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## EXTENT OF AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF LAW REPORTS BY LAW STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITIES OF UYO AND CALABAR LAW LIBRARIES

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### *Abstract*

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*This study investigates the extent of availability and utilization of law reports by final year lawstudents in the Universities of Uyo and Calabar law libraries. Survey research design was adopted for the study. A total of 450 under graduate final year Law students projects were examined to determine the frequency of citations of law reports. The study was carried out between 2003/2004-2006/2007 academic sessions. The instrument used for collecting data was the observation method. Simple percentage and chi-square were used to analyze data. Findings showed that the number of law reports available in the universities of Uyo and Calabar law libraries and the frequency of citations keep increasing in each academic session. Further results showed that there is a relationship between the extent of availability and utilization of law reports by law students in the law libraries surveyed. Recommendations were made, consequent upon findings of the study.*

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**Keywords:** Law reports, Utilization. Availability, Law library, Students.

### **Introduction**

The law library has distinctive and valuable contributions to make to the legal profession which is a highly book reading and book consumption profession. It is the pivot on which legal research revolves. Expectation of users of the law library includes availability of legal sources for teaching, learning and research. In trying to meet the expected provision, the library acquires legal sources of information, organizes and disseminates same in print and non-print formats. Without well-equipped law libraries, legal practitioners will surely perform below standard in the classrooms, courts, judicial offices, bench and finally in society, since law is a very functional, dynamic and an effective social engineering discipline.

Law resources are undoubtedly the raw materials with which legal framework is made. They are to the legal professionals what the stethoscope is to the doctors and laboratories to scientists. They point to what has been accepted and what is acceptable. They are very crucial in the basic processes of researching the law. These sources are heavily utilized by law students, lecturers and practicing lawyers.

A law library is ideally a collection of legal materials wholly or mainly consisting of legal information organized for use of those seeking to qualify as, or who have qualified as, lawyers and those enacting or administering law (Balogun, 1984). They are as critical as the knowledge and information foundation of legal institutions. These institutions may be located in the judiciary, law faculties, research institutions, private chambers, the legislature or law related institutions. The value of information so provided is predicated in the quality of available accessible resources. This refers to accuracy, currency and completeness of answers given to the library user's inquiry. Thus, the vast information resources in law libraries are of vital importance in tackling the challenges and problems of legal studies and law development. The law librarian must therefore be learned with an intimate knowledge of the collection in order to effectively organize access, retrieve and efficiently disseminate information available in the library resources.

The information resources available in the law library are classified into two broad categories: the primary sources and the secondary sources. The primary sources comprise original and authoritative statements of the law subdivided into legislations (law made by the parliaments) law reports, constitutions and regulations. The secondary sources on the other hand comprise the commentaries, explanations, reviews or guides to the primary sources. They are textbooks, encyclopedias, journals and other periodicals and research literature such as undergraduate projects and post graduate theses (Clinch, 2001).

Utilization of law library resources therefore is premised upon adequacy (Ranganathan, 1988; Waples 1993). Standard law libraries such as those of University of Uyo and Calabar render services like orientation, current awareness, user education, registration of readers and general information. All these services aim at producing quality library service to users thereby enhancing the effective utilization of the library resources.

It is against this background that this study sought to investigate the relationship between the extent of availability and utilization of law resources by law students in the Universities of Uyo and Calabar law libraries.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Behind the success of every academic institution there is a functional and dynamic library that strongly supports the institution's goals. No law faculty can successfully train law graduates without having in place an efficient and a well-managed library. Law libraries tend to have common characteristics, stocks and

similar approach to the acquisition, retrieval and dissemination of legal information. Sanni (2006) emphasized the crucial role of the primary sources of information in the law student's academic performance and advised all law students against the practice of confining themselves to only secondary sources. He advised that the undergraduate law students should familiarize themselves with the primary and secondary sources of information as well as the library catalogue. However, the effective utilization of these resources by the undergraduate law students in the Universities of Uyo and Calabar depends on the extent of their availability in the law libraries. This is the crux of this study.

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was formulated for this study;

- There is no significant relationship between the extent of availability and utilization of law reports by final year law students in universities of Uyo and Calabar law libraries.

