

## Obliterating the Norm: Employing Homophily as a Catalyst for Improved School Library Patronage

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### **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** *This paper is an exposition on homophily as precursory to user classification and innovative approaches towards increasing higher patronage of the school library. Characteristics of the average school library user were discussed, placing emphasis on Generation Z (children born after the Millennium) who are usually described as impatient, informal, digital natives, highly opinionated and adventurous, among others.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *The social survey design was adopted for this study. Respondents were furnished with a definition of homophily to offer them sufficient context to complete questionnaire. The descriptive statistics used include frequency counts and percentages. One hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 96 were returned constituting 96% return rate.*

**Findings:** *It was established in this work that librarians and school media professionals could draw secondary school students to the library through homophily (common interest that could make students bond and converge). It was found that innovative ideas such as football; computer games; hairdressing; chat hour on trendy fashion; comedy, oratory skills display; and many more could be used to attract children and adolescent into the school library.*

**Originality/Value:** *This is a major contribution towards encouraging high patronage of school libraries by secondary school pupils.*

**Keywords:** *School Libraries, Homophily. Secondary School Students,*

**Paper type:** *Empirical research*

### **Introduction**

Availability and accessibility of resources alone may not be the only factors to be considered in validating the achievement of the objectives of school libraries. The willingness and actual use by the expected category of users are integral metrics to consider. It has been severally reported that school libraries in Nigeria do not enjoy high patronage, whereas the school library is supposed to be the first platform for raising users of library resources. Afolabi (2016) identified some challenges associated with school libraries in Nigeria as causes of low patronage by secondary school students. In the same vein, Moruf (2015) also noted that school libraries in Nigeria lack facilities that could compel students to use the school libraries.

This study however did not further highlight some of the problems already identified in previous studies by Afolabi (2016) and Moruf (2015) but investigated a possible approach that could improve school library patronage in Nigeria. Focus was on one of the characteristics of expected users of the 21st century library users who are referred to as Generation Z.

As noted by Kurian (2017), Generation Z also known as Millenials prefer informal approach to issues. This is reflected in their preference for social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

Tait, Martzoukou and Reid (2016) explained that the new generation of users should be served with new thinking, deploying innovations that will propel them to use the library. One of such innovative approaches is exploration of homophily as a possible strategy to draw students to the library.

Homophily is the tendency to establish relationships among people who share similar characteristics or attributes (Burgess, Sanderson and Umaña-Aponte, 2011). The attributes that lead to homophily are demographic characteristics like age, education, socio-economic status, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Onwukanjo and Okwilagwe, 2016). Several strategies should be brought on board to arouse the interests of new generation of library users. Osadebe (2013) explored the use of football as innovative approach to improve library patronage at the Children Centre Library of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka by combining a book club with book

club and making active library membership a prerequisite for joining. The innovation significantly improved library patronage among the targeted homophiles.

### Statement of the Problem

It is evident that school libraries do not enjoy high patronage as expected. This has implication on reading habit of students and their outcome during examinations. Several studies have identified poor infrastructure and lackadaisical attitude of government towards school libraries, recommending the roles expected of government and proprietors. It is challenging that while some private school have even provided these facilities, secondary school students still evade school libraries. Could it be that librarians need to introduce new approaches to promote library patronage?

It is also challenging that while library and media professionals focus studies on the changing nature of library resources, very few studies have focused on the changing nature of school library users. Most user studies in librarianship focus on students at the tertiary level of education. There is also dearth of literature on the new generation of users who are termed Generation Z who constitute majority of secondary school students. Studies have found that Generation Z among other things prefers informal settings as they are also impatient and technologically-inclined. This study therefore focuses on the informal disposition of Generation Z to consider the need for obliterating the norm, employing homophily as a catalyst for improved school library patronage.

