INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF LAW STUDENTS IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this paper was to investigate the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate law students of a developing country. Specifically, the paper made efforts to globally review related literature on legal information, library information and its relevance to lawyers and law students, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the legal profession, information services to legal professionals, information needs of law students, information seeking strategy of law students, ICT utilisation skills of law students, law students’ utilisation of digital libraries, challenges and problems of digital libraries, and legal information seeking behaviour and ICT skills of law students in Nigeria. The results of the reviewed literature reveal that (lawyers) law students do not fully utilise library information resources while seeking information due to lack of exposure to ICTs equipment and or traditional teaching method used in law classes, which does not encouraged law students to harness legal information from the university law libraries. Some of the literatures reviewed reveal poor electricity power supply; lack of professional and skilled staff; lack of maintenance culture and lack of commitment by staff. It also reveal, lack of ICT library resources, staff training deficiencies as challenges faced, and the other contributory factor to why law students lack interest in patronising the law libraries to seek information.

Keywords: Information seeking behaviour; developing country; utilisation skills; Information Communication Technologies, digital libraries; law students; legal profession.
INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews literature on an ongoing research work on information seeking behaviour and ICT skills of law students in Nigerian universities. Several researches have been done globally to study the information seeking behaviour and ICT skills of law students (Doherty, 1998; Watt, 2004; Ajidahun, 2005; Tuhnmwire and Okello-Obura, 2010; Ossai 2011). However, very few studies seem yet to have been done to actually investigate the information seeking behaviour of law students in a developing country, such as Nigeria. The only other known study on this topic was done by Ossai (2011) who investigated information seeking utilisation by law students at the University of Benin, Benin City. No information currently exists on how ICTs are utilized in the process of seeking and using information.

The author, in her capacity as a law librarian at a Nigerian university, observed that law students seem neither able to utilize the core information retrieval tools used by law professionals to retrieve information, nor sufficiently skilled to use ICTs such as, computers, the Internet and information databases available in law libraries. In addition, law students seem to be apathetic towards the library believing that they have all the books required to graduate, in their personal homes. They mainly use the library as a reading room and as a place to write assignments.

As observed by Ajidahun, (2005), library information resources are very expensive, and therefore need to be properly managed and made accessible to users. As many relevant information sources are currently available in digital format it is imperative that ICT resources be promoted and the users skilled to a level where these sources can be effectively accessed and utilized. This study therefore, aimed at investigating the ICT skills, and the library usage of law students as a means of improving law library services in Nigerian universities. Based on the above the following research questions were generated to guide the full study:

1. Do the law students use ICT to seek information in the libraries?
2. How does the law students in Nigerian universities utilise ICT sources?
3. What are the ICT facilities available in the law libraries?
4. Why are the law students not using the ICT resources?
5. Is there any inhibiting factor against the usage of ICT resources?
6. What is the perception of the ICT resources by the law students?
7. Which of the ICT facilities mostly used by the law students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

However this paper mainly reports on the literature that informs the questions posed above, by providing information on the context of the study, explaining what is currently known about the general information seeking behaviour of law students, and also by referring to the effectiveness of ICT information resources to the legal profession.
THE CONCEPT OF INFORMATION IN LEGAL STUDY

According to Kemp as cited by Reddy (2010) information is an important resource, which can be ranked just after air, water, food, and shelter. The concept of information in legal study is paramount to people in legal disciplines such as judges, lawyers and law students. They need legal information for making decisions in all areas of law. Law students; particularly require information for various reasons in their study areas such as information on how to pass examinations, to write assignment, or to participate in moot courts. According to Reddy (2010), legal information can be acquired, processed, and disseminated through the university law libraries, where library resources, users and information managers interact with each other to transmit 'informational knowledge'. Reddy advocates that it is imperative for a library manager (librarian) to understand how library resources are searched and used by researching users’ needs to determine their levels of satisfaction with available sources and services.

HISTORY OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Legal education refers to the act or process of training law students to be a qualified lawyer and the course contents of law. According to Olugbenga Oke-Samuel (2008) and Fafunwa, (1971), the emergence of legal education and the current legal profession in Nigeria can be traced to the developments brought about by colonialism. The colonial administration needed lawyers that were trained in the English common law to occupy judicial positions in the then common law courts. These lawyers were to advise the administration, draft agreements, render general advice on commercial transactions, and plead the case of litigants in common law courts. The Chief Justice was empowered to appoint persons with basic education without former education in law, but experienced in court procedure, as lawyers (such as court clerks). They were given licenses to practice law while some others were appointed as local made attorneys and colonial solicitors to occupy judicial positions (Nigerian Supreme Court Civil Procedure Rules, 1948 and Ike, 1977). The appointed attorneys were known as local-made solicitors, self–taught attorneys or colonial solicitors (Doherty, 1998:5).