### **Literature Review**

Law reports refer to the publications containing collections of decisions. The basic element found in a law report according to Essien (2006) are; names of other parties, name of the court, name of judges, dates of hearing and judgment, catchwords, head note, commentary or notes, lists of other cases cited in argument, details of proceedings, names of counsel, judgment, formal order, names of solicitors and name of the law report.

Law reports as well as efficient law reporting system are essential for a smooth system of judicial administration. This is because in any nation where the principle of judicial precedent is operational, like Nigeria, it is only by references to reported cases that courts and lawyers would be able to ascertain the portion of law in their areas of jurisdiction. The first form of law reports in Nigeria was the Nigerian law reports which emerged in 1881 but today they have become extinct. One regrettable trend in the law reporting system in Nigeria is the lack of sustainability. This has been the experience with most government and private initiatives in that regard. Koleoso (2006) identifies the Law Reports in Nigerian circulation as follows:

*'Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (NWLR); Nigerian Law Reports (NLR,); Federal Supreme Court of Nigeria Law Reports (FSCNLR,); Law Report of the High Court of the Federal Territory of Lagos (LCCH); All Nigeria Law Reports (All NLR) Cyclostyled Judgment*

*of the Supreme Court of Nigeria (SC.); Nigerian Monthly Law Reports (NMLR.); Law Reports of Courts of Nigeria (LRCN) Law Reports of Nigeria (LRN.); The Nigerian Commercial Law Reports (NCLR.); Federal High Court Law Reports (FHCLR); Nigerian Constitutional Law Reports (NCLR); Law Reports of Eastern Nigeria (LREN); Rivers State Law Reports (RSLR.); University of Ife Law Reports (UILR); Federal Revenue Court Law Reports (FRCLR.); Law Reports of the Northern Region of Nigeria (LRNRN.); Nigerian Criminal Law Report (NCLR.); Law Reports of the East Central State (LRECS); Selected Judgments of High Court of Lagos State (SCJ) Akwa Ibom/Cross River State Law Report (AK/CRLR), All Federation Law Reports (All FWLR,) and Federation Weekly Law Report (FWLR)*

There are also some law reports which are classified as English Law Reports. These were published since 1865. They are published in English jurisdictions. Examples of these law reports according to Clinch (2001) are:

*“All England Law Report (All ELR.); 2 King’s Bench (KB); Queen’s Bench (QB); Appeal Cases (AC); Chancery Division (Ch.D.) International Law Quarterly (JLQ); Times Law Reports (TLR.); Supreme Court Reports (Canada (SCR).)*

Since there are many different law report publications, Clinch (2001) states that what constitutes an authoritative report is that the report must have been prepared by and published under the name of a barrister. In academic law libraries where law is taught to degree level, at least one set of each of the fulltext general coverage modern law reports and some if not all, of the brief-notes, general reports are available for utilization. Academic law libraries also keep a set of the English Law Reports (1220-1865) or at least the All England Law Reports Major cases (1558-1935). Some of the larger academic libraries will also have a selection of the nominate reports in their original form. Some of the series of these law reports are now available on Compact Disc (CD). The range of titles is ever widening and includes CD versions of the English reports, the Law Reports and specialist series such as criminal appeal cases and family law reports. These are available on the Internet but from subscriber access sites only (Clinch, 2001).

For proper utilization of these law reports, the index to the law reports is a valuable starting point for research on cases which are updated regularly and contain more

substantially summaries of cases or commentary. These indexes have an alphabetical subject index with a paragraph of catchwords for each considered by the courts in these cases are also included. Law reports are utilized during the citation of cases either for assignments, projects and examination by law students. These cases are referred to by the names of parties to the action. The citation according to Essien (2006) comprises five elements: title of case, a date, a volume, number, an abbreviation for the title of the publication in which the case is published and the page number. An example is shown below:

**Bentley-StevensvJames (1974)2 ER653**

Where Bentley-StevensvJames is the title, 1974 is the date, 2 is the volume number, ER is the abbreviation of the title of the publication of the law report and 653 is the page number.

