

PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION RESOURCES/SERVICES BY LAW STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study investigated the information seeking patterns of undergraduate law students of University of Benin, Benin City. The sample population consisted of 230 undergraduate law students randomly selected from the first to fifth year of study. Their information seeking activities were tested to discover how undergraduate law students seek information. The z-test statistic was used to test the stated hypotheses. The results provide an insight into the factors that hinder both female and male law student's information seeking pattern and the information sources used. The study makes recommendations that could lead to the improvement of students' information seeking pattern and use of information resources.

Introduction

The word "information" will be used to refer to data or a collection of academic ideas. Information seeking patterns on the other hand refers to attitude(s) demonstrated in a search for ideas that make for academic and human development. Since a pattern is a mode of behaviour, the term behaviour would sometimes be used synonymously with pattern in this work. Ellis's (1989) elaboration of the different behaviours involved in information seeking makes no claims that different behaviours constitute a single set of stages. Ellis (1989:12) also says: "...the detailed interrelation or interaction of the features in any individual information seeking pattern will depend on the unique circumstances of the information seeking activities of the person concerned at that particular point in time." While not totally pursuing Elli's model, it sets the agenda and focus of this work to test the problems students encounter in manifesting these behaviours in information seeking.

Information seeking behaviour is generally used as the attitude exhibited in a search for ideas that make for academic and human development. Information seeking is a process in which humans purposefully employ to change their state of knowledge. The term pattern is similarly used as the behavioural manifestation of humans involved in information seeking. Information pattern is a basic activity indulged in by all persons and manifested through a particular behavior. It is also an aspect of scholarly work of most interest to academic librarians who strive to develop collections, services, and organizational structures that facilitate information seeking (Wiberley, 1989).

There are problems involved in information seeking especially by students. Mellon (1986) noted that undergraduates encounter barriers like library anxiety. User's perceptions of the library and its programs also act as an intervening variable to information utilization in the library. Taylor (1990) noted that after interacting with the information sources (like in a library), what a user actually needs may not tally with what is practically available, due to constraints either within the stock or due to the users own inability.

Fister (1992) noted that undergraduate students are intelligent people, but find the university library to be frightening and the process of research nerve-racking. Unfortunately these undergraduates do not learn basic information skills necessary for information seeking. Wilson's (1996) notes that in the process of seeking information, problems are encountered which have to do with the content of information sought. These problems are that students seldom buy books, they have difficulties in using libraries and that seminars on library use have little effect.

Gender is considered to be another factor in information seeking behaviour of users (Wiklund, 1989; Adomi, Ogbomo and Inoni, 2003). In this relation, men are generally given the preferential right of interpretation, leading to an uneven distribution of resources. Though men and women do not have to act differently in information seeking and need, but women have to adjust to structural and cultural conditions where they do not have the same status as men.

Wiklund (1998) again posited that the academic community is a stratified social structure built on competition and a need to be acknowledged. According to Wiklund, in this environment men and

women do not have the same opportunities and one manifestation is that women have difficulties in gaining access to social networks. This is likely to affect women's access to information, particularly information otherwise difficult to get, since that is usually available through informal personal contacts. When studying how men and women find for themselves relevant information, it is interesting to take into consideration differences in access to information (Wiklund, 1998). In a study of highly successful students, (Ford, Miller, and Moss, 2001) found that females tended to experience more difficulty finding information online.

Craig (1991) reported students face the problem of digital searching. This is because academic law librarians were hesitant to instruct students in digital searching because they were concerned that students would grow accustomed to the wealth of digital information and run-up excessive access fees. Many academic law librarians also felt that graduates should learn this skill on the job, when employers would finance their learning (Craig, 1991).

Schwabach (1997) in a later study, concluded that students do have unlimited, free access to WESTLAW, as well as receive WESTLAW vendor training, are still unprepared to effectively search digital sources. Schwabach urges greater integration of electronic research techniques into the law curriculum. Schwabach's study did, however, point out the enormous popularity of digital resources among law students. Students were willing to spend hours searching digitally, rather than use print resources, even though they may simply be "floundering," and failing to retrieve adequate information.