By 1879, some aspiring lawyers traveled abroad to learn law in the available four Inns of courts (Middle Temple, Inner Temple, Lincoln’s Inn, and Gray Inn) in Great Britain. On their return to Nigeria they joined the local attorneys and enrolled as practicing lawyers in the Supreme Court. These lawyers had no law degrees as they were trained only at the Court Inns to read for the Bar examinations and to observe the compulsory twelve dinning terms required to be called to the Bar or to write the law society’s examination after serving an apprenticeship under experienced solicitors (Onalaja, n.d). According to Onalaja, (n.d), there was no local institution for the training of lawyers at Nigerian independent universities, thus they were trained in Great Britain universities who based their legal system on an unwritten constitution, the Westminster model, and a unitary system of government. Once back in Nigeria, however these lawyers were to practice within a federal governmental structure with a written constitution. The above deficiencies in the overseas training package of Nigerian lawyers became a big concern and in order to correct the situation, the colonial government constituted the Unsworth Committee in
1959 to examine and make recommendations for the future of legal education and the admission of lawyers into law practice in Nigeria (Oke-Samuel 2008).

The committee recommended that academic legal education be taught within the universities, to be followed with professional training at a vocational school (Nigerian Law School) where law graduates from Nigerian universities would undergo compulsory practical training before admission into the Nigerian Bar. The report of the Unsworth committee forms the basis of the Legal Education Act 1962 (Nigeria) and the Legal Practitioners Act 1962 (Nigeria). This development gave birth to the establishment of Law Faculties in five different universities in Nigeria. They are: University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (re-named: Obafemi Awolowo University in 1987), University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Lagos, respectively (Olugbenga Oke-Samuel, 2008).

Today, there are thirty public universities offering law education in Nigeria, of which twenty nine provide full time studies, with one (The National Open University of Nigeria) established as a distance learning institution offering part- time programs in law and additional courses for people who are gainfully employed but need to upgrade their level of education. The federal government owns fourteen universities, sixteen are established by different states, and four are in private ownership. (NUC, 2011; UME/JAMB brochure, 2010/2011). The admission into the universities for law education involves either a four or five-year training program, at the end of which successful students will be awarded a Bachelor of Law degree.

PURPOSE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The purpose of legal education in Nigeria is to produce a law graduate that will be able to use law as a tool for resolution of social, economic and political conflicts in the society. Therefore, training in law is specifically aimed at producing lawyers whose level of education would prepare them properly to serve as advisers to governments, companies, business firms, associations, individual and families etc. Since all activities are expected to be done within the legal framework, the output or end result of the law program should meet the needs of such agencies and institutions such as international organizations, academic teaching and research institutions, federal, state and local government bodies, various industrial, commercial and mercantile associations and various social, family and domestic groups (Olugbenga Oke-Samuel, 2008).

LIBRARY INFORMATION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO LAW STUDENTS

Riley (1999) indicated that information relevance is a condition for information to contribute to the achievement of a genuine or legitimate purpose. According to Opeke (2000) a well-organized system of information is a prerequisite for effective decision making, organizational function and higher educational goal attainment. In order to accomplish educational goals, law students require legal information therefore; they need to make effective use of the library sources and services relevant to their studies. Igbeka (1995) confirms that information centres or libraries are the best agent to provide such information sources and services.
Law students require library information to effectively cope with the workload of their academic work. They are taught substantive law courses like Contract Law, Constitutional Law, Criminal Law, Equity and Trust, Evidence, Land Law, Jurisprudence and Torts, etc. To be able to achieve success in these courses, they need to use library sources and services especially digital libraries. A Digital Library refers to an electronic library where legal information can be accessed to complement the lecture notes and the traditional way of teaching used by the law teachers. Law students need to be well groomed in research skills, because as lawyers whose roles include giving legal advice, they must know where to find relevant laws. The importance of this was emphasised by King George III cited in Watt (2004), who said that ‘a lawyer is not the one that knows the law, but the one who knows where to find law’.

INFORMATION SOURCES AND SERVICES IN THE LEGAL DISCIPLINE

There are distinct information sources available in the legal discipline, which differs from those available in others discipline. It includes both primary and secondary legal sources. The primary sources of law are divided in two categories, i.e. (a) legislation (i.e. statutes and regulations) and (b) case law (court decisions and administrative tribunals). Primary legal resources are the products of the legislative i.e. the official bodies within the authority that make laws. Secondary legal sources are the resources cited in court for its informative values, and it provides relevant references to primary sources of law. Secondary legal resources include law textbooks, legal journals, legal encyclopedias, case law digests, and electronic database resources. The electronic resources in a law library can include: Westlaw, LexisNexis, Legalpedia, Compulaw and Ebscohost. Secondary legal resources can be an excellent starting point for legal research because it provides a broad overview of the law (Singh, 2011).