### Objectives

1. To find out if secondary school students develop homophily (interest-based friendship) through hobbies.
2. To investigate if homophily (interest-based friendship) and hobbies could influence their library patronage

### Research Questions

1. Could homophily (friendship and attraction) take place among secondary school students' hobbies and interests?
2. Could homophily (interest-based friendship) and hobbies of secondary school students be used as basis for attracting them to school libraries?

### Scope of the Study

The study is focused on Senior Secondary School II and III of Landmark University Secondary School, Kwara State, North-Central Nigeria. The result generated from the study may therefore not represent the perception of secondary school students in Nigeria. The study investigated the hobbies (use of social media to chat, playing and discussing football, fashion and styles, playing video games; and how this could influence their use of school libraries).

### Review of Related Literature

Homophily is premised on the supposition that birds of a feather flock together (Borgatti, Everett and Johnson, 2013). Individuals' preferences and interests have been identified by Baccara and Yariv (2013) as avenue for homophilous relationship. They noted that individuals relate based on demographics, political opinions, or beliefs. It is therefore in order to investigate the characteristics of school library users, shifting the gaze from the perception that *they are children*. Most research studies in librarianship usually focus on academic libraries while most studies in school libraries focus on the state of school libraries; challenges of school libraries; and school library resources among others, with little research on characteristics and preferences of school library users.

The current expected users of school libraries have special characteristics that have created a dichotomy between them and the approaches used in attracting the previous generations of school library users into the library. Majority of these potential school library users are children born very much after the Millennium and have been tagged the Generation Z. Kurian (2017) referred to them as the Millenials, noting that their very active nature may not conform to the traditional systems of operations in organizations. Other researchers refer to them as post-millenials. There is no consensus on date to attach Generation Z to but it is certain that they were born at the dawn of the millennium and within it. They are sometimes called children born with and into Information and Communication Technologies. They have been represented with several nomenclatures such as digital natives, net savvy generation and google generation among others. They are said to be impatient, ambitious, unrealistic, quick learners, technologically inclined, daring, multi-tasking and pleasure-driven. (Šorgo, Bartol, Dolničar and Podgornik, 2016).

Scholars have made several recommendations to ameliorate this anomaly but cursory observation reveals that significant improvements have not been recorded except in cases of some private school libraries. Studies show that recommendations by researchers usually focus on what the government, school owners and administrators can do to encourage school library patronage; the attitude that readers should take on; and parental efforts in sending students to libraries, among others. The works of Afolabi (2016) and Moruf (2015) are cases in point. This work however focuses on what library personnel, media specialists and other stakeholders could do to attract adolescents who are major users of school libraries. Therefore, the study on homophily would be explored to stimulate school librarians on 'cataloguing' their users, thereby focusing on users'

special characteristics to reach out to them and make the school library a beehive of activities.

**Methodology**

The social survey design was adopted for this study. Respondents were furnished with a definition of homophily to offer them sufficient context to complete questionnaire. Fowler (2014) stated that error can arise in survey measures when respondents lack knowledge of the topic being assessed. Convenience sampling also known as Haphazard Sampling or Accidental Sampling (Dörnyei, 2007) was used for this study because students were given the choice of participation and they were also at close proximity for easy accessibility. The descriptive statistics used include frequency counts and percentages. One hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 96 were returned constituting 96% return rate.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Population**

| <b>Sex</b>                | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Male                      | 50               | 50.78%                |
| Female                    | 46               | 46.8%                 |
| <b>Age</b>                | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| 13 – 15 years             | 61               | 63.54%                |
| 16 – 18 years             | 35               | 36.45%                |
| <b>Class</b>              | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| SSII                      | 27               | 28.12%                |
| SSIII                     | 69               | 71.87%                |
| <b>Class Division</b>     | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| Art Class                 | 32               | 33.33%                |
| Commercial Class          | 24               | 25%                   |
| Science Class             | 40               | 41.66%                |
| <b>Residence</b>          | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b>     |
| Day Students              | 40               | 41.66%                |
| Students Living in Hostel | 56               | 58.33%                |

To avoid plethora of tables, this study compressed the demographic information of respondents on a single table but distinctly labelled each heading to identify each of the five sections represented on the table.

