | | 3 | | | 1 | | | 5 |
| R. Badenhorst | | | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| D. Moloto | 1 | | 2 | | 1 | | | | 4 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|-----|
| B. Bradley | | | | | | 3 | | | 3 |
| K. Van Deventer | 1 | | | | 2 | | | | 3 |
| H. Jonker | | | 1 | | | | | 2 | 3 |
| J. Lamprecht | | | 2 | | | | | | 2 |
| H. Spoelstra | | | 2 | | | | | | 2 |
| S. van Heerden | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| C. Musi | | | | | 2 | | | | 2 |
| H. Pretorius | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | 2 |
| G. Makate | 2 | | | | | | | | 2 |
| T. Moripa | 2 | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E. Legwale | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| L. van Den Heever | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| I. Muzvondiwa | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| Y. Engelbrecht | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| R. Matube | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| S. Mabena | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Y. Bucwa | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| R. Adelaar | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| J. Nyebeleza | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| S. Lessing | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| G. van Rooyen | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| T. Larney | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| S. Chizwina | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| S. Bangani | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |
| B. Oberholzer | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| N. Maseko | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| M. Van Rooyen | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| Total Acknowledgements | 99 | 13 | 97 | 21 | 43 | 44 | 7 | 80 | 404 |

Table 3: External Librarian/library acknowledgements per faculty

| Librarian | Library | NWU Faculty acknowledged |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Greenlee, P. | Benner Library, Olivet Nazarene University | Humanities |
| Gallagher, M. A., Valentino, P., Margaritondo, J. Bryan, J., Hawes, S., Van Kampen, D., Moon, C. A. Karshmer, E., Asher, D. and Selwyn, A. | Saint Leo University | Theology |
| Garvie, D. and Henry, P. | Union Theological College, Belfast Craigavon Library Services Linenhall Library Belfas Trinity College, Dublin | Theology |
| Gamibes, T. and October, L. | Northfield Mount Hermon | Humanities |
| Schumann, T. | Parliamentary Library: South Africa | Humanities |
| Khangala, M. | Constitutional Court: South Africa | Law |
| Lekganyane, C. and Ramasodi, B | University of South Africa | Natural & Agricultural Sciences |
| Hou, M. | International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva | Law |
| Rycroft, I. | University of Pretoria, Music Library | Humanities |
| Van Zyl, M. | Goldfields Library | Humanities |
| Gregory, J. | Christ's College, Cambridge New College, Edinburgh | Theology |
| Maré, H., Fourie, S., Tarentaal, E. | Theology Library: United States of America Music Library: United States of America | Theology |
| Ehlers, G. | University of Pretoria Library | Natural & Agricultural Sciences |
| Henke, K | Princeton Theological Seminary T.F | Theology |
| Van Tonder, H. | University of the Free State Library | Law |
| <i>Library Acknowledgements</i> | | <i>Faculty</i> |
| | University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Library | Economics & Management Sciences |
| | Gauteng Department of Education Library | Economics & Management Sciences |
| | Gauteng Department of Education Library | Education |

| | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| | Excelsius Nursing College library | Health Sciences |
| | Lekau Mamabolo of GDE: Education library | Education |
| | Makerere University Library | Health Sciences |
| | Oxford University, Bodleian Law Library | Law |
| | Lobatse High Court and Attorney General's Chambers' Libraries | Law |
| | George Whitefield College | Theology |
| | University of South Africa University of Pretoria | Theology |
| | Don Africana library | Humanities |
| | British Library Gladstone Library Fliedner Archive, Kaiserswerth Lambeth Palace Library | Theology |
| | University of Pretoria: Merensky Library | Theology |
| | University of Witwatersrand Law Library | Law |
| | National Library of South Africa | Natural & Agricultural Sciences |
| | All Nations Christian College, England | Theology |
| | Uganda Christian University Bujumbura Christian University, Burundi Université Libre des Pays de Grands Lacs Goma Université Protestante au Congo | Theology |
| | Heritage College and Seminary Library | Theology |
| | Fort Worth, Texas Public Library Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Library | Theology |

