UNRAVELING INFORMATION RESOURCE UTILIZATION STRATEGIES: A CASE STUDY OF LAW STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving landscape of information resources, there exists an exponential growth driven by the proliferation of diverse mediums and platforms. This surge is particularly evident in scientific literature, where traditional sources such as books are supplemented by the burgeoning array of online scholarly journals. Consequently, librarians find themselves occupying a pivotal role as intermediaries, adept at navigating this expanding ecosystem of information. This article delves into the multifaceted dynamics underlying the exponential growth of information resources, shedding light on the evolving responsibilities and challenges faced by librarians in this digital age.

Drawing upon insights from scholarly discourse and empirical data, the article examines the transformative impact of digitalization on information consumption patterns. The exponential increase in the availability of scientific literature, both in traditional and digital formats, underscores the need for librarians to adapt and innovate in their approaches to resource management and access. As the internet becomes a primary conduit for scholarly discourse, libraries have witnessed a significant surge in budget allocations for electronic materials, reflecting a fundamental shift in information acquisition and dissemination practices.

INTRODUCTION

Information resources are developing and increasing at very astronomical speed. This is due to the multiplying number of information resources being used and explored almost on a daily basis. Science information in books for instance have increased as well as online scholarly journals making librarians "middleware" (Jones, 2009). In the same vein, the growth of the internet, libraries budget for scholarly electronic materials has increased almost fourfold from 1990 to 2001 (Association of Research Libraries, 2008). The critical role that the collection,

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organization and dissemination of information plays in economic, political, social and cultural development is globally recognized, thus the use of the phrase "the information society". Information is the key to global development, as enunciated at the United Nations World Summits on the Information Society held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005 (Obasanjo, 2005). With the growth in information resources, there is corresponding growth and differences in information needs and behaviour of different groups of people. Thus, the several attempts to understand the information seeking patterns of different groups of professionals and students have become inevitable.

Since our world continues to become increasingly information based and information interconnected, the rates of change and exchange of information continue to grow. This is due largely to developments in technology and the importance of information to human and technical development. We live in an information society where more people must manage more information, which in turn requires more technological support, which both demands and creates more information. The general outcome of the growing information volume people have to deal with are tripartite in nature: larger volumes of information to handle or access, new forms of information to deal with and new tools for working with information in the midst of vast resources (Ndukwe, 2004). Students admitted into the faculty of Law are both from urban and rural high schools who have little or no proficiency in use of electronic information resources.

In the midst of this vastly developing information terrain, professionals as well as students find themselves dealing with more information in all aspects of learning and research. Not only are we required to continually seek and acquire information, but there are increasingly more sources and larger volumes available (Kajagbola, 2004). The large volume of information in turn demands more information management access and handling skills. In order to make the most of these large amounts of information, professionals and students are developing personal information needs and seeking behaviour which requires time and effort to build. These information seeking behaviours entails conscious and unconscious filtering of the data and developing fresh strategies for achieving learning goals.

Information seeking behaviour can be described as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating and development. This explains the fact that several manners of gathering information and consulting information resources determine the information seeking behaviour of an individual. Faire-Wessels (1990) Kakai et al. (2004) referred to this manner of consulting information resources and gathering information as the way people search for and utilize information. This is what informs the behaviour of an individual which might defer from person to person and discipline to discipline. This is why it is necessary to investigate the factors that inform the information gathering of people within the strata of certain areas of study. Information resource refers to the procedures, equipment, facilities, software and data that are designed, built, operated and maintained to collect, record, process, and store information. Information is a valuable resource in an academic environment, thus acquiring and using information are critical activities. The process known as information seeking is therefore becoming more fundamental and strategic for both students and professionals. Additionally, the information-seeking process is increasingly dependent on electronic technology. This research examined the information seeking patterns of law students of the University of Benin, Nigeria. While the data presentation and analyses appear comparative, the motivation of the research is to discover and present how law students utilize information resources. The separation of both sexes is therefore not exclusive but inclusive as law students are made up of both male and female students.