The first section shows that majority of respondents (50) were male students representing 50.78% of the respondents, while female (46) representing 46.8% of respondents.

The age distribution is reported irrespective of their sex, whether male or female. 61 students from age 13-15 were the majority of the respondents, accounting for 63.54% of the respondents. The remaining 35 students were from age 16-18 representing 36.45%.

Students in SS II among the respondents were 27 representing 28.12% of the respondents. Students in

SS III (69) were the majority of the respondents representing 71.87% of the respondents.

Students in the Art Class were 32, representing 33.33%, while students in the commercial class were 24, representing 25% of the respondents. Students

in the science class which constitute the majority of respondents were (40) representing 41.66%.

The last section shows that students living in the hostel (56) representing 58.33% constitute majority of the respondents while 40 students (41.66%) were day students

**Table 2: Hobby and Friendship Attractions**

| Statements   | Strongly Agree |        | Agree |        | Disagree |        | Strongly Disagree |        |
|--|----------------|--------|-------|--------|----------|--------|-------------------|--------|
|  | Fr             | %      | Fr    | %      | Fr       | %      | Fr                | %      |
| 1. I like to keep close friendship with those who discuss football, football clubs and football stars  | 19             | 19.79% | 24    | 25%    | 26       | 27.08% | 26                | 27.08% |
| 2. I like to be with students that know about fashion and hairstyles   | 19             | 19.79% | 50    | 52.08% | 23       | 23.95% | 6                 | 6.25%  |
| 3. I easily make friends with students that play video games   | 23             | 23.95% | 25    | 26.04% | 37       | 38.54% | 11                | 11.45% |
| 4. I can do anything to keep friends that know how to tell stories   | 14             | 14.58% | 36    | 37.5%  | 30       | 31.25% | 15                | 15.62% |
| 5. I like to be in the midst of people that are familiar with cartoon characters such as Avatar, Batman, Spiderman, Cinderella, Tom & Jerry etc. | 16             | 16.66% | 24    | 25%    | 38       | 39.58% | 17                | 17.70% |
| 6. I am particularly attracted to students that love music or play musical instruments   | 40             | 41.66% | 40    | 41.66% | 14       | 14.58% | 5                 | 5.20%  |
| 7. I am always attracted to students who share jokes and comedy clips they have seen before  | 43             | 44.79% | 38    | 39.58% | 15       | 15.62% | 0                 | 0      |
| 8. Trendy news, fashion and gossip on social media (to go, snapchat, Facebook, Instagram etc) attract me to students                             | 24             | 25%    | 38    | 39.58% | 24       | 25%    | 11                | 11.45% |

As reflected in the table, students that strongly agreed disagreed and strongly disagreed with 'I like to keep close friendship with those who discuss football, football clubs and football stars' were 56.25%. The population of students that strongly agreed and agreed with "I like to be with students that know about fashion and hairstyles" is 73.95%. While 50% of student population disagreed and strongly disagreed with 'I easily make friends with students that play video games', about 50% of students also disagreed and strongly disagreed with the idea. 52% of the students strongly agreed and agreed to 'I can do anything to keep friends that know how to tell stories'. About 58% of students

also disagreed and strongly disagreed with "I like to be in the midst of people that are familiar with cartoon characters such as Avatar, Batman, Spiderman, Cinderella, Tom & Jerry etc.' 83.33% of the students strongly agreed and agreed with 'I am particularly attracted to students that love music or play musical instruments.' 84.37% strongly agreed and agreed to 'I am always attracted to students who share jokes and comedy clips they have seen before.' 64.58% of students strongly agreed and agreed to 'Trendy news, fashion and gossip on social media (to go, snapchat, Facebook, Instagram etc.) attract me to students'