6. Acknowledgement behaviour of masters and doctoral students in ETDs

The survey was used to determine the acknowledgement behaviour of postgraduate students. The first section of the questionnaire related to the age, user category and faculty of the respondents. Table 4 reflects the demographic data of respondents. The table shows that most respondents were between the ages of 24 to 34 (38%), followed by 16 to 24 (32%). The majority of respondents were masters students (56) followed by PhDs (33), honours (16) and post-doctoral fellows (5). The interest shown by the postdoctoral fellows to this study stems from the fact that they had completed their PhDs a few months back.

Table 4: Demographic data of the respondents (n=110)

| <i>Age</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Value</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 16-24 | 32% | 35 |
| 24-34 | 38% | 42 |
| 35-44 | 14% | 15 |
| 45-54 | 11% | 12 |
| 55 and above | 5% | 6 |
| <i>User category</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Value</i> |
| Honours | 15% | 16 |
| Masters | 51% | 56 |
| Ph.D./Doctoral | 30% | 33 |
| Post-Doctoral | 5% | 5 |
| <i>Faculty</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Value</i> |
| Economics & management sciences | 23% | 25 |
| Engineering | 1% | 1 |
| Education | 5% | 6 |
| Health Sciences | 9% | 10 |
| Humanities | 21% | 23 |
| Law | 13% | 14 |
| Natural & Agricultural Sciences | 26% | 29 |
| Theology | 2% | 2 |

6.1 Views on acknowledgements in ETDs

The results in Figure 4 show that the majority of respondents viewed acknowledgements in TDs as a crucial element. To this effect, 98% of respondents indicated that acknowledgements are either very important or important. Only 2% of respondents indicated that acknowledgements are not important at all. Figure 5 shows that 86% of respondents either strongly agree or agree that acknowledgements are a good practice. Eleven percent either strongly disagree or disagree that acknowledging others in the academy is a good practice.

These results corroborate those of the bibliometrics study above that showed only 5% of ETDs did not have acknowledgements. Results of various other studies such as Hyland & Tse (2004); Scrivener, (2009) and Hubbard et al. (2018) are also vindicated. All these studies found the rate of acknowledgements in TDs to be around or above 90%.

Figure 4: The importance of acknowledgements in TDs (n=110)