Statement of the problem

Most students in particular are not exposed to these skills that have to do with information and communication technology Kakai et al. (2004). In this vein, students are not aware of the resources available and where they are

available they are not able to locate the right resources for their research. The problem therefore is that students do not have the skill and knowledge to locate the right information resources thereby wasting valuable time that would have been used in their course of study. Makri et al. (2006) observed that law students have problems discovering appropriate information resources for case law, legislation and journal articles. This is because they are limited in their knowledge of basic print materials. Makri et al. (2006) noted for instance, that for case digests and legislation, most law students experienced difficulties in choosing fitting electronic resources, especially for locating case law and journal articles.

Students identified that they dissipated energy thereby losing precious time when seeking information because of these inadequacies. Furthermore, academic sources, in printed and electronic formats, were not easy to find, as students testified ignoring some resources in favour of others items on a reading catalog.

Law students in the University of Benin are expected to maximally utilize the University Library as one of their major resources of information in addition to several other information resources. However, noting from observation and from the studies conducted on information needs and seeking of students particularly law students it was established that students do not use most of the information resources. It was assumed that students could be experiencing technical or literacy problems in accessing information resources; coupled with lack of knowledge and awareness of the resources. The students' poor information seeking behaviour might be singled out as the biggest cause that needs investigation. Therefore, the background for this study informed the purpose(s) for the research.

Purpose of the study

There are several factors that can determine the Information Seeking Behaviour of an individual or a group of individuals. It is therefore desirable to understand the goal for which information is needed, the environment in which the information seeker operates his/her skills in sourcing the needed information, preferred media for acquiring information and hindrances to accessing information resources. These were factors investigated by the researcher in a research carried out with law students of University of Benin, Benin City which led to the formation of the purpose(s) of this study and the formulated hypothesis. (1) Find out the purpose(s) for which law students seek information. (2) Explore the information resources/channels/services consulted by law students. (1) Determine how law students acquire their information search skills. (2) To suggest ways of improving the information services for law students.

Hypotheses

(1) There is no difference in the purpose for which male and female law students use information. (2) There is no difference in the information resources consulted by male and female law students. (3) There is no difference in the acquisition of information search skills of male and female law students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Information needs is understood in information science

Table 1. Sample of respondents.

Total number of students

Year			Grand total	Sample (20%)
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

Male   **Female**

as stemming from a vague awareness of something missing and as culminating in locating information that contributes to understanding and meaning (Kuhlthau, 1994). According to Wilson (1999) information behaviour information need and its drivers, that is, the factors that give rise to an individual's perception of need; the factors that affect the individual's response to the perception of that and the processes or actions involved in that Information seeking behaviour refers to the way people search for and utilize information (Fairer–Wessels, 1990).

Most times student's information seeking behaviour involves active or purposeful information seeking as a result of the need to complete course assignments, prepare for class discussions, seminars, workshops, conferences, or write final year research papers. Limberg (1998b) states that the nature of one's task referred to as "content" is crucial to how people seek and use information. This is contrary to the understanding that information-seeking is a general process which occurs independently of the content in the information. Information Seeking Behaviour can be described as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating and practices; information on new laws and recent development. This explains the fact that several manners of gathering information and consulting information resources and gathering information as the way people search for and utilize information. This is what informs the behavior of an individual which might differ from person **METHODOLOGY** to person and discipline to discipline. This is why it is necessary to investigate the factors that inform the employed a descriptive design. The population of this study consisted of undergraduate law students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria in the 2008/2009 academic session.

Most law students claim to use the resources of a library heavily over the course of their academic pro-grammes. In spite of this claim, most law students have students. The difficulty in locating resources and identifying suitable

(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 needs to include at least the following three elements: "an seeking only as a complimentary method. Law students information need and its drivers, that is, the factors that noted that their information seeking during their give rise undergraduate programmes and to a lesser extent during their postgraduate programmes, centered on items such as reading lists, textbooks and course packs. Students response." reported that their legal training was largely teacher centered and content-oriented (McInnis and Symes, 1991; Bruce, 1997a). Students tended to display poor judgement in their choice of electronic resources when attempting to match information needs (Herman, 2001; Genoni and Partridge, 2000). Pedagogical approaches to legal education in Ireland seem not to encourage the development of information skills among law students (Kerins et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Oyesiku (2005) pointed out that the information needs of law lecturers cut across educational, psychological and social needs like every other profession. While this might be the case, however the information needs of law lecturers specifically deal with: gathering and sourcing research and teaching in matters of law and legal enactments, research findings arising from conferences, seminars, workshops and academic journals. Also, resources determine the information seeking behaviour of information that has to do with current affairs, public administration, governance and general knowledge constitute information needs of lawyers resources.