The principle of law practice is based on precedents. Law libraries clientele use law reports much more to solve their legal problems and to keep abreast of legal developments generally. Students lawyers too, learn through legal opinions, cases and judge's rulings as precedents of decided issues. The cause of unavailability of most law reports in most academic law libraries according to Malomo (1994) is the high cost of subscription. This study assumes that academic law libraries are notable for the variety and depth of law reports in their holdings for the quality of research they support. Increasingly, available law reports in law libraries are used by legal scholars for legal research. Any inadequacy in the range or depth of availability of these law reports in law libraries will jeopardize and limit the academic performance of law undergraduate students. The implication of this is that for an available law report to be utilized by undergraduate law students in the Universities of Uyo and Calabar it must provide specific, accurate information on the cases that will help the law students in their citations in legal research or examinations. This study sought to investigate therefore the relationship between the availability of law reports and their utilization in the Universities of Uyo and Calabar law libraries.

**Research Methods**

Survey research design was used for the study. It examined 450 undergraduate law students' projects accepted for degree awards in the Universities of Uyo and Calabar Law Faculties from 2003/2004 to 2006/2007 academic sessions and was limited to the projects that were housed in these law libraries. The tables of cases in these projects were photocopied and information was extracted from them. The cited law reports were counted according to their frequency of citation through a

checklist to ascertain utilization and the library's card catalogues were used to ascertain the availability of the cited sources in these libraries. The data collected are presented in tables and percentages under various headings.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings in the study are outlined below:

**Table 1:**

Availability And Utilization Of Law Reports By Undergraduate Law Students in University of Uyo Law Library, 2003/2004-2006/2007 Academic Sessions

Academic sessions	Category			
	Number of law reports cited	Frequency of citation	Number of cited law reports available in the law library	Number of cited law reports not available in the library
2003/2004	163	301	102 (62.6%)	61 (37.4%)
2004/2005	211	365	148 (70.1%)	63 (29.9%)
2005/2006	352	402	289 (82.1%)	63 (17.9%)
2006/2007	328	587	248 (75.6%)	80 (24.4%)

Table I shows the distribution of law reports by undergraduate law students in the University of Uyo law library. It indicates that in 2003/2004 academic session, 163 individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of these citations was 301. Out of 163, some 102 (62.6%) of the cited law reports were available in the library, while 61 (37.4 %) of the cited law reports were not available in the University of Uyo law library. In 2004/2005 academic session, 211 individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of these citations was 365. Out of 211, some, 148 (70.1%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while 63 (29.9%) of the cited law reports were not available in the University of Uyo law library. In 2005/2006 academic session, 352 individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of these citations was 402. Out of 352, some, 289 (82.1%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while 63 (17.9%) of the cited reports were not available in the University of Uyo law library. In

2006/2007 academic session, 328 individual law reports were cited by the students frequency of these citations was 587 Out of 328, some, 248(75.6%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while-80(24.4%) of the cited law reports were not available in the University of Uyo law library.

**Table 2:**

Availability and Utilization of Law Reports by Undergraduate Law Students in University of Calabar Law Library, 2003/2004-2006/2007 Academic Sessions.

Academic sessions	Category			
	Number of law reports cited	Frequency of citation	Number of cited law reports available in the law library	Number of cited law reports not available in the library
2003/2004	129	265	85 (65.9%)	44 (34.1%)
2004/2005	131	289	78 (59.5%)	53 (40.5%)
2005/2006	352	387	285 (80.9%)	67 (19.1%)
2006/2007	300	365	228 (76%)	72 (24%)

Table 2 shows the distribution of law reports by undergraduate law students in the University of Calabar law library. It indicates that in 2003/2004 academic session, 129 individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of citations was 265. Out of 129, some, 85(65.9%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while 44(34.1%) of the cited law reports were not available in the University of Calabar law library. In 2004/2005 academic session 131, individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of these citations was 289. Out of 131 some, 78(59.5%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while 53(40.5%) of the cited law reports were not available in the University of Calabar law library, in 2005/2006 academic session, 352 individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of these citations was 387. Out of 352 some, 285(80.9%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while 67(19.1%) of the cited law reports were not available in the University of Calabar law library. In 2006/2007 academic session, 300 individual law reports were cited by the students. The frequency of these citations was 365. Out of 300, some 228(76%) of the cited law reports were available in the library while

72(24%). cited law reports were not available in the University of Calabar law library

A significant finding of the study in tables 1 and 2 above, show that the number of law reports available in these libraries and the frequency of citations keep increasing on each academic session. The study also found a growing prominence reports as an emerging and active research resource for the law students. This finding is in agreement with the views expressed by Kurnar (1993) and Akinade&Ogunyade (2002) who stated that law reports are valuable legal resources required in any law library to meet its objective. Its availability to law students and consequently their utilization determines to a very large extent their success and future development as lawyers.

