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Town-Gown Relationship: Assessment of Community Information Services by Academic Libraries in Ondo State Nigeria

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Background to the Study:

Town in the context of this study means the non-academic population while gown mean the university, polytechnic or college setup. Hence Town-gown relationship is the cohabitation among community residents, students and the academic community (faculty, registry and so on), which could be friendly or hostile. Wikipedia (2014) recorded that in the past (early 1800), newly admitted European University students often wear clerical gown and donned garb similar to that worn by clergy. This served as social symbol. By this distinct, the students were set apart from the citizens of the town. This led to the origination of the concept: town and gown.

According to Highered (2014) the International Town and Gown Association (ITGA) has been established in the United States of America with the responsibility of advocating issues and trends as well as tips for fostering successful relations between colleges and the communities in which they reside. The body also offers certificate programmes in town-gown relations. The justification for this was reported by Kemp (2013) that higher institutions have positive economic development impact, directly or indirectly on the community and the residents who live on it. Besides, Ezzo (2014) believed that town-gown relationship facilitate communication between institutions of higher education and the neighbourhood in which they reside. This help to balance ideas or concept definitions between the town and the school.

Various researches have revealed how universities and other academic institutions have identified the gains of town-gown relationship and have taken one step or the other to maximise the potentials. For instance, Queen University Canada (2014) stated that it has established a Town-gown relations department under the students Affairs Division. The department primary duty are to: bring students and community together, provide guidance, foster the spirit of oneness in the community and ensure better understanding of rights and responsibilities by students. Also, Ohme (2014) carried out a research on the economic impact of university of Delaware on its community and state and found that the university had impacted positively the economic development of the community. It was concluded that the estimated spending from student, staff and university support approximately 8170 jobs in the state of Delaware and have contributed 735 million dollars worth of economic impact between 1999 and 2003.

Based on these premises, of what significance is the academic library which usually claim to be the heart beat of the academic community? That is, academic libraries should be able to contribute to the external community either socially, mentally, financially or

otherwise. These could only occur when they see themselves as agent of community and national development. Hence, they need to change their scope beyond the academic environment by providing evidence of their value to their immediate community. As a matter of fact, one of the ways to achieve this is through effective rendering of Community Information Service (CIS).

CIS revolves round information meant for the survival and growth of the community or information needed by community members to make good use of available information resources. Islam (2010) described CIS as offering survival information such as that related to health, housing, income, legal protection, economic opportunity and political right. It is a service offered by all librarians and libraries to provide people with information relevant to their everyday life, particularly those in the lower – economic and disadvantaged groups who need to learn how to obtain, understand and use information. It was originally intended to eradicate deprivation and illiteracy in the rural area. By implication, this in the long run makes them better citizens who are ready to participate and contribute meaningfully to societal development.

University of San Diego (2013); Columbia University (2013); Shippensburg University (2014); and Queen's University (2014) reported how community people or visitors have been utilizing their community information services. University of San Diego (2013) revealed that its library provided access for the community people to make use of research library subject to availability of staff and resources. They are also subjected to additional restrictions apart from the library's code of conduct. Visitors are allowed to use the collections within the library's building but cannot borrow materials for use at home, without a library privilege card. Such visitor must be over 18 years of age. Though, access to licensed database is not available to visitors, services such as: assistance in using the online catalogue, access to library resources on self-help basis, brief answer to references queries, assistance in locating collections and limited telephone and e-mail assistance are available to them.

Besides, Columbia University (2013) indicated that its library created a database known as: Community Service Society Photographs. This is an online presentation of almost 1400 photographs of most significant social documentary images taken in New York City from the 1880s through 1950s. Such photographs are men, women, and children in environments such as bath houses, tenements, playground, streets and business. The objective of this is to advocate for quality of life improvement in housing, nutrition, sanitation and labour.

Also, Shippensburg University (2014) reported that its library registers community patrons who are above 18 years of age. They could borrow books for 28 days and video/DVD for 14 days. They pay 10 dollars per annum and are subjects to overdue fines and replacement costs. High school students could borrow through interlibrary loan at their school library or parents must accompany them to the university library and make application on behalf of their children. Equally, according to Queen's University (2014) library visitors are welcome to consult prints, library catalogue, database (in-library access only), basic information services and reading room. They may borrow books, but must first purchase a community borrowers card. Adults pay 50 dollars while community students pay 35 dollars per years.