ICCTS IN LEGAL PROFESSION

The university libraries are shifting from the traditional form of providing manual services to the electronic form using ICTs to improve effective and efficient information service delivery. ICTs are electronic networks, which consist of hardware and software that are linked by a vast array of technical protocols. ICTs are embedded in networks and services that affect the local and global accumulation of general flow of knowledge (Mansell and Silverstone cited in Bosire, 2011:55). They are the electronic tools used for gathering and storing information for easy access by users.

The changing nature of ICT applications in the library setting has brought about different ICTs equipment such networks, digital library etc. The digital libraries’ collections are either locally stored in digital format or can be remotely accessed through computer networks at various locations. The information contained in such a digital information source can be full-text or bibliographic by nature (Aina, 2004:329; Akpoghome and Idiegbeyan-Ose 2010:108-113).

Abubakar (2005) argued that digital libraries will make the task of legal research more challenging and interesting. He emphasised that the judicial officers (judges), lawyers and or law students in academic work record success in their ability to locate digital sources in the library, especially when retrieved at the time needed.
The channels for service delivery in most law libraries in Nigerian universities include electronic databases, internet services, computer system, etc. The application of ICTs in Nigerian university libraries has impacted on service delivery in areas such as storage, retrieval and dissemination of information resources (materials).

Information needs of law students in Nigerian universities

The specific information needs of law students arise mainly from the teaching and research in law education and can include aspects such as:

➢ The need for current information on research findings emanating from law conferences, seminars, workshops etc.

➢ Information on current affairs and general knowledge (Odusanya and Amusa, 2003)

In addition, law students in Nigerian universities, might experience a need for information for their daily existence on campus, information on business and economic matters, consumer goods, health, good living, politics, religion, food, shelter, student unionism on campus, as well as information on scholarship, bursary and job opportunities. Therefore, law students require primary information for academic and research needs in school while the other types of information that they may need is secondary to the legal information requirements in their academic curriculum.

INFORMATION SEEKING STRATEGY OF LAW STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Ossai (2011) in her study on the utilization of information by the University of Benin law students found that most of the law students indicated that they heavily used library resources in the course of their academic programs. However her study also revealed that most of the law students had difficulty in locating and identifying suitable library information sources for case law, legislation and legal journal articles. Ossai recommended that law students should be required to more frequently utilise the library facilities and be encouraged to spend more time in the library than what they spent attending lectures, as this would increase their ability to search and retrieve information more effectively, especially when using available ICTs.

However, various studies (Tunkel, 1997; Mock, 2001; Cuffe, 2002; Milles, 2005; Niedwiecki, 2006; Barkan, 2007; Lawal, 2007) Oke–Samuel, 2008) ascribed deficiencies in information seeking behaviour of law students to factors such as:

➢ Traditional teaching method of lecture and note-taking adopted by law teachers with little or no room for interactive teaching methodologies, which did not encourage law students to develop a sense of independent research skills.
➢ • The fact that the specific information needs of information seekers are either not well-known to them or not well understood by them.

➢ • Information professionals who seem to put more emphasis on information technology instead of concentrating on the quality of the information usage in itself.

➢ • Inadequate libraries or information centres with inadequately qualified staff

➢ • The economic squeeze (inadequate funding of the Libraries)

➢ • Lack of relevant and up-to-date information-bearing materials (resources)

➢ • Lack of knowledge of how to obtain required information

➢ • Non conducive operational hours

➢ • Lack of ICT facilities e.g. Internet services, E-mail facilities, computer facilities, databases etc.

➢ • Low patronage of libraries due to non-availability of desired information resources, accessibility problems, obsolete and absence of online facilities

➢ • Inadequate technical staff; unstable staff and insufficient computer literate manpower

➢ • Lack of constant power supply as experienced in Nigeria

➢ • Lack of maintenance (Adetunmisi, 2005:25-45; Akpoghome and Idiegbeyan-Ose, 2010; Adegbore, 2010).

All these can stand as an impediment to law students’ usage of law libraries as sources of information.

CONCLUSION

The issue of information seeking behaviour and ICT usage of University law students in developing countries of Africa has become more paramount especially now that Information Communication Technologies have become the mean of harnessing legal information in law libraries worldwide. This has posed serious challenges to law students of the Universities in developing countries. In view of which, this paper purposefully reviewed literature on the information seeking behaviour of law students and how they generally seek information utilising library ICT facilities to source information in law libraries worldwide. Literature thus revealed various factors leading to law students’ underutilization of law library to include among others: Inadequate libraries or information centres with inadequately qualified staff; non-availability of desired information resources, accessibility problems, obsolete and absence of online facilities
and misperception of the roles and values of law libraries and information professionals in their quest for legal information. Thus, these have resulted into law students’ adoption of other information seeking strategies that excludes the use of law libraries and the library staff in the process of seeking information.

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