### Testing of Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the extent of availability and utilization of law reports by final year law students in Universities of Uyo and Calabar law libraries.

The data were analyzed using Chi square.

### Table 3:

Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis of Availability and Utilization of Law Reports by Final Year Law Students sessions in the University of Uyo 2003/2004 to 2006/2007 academic sessions.

Law reports	2003/04 Academic session	2004/05 Academic sessions	2005/06 Academic sessions	2006/07 Academic sessions	Total	$X^2$
Frequency of Law Reports Cited	301 (275.76)	365 (346.1)	402 (486.4)	587 (546.7)	1655	
Total Law Reports cited	163 (175.62)	211 (220.4)	353 (309.9)	328 (348.1)	1054	
No. of Law Reports available	102 (131.1)	148 (164.6)	289 (231.3)	248 (259.9)	787	
No. of Law Reports not available	61 (44.48)	63 (55.84)	63 (78.47)	80 (88.19)	267	
Total	627	787	1106	1243	3763	<b>63.14</b>



Significant at 0.05 level,  $df=9$ , critical  $X^2$  value= 16.92

Table 3 above tested the relationship between the availability and utilization of law reports by law students in University of Uyo law library. It showed the calculated chi-square ( $X^2$ ) value of 63.14. This was tested for significance at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom 9. The calculated  $X^2$  value of 63.14 was greater than the critical ( $X^2$ ) value of 16.92. This shows that there is significant relationship between the extent of availability and utilization of law reports by undergraduate law students in Nigerian universities.

**Table 4:**

Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis of Availability and Utilization of law Report by Final Year law student in the University of Calabar 2003/2004 to 2006/2007 Academic Session

<b>Law reports</b>	<b>2003/04 Academic session</b>	<b>2004/05 Academic sessions</b>	<b>2005/06 Academic sessions</b>	<b>2006/07 Academic sessions</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b><math>X^2</math></b>
Frequency of Law Reports Cited	265 (218.2)	289 (229.9)	387	365 (402.6)	1306	
Total Law Reports cited	129 (152.4)	131 (160.5)	352 (311.8)	300 (281.1)	912	
No. of Law Reports available	85 (112.9)	78 (119.0)	285 (235.6)	228 (235.6)	676	
No. of Law Reports not available	44 (39.43)	53 (41.54)	67 (82.2)	72 (72.7)	236	
<b>Total</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>1091</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>3130</b>	<b>92.66</b>

Significant at 0.05 level,  $df=9$ , critical  $X^2$  value= 16.92

Table 4 above tested the relationship between the availability and utilization of law reports by law students in University of Calabar law library. It showed the calculated chi-square ( $X^2$ ) value of 92.66. This was tested for significance at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom 9. The calculated  $X^2$  value of 92.66 was greater than the critical ( $X^2$ ) value of 16.92. Hence the result was significant.

The findings in the study show that over 50% of the Law Reports utilized by law students in Universities of Uyo and Calabar for their researches are available in the law libraries. The result was significant because the calculated  $X^2$  values of 63.14 in University of Uyo and 92.66 in University of Calabar were greater than critical  $X^2$  value of 16.92 at 0.05 level of significance. This result implies that utilization of law reports in law libraries can be enhanced by the extent of availability in the law libraries. This finding is in line with the views of Malomo (1994) who asserted that availability and utilization of law reports in law libraries help the law students to solve their law problems, keep abreast of law development and learn through law opinions, cases, and judges' rulings as precedents of decided issues. Its availability to law students and consequently their usage determines to a very large extent their success and future development as lawyers.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings and their interpretations in this study, it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between the extent of availability and utilization of law reports. The result revealed that most of the undergraduate law students utilize the resources that are available in their law libraries for their research.

Consequent upon the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Law libraries should be properly funded to enable them achieve their goals and objectives.
- There should be an up-to-date subscription to local and foreign law reports in the law libraries to aid in utilization of these information resources by the undergraduate law students.
- At least five copies of individual law reports should be acquired into the law libraries to enhance proper utilization by law students.

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