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ICT utilisation skills among law students in Nigerian university law libraries

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ABSTRACT

The application and use of ICTs and e-resources requires new skill sets, a fact that might not always be as pronounced in developing countries as it is in developed countries. Currently, only a few studies have been done on the topic of the ICT utilization skills of law students within the African context. The aim of this paper was to investigate the ICT utilization skills of undergraduate law students in Nigerian universities. Purposive sampling was used to select twelve law faculties. The population consisted of 7219 law students in the 12 law faculties. A sampling size of 1534 (21%) law students and 24 key informants (12 lecturers and 12 librarians) was used. The findings revealed that existing electronic libraries are inadequately equipped, inaccessible and under-utilised. The majority of Nigerian law students are ICT literate and can conveniently and independently source electronic information resources from the Internet and law databases. The findings further revealed that most of the law libraries denied students’ access to electronic resources due to poor Internet connectivity, inadequate power supply, insufficient computer systems, slow bandwidth, inadequate funds, and lack of technical experts. The paper recommends that the Nigerian Government should provide sufficient funds for university libraries to purchase adequate electronic resources that would motivate law students’ use of electronic libraries. That the utilisation of electronic information resources in law libraries should be strongly encouraged among the undergraduate law students in Nigerian universities

Originality/Value- This article is the product of an on-going doctoral study carried out by the authors to investigate the ICT utilisation skills among undergraduate law students in Nigerian universities. The findings reported here are original and reflect the current assessments and observation of Nigerian undergraduate law students’ ICT utilization skills and the use of law library electronic sources and resources.
**Keywords:** ICT skills, ICT utilisation, Law students, Nigerian universities

**INTRODUCTION**

Generally, there are distinctive information sources available in the legal discipline that differ from those available in other disciplines, both at primary and secondary levels. Primary legal sources are the products of official bodies (legislatures) that have the authority to make and amend laws that guide society. Primary sources consist of legislation (statutes and regulations) and case law (court decisions and administrative tribunals), which can directly affect the legal rights of the people (Singh, 2011). These sources are available in print form and as e-resources.

Secondary legal sources are background sources that have no power to affect the legal rights of the citizens, and they are cited for their informative value and for the references that they provide to relevant primary sources of law. Secondary legal resources include textbooks, legal journals, encyclopaedias, case law, and electronic sources. Singh (2011) observes that secondary legal resources can be an excellent starting point for legal research because secondary sources provide a broad overview of the law.

The introduction of information communication technology (ICT) into the traditional law library setting has transformed the variety of library information resources available in university law libraries. University law libraries currently widely subscribe to diverse electronic information resources, especially law databases that were not customarily used for legal research before the advent of ICTs in these libraries (Olorunfemi and Mostert, 2012).

In Nigerian universities, the database sources that are available in the legal discipline include: Westlaw; Lexis-Nexis International; Complaw, Ebscohost and Legalpedia (Lawal, 2012 and Ossai, 2011). Thanuskodi (2009) identified other electronic resources to include the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), CD-ROM databases, audio-visual sources, and multimedia collections. Chowdhury (2004) explains that whatever the nature of the database available, whether bibliographic, full-text or multimedia, it should aim to provide relevant information sources that answer library users’ queries.

Law libraries in Nigerian universities are currently shifting from the traditional form of manual service to the electronic format, using Information Communication Technology
networks (computer and Internet networks) for effective and efficient information dissemination and service delivery to their clients (academic staff, scholars, students, university staff and other library users). The application of electronic information resources in law libraries has positively influenced the libraries’ service delivery with respect to storage, retrieval, and the dissemination of information sources. The impact of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought about the provision of a variety of electronic resources and different tools and techniques (Internet and databases) used to access online and offline (database, CD-ROM) information in the law libraries.

Ossai (2011) identifies the electronic information resources available for service delivery in law libraries in Nigerian universities to include e-books, the Internet, computer systems and law databases. The availability, accessibility and use of the electronic sources in law libraries aim to enhance the research and learning processes of law students within the university environment. According to Doherty (1998), law library users have indicated that the law library databases make their research work easier and more interesting. Doherty (1998) explains that accessing legal material through ICTs for lecture preparation and law students’ assignments can be effortlessly carried out, without stress, because the only requirement is the input of the correct keywords into the computer system to download the necessary information from the Internet or a law database.

However, studies have shown that law students generally do not use electronic information resources in the library for their academic exploits (Barkan, 2007; Milles, 2005; Cuffe, 2002; Tunkel, 1997). Possible reasons for this could be that they are inaccessible, inadequate and/or unavailable within the law libraries. Olorunfemi and Mostert (2012), focusing on Nigerian law students’ use of law libraries, found that the ICT infrastructure and information services were generally inadequate, and the available sources inaccessible to students, and that some of the law students also lacked the skills necessary to search for information using electronic information resources.

