



Utilization of Legal Information Resources by Postgraduate Law Students in ICT era: the case study of Federal Universities of Northern Nigeria

Abstract

The paper investigated the utilization of legal information resources by postgraduate law students in federal universities of northern Nigeria. The study was based on the perceived problem of scanty literature on the utilization of legal information resources in faculty of law libraries by postgraduate law students. The study employed quantitative research method using cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised of one thousand three hundred eight (1,348) registered postgraduate law students (those who have registered for 2016/17 academic session) in the seven faculties of law of the universities studied. Simple random sampling equation (SRS-Equation) was used to calculate the sample size as recommended by Research Advisers (2006) which consists of (308) postgraduate law students. A total number of 308 copies of questionnaire were administered, and 271 were returned and found useful. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics using frequencies and percentages. The findings of the study revealed that: the postgraduate law students purposes of utilizing legal information resources in the libraries studied are writing assignments and presentations, writing projects dissertations or theses, for teaching and for legal and non legal researches; the postgraduate law students frequently utilize all the printed legal information resources in their libraries. But electronic resources and online legal databases are found not frequently utilized. The study conclude that postgraduate law students in federal universities of northern Nigeria are yet to fully enjoy the vast electronic legal information resources, and this could significantly affect the quality of legal researches and academic excellence in legal profession. Among the recommendations of the study include the University Librarians and Deans of the institutions under study should solicit other means of funding law library activities so as to improve on the utilization of types information resources especially those in electronic formats.

Keywords: Faculty of Law Libraries; Legal Information Resources; Postgraduate Law Students; Utilization

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1.1 Introduction

Understanding the information utilization patterns of different groups of professionals

and students is inevitable due to the critical role which collection, organization and dissemination of information globally plays in

economic, political, and socio-cultural development. Utilization of information resources in law libraries is the process through which legal information resources are used. It is the maximum usage of information resources since it is expected that all types of legal information resources available in faculty of law libraries should be encouraged to be utilized. Scholars like Mallik and Sen (2008) suggested that there are many reasons which could make postgraduate students utilize the resources of their libraries, some of which include: teaching and learning, legal and non-legal research, moot court practice, writing assignments and presentations, leisure and entertainment etc. As such, it is expected that postgraduate law students in Nigerian universities should be encouraged to utilize all types of information resources for their academic development so as to move to move simultaneously with their counter parts in other parts of the world.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Law libraries are indispensable to law faculties, which provide resources in various formats that are vital to both staff and students. In fact, these libraries exist essentially to provide information resources and services to satisfy the needs of their users. As such, it is expected that law librarians should undertake researches to understand the level at which the postgraduate law students utilize the resources of their libraries. Such an understanding will help law libraries to develop collections and services to satisfy their users. Which in turn encourage more patronage by the postgraduate law students. However, Uluocha and Mabawonku (2014) observe that there is scanty literature on the level of utilization of legal information resources by the postgraduate law students, yet they form a significant group of researchers in a university. Furthermore, she noted how the postgraduate students utilize their university library matters a lot. This is

very important because the nature of postgraduate study demands that students must do a lot of independent studies on their own. The use of legal information resources is thus indispensable to the postgraduate law students in order to achieve their academic objectives.

From the foregoing, one can argue that there is a dire need for the faculty of law libraries to identify the purpose for which users utilize the resources of their libraries with a view to providing resources and services to serve those purposes. Despite this declaration, there is no single study conducted with the aim of investigating whether or not faculty of law libraries in federal universities in northern Nigeria have examined the postgraduate law students purpose of utilizing legal information resources and the level of utilization of the resources in their libraries. This study therefore, seeks to bridge the gap by examining the utilization of the legal information resources by postgraduate law students with the law libraries in federal universities of northern Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of The Study

The main aim of the study is to investigate the utilization of legal information resources in faculty of law libraries by postgraduate law students in federal universities of northern Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are:

- 1) Find out the purpose of utilization of legal information resources information resources by postgraduate law students in the libraries under study.
- 2) To find out the types of legal information resources utilized by postgraduate law students in faculty of law libraries in federal universities of northern Nigeria.
- 3) To determine the frequency of utilization of legal information resources by postgraduate law students in libraries under study.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Legal information resources are essential ingredients for effective legal research undertaking by postgraduate students. Law information resources could be referred to as legal literature such as law books, law reports, legislation and statutes, legal periodicals, government publications, reference materials and other inter-related non-legal books, e-resources, unpublished works of law, for example conference papers, theses on law, and so on. Legal literature is an indispensable tool of legal education. These can be used for legal research productivity which includes, research publication in professional journals and in conference proceedings, writing a book or chapter, gathering and analyzing original evidence, working with other post-graduate students on dissertations and class projects, obtaining research grants, carrying out editorial duties, obtaining patents and licenses, writing monographs, developing experimental designs, producing works of an artistic or creative nature and engaging in public debates and commentaries. However, legal information resources according to Mallik and Sen (2008) are used by postgraduate law Students in numerous ways and for various purposes as follows: Assignments & presentations, Project Dissertation or Theses Research, Legal and Non Legal Researches, Administration and policy making, Supplementing Regular Classes, Teaching and Lecturing and Other purposes.

The complexity of the legal profession naturally demands maximum information resource utilisation for appropriate and effective legal activities. As such, utilization of information resources refers to the extent to which library users make use of the resources of a library to meet their information needs. In the context of this research work, utilization of Legal information resources refers to the extent to which postgraduate law students

make use of the resources of faculty of law library for various purposes. Adeleke (2015) asserts that if the library is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge, it must not only provide the resources but also ensure utilization of the resources by its clientele. Okiy cited in Adeoye and Popoola (2011) in support of this claim, posits that for the library to perform its role adequately, its resources must be effectively used. "Books are for use" as stated by Ranganathan, therefore information resources of faculty of law libraries should not just remain idle in their respective place either on shelves, display racks or databases but their use should be facilitated for the resources to add value.

A library according to Ranganathan (1931) quoted in Aguolu (2002) is a "growing organism." As a result of this growth, changes become inevitable especially with the advent of ICT applications and evident in the way users' access and utilize information, as well as how libraries are managing their information resources in the present age. These changes also affect faculty of law libraries and law librarians in new ways as never before (Mahesh and Mittal, 2009). Thus, the need not only for law libraries to provide legal information resources in print and electronic format but also the need for both the law librarians and users to be skilled in many ways in order to optimize the use of the library resources since the success of faculty of law libraries depend on the ability of users to utilize information sources to better serve the needs of the academic community.

However the use of these resources, according to Amusa and Atinmo (2016), is likely to be influenced by availability of the resources. This implies that electronic resources must be made available in several brands to the users in their institutions. Their contents must also be publicized by the library in order to prompt their use (Olubiyo and Ogunniyi, 2017). This

research therefore, seeks to find out the extent to which both the printed and electronic legal information resources in faculty of law libraries are utilized by the postgraduate law students in federal universities in northern Nigeria.

3.1 Methodology

The study adopted quantitative research methodology using survey research design. The population of the study consisted of one thousand three hundred and forty eight (1348) registered postgraduate law students (those who have registered for 2016/2017 in federal universities in Northern states of

Nigeria. Simple Random Sampling Equation (SRS-Equation) formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size in each of the institution to arrive at the sample size of three hundred and eight (308) postgraduate law students as recommended by Research Advisers (2006). Questionnaire was used as the instrument of the study. A total number of 308 copies of questionnaire were administered to the postgraduate law students of federal universities of northern Nigeria by the researcher and four research assistants, and 271 were returned and found useful. The data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics with frequency and percentages.

4.1 Result/Findings

Table 1: Purpose of Utilizing Legal Information Resources by PG Law Students

S/N	Reasons/Purposes	Responses	
		N	%
1	For writing assignments and presentations	252	93.0
2	For projects and dissertations/ theses or research	253	93.4
3	For legal and non-legal researches	207	76.4
4	To gain information for administration and policy making	163	60.1
5	for teaching or lecturing	152	56.1
6	To get useful legal information for moot court practice	183	67.5
7	For Leisure and entertainment	98	36.2
8	To supplement lecture notes or regular classes	192	70.8

Table 1 showsthat the respondents indicated they utilize legal information resources for various purposes most of which are for academic related activities with more than 50% response rate. However, only (98: 36.2%) of the respondents indicated the utilization of legal resources for leisure and entertainment. This finding reveals the level

of preparedness of the postgraduate law students to excel in their academic pursuit and career progression and also the rigorous nature of postgraduate law degree programme in Nigeria for which the postgraduate law students cannot successfully carried out without using the library.