Craig (1991) and Schwabach (1997) in their studies therefore submitted that law schools currently produce graduates who lack effective digital searching skills. This is because; the prohibitive cost of accessing many digital databases is the primary reason that so few law students receive adequate training in digital searching techniques.

Makri, Blandford and Cox (2006) concluded that with the introduction of digital law libraries academic lawyers found it more difficult to find information necessary for their work. They said that "A potential symptom of this difficulty was that the hazy and incorrect knowledge of the digital library system and information sources within the system was rife".

Makri (2006) identifies use of digital libraries as a reason for difficulties academic lawyers face in locating appropriate resources. Digital libraries are regarded as difficult to use based on observation of academic lawyers. Digital law libraries such as LexisNexis Professional and Westlaw are no exception. This difficulty arose from poor knowledge of the digital library system itself rather than from poor research skills in general.

Kerins, Madden, and Fulton (2004) say students have problems in identifying suitable information sources for case law, legislation and journal articles. As well as being limited in their knowledge of basic print materials, for example, case digests and legislation, most law students in the study had trouble choosing suitable electronic resources, especially for locating case law and journal articles. Students noted that they wasted time when seeking information because of these difficulties. When sources, in both printed and electronic formats, were difficult to locate, students reported skipping a particular source in favour of other items on a reading list. (Kerins, Madden, and Fulton, 2004). Majority of students claimed that they had developed high levels of information skills by the end of their undergraduate programmes, often developing these skills on their own.

In the same vein, electronic resources, such as legal databases and the Internet, became more important for students as they progressed through their studies and into their postgraduate courses. Students expressed enthusiasm for, but in many cases, a lack of confidence in their ability to use electronic resources effectively. The study revealed that the students tended to display poor judgement in their choice of electronic resources when attempting to match information needs. (Kerins, Madden, and Fulton, 2004).

Kasting (2006) in very unambiguous terms says law students lack "legal research and information literacy." Kasting (2004) said: "I attended law school when Lexis and Westlaw were just starting. We had access, but content and functionality were still minimal, so even from the students' perspective, books were better. The Internet did not exist for the public. Research was still complex, but within a print and, therefore, clearly defined system. It was easy to determine what resources were available and the conceptual connection among them. The hard part was evaluating what we had found and its relevance to our research issue." Kasting (2006) notes that though some law students

have good information technology skills, but they are deficient in information literacy skills. This is because; many students seem to equate computer skills with search skills which is not the same.

Statement of Problem

Makri, Blandford and Cox, (2006) in “Studying Law Students’ Information Seeking Behaviour to Inform the Design of Digital Law Libraries”, observed that law students used diverse electronic information sources to conduct their legal information seeking only as a complimentary method. This attitude appears influenced by factors that constitute problems in the information seeking process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose(s) of this study include:

1. Discover the reactions of law students when their information needs are not met.
2. Unravel the problems law students encounter while seeking or using information.
3. Examine the role of gender in the information seeking pattern of law students.
4. To suggest ways of addressing the problems students encounter in the information seeking of law students

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant mean difference in the reaction(s) of male and female law students when their information needs are not met.
2. There is no significant mean difference in the role of gender in the information resources/services utilization pattern of male and female law students.
3. There is no significant mean difference in the problems encountered by male and female law students when seeking.
4. There is no significant mean difference in the information sources/channels/services consulted by male and female law students.

Method

This is a descriptive survey research; therefore, the researcher employed a descriptive design. The population of this study consisted of all the undergraduate law students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria in the 2006/2007 academic session. The population was 1,145 students in all the five levels of study. A breakdown of this population is shown as follows in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Sample of Respondents

Year	Total Number Of Students		Grand Total	Sample (20%)
	Male	Female		
One	129	115	244	49
Two	184	164	348	70
Three	126	98	224	45
Four	132	128	260	52
Five	37	32	69	14
TOTAL	608	537	1,145	230

From this number there is a grand total of 1,145 students.

