

Electronic Information Resources and the Legal Profession: The Case of Oyo State High Courts, Nigeria**Hawwau A. Moruf***American University of Nigeria, Yola***Lateef A. Adeleke***Crescent University, Abeokuta***Information Impact:**

Journal of Information and Knowledge Management
2018, Vol. 9 (1) Pg 26 - 34
ISSN: 2141 – 4297 (print)
ISSN: 2360 – 994X (e-version)

Abstract

Electronic information resources as a product of technological development plays a vital role in providing a veritable platform for networking among legal practitioners as well as guarantee timely access to legal information. This study examined the role played by digital/electronic resources in legal profession taking Oyo state as a case study. Descriptive survey design was used for the study and questionnaire as a research instrument was administered to judges, lawyers and law library personnel. The studies found that majority of respondents were aware of the available electronic resources essential to legal practice and research. Though, some of the online legal information resources were not available, email discussion list and online journal were the most used. It was observed that most court libraries are still operating manually as e-legal resources like law reference materials, laws of other countries, human right needs, law reports, judged cases and court proceedings were poorly accessible. However, findings indicate that the use of electronic legal information resources leads to faster and timely execution of cases and also provide platform for comparative jurisprudence.

Key words: Legal profession, electronic resources, technology, court, legal information.

Introduction

Technological developments are formidable enough to mark turning points in the history of Legal profession. The emergence of digital and electronic resources is one such development. This advancement in library has enhanced free transfer of information and instant access to knowledge which was not possible in the past. The revolution affects every aspect of human endeavour of which the legal profession is not left out (Anyaegebu et al., 2013). Digital age has now changed the way legal information resources are processed, organized, stored, accessed and disseminated. This digital age is characterized by the processing and conversion of information from the known conventional formats to electronic and digital formats hence, the consequences and challenges are expectedly high (Dada, 2011).

In the past, the three professions regarded as ‘learned professions’ are law, medicine and religion. Nowadays, lawyers have wrested and won the exclusive label of being the learned profession (Oba, 2007). Lawyers have no doubt some rights to this appellation because of the information-seeking nature of legal profession and library is the only organization that is responsible for acquisition, processing, organizing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of all forms of information, thus library is a custodian of knowledge and the laboratory of all laboratories (Moruf & Olajojo, 2017). The significance of law collections is indispensable to the effective practice of law and this has been universally acknowledged long ago, as stated by Gerbert (1998) “there is no class of men, professional or otherwise so dependent upon books as the lawyers. There is no library of whatsoever kind or nature which so directly pertains to the interest which it is designed to serve as the law library. I am speaking with authority when I say the lawyers books are his tools without which he would be unable to provide for himself and his family”. According to Anyaegbu et al. (2013), the indispensability of the law library collection to the successful practice, teaching and researching into law cannot be over emphasized.

A number of researches have been carried out on the role of EIR in legal profession in Nigeria. Notable amongst them are Omekwu (2003) on legal issues and electronic commerce; Omekwu, (2004) on Information technology fundamentals for lawyers; Akpoghome and Idiegbeyan-Ose (2010) on the role of digital library in law research; Owoeye (2011) on ICT use as a predictor of lawyers’ productivity; Dada (2011) on Law librarianship and legal research in the digital age; Anyaegbu *et al.* (2013) on Law Libraries in Information Age. However, there is dearth of information on the role of EIR in legal practices. The study therefore examined the level of awareness, availability, accessibility and use of electronic legal information resources in legal practice as providing a veritable platform for networking among legal practitioners, with a view to developing robust legal mind, as well as facilitates the use of library electronic information resources in legal profession.

Objectives of the Study

The study examined the impact of electronic information resources in legal profession. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the level of awareness of electronic resources among legal practitioners in Oyo State.
2. To establish the level of availability of electronic sources of information in Oyo State high courts’ libraries.

3. To establish the level of accessibility, retrieval and usage of online legal information resources through courts libraries.
4. To determine the extent to which digital library provide a veritable platform for networking among legal practitioners.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used in this study with questionnaire as a research instrument to explore and analyse the role of EIR in legal profession. The study population consisted of Oyo State High Courts, Nigeria and some selected legal practitioners in the state. The total enumeration technique was adopted in drawing sample covering judges, lawyers and law library personnel in the court and its branches. In all, 111 respondents including law library personnel, lawyers and judges were covered. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and standard deviation.