In order to cope with academic requirements while still studying, and also in preparation for effective and efficient performance in their future roles as legal advisers, it is imperative that every law student acquire the requisite information seeking skills in order to access, retrieve and utilise information via electronic resources.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

It was observed that law students in the Faculty of Law in a Nigerian university were not optimally utilising ICT resources when searching for information in the law library. It was assumed that some of them lacked the ICT information seeking skills required to search for information using electronic resources. It also seemed as if some students were not familiar with searching for information on the Internet or using legal databases. Furthermore, the students seemed to prefer to use their own computers or mobile phones to access electronic sources, rather than using the networked computers available in the law library. The law library was either used as a reading place or as a place where they could write assignments (Olorunfemi and Mostert, 2012), rather than as a place to search for, and retrieve information. This led the authors to ask why the students were not interested in using the available e-resources in the library; whether they had the required skills to effectively search for electronic information; and to determine what challenges, if any, they experienced in using ICT information sources within the university law library. In order to determine whether these trends were also experienced in other universities, the study was expanded to include other Nigerian university law libraries.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the paper was to examine the ICT utilisation skills of law students in Nigerian universities. The paper sought to determine:

1. The level of ICT skills among the law students to determine whether they can effectively search for information using electronic resources
2. Which law students utilise ICTs to source information in law libraries in Nigerian universities
3. The ICT information resources available to law students in law libraries in Nigerian universities
4. The challenges faced by Nigerian law students who attempt to use ICTs in their information retrieval process

METHODOLOGY

This study gathered data using the descriptive survey method, with the use of mixed methodology based on the study’s objectives. Both probability and non-probability random
sampling techniques were used in the study. The convenience sampling technique was used to select 12 university law libraries from the 30 universities that offer law in Nigeria. Purposive sampling was used to select 24 key informants, consisting of 12 law librarians and 12 law lecturers. A simple random technique was used to select a sample size of 1534 (21%) out of the 7219 (100%) law students in the 12 selected universities. A questionnaire containing both open ended and close ended questions was designed and administered to the sampled law students. 1260 questionnaires were returned with useful responses, giving a response rate of 82%. An 83% response rate was achieved from the interviews with key informants. The data gathered from returned questionnaires was analysed and presented using relevant simple descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. The qualitative information received from the students and key informants was analysed according to themes and presented in tables.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Age

The student respondents were asked to indicate their ages. Figure 1 below shows the age distribution of the respondents.

![Age of respondents](image)

**Figure 1: Age of respondents N=1260**

As expected, the younger age groups were highly represented amongst Nigerian law students. The majority (1074; 85%) of respondents were between 17 - 27 years, followed by 28 - 37 years (109; 9%). The next highest group consisted of 38 - 47 year olds (32; 3%), followed by
students between the ages of 48 and 57 (18; 1%). Only 2 (0.1%) respondents were 58 or over, while 24 (1.9%) respondents did not indicate their ages.

**Distribution of respondents according to level of education**

The aim of this question was to determine the level of education of the respondents in order to ensure that all levels of education were represented in the study. Four categories were used to describe the educational levels, namely 200L, 300L, 400L and 500L. Table 1 below shows the results.

**Table 1: Level of study N= 1260**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>200L</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>300L</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>400L</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>500L</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>315</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1260</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that while all the year levels were comparatively well represented in the study, the second and third year levels were the most highly represented.

**Awareness of the available ICTs in law libraries**

In order for users to utilise the available ICTs, they first need to be aware of their existence in libraries. This question was posed to establish students’ awareness of available ICT resources in law libraries. The results are reflected in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2: Awareness of available ICTs and their utilisation in law libraries**
Figure 2 shows that majority 51% of the respondents indicated that they were not aware of ICTs in their law libraries; 40% indicated “Yes”, they were aware, while 9% did not respond to this question. It can be assumed that those who did not respond to this question did so because they were unaware of the ICT resources that were available to law students in the law libraries.

Four of the law librarians confirmed that there was a high awareness and utilisation of the Internet facilities and databases (Legalpedia, Compulaw, Westlaw and Lexis-Nexis International), while three librarians indicated that awareness and utilisation was good but not at an optimum level. Some of the interviewed librarians also reported that Internet facilities were not popular in their libraries, even though they were promoted among the students. The author’s observation of the law libraries surveyed was that they possessed electronic libraries; but the electronic libraries were not made available or accessible to law students. This would explain why the students claimed to be unaware of such facilities in the law libraries.