The sample for this study was drawn through systematic random sampling. Law students in each level were randomly presented a questionnaire. The researcher administered a copy of the questionnaire to every twentieth (20th) person that sat in the lecture room during the course of a

lecture period. This was done in order to obtain 230 students that constitute 20% of the sample of the study as cited by Ofo (1994).

Table 2: Sex and level of Respondents

Level	Male		Female		Total
	No	%	No	%	
Year I	21	9.13	28	12.17	49
Year ii	37	16.09	33	14.35	70
Year iii	23	10.00	22	9.57	45
Year iv	24	10.43	28	12.17	52
Year v	8	3.48	6	6.21	14
Total	113	49.13 %	117	50.87	230

Data Analysis and Discussion

The questionnaire was administered to 230 students that constituted the sample population. Data gathered from retrieved copies of questionnaires were analyzed using Z- test statistics (to test the formulated hypotheses). The data generated were collated, organized, tabulated and analyzed around the research questions and null hypothesis formulated for the study. The formula for the Z- test statistics is given below

Reactions of both Sexes to Inability to Locate Information Resource

Table 4. Reactions of both sexes to inability to locate information resource

Reactions	Sex	Agree		Disagree		Undecided	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I keep searching for information	M	96	84.86	7	6.19	10	8.85
	F	97	82.91	10	8.55	10	8.55
I sometimes feel bad	M	84	74.34	12	10.62	17	20.06
	F	92	78.63	16	13.68	9	7.69
I sometimes consult the librarian	M	80	70.80	17	15.04	16	14.16
	F	74	63.25	23	19.66	20	17.09

Table 4 contains data on reactions of both sexes to inability to locate information resource. More females keep searching for information 96(82.91 percent) as against males 96(84.96 percent), and females 74(63.25) consult the librarian less than males 80(70.80 percent). Gozard (2004) points out that student’s repeat their search for information in one form or another. The reason for the repeated or continuous search for materials corroborates the findings of Ford, Miller, and Moss (2001) that women have more difficulty locating information. Wiklund (1998) attributes this to the cultural and structural conditions because female law students do not have the same cultural and social status as men.

Also males 80(70.80 percent) and females 74(63.25) sometimes consult the librarian more than female law students. This supports the proposition of Wiklund (1998) that “men are generally given the preferential right of interpretation, leading to an uneven distribution of resources.” Similarly, the reason for consulting the librarian sometimes agrees with the finding of Guest (1987) that librarians were rated the lowest as a source for getting much needed information.

Assistance in Using the Library by Both Sexes

Table 5. Assistance in using the library by both sexes

Frequency	Sex	No	%
Very Often	M	7	6.19
	F	7	5.98
Often	M	2	1.77

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	F	2	1.71
Sometimes	M	70	61.95
	F	70	59.83
Seldom	M	22	19.47
	F	27	23.08
Undecided	M	12	10.62
	F	11	9.40

In table 4.11 both sexes record the same number in seeking assistance in the use of the library sometimes – males 70(61.95 percent) and females 70(59.83 percent). Based on this trend, females cannot be said to be more disadvantaged in the library environment as asserted by Wiklund (1998) and Ford, Miller, and Moss (2001). The search for assistance sometimes is because Kerins et al (2004) observe that when it comes to information, law students appear to work independently to develop their own skills without a lot of help either from law faculty members or from the library.