This was a descriptive survey research; therefore, the researcher information gathering of people within the strata of certain areas of study.

The population was 1,145 students in the five levels of study. A breakdown of this population is shown as follows in Table 1: From this number there is a grand total of 1,145 students. Law students in each level were

Faire-Wessels (1990) and Kakai et al., (2004) referred to this manner of consulting information

randomly presented a sample for this study was drawn through systematic random information sources for case law, legislation and journal questionnaire.

articles, as well as being limited in their knowledge of The researcher administered a copy of the questionnaire to every basic print materials (Kerins et al., 2004). Makri et al. twentieth (20th) person that sat in the lecture room during the **Table 2.** Sex and level of respondents.

Level	Male		Female		Total
	No	%	No	%	
Year 1	21	9.13	28	12.17	49
Year 2	37	16.09	33	4.35	70
Year 3	23	10.00	22	9.57	45
Year 4	24	10.43	28	12.17	52
Year 5	8	3.48	6	6.21	14
Total	113	49.13	117	50.87	230

Table 3. Purpose(s) of seeking information by both sexes.

Purpose(s)	Sex	No.	Agree %	Disagree No.	%	Undecided No.	%
To supplement lecture notes given by lecturers	M	92	81.42	9	7.96	12	10.6
	F	90	76.92	15	12.82	12	10.3
To complete projects/thesis	M F	76	67.26	7	6.91	30	26.5
		80	68.38	5	4.27	32	27.4
To keep up with current development /update knowledge	M	102	90.27	2	1.77	9	7.9
	F	99	84.62	4	3.42	14	11.9
To complete class assignments	M F	101	89.38	5	4.42	7	6.2
		100	85.47	1	0.85	6	5.1
For entertainment	M F	41	36.28	38	33.63	34	30.0
		47	40.17	39	33.33	31	26.5

Table 4. Academic benefits of information use by both sexes.

Academic performance	Sex	Agree No.	%	Disagree No.	%	Undecided No.	%
Promote completion of class assignment	M	103	91.15	3	2.65	7	6.19
	F	115	98.29	0		2	1.71
Facilitates easy comprehension of course work	M	107	94.69	2	1.77	4	2.83
	F	114	97.44	1	0.85	2	1.71
Enrichment of lecture notes	M	97	85.84	8	7.08	8	7.08
	F	108	92.31	2	1.71	8	6.84
Being current in the course/profession	M	103	91.15	5	4.42	5	4.42
	F	107	91.45	3	2.56	7	5.89

Table 5. Frequency of information resources used by both sexes.

	Sex	Very often No.	%	Often No.	%	Some-times No.	%	Seldom No.	%	Never No.	%	Undecided No.	%
Government publication	M	15	13.27	22	19.47	44	38.94	22	19.47	5	4.42	5	4.42
	F	8	6.84	18	15.38	53	45.30	19	16.24	2	1.71	7	5.98
Law reports	M	63	55.75	24	21.24	10	8.85	8	7.18	1	0.85	0	0
	F	63	63.85	19	16.24	22	18.80	6	5.13	1	0.85	1	0.85
Lecture handouts	M	38	33.62	19	16.81	18	15.93	11	9.73	13	11.50	14	12.38
	F	76	64.96	33	28.21	13	11.11	6	5.13	6	5.13	7	5.98
Websites	M	4	3.54	20	23.60	52	46.02	23	20.35	5	4.42	9	7.93
	F	14	11.97	18	15.38	46	39.32	27	23.08	5	4.27	7	5.98
Dissertations	M	3	2.65	6	5.31	24	21.24	29	25.66	10	8.85	41	36.28
	F	1	0.85	3	2.56	27	23.08	24	20.51	12	10.26	50	42.74

