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## Examining the Role, Values, and Legal Policy Issues Facing Public Library Resources in Supporting Students to Achieve Academic Success

### Abstract

This paper aims to present the role, values, and legal policy issues facing public Library resources in supporting students to achieve academic success. Research indicates that majority of people that own or work in the Library tend to ignore some of the vital roles, values and legal policy issues paramount to libraries. Some of these issues are centred on internet access, data protection, copyright and access for disabled. Whether you are dealing with internet access, data protection, copyright or disabilities, the best way to protect yourself is to be aware of the policies and legal implications that access to library presents. This mini research therefore aims to present the findings and perceptions of Library users with main focus on the role, values and legal policy implications; with reference to Steve Azaiki Library in a Local Community of Bayelsa State of Nigeria and impact on students' academic success. Collection of data analysis was based on our visit to the Azaiki Library in Yenagoa during the ISCEST annual conference 2014, which gave us access and big opportunity to interview some of the library users to ascertain from them how they perceive the role, values and implications of legal policy on Azaiki Library. The findings of this mini research clearly indicates good benefit and value of library resources and link to academic achievement as well as enhanced research activities of the Bayelsa law students and the entire community; although with few participants not quite sure of the key legal policy implications such as access to disabled students and data protection using the library internet. Few participants stated that it was too early to see the full benefits and full utilisation of resources as the library had recently been built and opened.

Keywords: education, library resources, legal policy compliance, students, academic success

### Introduction

Student support in the world of education has always been one of the key research interest of the Focus Learning Support Group with the primary aim of 'Making Education Count' for the youths.

Students' academic success is a key issue in education and something that all involved in should take serious. Achinewhu-Nworgu (2007) in her Doctorate research identified nine key strategies promoting student retention and when students are retained, they are likely to achieve academic success. Achieving academic success obviously requires some element of support from the institutions, parents and what more the resources to back up the study. There are many strategies put in place to support academic achievements. Library is one of the key resources perceived as important in supporting students. Library is also subject to legal policy compliance in the areas of health and safety, access to internet, copywriter, data protection and access to disabled. They key issue is that all involved in the work of providing library resources (education institutions or private ownership) as an aid to

support students' academic success must comply to the legal policy obligations. Failure to provide strict rules and regulations to manage and access library information can lead to breach of compliance to government laid down rules and regulations in the areas mentioned above.

## **Context**

The movement for Public Libraries started in America in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (NCAC, 1999), and since then, libraries have played a unique and critical role in the academic world including America, United Kingdom and Nigeria. Public libraries play a vital role in providing free access to resources that stimulate the mind, develop the skills and knowledge in the academic world. It acts as a connecting point for students, individuals, community and caters for other non-academic events. Libraries can be used for academic research, information about jobs, meetings, events, government activities and community functions and like every other education resource; they are subject to legal policy scrutiny and compliance.

A lot of research and literature have centred on the use and role of library in institutions; however, there are limitations in research about the importance of being aware of the legal policy issues in the areas of complying with data protection, copy rights and access for disabled in a Nigerian Local Community Library. Libraries if well-resourced and managed properly play a vital role in connecting students to achieving academic success. Use of library resources can help students to connect and engage with the universities or colleges, also in the areas of available learning materials such as books, e-learning materials and equip students with the skills and knowledge to effectively engage in academic studies.

In addition, many researchers are beginning to seriously engage more on exploring formally the benefits and values university and college academic libraries can provide to students, while others like Prof. Azaiki embarked on intensive projects in building a library as a resource centre to support students' academic achievement. The benefits and values of academic libraries has extended to scholars providing evidence of positive associations between college students' use of academic libraries and link to retention and academic achievement from their first year to their second year of enrolment and to their final first-year cumulative grade point average.

Other studies, such as Wells (2008), have revealed positive links between the number of books students borrowed and their grade point average and significant relationships between the number of resources held at libraries and students' development of critical thinking skills. In an earlier study, Wells also found statistically significant and positive correlations between students' use of academic library resources (e.g., borrowed books, journal articles, items in the reserve collection) and their academic achievement. The effects of these research studies have helped move librarians from simply asserting that their libraries positively promote students' learning to truly understanding the ways in which students' use of academic libraries is associated with their learning and academic success. However, irrespective of the body of literature in this area, there is still limited evidence to justify a link between students' use of academic libraries to their academic success. As justified by Wells "Moving forward with a service and enhancing the library services through online, means that more remote and rural

areas have access to books which will be great". Library provides good opportunity for online services and to obtain relevant books as justified in Wells argument not to close a Local Council Library.