Table 4. 15. Impediments to information seeking of both sexes

	Sex	Agree		Disagree		Undecided	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Inadequate/lack of ICT skills	M	58	52.21	30	26.55	24	21.24
	F	42	35.89	29	24.79	46	39.32
Inadequate relevant materials in the library	M	64	56.64	36	31.86	13	11.50
	F	58	49.57	32	27.35	27	23.08
High cost of information resources	M	59	52.21	37	32.74	17	15.04
	F	51	43.59	34	29.06	32	27.35
Slow internet response	M	60	53.09	28	24.78	25	22.12
	F	59	50.43	20	17.09	38	32.48
Unconducive library environment	M	45	39.82	49	43.36	19	16.81
	F	40	34.19	53	45.30	24	20.51
Electricity interruption	M	64	56.64	27	23.89	22	19.47
	F	63	53.88	34	29.06	20	17.09
Uncooperative library staff	M	38	33.63	55	48.67	20	17.69
	F	36	30.77	48	41.03	33	28.21

In table 4.15 the impediment to information seeking by both sexes is poignant, more males 64(56.64 percent) point it to inadequate relevant materials in the library than females 58(49.57 percent). Taylor (1990) noted that after interacting with the information sources (like in a library), what a user actually needs may not tally with what is practically available, due to constraints either within the stock or due to the users own inability. In this case, from the table above, an impediment to information seeking is actually inadequate relevant materials in the library.

Al-Shanbari and Meadows (1995) reported that in developing countries acquiring the needed information is problematic because of inadequate and irrelevant library collections, lack of information infrastructures, ineffective library services, lack of money to use fee-based information services, inadequately trained and less co-operative library staff.

Furthermore, Inadequate/lack of ICT skill is seen as an impediment among more males 58(52.21 percent) than females 42(35.89 percent). An inadequate ICT skill is a major problem in information seeking of law students (Kasting, 2004, Makri, Blandford and Cox, 2006). Furthermore, Kasting (2006) reveals that one impediment to information seeking of Law students is deficiency in information literacy skills.

The data collected from the questionnaires admitted to 230 respondents sampled in the study were collated and analyzed. For the purpose of clarity and logical presentation, the analysis and presentation of results were organized around the respective null hypothesis and research questions formulated in the study.

Table 4.24. Z – test analysis of mean difference between both sexes with respect to reactions of both sexes to inability to locate information resource

Sex	No.	X	SD	Df	Z-critical	Z-calculate	Decision
Male	113	7.80	1.82	228	1.96	0.09	Not significant
Female	117	7.97	1.83				

Table 4.24 shows that the calculated Z-critical value is 1.96 while the Z-calculated value is 0.09 at the degree of freedom (Df) of 228 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value is lower than the critical value, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the reaction(s) of male and female law students when their information needs are not met is accepted.

Table 4.25

Z – test analysis of mean difference between both sexes with respect to assistance in using the library

Sex	No.	X	SD	Df	Z-critical	Z-calculate	Decision
Male	113	2.67	0.98	228	1.96	0.01	Not significant
Female	117	2.66	0.98				

The table reveals that the Z-critical value which is 1.96 is greater than the Z-calculated value which is 0.01 at 228 degree of freedom (Df) at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the reaction(s) of male and female law students when their information needs are not met is not significant; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion

Both male and female law students face similar challenges in their information seeking patterns and needs. This study has shown that no category of either male or female law students is more advantaged than the other. Problems of lack of ICT skills, inadequate library resources, independent development of information seeking skills and electricity interruption is common to both male and female law students.

Recommendations:

1. Since both male and female law students face the same form of limitation in inadequate resources in the library, school authority should endeavour to stock the library with materials that would the information needs of students
2. Since librarians ranked lowest in students source for locating information, the chief librarian should seek to educate find out why this is the case and put machinery in place to correct it because the library is the knowledge house of every school
3. Since most male and female law students lack ICT kills and this hampers there information seeking, ICT should be made a core part of law student’s curriculum to help students locate their needed materials easily both in school and after graduation.
4. Since electricity is a major factor in information seeking, government should endeavour to provide uninterrupted power, while school authorities should complement electricity supply with stand by generators that would help students when there is no power supply.

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