

Information Needs of Law Students in Delta State
University, Abraka, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the issues in information needs of law students in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research method was used for this study. The population for the study is one thousand and twenty-nine (1,029) students with a sample size of one hundred and five (105) respondents. The data collection instrument used was the questionnaire. The findings revealed that the major information needs of law students are information on academics, information on legal issues, information on innovative ideas/exploratory knowledge, information on current research as well as information on personal growth and development. Based on these findings, conclusion was drawn; suggestions and recommendations were also given that as future lawyers, law students need information to excel in their legal profession. The study recommends that adequate information resources should be provided to law students and they should be adequately educated and trained on how to effectively seek and use them to satisfy their information needs.

Introduction

Overtime, the information field has developed a deep understanding of the concepts of information need and its role in information seeking and use. The view that information needs motivates information behaviour, is an embedded assumption of the user-oriented paradigm which focuses upon what people think, do and feel when they seek information (Wilson, 2007). Dervin (2009) stated that an information need is an independent preventing an individual from moving forward in cognitive time and space. She went further to state that the person is faced with a gap that must be bridged by asking questions, creating ideas and/or obtaining resources. Such gaps do not occur in the abstract but arise out of a particular critical events and situations.

Information needs could be seen as individual or group desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a conscious or unconscious need. The concept of information needs was covered by an American Information Scientist Roberts Taylor in his article “The Process of Asking Questions” published in American documentation. Taylor attempted to describe

how an inquirer obtains an answer from an influence between the inquirer and a given answer (khan & Shatigue, 2010).

According to Taylor (2008) Information needs is categorised into two (2) different levels:

- The conscious and unconscious mental description of an ill-defined area in decision. In this level, the inquirer might talk to someone else in the field to get an answer. The inquirer forms a rational statement of his question. This statement is a rational and unambiguous description of the inquirer's doubt.
- The question as presented to the information system. Information need is often understood as evolving from a vague awareness of something used and as culminating in locating the information that contribute to the understanding and meaning (Kahlow, 2002).

Thus, it is seen that there is a need to understand the user's requirements because the root of any information seeking is believed to be the concept or as a result of information needs, which fall into various categories: need for new information, need to expand and clarify the information obtained and need to confirm or validate the information known (Allen, 1996).

Paisely (1998) as cited by Okwilagwe, and Opeke (2006) highlighted five factors that affects the information needs of the inquirers, which are: their background, professional orientation, the full array of information sources available, motivation and other individual characteristics such as social, political, economic and other systems that affects the users and their functions.

Bunkrank, as cited in Wilson (2007) defines need as "a cognitive representation of a future goal that is desired". However, in spite of the subjective nature of needs, Morgan and king as cited by Wilson (1997) propose that needs emerge from three kinds of motives:

- Psychological motives (hunger and thirst)
- Unlearned motives (Including curiosity and sensory stimulation)
- Social motives (the desire for affiliation, approval or status or aggression)

The concept of motive maybe applied to law student's information needs and seeking attitude since it can be assumed that, for cognitive, affective or psychological reasons, law students in Delta State University, Oleh Campus experience needs for information. It is these needs that actually activate their motive to engage in seeking information on how to enter a university to study law, prepare for examinations, write assignment, pass out of the university as law graduates and eventually become qualified lawyers.

Law students require information to effectively cope with the work load of their academic work. They are taught subjective law courses like contract law, constitutional law, criminal law, Equity and trust, Evidence, Land law, Jurisprudence and Torts etc (Yemisi, Janneke & Ocholla, 2012), and to be able to cope thy need to embrace library materials irrespective of their formats. Olorunfemi and Mostert (2011) are of the view that students

require primary information for academic and research needs in school, while the other types of information that they may need is secondary for the legal information requirements in their academic curriculum. According to Sigh (2011), the primary sources of information of law students are divided into two (2) categories, they are:

- 1 legislation (i.e statutes and regulation) and
- 2 Case law (Court decision and administrative tribunals)

Primary legal sources are product of the legislative i.e. the official bodies within the authority that makes laws. Secondary legal sources are the resources cited in the court for its informative values, and it provides relevant references to sources of law.

Sigh (2011) also noted that the secondary legal sources include law textbooks, legal journals, legal encyclopaedias, case law digests, citations, precedents, customs, legislation and electronic data base resources. Earlier studies have reported that law students and legal professional use a wide range of information resources. Kahlav and Tama (2006) in their study found out that lawyers and law students prefer printed text. Majid and Kassin (2004) corroborated this in their study of the information seeking behaviour of international Islamic University Malaysia law faculty members. The study also reveals that the respondents prefer printed format over electronic format and that they first consult their personal collection before resorting to other information providing sources and agencies. Similarly, Wilson as cited in Majid and Kasin (2004) concludes that law students prefer informal sources when seeking for information to satisfy their needs. In addition, Makin et al (2008) observed that law students used diverse electronic information sources to conduct their legal information search only as a complimentary method.