However, in Nigeria, Community Information Service (CIS) rendered by academic libraries does not thrive as it is in developed nations. Priority is not given to providing information materials for community residents during selection and when they come occasionally they face brick wall. This therefore calls for a second look at the academic library acquisition policy in order to align with current global practices in academic libraries. Evidences abound on how academic communities in both developed and developing nations have been promoting the concept: town-gown relationship. Academic libraries being significant components of academic community would not fold their hands and watch from the side track. It must be a participating and dominant partner in town-gown relationship through delivering of CIS. It is in light of this that this study assessed CIS delivery among academic libraries in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Information poverty abounds among citizens in Ondo State, Nigeria. Pointers to this are: insufficient information for business, survival, community growth, health, housing income, political right and economic opportunity. Besides isolated cases of protest, kidnapping and terrorism is an evidence of social misdemeanour which could arise as a result of lack of access to information that would educate and re-orientate the citizens towards understanding governance principles and ensuring peace. Could these be informed by poor community information service delivery by academic libraries? Consequently, this work assesses CIS in academic libraries in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Evaluate Community Information Service (CIS) among academic libraries in Ondo State, Nigeria;
- ii. Assess services in CIS;
- iii. Identify the category of community citizens that benefit from CIS;
- iv. Identify the category of information the community sought for;
- v. Evaluate materials being sought for by community citizens; and
- vi. Find challenges militating against CIS in academic libraries.

Research Questions

- 1) How is CIS among academic libraries in Ondo State?
- 2) What are the CIS being rendered?
- 3) What category of community citizens do benefit from CIS?
- 4) What category of information does the community citizens sought for?
- 5) What type of materials do community citizens use?
- 6) What are the challenges militating against CIS?

Scope of the Study:

The scope of this study is all the six academic libraries in Ondo State Nigeria. Community Information Service covers: the services being rendered to the community by academic libraries the category of community people being served, information being sought by them, materials being used and challenges.

Research Design:

The descriptive research design is adopted in this study.

Population of the Study:

The study population were all 58 librarians working in 6 academic libraries in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size:

Complete enumeration sampling technique was used to select all 58 librarians working in academic libraries in Ondo State. The sample size was therefore 58.

Data Collection Instrument:

Data was collected using a 6 – section questionnaire titled: Community Information Service By Academic Library Questionnaire. Section A evaluated CIS, Section B asked questions on services, section C sought for answers on category of community citizens that benefit from CIS, section D asked for the kind of information they sought, section E sought for materials used most while section F asked for challenges militating against CIS.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments:

The instrument validity was conducted by giving it to experts in the field of librarianship working at Adeyemi College of Education (ACE) Ondo. Contributions/ suggestions made by them were effected to boost the validity of the instrument. Also, the instrument reliability was carried out by distributing them to all 8 librarians working at the College of Education, Ikere Ekiti. It has a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

Response Rate:

Table 1: Response Rate of Questionnaire

No of questionnaires distributed	No of questionnaires returned	Response Rate (%)
58	52	89.7

Out of 58 questionnaires distributed, 52 were returned and found useful. The response rate was therefore 89.7%.

Research Question 1: How is CIS among academic libraries in Ondo State?

92.3% of the respondents indicated that they rendered community service to visitors in academic libraries. However, none of the investigated libraries issued out privilege card to community members except the relations of the institutions’ staff. Registration fee was not being collected from members of the community in all the academic libraries. Visitors were highly restricted and must show school, office or national identity card before making use of library resources. Some libraries mandated them to submit their hand phones before making photocopies. These were contrary to events in University of San Diego University and Columbia University which register external at specific fees.

Research Questions 2: What are the CISs being rendered?