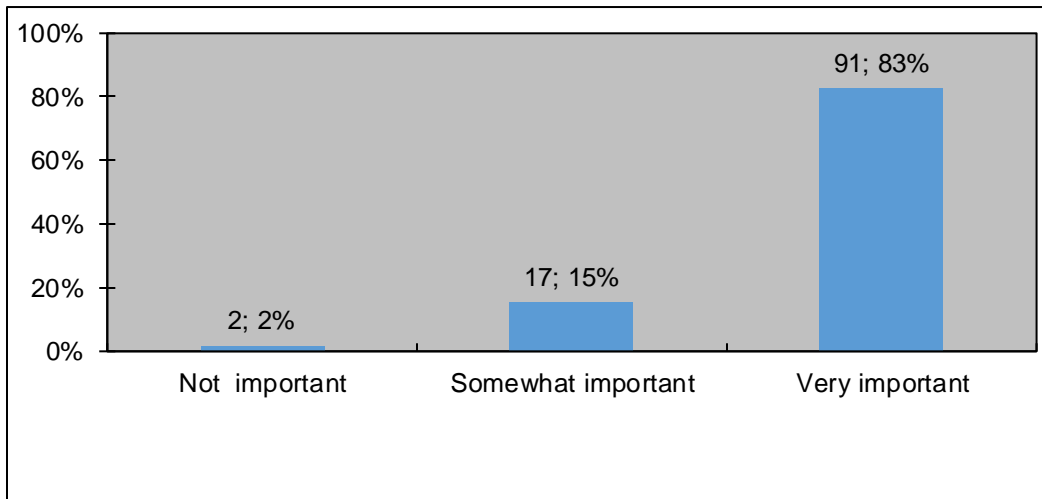
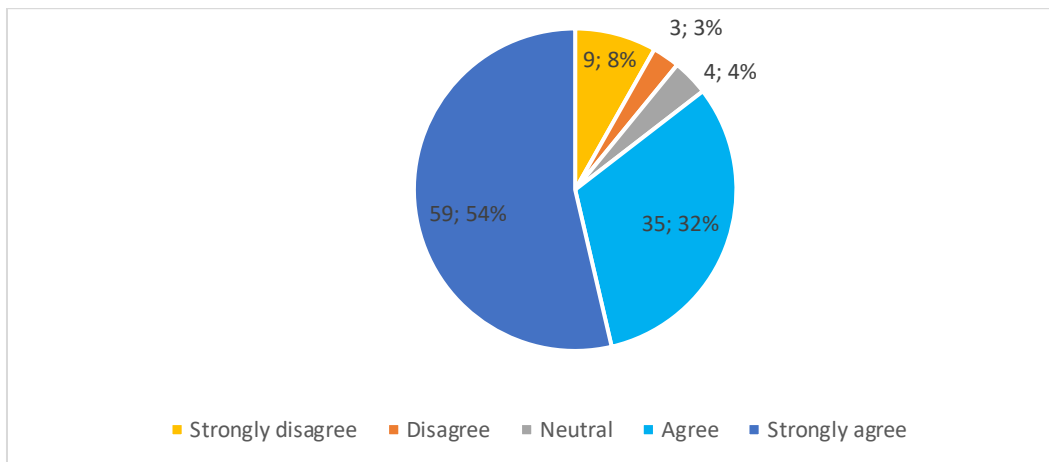


Figure 5: Acknowledgements as a good practice in theses and dissertations (n=110)