In Nigeria, few studies have been carried out in relation to the information seeking behaviour of law students in Nigeria. There is no gainsaying the fact that those involved in the study and practice of law need to stay current with published legal literature relating to their area of study or practice. However, they experience some problems in searching for information to satisfy their needs. Hence, this study is carried out to ascertain the information needs of law student in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The study seeks to investigate the information needs and seeking behaviour of law students at the Delta State University Abraka. It specifically seeks to:

- Determine the information needs of law students
- Know the sources of information available to law students
- Know the most preferable format of information of law students
- Know the challenges militating against information needs of law students, and
- Proffer solutions to the challenges of information needs of law stud

Research questions

This research specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the information needs of law students?
2. What are the sources of Information available to law students?
3. Which is the most preferable format of information known to law students?
4. What are the challenges militating against information needs of law students?
5. What are solutions to the challenges of information needs of law students?

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consist of one thousand and twenty-nine students (1,029) of the law students of 2014/2015 academic session of the faculty of law Delta State University, Abraka. A sample size of one hundred and twenty-nine respondents was drawn from the entire population, which represents 12.54% of the population. The questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data were analysed using frequency and simple percentages.

Findings and discussion

Table 1: Questionnaire response rate

Respondents	No of Questionnaire Administered	No of Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage%
Law Faculty, Delsu Oleh Campus	129	105	100%

As shown in Table1, 129 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents and 105 (81.40%) were successfully retrieved and were used for the study.

Table 2: Sex of the respondents

Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage %
Male	75	71%
Female	30	29%
Total	105	100%

Table 2 shows the gender of the respondents. As shown in Table 2, 75 (71%) of the respondent are male, while 30 (29%) of the respondents were female. This implies that the majority of the respondents are Male.

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Research question one

What are the information needs of law students?

Data analysis pertaining to information needs as presented below

Table 3: information needs of law students

Information Needs	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Information on academics	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Information about current research findings	94	89.5	7	6.7	4	3.8	105	100
Information about tests and examination	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Information about legal administration	101	96.2	4	3.8	-	-	105	100
Information on business and economics matters	43	40.9	51	54.3		4.8	105	100
Information on health	55	52.4	50	47.6		-	105	100
Information on politics	49	46.7	56	53.3		-	105	100
Information on religion	39	37.1	66	62.9		-	105	100
Information on bursary and scholarship	32	30.5	49	46.7		22.8	105	100

Table 3: shows the information needs of the respondents. As shown in the table, information on academics 105 (100%), information about text and examination 105 (100%), information about legal administration 101 (96.2%), information about current research findings 94 (89.5%), constitute the information needs of majority of the respondents. Although there are other identified information on health, religion, politics, business and economic matters, but the major information needs were clearly stated in the Table above.

This finding corroborates the findings of Otike (2000), Odunsanya and Amusa (2003) who found that the major information needs of law students are information on academic, information on legal issues, information on research as well as information on personal growth and development. Similarly, Olorunfemi and Mostert (2011) found that law students information needs includes legal information, information on academics, information on research as well as information on societal values.

Research question two

What are the sources of information available to law students?

Table 4: sources of information of law students

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Information Sources	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Legislation	22	20.9	76	72.4	7	6.7	105	100
Case Law	15	14.3	80	76.2	10	9.5	105	100
Law Textbooks	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Legal Journals	99	94.3	6	5.7	-	-	105	100
Legal Encyclopaedia	90	85.7	9	8.6	6	5.7	105	100
Citations	13	12.4	83	79.1	9	8.5	105	100
Electronic Database	101	96.2	4	3.8	-	-	105	100
Precedents	12	11.4	81	77.1	13	12.4	105	100
Customs	18	17.1	85	80.9	2	1.9	105	100

Table 4 shows the sources of information consulted by the respondents for their information needs. As shown in the table, law textbooks 105 (100%), electronic data bases 101 (96.2%), legal journals 99 (94.3%), and legal encyclopaedia, 90 (85.7%) constitute the sources of information consulted by majority of the respondents. In the same time, majority of the respondents do not consult precedents, 81 (77.1%), case law 80 (76.2%) customs 85 (80.9%), citations 83 (76.1%), and legislation 76 (72.4%) as sources of information. This implies that the sources of information consulted by majority of the respondents are law textbooks, electronic databases, legal journals, library and legal encyclopaedia. This finding is in line with the findings of Singh (2011) who found that the majority of law students use law textbooks, law library, legal journal and electronic databases as major sources of information.