Table 2: CISs Being Rendered by Academic Libraries

S/No	CISs	No	%
1.	Access to academic research	46	88.5
2.	Access to instructional materials	45	86.5
3.	Selective dissemination of information	3	5.8
4.	Current awareness services	5	9.6
5.	References	43	82.7
6.	Workshop / seminars	8	15.4
7.	Borrowing	0	0
8.	Reading / studying	50	96.2
9.	Online Catalogue	12	23.1
10.	Location of collections	21	40.4
11.	e-mail	2	3.9
12.	Photocopy	45	86.5
13.	Binding	33	63.5
14.	Relaxation	5	9.6

From table 2 above main services being enjoyed by community members were: reading/studying (96.2%) photocopy (86.5%), access to academic research (88.5%). The least utilized services were: e-mailing (3.9%), SDI (5.8%), CAS (9.6%) and relaxation (9.6%). None of the academic libraries allowed community member to borrow books. However, photocopy can be made (86.5%). This is contrary to situations in Shippensburg University and Queen's University where visitors are allowed to borrow book.

Research Question 3: What category of community citizens do benefit from CIS?

Table 3: Categories of Community Members that Benefit from CIS

S/No	Community Members	No	%
1.	Students (other schools)	52	100
2.	Market women	2	3.9
3.	Professionals	51	98.1
4.	Artisans	3	5.8
5.	Drivers	3	5.8

6.	Researchers	52	100
7.	Staff family members	52	100

From table 3, the main category of community members that benefited from CIS were students from other schools (100%), researchers (100%), staff family members (100%) and professionals (98.1%). Artisans (5.8%) drivers (5.8%) and market women (3.9%) were least served. This implied that the CIS being delivered by academic libraries centred on the literate segment of the society leaving behind the illiterates who really need the CIS.

Research Questions 4: What category of information do community members sought for?

Table 4: Categories of Information Being Sought by Community Member

S/No	Information Categories	No	%
1.	Health	11	21.2
2.	Housing	20	38.5
3.	Income	26	50
4.	Legal protection	31	59.7
5.	Economic opportunity	37	71.2
6.	Political right	50	96.2
7.	Job opportunities	50	96.2
8.	Entertainment	48	92.3
9.	Research	48	92.2

From table 4, the main categories of information being sought are: politics (96.2%) job opportunities (96.2%) entertainment (92.3%) and research (92.3%). The least are: housing (38.5%) and health (21.2%). This implies that citizens did not place priority on health and housing, but on job and politics.

Research Question 5: What type of information materials do community members use?

Table 5: Information Materials Being Used by Community Members

S/No	Materials	No	%
1.	Newspapers	47	90.4
2.	Journals	31	59.7
3.	Textbooks	50	96.2
4.	References materials	45	86.5
5.	Magazines	36	69.2
6.	Projects	41	78.9
7.	ICT	23	44.2

The main information materials being used as shown on table 5 were: textbooks (96.2%) newspaper (90.4%) and reference materials (86.5%). The least used were: Journals (59.7%) and ICT (44.2%). 59.7 % used journals because most of the visitors were scholars

Research Question 6: What are challenges militating against CIS

Table 6: Challenges of CIS in Academic Libraries

S/No	Materials	No	%
1.	Insufficient staff	23	44.2
2.	Insufficient information resources	49	94.2
3.	Insecurity	51	98.1
4.	Abuse by visitors	19	36.5
5.	Disobedience to sue and conduct code	18	34.6

From table 6, main challenges of CIS were: insufficient information resources (94.2%) and insecurity (98.1%) while least challenges were abuse (36.5%) and disobedience to use and conduct code (34.6%).

Conclusion:

The study conclusively found that CISs were being utilized only by scholars and professional while main information being sought were on job opportunities and political right. Besides, restrictions meted on visitors were likely to discourage artisans, market women, drivers and others from using academic libraries. Hence academic librarians and other stakeholders should begin to visualize their libraries as an integral part of the academic system which must make its service to the immediate community a significant one. This would also align with practices in developed nations academic libraries that have key in into the concept of town-gown relationship.

Recommendations:

Having exhaustively discussed town-gown relationship with cognisance to CIS by academic libraries, the following recommendations are provided:

- Adequate publicity should be made to inform the community that they can benefit from academic libraries;
- Community members should be allowed to borrow books once staff can stand as their surety;
- Illiterates should be well accommodated into the library;
- Materials that are relevant to needs of community members should be acquired; and
- Security system in academic libraries should be beefed up to accommodate externals.

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