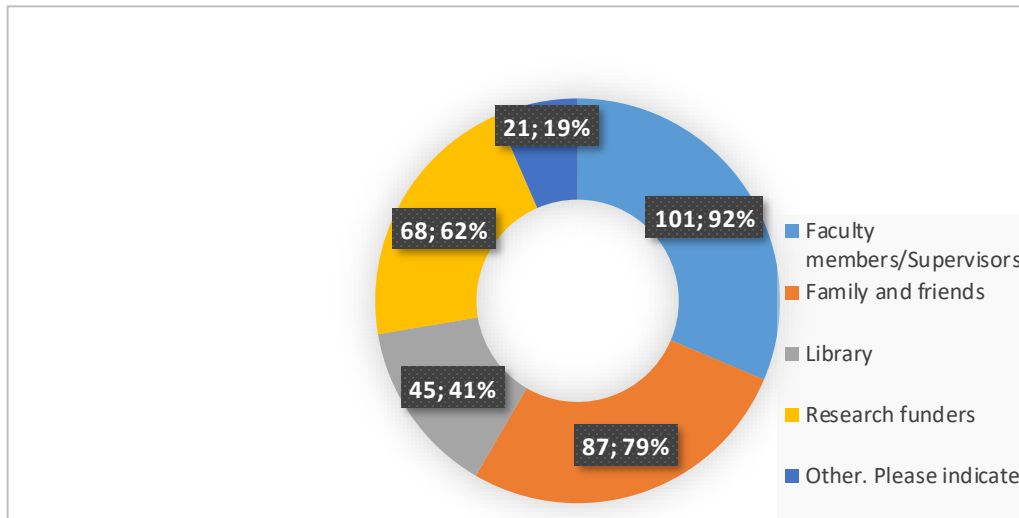


6.2 Role players considered in theses and dissertation acknowledgements

The researchers also wanted to know what role players do postgraduate students consider when deciding to acknowledge in TDs. Figure 6 reflects the role players considered in acknowledgements. It is evident that supervisors/faculty members are prominently considered for acknowledgements. This is not surprising as supervisors play a fundamental role in guiding the students through the research process. Acknowledging supervisors is also an expected academic protocol (Yang, 2012). In some cases not doing so may be interpreted as a snub (Kumar & Sanderson, 2019). This study agrees with several other similar studies. Studies by Hyland & Tse (2004), Scrivener (2009), Afful & Nuokyaa-Ire Mwinlaaru (2012) and Cheng (2012) revealed that students acknowledged their supervisors/advisors more than the rest of the other role players followed by family and friends. The acknowledgement of family and friends show the importance of social support in most cultures of the world. Of interest to this study was the increase in the number of those who would consider to acknowledge the library which

stood at 41%. This means that with sufficient awareness there are many more students who could acknowledge the library at NWU than the 15% reflected by the bibliometrics above.

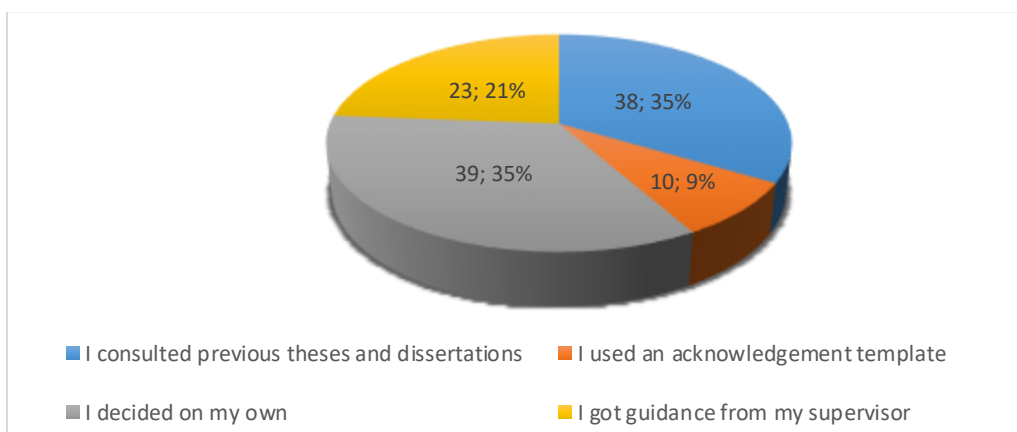
Figure 6: Role players acknowledged (n=110)



6.3 Acknowledgement considerations in theses and dissertations

The researchers were also interested to know how students decide who to acknowledge. Figure 7 shows that the majority of students either consulted previous TDs or took it upon themselves to identify which role players they deem fit to include in their acknowledgements, 21% consulted their supervisors to seek guidance in constructing their acknowledgements section, and only 9% used acknowledgement templates. The fact that 35% of students conceded to consulting previous TDs further confirms that acknowledgements and what you acknowledge can develop into a culture. This further confirms the potential role of the “Matthew Effect” in acknowledgements (Price, 1976:292).

Figure 7: Decision on previous acknowledgements (n=110)



6.4 Acknowledgements in previous and current theses and dissertations

An overwhelming majority of students (92% of 110) never acknowledged the library in their previous TDs. This is more or less similar to the findings in the bibliometrics study where 85% of students did not acknowledge the library. There are many reasons advanced by students as to why they never acknowledged the library. Sixty-seven percent of the students revealed that they never thought of the library/librarians as role players eligible for inclusion in the acknowledgement sections while 20% stated that they were not aware of the services available to them, and a smaller portion of 13% indicated that they have never received any support from the library. Among the 9 students who indicated that they have acknowledged the library, 3 were grateful for the facilities available to them, 2 appreciated the resources they could access from the library, 2 indicated that they were thankful for the research support provided, and 2 were grateful to the library staff members. These results are somewhat different from the bibliometrics study and even other studies by Scrivener (2009) and Hubbard et al. (2018) that recognised individual librarians than the general library. No plausible explanation could be found for the slight differences between these two results.