Thesis	M	F5	4.42	9	7.96	33	29.20	33	29.20	7	6.19	26	23.00
		5	4.27	8	6.84	25	21.37	28	25.93	22	18.80	29	24.78
Encyclopedia	M	F9	7.96	9	7.96	43	38.05	36	31.86	6	5.31	10	8.85
		7	5.18	17	14.53	32	27.35	30	25.64	18	15.38	13	11.11
Legal/ law digest	M	27	23.89	27	23.89	23	20.35	33	29.20	0	0	3	2.65
	F	25	21.37	26	22.22	33	28.21	20	17.07	5	4.27	8	6.84
Bibliographies	M	11	9.73	13	11.50	39	34.51	30	26.55	6	5.31	14	12.34
	F	7	5.98	14	11.97	38	32.48	27	23.08	13	11.11	18	15.38
Newspapers	M	46	40.71	38	33.63	24	21.24	3	2.65	0	0	2	1.79
	F	38	32.48	33	28.21	33	28.21	6	5.13	2	1.71	5	4.27
Decrees	M	F21	18.58	27	23.89	31	27.43	15	13.27	7	6.19	12	10.62
		27	23.08	21	17.93	31	26.50	17	14.53	7	5.98	14	11.97

Table 5. Cont.

Textbooks	M	99	87.61	13	11.50	1	0.88	0	0	0	0	0	0
	F	102	87.18	14	11.97	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.85
Video/films	M	11	9.73	10	8.85	36	31.36	29	25.66	18	15.93	9	7.93
	F	21	17.95	12	10.26	27	23.08	20	17.09	26	22.22	11	9.40
Review publications	M	9	7.96	29	25.66	47	41.59	14	12.39	4	3.54	10	8.85
	F	19	16.24	23	19.66	41	35.04	13	11.11	7	5.89	14	11.97
Dictionaries	M	64	56.84	37	32.74	10	8.85	1	0.88	0	0	1	0.88
	F	70	59.83	31	26.50	12	10.26	0	0	2	1.70	2	1.70
Maps/Atlases	M	3	2.65	6	5.31	33	29.20	43	38.05	17	15.04	11	9.73
	F	3	2.56	7	5.98	19	16.24	37	31.62	38	32.48	13	11.11
Access databases	M	3	2.65	5	4.42	35	30.97	37	32.74	17	15.04	16	14.15
	F	3	2.56	7	5.98	15	12.82	34	29.06	33	28.21	25	21.37
Indices/guides	M	8	7.08	12	10.62	36	31.86	28	24.48	15	13.27	14	12.38
	F	12	10.26	23	19.66	20	17.09	16	13.68	27	23.08	19	16.24
Conference/workshop/	M	7	6.19	11	9.73	53	46.93	25	22.12	10	8.85	7	6.19

	Sex	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
seminar	F	8	6.84	20	17.9	31	26.50	27	23.08	16	13.68	15	12.82
Communication with peers/ colleagues	M	52	46.02	30	26.51	26	33.01	4	3.54	0	0	1	0.88
	F	62	52.99	29	24.79	16	13.68	3	2.56	3	2.56	4	3.42
Electronic mail	M	10	8.85	29	25.66	35	30.97	21	18.58	11	9.73	7	6.19
	F	19	16.24	17	14.53	24	20.51	16	13.68	24	20.51	17	14.53
Journals	M	35	30.97	37	32.74	25	22.12	9	7.96	5	4.42	2	1.77
	F	33	28.21	83	70.9	29	24.79	11	9.40	3	2.5	7	5.98
Abstracts/ indexes	M	8	7.08	16	14.16	38	33.63	27	23.89	10	8.85	14	12.39
	F	18	15.38	16	13.68	24	20.59	22	18.80	17	14.53	20	17.07

female law students (97.44%) agree that one benefit of information use is to facilitate easy comprehension of course work, though female law students appear to agree more in this regard. Similarly, another benefit for information use is promotion of class assignments completion in which females 115(98.29%) agree more in relation to male 103(91.15%). It is given that certain subject matter taught within a course of study will only make more meaning when other information resources are consulted which shed light on it. Other information resources add fresh insight, sources and data as these cannot be totally unpacked in a lecture time of approximately one hour. This also broadens the student's perspectives to see the issues from the thought of other academics not limiting themselves to the views and opinions of their legal instructors.

Information resources

Table 5 reveals how often both sexes of students use information resources. In the use of information resources females 102(87.18%) agree more to the use of textbooks than males 99(87.61%). Females 63(53.85%) agree to use less of law reports than males 63(55.75%). Law education is purely pedagogical, thus, law students would definitely use textbooks since some of these are written by the lecturers handling a course of study. Also, since lecturers are attuned to following scholars who share their views, law students would be referred to the

$$x^2_{cal} = \sum_{i=1}^{3} \sum_{j=1}^{2} \frac{(o_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

Table 6. How often, materials are located through various means by both sexes.