**Table 3: Homophily Propelled Library Patronage**

| Statements   | Strongly Agree |        | Agree |        | Disagree |        | Strongly Disagree |        |
|--|----------------|--------|-------|--------|----------|--------|-------------------|--------|
|  | Fr.            | %      | Fr.   | %      | Fr.      | %      | Fr.               | %      |
| I will be excited to come to library and borrow a book to read if I am sure that I can also borrow comedy CDs and share jokes with others alongside                                    | 30             | 31.25% | 36    | 37.5%  | 15       | 15.62% | 15                | 15.62% |
| I will willingly join the school library football team if any, even if I am required to read a book per week to maintain my membership   | 24             | 25%    | 33    | 34.37% | 25       | 29.16% | 14                | 19.79% |
| Opportunity to play computer games with others will increase my interest in using the library  | 26             | 27.08% | 30    | 31.25% | 25       | 26.04% | 15                | 14.58% |
| I don't mind coming to the library always if I will be given the chance to chat with others about cartoon characters such as Batman, Spiderman, Avatar, Tom and Jerry, Cinderella etc. | 14             | 12.5%  | 22    | 18.75% | 38       | 39.58% | 22                | 21.87% |
| I will be eager to come to the library if I am sure that there will be periods to discuss football, football clubs and football stars with others                                      | 17             | 17.70% | 16    | 16.66% | 36       | 37.5%  | 27                | 28.12% |
| I will be eager to come to library if I know we will have opportunity to share poetry and novels   | 36             | 37.5%  | 35    | 36.45% | 17       | 17.70% | 9                 | 9.37%  |
| I will come to the library if I know there is a section where I may be allowed to chat with my friends   | 16             | 16.66% | 36    | 37.5%  | 34       | 35.41% | 5                 | 5.20%  |
| I will readily come to library if there are interesting videos and TV programmes   | 36             | 37.5%  | 34    | 35.41% | 16       | 16.66% | 9                 | 9.37%  |

From table 3, 68.75% of students strongly agree and agree to 'I will be excited to come to library and borrow a book to read if I am sure that I can also borrow comedy CDs and share jokes with others alongside.' 59.37% of respondents strongly agree and agree to 'I will willingly join the school library football team if any, even if I am required to read a book per week to maintain my membership.' 58.33% of respondents strongly agree and agree to 'Opportunity to play computer games with others will increase my interest in using the library.' Contrary to others, 61.45% of respondents disagree and strongly disagree with 'I don't mind coming to the library always if I will be given the chance to chat with others about cartoon characters such as Batman, Spiderman, Avatar, Tom and Jerry, Cinderella etc.' In the same vein, respondents (65.62%) disagree and strongly disagree with 'I will be eager to come to the library if I am sure that there

will be periods to discuss football, football clubs and football stars with others.' 73.9% however strongly agree and agree with 'I will be eager to come to library if I know we will have opportunity to share poetry and novels.' 54.16% of respondents strongly agree and agree to 'I will come to the library if I know there is a section where I may be allowed to chat with my friends.' Respondens (72.91%) also agreed with 'I will readily come to library if there are interesting videos and TV programmes.

**Conclusion**

Meeting library users at the point of their interests is becoming the trend all over the world and the earlier this is embraced the best it is for the school librarians. This study has investigated homophily and how it could be used as a catalyst for library patronage. From the study, it is obvious that

students could be brought to library based on interests they have and the interests of their peers. It could therefore be deduced that library stands to gain a lot through exploring homophily as one of the strategies to arouse the interest of students in school libraries.

### Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

- School librarians should be altruistic enough to ensure that secondary school students are constantly studied to know their areas of interests that could be incorporated into the library
- School librarians should jettison the idea that the library should focus only on acquisition,

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- processing and dissemination of books without considering other side attractions
- Government and school proprietors should collaborate with librarians on innovations to increase library patronage
  - The period set apart as library hour should be strictly adhered to, and supervised to encourage maximum participation of all students
  - Synergy between classroom teachers and librarians should also be driven by school librarians who are considered as the major stakeholders.
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