From the analysis of the results, it is evident that the role players considered for acknowledgements indicated in Figure 6 will still be acknowledged by the students in their current TDs almost with the same proportion. Supervisors/faculty members take the lead with 92% as depicted in Figure 9. This is followed by family and friends with a 82%, research funders 55%, library 39% and lastly 16% have indicated other role players including data analysts, language editors, participants, colleagues, external researchers, fellow students, IT support services and others. These results follow similar patterns to those of other studies by Hyland & Tse (2004), Scrivener (2009), Afful & Nuokya-Ire Mwinlaaru (2012) and Cheng (2012).

Figure 8: Library acknowledgements in previous theses and dissertations (n=110)

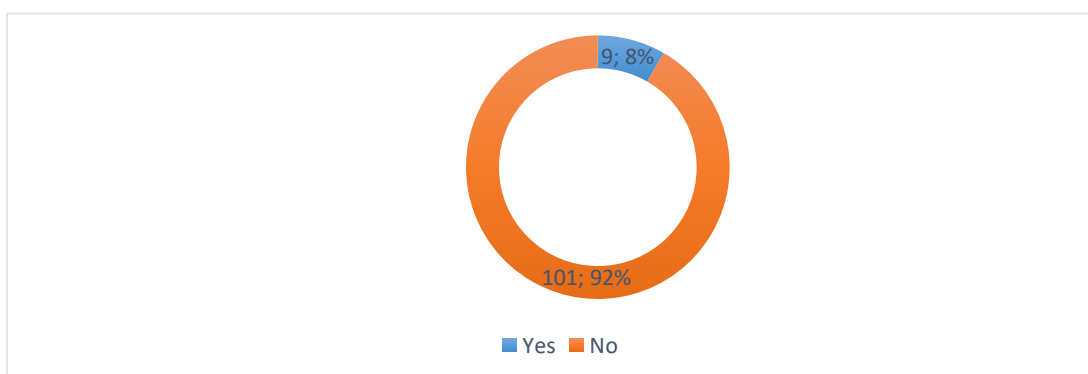
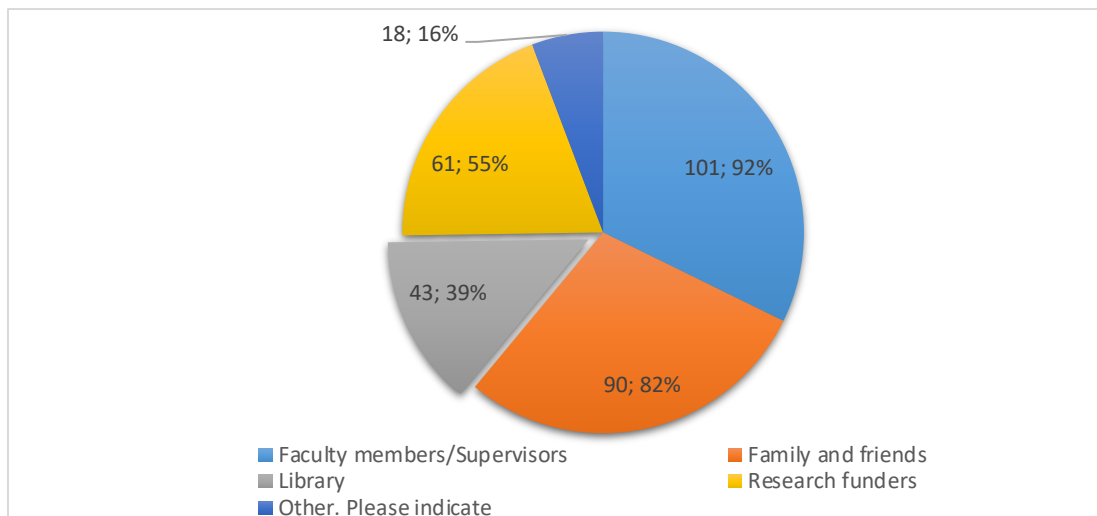