		Very often		Often		Sometimes		Seldom		Undecided	
	Sex	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%

Browsing shelves is the most used by both sexes to
19(16.81%) males and 60(51.28%)
followed by friends with 35(30.97%) males and

$$x_{cal}^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{3}\sum_{j=1}^{2}\frac{(o_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$ locate materials with

Table 7. Acquisition of search skills by both male and female law students.

	Sex	Agree No.	%	Disagree No.	%	Undecided No.	%
Trial and error	M	59	52.21	39	34.51	15	13.27
	F	49	41.88	39	33.33	29	24.79
Reading IT books/materials from Library staff	M	29	23.66	49	43.36	35	30.97
	F	32	27.35	43	36.75	42	35.89
Cyber café staff	M	28	24.78	47	41.59	38	33.63
	F	27	23.08	46	39.32	44	37.61
ICT training programme	M	16	14.16	57	50.44	40	35.39
	F	20	17.09	49	41.88	48	41.02
Friends/colleagues	M	87	76.99	6	5.30	20	17.70
	F	96	82.05	3	2.56	18	15.38

Table 8. Chi-square (X²) analysis of the difference between sexes with respect to purpose of using information.

Purpose for seeking information	Sex Male	Female	Total
Agree	505	522	1027
Disagree	66	66	132
Undecided	107	104	211
Total	678	692	1370

in the purpose for which male and female law students use information.

Testing the students' information resources

$$x_{cal}^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{6}\sum_{j=1}^{2}\frac{(o_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

x_{cal}^2 = 66.6153, Df = 5, Table X² = 11.07, Level of confidence = 0.05, Decision: Since x_{cal}^2 is greater than X² critical, the null hypothesis is rejected. Remark: Significant.

From the result presented above, the null hypothesis of no significant difference is rejected. This is because the calculated X^2 (66.6153) is greater than X^2critical (11.07). This implies that there is difference in the information resources consulted by male and female law students as shown in Table 9.

Testing the students information resources utilization pattern

$$x_{cal}^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{3}\sum_{j=1}^{2}\frac{(o_{ij}-e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

Calculated $X^2 = 3.8755$, Df = 2, Table $X^2 = 5.99$, Level of confidence = 0.05, Decision: Since x_{cal}^2 is less than X^2 critical, the null hypothesis is accepted. Remark: Not significant.

From the presented result above, the null hypothesis of no significant difference is accepted. This is because, the calculated value of (X^2) 3.8755 is less than X^2 critical (5.99). This implies that there is no difference in the acquisition of information search skills of male and female law students as shown in Table 10.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher wishes to recommend the following based on the conclusions drawn in this study: (1) Since both male and female male and female law students seek information for the purpose of current development, update their knowledge, current awareness, and to complete class assignments given by their lecturers, efforts should be made by university authority to consistently stock the library with relevant, current and up-to-date information resources/materials which would keep the students abreast with the current trends in their training/profession. (2) Since male law students consult law reports more and female law students consult textbooks more, the reason for this disparity should be investigated and attended to. (3) Both male and female

Table 9. Chi-square (X^2) analysis of mean difference between both sexes with respect to information resources used.

Information resources	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Very Often	551	487	1030
Often	449	409	858
Sometimes	716	587	1303
Seldom	481	409	890
Never	167	289	456
Undecided	228	307	535
Total	2592	2488	5080

Table 10. Acquisition of search skills by both sexes.

Acquisition of search skills	Sex		Total	
	Male	Female		
Agree	219	224	443	
Disagree	198	180	378	
Undecided	148	181	329	
Total	565	585	1150	

law students develop their information search skills more from friends and colleagues, therefore, university authority should endeavour to make formal information search skill training a formal part of legal training especially because information search is time consuming. This would enable both male and female law students to use their time more usefully each time they visit the library.

Conclusion

The findings of this study pointed out various facts concerning both male and female male and female law students in their patterns of information search and use. From the research it was clearly shown that male law students obtain higher mean scores in their information utilization pattern than the female law students. The null hypothesis that was rejected is one (hypothesis two), compared with those that had no difference that were on the higher size using the probability level of 0.05 is accepted. It shows that the information utilization patterns of both male and female law students are the same with perhaps slight differences not highly evident.

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