Findings and discussion

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Descriptive data revealed that 7.2% of the 111 respondents were judges, 90.1% were lawyers while the rest 2.7% were law library personnel. In addition, the gender distribution of the respondents revealed that 64% were male while 36% were female. The age distribution showed that many of the respondents (39.4%) were between the age of 35 and 44years, 25.8% were between 45 and 54year, 24.5% were between 25 and 34 years, while the remaining 10.3% were between 55 years and above. In terms of area of specialization, 14.5% of the total respondents specialized in advocacy, 10.9% specialized in soliciting while the remaining 74.6% specialized in both advocacy and soliciting. The academic qualification shows that most of the respondents - 68.5% possessed LLB/BL, 19.8% possessed LLM, 2.7% had Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS), 2.7% also had PhD, while the remaining 6.3% respondents did not indicate their academic qualifications. Demographic data further revealed that 38.8% of the respondents had between 1 and 5 years legal experience, 17.7% had between 6 years and 10 years, 20.7% had between 11 and 15 years, 9.9% between 16 years and 20, 4.7% of the respondents had been in legal profession between 21 to 25 years, 4.5% had between 26 to 30 years of experience while the remaining 3.7% had 31years and above work experience.

Table 1: Awareness and Availability of electronic Information resources in Legal Practice

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	(\bar{x})	Std. Dev.
1	The court library where I work is automated	10 (9.3)	21 (19.4)	33 (30.6)	44 (40.7)	3.02	0.99
2	Oyo State High Court library has internet connectivity	16 (14.8)	26 (24.1)	26 (24.1)	40 (37.0)	2.83	1.089
3	Oyo State High Court library provides digital library service	5 (4.6)	27 (25.0)	27 (25.0)	49 (45.4)	3.11	0.94
4	Oyo State high court library subscribes to e-resources such as e-journals, e-databases etc.	11 (10.2)	26 (24.1)	26 (24.1)	45 (41.7)	2.99	1.023
5	E-legal information resources are available through digital library in Oyo State High Courts	2 (1.9)	21 (19.4)	36 (33.3)	49 (45.4)	3.22	0.824

SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

Table 1 reveals that 28.7% of respondents agreed that the court libraries where they work is automated ($\bar{X} = 3.02$), 38.9% of respondents agreed that the court libraries have internet connectivity ($\bar{X} = 2.83$), 29.6% of respondents agreed that the court library provides electronic library service ($\bar{X} = 3.11$), 34.3% of respondents consented to the court libraries subscription to e-resources such as e-journals, e-databases etc. ($\bar{X} = 2.88$), while 21.3% of respondents concurred that electronic legal information resources are mostly available through digital library ($\bar{X} = 3.22$). Larger proportion of the respondents indicated that Oyo State High Court libraries do not provide electronic library services. Thus, have no internet connectivity. Based on the result from Table 1, Oyo State High Court Libraries have not been automated, therefore, yet to provide electronic library services.

Table 2: Access and Retrieval of Online Legal Information Resources

E-Legal Resources	Very high extent	High extent	Low extent	Very low extent
CD-ROM databases	2 (1.9)	15 (13.9)	48 (44.4)	43 (39.8)
Internet/web	2 (1.9)	4 (3.7)	65 (60.2)	37 (34.3)
E-mail	-	16 (14.8)	48 (44.4)	44 (40.7)
E-mail discussion list	-	15 (13.9)	47 (43.5)	46 (42.6)
Search engines	-	16 (14.8)	45 (41.7)	47 (43.5)
Online databases	-	1 (0.9)	51 (47.2)	56 (51.9)
Online journals	1 (0.9)	16 (14.8)	39 (36.1)	51 (47.2)

The result of Table 2 shows that online legal resources like e-mail discussion, search engines, online database and online journals were not easily accessed and retrieved to a high extent.

Table 3: Accessibility to Electronic Legal Information Resources through Digital Library

E-Legal Resources	Very high accessible	Highly accessible	Averagely Accessible	Poorly Accessible
Law reference materials	2 (1.9)	4 (3.7)	40 (37.0)	62 (57.4)
Laws of other countries	-	2 (1.9)	27 (25.0)	79 (73.1)
Human right needs	-	5 (4.6)	38 (35.2)	65 (60.2)
Updates of court rules	-	-	27 (25.0)	81 (75.0)
Basic state resources	-	2 (1.9)	37 (34.3)	69 (63.9)
Constitutional information	-	7 (6.5)	19 (17.6)	82 (75.9)
Law reports	-	14 (13.0)	35 (32.4)	59 (54.6)
Judges cases	-	3 (2.8)	36 (33.4)	69 (63.9)
Court proceedings	-	9 (8.3)	20 (18.5)	79 (73.1)
Laptop usage	11 (10.2)	8 (7.4)	27 (25.0)	62 (57.4)

Table 3 reveals easy access and retrieval of legal information resources by digital library. The result shows that e-legal resources like law reference materials, laws of other countries, human right needs, law reports, judge cases and court proceedings were averagely and poorly accessible. This indicates that the extent to which digital library provides easy access and retrieval of legal information resources is very low.