Figure 9: Current considerations for acknowledgements (n=110)



6.5 Other comments and suggestions by postgraduate students

The last section of the survey allowed students to comment or make suggestions. The majority of comments showed that this study has served to create an awareness that the library can be acknowledged in TDs although a few other comments pointed out that the library did not play a big enough role to be acknowledged in their studies. Below are some of the students' comments:

Respondent A: *Library employees are very useful to postgraduate studies. I suggest they should be consulted from the beginning of the thesis and they should also be acknowledged.*

Respondent B: *The library is very important and plays a very vital role in our academic journey. I would like to acknowledge the library.*

Respondent C: *One has never thought of acknowledging the library for the support provided. 2 (sic) think of it, it is a noble thing to do and that the library and librarians should be acknowledged for the part they play in helping students with their theses.*

Respondent D: *The library plays a vital role in our studies, looking back, I do not think I could have made it without the library and certain staff members who were always delighted to guide me in finding information. Thank you for making me aware of its important role in my studies and it deserves great acknowledgements.*

Respondent E: *More awareness into getting to know that the library can be acknowledged is needed because I did not see anyone acknowledging it in their theses so I thought it was not necessary. Maybe supervisors should tell students to acknowledge the library as well.*

Respondent F: *The general thinking of researchers is that the library is a university facility, and it never occurs in the minds of researchers to go an extra mile and acknowledge the library. From now on, I will have to acknowledge all those who give me a hand during the course of my success. Thank you.*

Respondent G: *Through this survey I was able to see how one often overlooks the important role played by the library in the completion of a thesis/dissertation. This is particularly because I am originally a student at Wits University. I am a CHELSA member at the NWU hence I have access to the library. It would be worth considering acknowledging NWU library in my case.*

Respondent G: *This is novel and I was struck by the negligence of not acknowledging the library.*

Respondent H: *In my opinion librarians act as catalyst to research development but do not actively contribute to knowledge creation hence I do not acknowledge them.*

Respondent I: *I only acknowledged my family and friends because there was no support from the library and supervisors.*

Respondent J: *In my previous studies I did not have much support from the library as much as I do now at NWU.*

Students' comments re-emphasise earlier findings that most students use previous TDs to decide on who to acknowledge. Students who have never been exposed to library acknowledgements in previous TDs may not feel the need to acknowledge the library at all in theirs further confirming the existence of a cumulative advantage in acknowledgements (Price, 1976:292). Therefore, libraries and librarians in fields or disciplines or libraries that do not have a common culture of library acknowledgements in TDs, may find it difficult to consider acknowledgements as a reliable measure of the impact of the library. It is also interesting to note that students' views also highlight the role of libraries to other institutions. Respondent G, indicates that s/he makes use of NWU LIS despite being a student of Wits University. This indicates that academic libraries and librarians have an impact beyond their host university as also shown by the acknowledgements of external libraries and librarians in the bibliometrics study as well as other studies including Hubbard et al. (2018). This comment may be interpreted as the vindication of the CHELSA Agreement between public universities in South Africa (CHELSA, 2005).

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine acknowledgements in ETDs at North-West University in South Africa. It was found that the role of librarians and libraries is rarely captured in ETD acknowledgements. In line with other studies on the subject, supervisors of postgraduate students received more acknowledgements than any other category of those acknowledged followed by family and friends, religious support and inspiration while the library and librarians were acknowledged in only 15% of the ETDs. The research also found that the majority of postgraduate students consider previous studies as a template for who to acknowledge in their studies meaning that those who were previously acknowledged in ETDs have a better chance of receiving more acknowledgements in future. Based on these results, it was concluded that acknowledgements appear to conform to the cumulative advantage theory of citation.