The current finding of unawareness due to the inaccessibility of electronic law libraries is contrary to an earlier study by Ekwelem, Okafor and Ukwoma (2009), who studied “Students use of electronic information sources at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.” Their study found that the introduction of electronic information resources into the law library environment brought about rapid growth. However, the current findings agreed with Iyoro (2004) who studied serial availability, accessibility, utilization and perception of in-training information professionals in a Nigerian University. Iyoro’s findings showed that access to information sources is the pre-requisite to information awareness and utilization of information in any library. Therefore, earlier literature reveals that students’ use of electronic resources in the library is subject to access and awareness of the available electronic libraries resources.

ICT and digital resources availability and utilisation in Nigerian university law libraries
As a follow-up question, the students were asked about ICT sources that they were aware of and whether they actually used the available sources. The results are shown in Table 2.
Table 2: ICT and digital resources availability and utilisation in law libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICTs availability and utilisation</th>
<th>AV</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>NR</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Utilisation</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet facilities</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital law library (e-library)</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law database (Westlaw, Lexis-Nexis)</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1036</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD ROM Database</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1158</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1235</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AV= Available. NR= No Response. Note: Respondents were permitted to choose more one option.

Table 2 identifies the ICT information sources provided in Nigerian university law libraries as: Internet facilities, digital law library, law database, email, CD ROM database, and fax. 43% of the respondents indicated Internet facilities as the electronic resource that is mostly available in law libraries, while only 20% utilised it within law libraries. This was followed by digital law libraries, with 26% aware of their availability. However, only 9% utilized digital law libraries. Fax facilities had the lowest awareness with 102 (8%) responses. It was also a poorly utilized source with only 54 (4%) responses. Law students specified mobile phones, photocopy machines, and personal laptops as other ICT sources that could be used in the law libraries.

The results suggest that the available digital information resources within the law library do not play a very important role in the academic development of the students, because majority of the students are not aware of the electronic resources as they could not access the digital libraries to utilize the information sources. The results seem to corroborate Popoola’s (2001) findings in a study on “Faculty awareness about library information products and services in Nigerian Universities.” Popoola found that the availability of information does not indicate awareness, accessibility and use.

**Information seeking behaviour using ICTs**

In order to search for information effectively using ICTs such as computers and the Internet, a specific skill set is required. The section that follows determined the ability of the respondents to actively and efficiently use computers and the Internet to search for, retrieve and disseminate information.
Methods used to gain computer and Internet search skills

Respondents were asked to indicate how they gained the ability to use a computer and the Internet to search for information. A number of the respondents (276) indicated that they attended a computer school in their home towns, or alternatively did a course on computers at the university. Two hundred and fifty respondents (250) indicated that they taught themselves, mostly on a computer at home. Forty five (45) had relied on family or friends to teach them. The rest did not respond to this question. Examples of some of the responses are as follows:

- “I went to a computer training school where I learnt computer appreciations like typing, designing, spiral binding and photocopying”
- “I learnt it from a computer institute in my home town”
- “From using a personal computer, through friends, and regular visits to the cyber café”
- “From using the Internet and the library”
- “From elementary and secondary educational institutions, also through own PC use”
- “I learnt using computers before coming to the Faculty of Law, and library skills I learnt during my 100 levels in the ‘Legal Method’ class”
- “At secondary school through computer classes”
- “Personally during the strike period and my breaks - I was into computer networking”

Internet Access

The study sought to establish which devices were used by respondents to access the Internet. Their responses are enumerated below in Table 3.

Table 3: Device used to access the Internet N=1260

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device used</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phones</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own computers</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers in law library</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (66%) of respondents reported that they accessed the Internet via mobile phones. 29% accessed the Internet using their own computers, while only an insignificant number (5%) indicated that they accessed the Internet using law library computers.
The findings indicate a low level of Internet access using digital resources in law libraries by students, possibly due to the inaccessibility of these digital resources. Due to this lack of access, students opt to use their own computers, mobile phones and commercial cyber cafes in or around their universities to search for the information that they require. However, all these options have one disadvantage: the cost of airtime. The majority of students can barely afford airtime on a regular basis considering other compulsory expenses that are incurred while studying. Effectively, to spend any additional money on airtime in order to browse for information on the Internet is cumbersome and expensive to the student. This is something that law libraries ought to have addressed through the provision of access to electronic law libraries.

Subsequently, the majority of law students have thoughtfully devised a means of searching the Internet only when necessary, while another large number prefer to study using their textbooks and lecture notes rather than using the Internet at all. However, the 12% who did not respond to the question probably represent the few law students who are not skilled enough to utilise the ICT facilities.

**Skills necessary to effectively search the Internet for information**

Respondents were asked to give their views on the level of their Internet information retrieval skills. The question was asked in order to gain an insight into their ability to effectively search for and find relevant information using the Internet.