Library resource acts as a first point of internet access to students for their school work, children, community, government and academicians as well as the public and community at large. There is currently no baseline national data on precisely why these individuals are looking to the public library for Internet access, in any case, there are legal policy issues on copywriter and data protection and to how or to what extent they are using the technology provided in the libraries. Research evidence indicates that many libraries are integrating technology into existing programs, including children's services and homework centres. Libraries are enhancing their reference collections with electronic resources, including commercial databases of magazines, newspapers and sometimes more specialized sources. Research indicates that, as of 1997, about ten percent of public libraries—mostly in large cities—had home pages on the World Wide Web. Some of these include online catalogues, remote access to databases and guidance on finding and selecting online resources. Some libraries have embarked on more extensive (and more expensive) efforts to use the Internet to build and strengthen real-world communities, attract new users and enhance the library's role as a source of information and learning. These initiatives, too, draw on librarians' expertise in selecting and evaluating material, as well as the role of the library in protection of legal rights in accessing certain information and providing access to disabled. It then seems obvious that Libraries play key roles and values in the academic lives of students and people at large.

In examining nine key strategies promoting student retention (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2007, 2008), most of these nine key strategies have focussed on tutoring, financial support, additional learning support, financial advice, liaison with job centres and other agencies, health care support and counselling services. There was not much mention about the role of Library resources in supporting students' academic success. Library resources provide useful academic information required by students to successfully complete a programme of study particularly in this modern era where computer access in the library plays vital role through internet access to information.

In relation to broader institution support services for students over the world, it has been found that students are generally aware that these services exist but do not always know how to access them (Martinez & Munday, 1998, p. 102). Moreover, there can be a fear of becoming stigmatised that may prevent some students from accessing these academic supporting services. The most effective student support services appear to exist where there are clear roles, responsibilities, policy and procedures for course teams and dedicated support staff to create awareness of the existence of these services (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2007) hence creating awareness of the role, values and legal policy implications of libraries is crucial.

From the point of view of this paper, it is important that the full range of library support services are available and accessible; that students are kept well informed about these and that there is no stigma in accessing these services particularly to the disabled; as well as be made aware of legal policy compliance to copywriter and data protection acts. Library support has been seen as being a particularly important

aspect of student support, although there has been limited research on their link to student academic achievement. Access to library may be the first point of call for students when they are having difficulties in achieving academic success and are therefore key to the early identification of problems in their studies. This mini research therefore aimed to further explore whether there is a link between the uses of Steve Azaiki library to the Bayelsa Law students' academic success; whether the users did have clear knowledge of copywriter, data protection and access to disable issues relating to legal policy compliance.

## **Methodology**

In any education research carried out, there must exist a systematic way of conducting it to basically have access for information as a tool to analyse and draw conclusions. In this small scale research, the prompt was based on a visit to Bayelsa State of Nigeria during the ISCEST Annual conference 2014, where we visited the Azaiki Public Library in Yenagoa. We approached some of the beneficiaries of the Azaiki Library who were students and some indigenes of Bayelsa community; to find out their perceptions on the role, values and understanding of legal policy issues of the Azaiki Library.

Data collection was mainly through discussion, going round talking to people, followed by a phone call to those whose numbers were collected. We targeted a small group of 20 students who were mainly law students who also attended the conference, including some university students we visited in Etuoke University in Bayelsa State. Bearing in mind that this is a small scale research; the number of participants in this present work were sufficient at this stage to gather relevant data to form research opinion and to draw a conclusion on the role, values and legal policy issues and impact to students' academic success.