Research question three

Which is the most preferable format of information of law students?

Table 5: Preferred format of information

Information sources	Frequency	Percentage
Printed format	79	75.23
Electronic format	26	24.76
Total	105	100

Table 5 shows the preferred type of format that the respondents consult mostly. As show in the Table, 79(75.23%) of the respondents indicated printed format while 26(24.76%) of the respondents indicated electronic format. This implies that majority of the respondent's preferred printed format of information. This finding is in line with the report of Otike (2000) who reported that majority of law students preferred the printed source of information (textbooks, journals, reports, encyclopaedia e.t.c.) over the electronic format (internet, online databases, CD-Rom e.t.c.).

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Research Question four

What are the challenges militating against information needs of law students?

Table 6: Challenges militating against information needs of law students

Challenges	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Inadequate requisite information literacy skill	93	88.6	12	11.4	-	-	105	100
Limited knowledge	19	18.1	76	72.4	10	9.5	105	100
Inadequate qualified library staff	5	4.8	97	92.3	3	2.9	105	100
Inadequate relevant and up-to-date information resources	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Poor internet skills	99	94.3	6	5.7	-	-	105	100
Poorly stated information needs	23	21.9	82	78.1	-	-	105	100
Poor understanding of library resources	30	28.6	71	67.6	4	3.8	105	100
Technical or literacy problems	7	6.7	93	88.6	5	4.7	105	100
Low level of awareness of information resources	16	15.2	69	65.7	20	19.1	105	100

Table 6 shows the challenges encountered by the respondents in meeting their information needs. As shown in the table, inadequate relevant and up-to-date information sources 105 (100%), poor internet skills 99 (94.3%), poor internet connectivity, 97 (92.4%) lack of requisite information skill 93 (88.6%) and lack of user education 83 (79.1%) constitute the challenges encountered by the majority of the respondents in meeting their information needs. This findings corroborates the findings of Otike and Mathew (2003) who found that majority of law students face the problems of lack of requisite information literacy skills required to effectively seek for information, most law students do not learn the basic information skills, they only end up using trial and error method of information search and this limits their capabilities in satisfying their information needs.

Research question five

What are the solutions to the challenges of information needs of law students?

Table 8: Remedies to challenges encountered in meeting information needs.

Remedies	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Library use education	93	88.6	12	11.4	-	-	105	100
Availability of current & relevant information resource	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Formal training on how to use the internet to search for information	88	83.8	17	16.2	-	-	105	100
Creating awareness of information resources	5	4.8	77	73.3	23	21.9	105	100
Quality online facilities	102	97.1	3	2.9	-	-	105	100
Constant power supply	90	85.7	15	14.3	-	-	105	100

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Standard internet connectivity	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Easy accessibility to library materials	90	85.7	15	14.3	-	-	105	100
Training on how to acquire information literacy skills	105	100	-	-	-	-	105	100
Competent library staff	27	25.7	70	66.7	8	7.6	105	100

Table 8 shows the remedy to the challenges encountered by the respondents in meeting their information needs. As shown above, Library use education 93 (88.6%), availability of current and relevant information resources 105 (100%), formal training on how to use the internet to search for information 88 (83.8%), quality online facility 102 (97.1%), training on how to acquire information literacy skills 105 (100%) standard internet connectivity 105 (100%) and easy accessibility to library materials.

From the analysis, it can be seen that the respondents needs library use education, adequate, current and relevant information resources formal training on how to use the internet to search for information, training on how to acquire information literacy skills, standard internet connectivity, quality online facilities and easy accessibility to library materials.

Conclusion

Information is a valuable resource and an indispensable asset in the teaching, learning, research and legal profession. Law students need information to excel in the legal profession. Information acquired can be used for problem solving and enhancing academic growth, professional growth and personal development.

To satisfy an information need, information is sought using a variety of information needs and their information needs revolve round information on academics, information about tests and examination, information about current recent findings. To satisfy their information needs, law students consult law textbooks, electronic data bases, legal journals, and library and legal encyclopaedias. The challenges encountered by law students in meeting their information needs are lack of relevant and up-to-date information resources, poor internet skills, poor internet connectivity, lack of requisite information literacy skills and lack of user education. The remedies to those challenges faced by law students are library education, availability of current and up-to-date resources, formal training on how to use the internet connectivity, training on how to acquire information skills and quality online facilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations would suffice:

- Law students should be adequately trained and educated on how to effectively seek for information to meet with their needs.

- The law students should be trained on the use of electronic resources, most especially the internet in searching for information to meet their information needs.
- Information literacy should be incorporated into the curriculum of the law students.
- The law library should be fully automated with ICT and the internet facilitated to enable the law students have access to information resources to meet their information needs.

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