![Skills to search Internet effectively](image)

**Figure 3:** Skills necessary to effectively search the Internet for information N=1260
Figure 3 indicates that the majority (64%) of respondents felt that they had the necessary skills to search for information on the Internet, while 18% lacked the necessary knowledge to search the Internet for information. (224) respondents (18%) did not respond to this question. Based on the responses, it would appear that the majority of students had sufficient ICT skills for Internet searches.

In contrast to this finding, seven of the interviewed law librarians indicated that students were not able to search for information effectively using the Internet, while five felt that they were skilled enough to find the information that they required. A possible reason for the disparity in law librarians’ opinion of the students’ ability to effectively search the Internet may be attributed to the fact that some of the law librarians did not seem to realize that these students could be using alternative sources to access and search the Internet.

**Information seeking on the Internet**

Respondents were asked to indicate how they searched for information on the Internet. Table 5 presents the responses.

**Table 5: Information seeking on the Internet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I search independently</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I search with the assistance of friends</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask assistance from librarians</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask librarians to search for me</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 above indicates that the majority (69%) of respondents independently searched for information on the Internet, while 14% searched with friends’ assistance and 7% asked librarians for assistance. 6% did not respond to this question, and only 4% required the librarians to search for them. From these findings, it seems that the majority of the respondents were sufficiently ICT literate to search the Internet without any assistance. Were law students to be provided with an enabling environment where relevant library information resources (Internet and databases) flourished, the students would comfortably utilise library ICT facilities to retrieve the required information for their studies. This concurs with Chipeta, Jacobs and Mostert’s (2009) observation that students become information literate when exposed to the right situations, which allow them to comfortably and independently utilise all
information resources in both printed and electronic formats. Thus, the result reveals that Nigerian law students are ICT literate and can use computers, Internet resources, and other applicable databases to search for relevant information.

**PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN SEARCHING ELECTRONIC DIGITAL SOURCES**

The respondents were asked to state the challenges faced when searching law library electronic digital sources for legal information in their studies. Table 6 enumerates the problems encountered by the respondents from all twelve universities.

**Table 6: Problems encountered when searching electronic resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No ICTs available or inaccessible ICTs</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow speed of Internet</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate skills to search for information</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erratic power supply</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient computer systems</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No competent staff to assist</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate space/non conducive environment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and regulations using these sources frightens me</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No friend to help me</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints and lack of privacy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 indicates that Nigerian law students were facing several problems when searching for digital information in the law libraries. A large number of the respondents (210) indicated that ICT hardware was mostly unavailable, and where available it was not accessible (210) as students were not permitted access to the available ICTs. One hundred and twenty four (124) respondents cited the slow speed of the Internet as a challenge, while (39) complained about lacking the ICT knowledge to efficiently search for information. Thirty two (32) mentioned erratic power supplies, 30 mentioned insufficient computer systems, and (9) respondents indicated that lack of competent staff as a challenge. These problems were corroborated by the law librarians as some of the major constraints affecting the effective provision of services in the law libraries.
When asked to indicate difficulties/challenges faced in using the Internet as an information retrieval tool, respondents indicated the non-availability of digital information resources and bad network connections in the law library. However, the same problem was also experienced when using their mobile phones or personal computers both on and off campus. Power failures or interruptions that resulted in loss of research and the inability to access digital resources were also mentioned as serious impediments, while some respondents indicated that they felt that they were inadequately skilled to search the Internet effectively. The lack of funds to buy airtime was also mentioned as an issue. These challenges prevent the library from being the best agent to provide information sources and resources as advanced by Igbeka (1995).

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that a proportionately large number of law students in Nigerian universities have a sufficiently high ICT skill set to access information via electronic resources. However access to electronic information through academic law libraries is peppered with constraints such as lack of access to ICTs like networked computers; erratic power supplies; inadequate human resources; and lack of electronic resources.

The result is that law students are not fully utilising the law library’s electronic resources, which not only impacts on their ability to access and use the most current information in their studies, but will also impede their ability to effectively trace and retrieve such information once they are in their chosen profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the paper recommends the following:

1. The utilisation of electronic information resources in law libraries should be strongly encouraged among undergraduate law students in Nigerian universities.
2. More electronic resources should be availed to law library users.
3. Adequate funds should be provided to procure the required electronic resources for law students in Nigerian universities.
4. University managements should review their policies on the provision of electronic information resources to law libraries. Librarians in charge of law libraries should embark
on extensive library promotion and user education programmes to create library awareness among law students.

5. ICT skills training should be included in the law faculty curriculum as a compulsory subject for all undergraduate law students (100L-500L).

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