Table 2: Types of Legal Information Resources Utilized by Postgraduate law Students

S/N	Types of Legal Information Resources Utilized	Responses	
		N	%
	Rules and Regulations et.)		
2	Judicial Decisions (Reported & Unreported Cases)	267	98.52
3	Legal Periodicals (e.g. Law Journals and Magazines)	264	97.42
4	Law Books (Textbooks), Legal Dictionaries and Encyclopedias	271	100
5	Indexes, Digest and Abstracts	247	91.14
6	Treaties and International Laws	264	97.42
7	Government Publications (e.g. Government Acts, Bills, Gazettes, Proclamations, Statues, Policies etc.)	177	65.31
8	Non-Legal Materials	77	28.41
9	Newspapers	254	93.73
10	Lecture Handouts	42	15.49
11	Research Reports, Theses & Dissertations	271	100
12	Law Reviews	257	94.83
13	E-Resources (e.g. E-Conference proceedings, E-Project Reports, Theses & Dissertations, E-Laws of Federation, States and Local Government etc).	68	25.09
14	Online Legal Databases (e.g. Lexis Nexis, Westlaw, JSTOR, Hein online, EBSCOHOST etc.) and Website(s)	82	30.26

Table 2 reveals that the postgraduate students indicated their utilization of print legal information resources with more than 50% response rate. They include: Law Books (Textbooks, Legal Dictionaries and Encyclopedias) (100%); Judicial Decisions (Reported and Unreported Cases) (98.52%); Statutes and Statutory Instruments (Acts, Laws, Bye-Laws, Rules and Regulations etc.)(98.14%).The high response on

utilization of these resources could be as a result of awareness and accessibility of the resources in the studied libraries. Furthermore, from the table, the utilization of electronic information resources is significantly low with (25.09%) and online legal databases (30.26%) response rate. This response could be due to fair accessibility or poor availability of electronic resources and legal databases in the studied libraries.

Table 3: Frequency of Utilizing Legal Information Resources by PG Law Students

S/N	Types of Legal Information	Frequency of Utilization			
		Daily	Three Times	Once a week	Occasionally
1	Statutes and Statutory Instruments (Acts, Laws, Bye-Laws, Rules & Regulations et.)	138 (50.9%)	100 (36.9%)	23 (8.5%)	10 (3.7%)
2	Judicial Decisions (Reported & Unreported Cases)	124 (45.8%)	108 (39.9%)	34 (12.5%)	5 (1.8%)
3	Legal Periodicals (e.g. Law Journals & Magazines)	113 (41.7%)	112 (41.3%)	38 (14.0%)	8 (3.0%)

4	Law Books (Textbooks), Legal Dictionaries & Encyclopedias	136 (50.2%)	102 (37.6%)	28 (10.3%)	5 (1.8%)
5	Indexes, Digest and Abstracts	60 (22.1%)	112 (41.3%)	74 (27.3%)	25 (9.2%)
6	Treaties & International Laws	46 (17.0%)	97 (35.8%)	71 (26.2%)	57 (21.0%)
7	Government Publications	60 (22.1%)	110 (40.6%)	65 (24.0%)	36 (13.3%)
8	Non-Legal Materials	68 (25.1%)	75 (27.7%)	92 (33.9%)	36 (13.3%)
9	Newspapers	128 (47.2%)	89 (32.8%)	33 (12.2%)	21 (7.7%)
10	Lecture Handouts	85 (31.45)	94 (34.7%)	62 (22.9%)	30 (11.1%)
11	Research Reports, Theses & Dissertations	101 (37.3%)	109 (40.2%)	40 (14.8%)	21 (7.7%)
12	Law Reviews	86 (31.7%)	98 (36.2%)	61 (22.5%)	26 (9.6%)
13	E-Resources (e.g E-Conference proceedings, E-Project Reports, Theses & Dissertations, E-Laws of Federation, States and Local Government etc).	1 (.4%)	27 (10.0%)	70 (25.8%)	173 (63.8%)
14	Online Legal Databases (e.g. Lexis Nexis, Westlaw, JSTOR, Hein online, EBSCOHOST etc.) and Website(s)	1 (.4%)	37 (13.7%)	64 (23.6%)	169 (62.4%)