The results of this study have implications for libraries and librarians alike. These results show that ETD acknowledgements may not be a complete reflection of the extent of library contribution to postgraduate students' learning, research and throughput. In some cases, the low number of acknowledgements of the library and librarians is a reflection of a lack of a

culture of acknowledging the library in an institution or discipline or campus. As a measure of the impact of libraries, therefore, acknowledgements should be used with caution. Although they may be used to indicate that the library/librarians play some role in the production of TDs, most students do not give acknowledgements serious thought as they simply copy what other students before them wrote. If the culture of giving gratitude to the library/librarians is not developed in a particular university or discipline or campus, students may not acknowledge the role of the library/librarians out of ignorance rather than as a result of the library/librarians not playing a significant role. Assessing the impact of the library using the TD acknowledgements, therefore, would work better in environments that have developed a culture of acknowledging the library. In environments where the culture of library acknowledgements has not taken root, acknowledgements may work better as a good evidence for individual librarians' performance management reviews rather than to demonstrate the contribution of the whole library. These results support some usage of acknowledgements as a complementary measure to prove the library's worth and as part of individual librarian's portfolio of evidence during performance reviews or even as part of one's CV in certain fields such as Law, Theology, History, Humanities and Health. Evidence in this study shows that they may not work for the majority of Natural Sciences and Engineering fields. This study has also provided evidence that acknowledgements may not reflect the role of bigger libraries well compared to small branch libraries and dedicated libraries or spaces within bigger libraries. As a measure of impact, acknowledgements should be used with caution in bigger libraries and Natural Sciences and Engineering libraries.

Based on the results, the authors recommend that: since acknowledgements may inspire or motivate those who are acknowledged to assist more, research offices should develop clear guidelines regarding the acknowledgement section of research which should be incorporated into the postgraduate studies guide. The authors further recommend that a study involving a wider audience in respect of universities and librarians be conducted in order to be able to generalise the trends. A study of librarians' views will shed some light on their feelings about being or not being acknowledged as well as the value they attach to acknowledgements.

Acknowledgements and non-acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge Ms Papula Baas, the Interlibrary Loans Librarian at the Mafikeng Campus of NWU, for her willingness to request books for us from other campuses of NWU and libraries of other institutions. We are grateful to all those who participated in our study, including those who do not intend to acknowledge the library/librarians in future. We salute all students who acknowledged the library/librarians in their ETDs. On a lighter note, besides the students who participated in this study, we do not acknowledge all other students who did not show gratitude to the library in their TDs previously or in future.

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Library & Information Services

LIBRARY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN THESES AND DISSERTATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

You are invited to participate in the survey that aims to determine the library acknowledgment behaviour of postgraduate students in their theses and dissertations. It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete the survey. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can decide not to participate in the survey. It is very important for us to learn your opinions. Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate in the form of library report/s, conference paper/s and journal article/s.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Which of the following categories relates to you?

a. Age

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55 and above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54 | |

b. User category

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honours | <input type="checkbox"/> Masters | <input type="checkbox"/> PhD |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

c. Faculty

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics & Management Sciences | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health Sciences | <input type="checkbox"/> Humanities | <input type="checkbox"/> Law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Natural & Agricultural Sciences | <input type="checkbox"/> Theology | |

B. LIBRARY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. What is your view in relation to acknowledgments in thesis and dissertations?

- Not important Somewhat important Very important

2. Do you think acknowledging parties that play a role in your academic achievements is a good practice?

- Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral
 Agree Strongly agree

3. Which role players do you consider to be included in acknowledgements?

- Faculty
 Members/Supervisors Family and friends Library
 Research funders

4. Have you acknowledged the library or librarians in your master's thesis/dissertation?

- Yes No

a. If you answered "No" in the previous question, which reason/s made you not to acknowledge the library?

- Never had support from Unaware of the services Never thought of the
 the library available to me library

a. If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, which reason/s made you to acknowledge the library?

- Research support Facilities Resources
 Staff

4. Would you consider acknowledging the library in your thesis or dissertation in future?

- Yes No

Comments or suggestions

Thank you for your participation