Table 4: Usage of Legal Information Resources through Electronic Information Resources

Legal Resources	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly
Law Data management software	-	-	19 (17.6)	89 (82.4)
Law books on CD	-	4 (3.7)	15 (13.9)	89 (82.4)
Law reports on CD	-	4 (3.7)	28 (25.9)	76 (70.4)
Law journals on CD	-	-	25 (23.2)	83 (76.9)
Decided cases on CD	-	9 (8.3)	32 (29.6)	67 (62.0)
Electronic court proceedings	-	9 (8.3)	14 (13.0)	85 (78.7)
Online access to decided cases	-	8 (7.4)	12 (11.1)	88 (81.5)
JSTOR	-	9 (8.3)	5 (4.6)	94 (87.0)
EBSCOHOST	-	7 (6.5)	7 (6.5)	94 (87.0)
DOAJ	-	11 (10.2)	15 (13.9)	82 (75.9)

Table 4 reveals usage of legal information resources through digital library. The result shows that legal resources like law data management software, law books on CD, law reports on CD, law journals on CD, decided cases on CD, electronic court proceedings and online access to decided cases were all used on monthly and quarterly basis, very few of the respondents used them on weekly basis. It therefore shows that Legal information resources provided via digital library was not used often but used occasionally.

Table 5: Digital library as a Platform for Networking among Legal Practitioners

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	(\bar{x})	Std. Dev.
1	Use of digital library leads to faster and timely execution of cases	24 (22.2)	41 (38.0)	26 (24.1)	17 (15.7)	2.33	0.995
2	Use of digital library provides access to index to reports	20 (18.5)	37 (34.3)	33 (30.6)	18 (16.7)	2.45	0.977
3	Use of digital library provides access to national acts	29 (26.9)	41 (38.0)	5 (4.6)	33 (30.6)	2.38	1.182
4	Use of digital library provides platform for comparative jurisprudence	21 (19.4)	33 (30.6)	21 (19.4)	33 (30.6)	2.56	1.104
5	Use of digital library improves access to legal information sources	20 (18.5)	39 (36.1)	17 (15.7)	32 (29.6)	2.51	1.163

SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

Table 5 reveals that 60.2% of respondents agreed that digital library leads to faster and timely execution of cases ($\bar{X} = 2.33$), 52.8% of respondents agreed that digital library provides access to index of reports ($\bar{X} = 2.45$), 64.9% of respondents agreed that digital library provides access to national acts ($\bar{X} = 2.38$), 50% of respondents agreed that digital library provides platform for comparative jurisprudence ($\bar{X} = 2.56$), while 54.6% of respondents agreed that digital library improves access to legal information sources ($\bar{X} = 2.51$). Based on the result from Table 5, it is clear that Electronic Information Resources play a vital role in providing a veritable platform for networking among legal practitioners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sharma (1992) stated that understanding the user is half battle in providing information-services. Personal profile of the respondents revealed that the middle age group used more electronic information resources than other groups. As opined by Owoye (2011), usage of ICT facilities by middle age group may be due to their level of awareness when compared to older age. It was also inferred that majority of lawyers in Oyo state practice both as advocates and solicitors. It was also observed from the academic qualifications of the respondents that majority had Bachelor of Law and Bachelor of Library Science which serve as criteria to practice as lawyer and librarian respectively. This is followed by LL.M (Second degree in Law) and the least qualification possessed was Ph.D. This may imply that attainment of higher degrees in law is not a prerequisite to professional efficiency and competency but an added advantage (Owoye,

2011). The data from the analysis of the research questions showed a great awareness on availability of electronic legal information resources. The 2002 lawyers' survey research also revealed that they had developed a high level of acceptance of digital resources. However, online databases and online journals were not easily accessed and retrieved to a high extent. Akpaghome and idiegbeyan-Ose (2010) claimed that many law libraries are now actively involved in building institutional repositories of their library materials and are made available to students and the general public without much restriction. This statement is true for academic law libraries, as most court libraries are still operating manually.

It was also inferred that e-legal resources like law reference materials, laws of other countries, human right needs, law reports, judged cases and court proceedings were averagely and poorly accessible. Further findings indicate that the use of digital library leads to faster and timely execution of cases and also provide platform for comparative jurisprudence. This corroborates the findings of earlier researchers. According to Reach *et al.* (2003), many lawyers appear to be using digital resources to fulfill their need for primary and secondary materials. Bosire (2011) agreed that ICTs are instrumental to increasing productivity, efficiency, competitiveness and growth in every sphere of human life. In addition, Owoeye (2011) found that the availability and utilization of IT resources in the law firms has influenced legal practitioners' productivity. In conclusion, it is clear that Electronic Information Resources play a vital role in providing a veritable platform for networking among legal practitioners.

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