## **Azaiki Public Library (A case study)**

Azaiki Public Library Foundation Inc is a registered United States based Non Profit educational foundation organized primarily to provide educational and research assistance to students, academics, educational institutions and the general public in Africa with main focus in Nigeria. The foundation has just completed the construction of a State of the Art Library and Museum in Yenogua, Bayelsa State of Nigeria which the City is central to the Nigerian Law School-Yenagoa, University of Port-Harcourt, Center of Advanced Social Sciences and other notable educational Institutions in Southern Nigeria. The Library has over 30,000 books shelved on traditional way, an offline solution of e-library with over 30,000,000 reading materials including audio, video materials, articles to mention but a few. The main objective is to empower the new generation and make a contribution to the nation to help uplift the progress in business, science, technology and to undertake cutting-edge research that will inform policy and development in Nigeria. The Library has building reading rooms, a mini children corner, two Conference/Seminar halls (for 100 and 50 seats respectively), Museum of Niger-Delta, and a Gallery of Modern and Contemporary African Arts occupying four large halls. As a generation of greater opportunities backed up by modern technological advancement and unprecedented innovations, the activities of the library is committed to knowledge

development services creating a legacy of continuing education, re-engineering of skills and retaining leadership position by providing up to date needing materials and a world class e-Library. The key focus of this mini research is to examine the role and contribution of the library in providing needing materials and a world class e-library to support students from Bayelsa State of Nigeria in achieving academic success also to find out the understanding of the legal policy and compliance in the areas of copywriter, data protection and access to disabled.

## Findings

Majority of the people we had discussion with during the visit were very grateful and appreciative of the Azaiki library as a good resource centre for them, particularly within their community as people can easily visit the library and get relevant books to study. The Majority of the law students met found the use of the library relevant in accessing the history and law books which are made available and accessible. The findings also indicate that most law students who made use of the library to borrow books for their studies (law and history books, offline loans etc.) performed better in their studies. Most students who used the library commented on the values and benefits as being relevant to their academic studies in the areas of information technology using library computers for internet access, search for information, relevant literature, developing analytical skills, effective reading and writing, access to research materials and generation of academic ideas in report writing and essays. However, few of the participants did not realise the seriousness of compliance to the legal policy implications such as data protection, copywriter and access to disabled.

### *Students' comments*

*I witnessed the building of this library and I am very happy that it benefits me and other law students in our studies. Although a little bit far from my university, I don't mind coming all the way from Etuoke to use the library. It has what I need, relevant books and I like reading different textbooks before constructing my essay. I can also browse the computers for what I want to research on. The resources definitely help a lot in boosting my grades as I can compare and contrast with other books. (MA)*

*Madam, honestly the root of academic success is having the resources to support it. A study without access to a good Library does not go well. The good thing about Azaiki Library is that it has a lot of resources, many different text books from abroad, very neat and tidy, conducive atmosphere to study quietly. I like coming here to hide for my studies. However, more people need to have access and made aware which can be done through creating more awareness. (CHA)*

*I cannot tell you how grateful we are in this community having this wonderful Library mainly used by the law students. Ma, you do know what it takes to study law, constant reading of relevant and current cases, articles and law books with changes in articles and law, require updating of the skills. In UK, most libraries open 24 hours. We need that here particularly during exam time. Finding relevant books here in Nigeria to cope with your research work is not easy, but his library is a great opportunity for us and can be more resourced with current law books. (HE)*

*Sorry I am not from Bayelsa to know the benefits of this library. My friend invited me to this event and that is my reason for being here. I wish this library was built in Port Harcourt. Students would have benefited more in uni campus. (OC)*

*This building serves a lot of things, conferences like this, government activities, arts, history, exhibitions as you can see many historical things. It is amazing and very beneficial to all in Bayelsa. But it must have free access, although it is new to tell you more of my benefits to it. (EAB)*

*I am not quite sure of the relevant legal policy issues than health and safety while in the building. Internet regulation has always been ignored by all providers of internet. People can still have access to your information if they want to. Who will monitor what you are browsing on computer, the staff or the Prof himself? The only way to comply with the law is for us to have a written policy which everyone has to have a copy and let it be displayed where we can all see it. Word of mouth does not work in Niger; although, there is good security system and fire safety precautions here to protect those using the library.*

*Disabled people, what sort of access and legal protection here for them? People on their legs need to be catered for first. In Nigeria, disabled people are not recognised, much more building a special entrance door for them. Who will do that? Too early to access the benefits, values and what the library will do more in the case of policy and legal compliance. (TO)*

## Conclusions

The findings of the mini research clearly indicate good benefits and values perceived by the participants; how it has enhanced research activities; although with some stating that it was too early to see the full benefits as the library had recently been built and opened to the public use. Others commented on creating lack of access for the disabled and unclear knowledge of legal policy compliance. We conclude to say that the most effective support to students here is to have clear legal policy and access to disabled. However, due to limited words for this paper, part 2 of our findings on legal compliance of Azaiki Library will be fully presented in future conference.

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