Table 3 shows that on a daily basis, a majority of the students use Statutes and Statutory Instrument (138: 50.9%), Law Books (Textbooks, Legal Dictionaries & Encyclopedias) (136: 50.2%), Newspapers (128: 47.2%) and (Judicial Decisions (Reported & Unreported Cases) (124: 45.8%). The daily use of these resources could be attributed on the relevance of these resources to their program of study. Legal Periodicals (112: 41.3%), government publications (110: 40.6%), research reports, theses and dissertations (109: 40.2%), judicial decisions (108: 39.9%) were utilized three times a week. However, online legal data bases and e-resources were utilized occasionally based on data collected with (169: 62.4%) and (173: 63.8%) respectively. The occasional utilization of online legal

databases could be attributed to poor internet services, poor subscription of the legal databases by the libraries or interrupted power supply, which can affect the utilization of these resources.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that, the postgraduate law students purpose of utilizing legal information resources in the libraries studied includes: for writing assignments and presentations, for projects and dissertations/ theses, for legal and non legal research, for supplementing lecture notes, for teaching or lecturing and others. This finding reaffirmed the study of Mallik and Sen (2008) who found the purpose of utilizing legal information resources in Academic law libraries in India to include for

writing assignments and presentations, for teaching, for supplementing lecture note, for theses / dissertations, for administration and policy making, for moot courts, for administration and policy making and for research purpose.

On utilization of legal information resources by the postgraduate law students, the finding revealed that all the postgraduate law students utilize all the various types of legal information resources in their libraries such as Statutes and Statutory Instruments, Judicial Decisions, Legal Periodicals, Law Books (Textbooks), Legal Dictionaries & Encyclopedias, Newspapers, Research Reports, theses & Dissertations, Law Reviews, Lecture Handouts, Indexes, Digest and Abstracts, Government Publications, and Non-Legal Materials. These results corroborate the findings of Ossai, (2011) who establishes that in University of Benin Nigeria, most of the law students have been identified to make full use of the available library resources in complying with their academic programs. This study is also in line with the findings of Uluocha and Mabawonku, (2014) who report that in the Faculties of Law in Nigerian universities, legal periodicals, law books, reference materials, law reports, legislation and statutes are the types of resources that are daily utilized by law lecturers for research in faculties of law in Nigerian universities.

Furthermore, findings on utilization revealed that, e-resources and online legal databases are not frequently utilized which contradict the finding of another study by Abu Hasrah, (2014), who establishes that, Students studying in Aberystwyth University and Sultan Sharif University very often use the Westlaw, Lexis Nexis, Hein online and JSTOR databases.

Similarly, a significant number of postgraduate law students indicate the occasional utilization of electronic resources and legal databases in their law libraries. This

is in line with the findings of Olorunfemi and Mostert, (2013) who found out that Nigerian universities' law students do not fully utilize ICT resources in libraries while seeking information in their studies. This shows that despite the advent of ICT in Nigerian university libraries, their utilization is still nothing to write home about.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study revealed that the postgraduate law students purposes of utilizing legal information resources in the libraries studied are writing assignments and presentations, writing projects dissertations or theses, teaching, legal and non legal researches, they frequently utilize all the printed legal information resources in their libraries. But not frequently utilize electronic resources and online legal databases. Based on these findings, it is necessary to conclude that despite the continues emergence technological innovation and globalization, postgraduate law students in federal universities of northern Nigeria are yet to fully enjoy the vast electronic legal information resources, and this could significantly affect the quality of legal researches and academic excellence in legal profession.

Recommendations

The university management of the institutions under study should strictly adhere to the ten percent budget allocation to the libraries. In addition, the university librarians of the respective institutions should solicit other means of funding for law library activities. The funds will enable the librarians to acquire current and high quality law library resources, such as law databases, automate library functions, improve Internet connection, procure better broadband, and provide alternative power generating machines. These if provided will attract optimum utilization of information resources

by the postgraduate students in the faculty of law libraries in Nigeria.

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