

# **INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS AND SEEKING STRATEGIES OF POSTGRADUATE LAW STUDENTS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES OF NORTHERN NIGERIA**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

The paper examined the information literacy skills and seeking strategies of postgraduate law students in federal universities in northern Nigeria with specific focus on the availability of legal information resources in the faculty of law libraries. The study employed quantitative research method using cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised of seven heads of law libraries and 1,348 registered postgraduate law students for 2016/17 academic session in the seven faculties of law of the universities studied. Simple random sampling equation (SRS-Equation) was used to calculate the sample size which consisted of 308 postgraduate law students. Thus, a total number of 308 copies of questionnaire were administered, and 271 were returned and found useful. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study showed that the postgraduate law students under study possessed skills such as: the ability to define their information need, the ability to locate and use primary and secondary sources, and the ability to evaluate legal and non legal sources. The finding also shows that the postgraduate law students seek the resources of their libraries by asking the library staff, by checking the catalogue cards and OPAC, by asking colleagues/course mates and through Wireless Student's User ID. Some recommendations include: the need for postgraduate law students of federal universities of Northern Nigeria to have both computer and information literacy (IL) skills in order to effectively use the rapidly growing and changing legal information resources of their libraries.

**Keywords: Information literacy Skills, Information Seeking Strategies, Postgraduate Law Students, Law Libraries.**

## **Introduction**

As the volume of information is constantly increasing, search skills are required not only in order to get access to the available information resources, but also to sift from the large quantity and utilize the most appropriate information resources. Pezeshi-Rad and Zamani (2005) assert that the real challenge of our time is not producing information or storing information, but getting people to gain and use information resources. Seeking for information is a fundamental

human function, vital for survival in all human endeavors. As Marchionini (2005) explains, life requires us to plan and execute actions, and to do this we need to have some degree of understanding of the world or environment we live in. As such, information is needed. According to Adekumasi (2012) information seeking is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. This is true because information is needed for a reason and these reasons differ across different individuals or groups.

The postgraduates in the field of law are mostly lawyers who practice law and law lecturers who teach law in tertiary institutions. Law lecturers teach and conduct legal researches in universities. They operate in information intensive environment because whatever they do: teaching, research, publishing, consultancy and so on require information (Amusa & Atimmo 2016). These activities require them to possess skills on how to use and seek for information resources in both prints and electronic formats.

It is imperative for postgraduate law students as researchers and legal practitioners, to possess literacy skills and engage with information seeking processes throughout their academic years of study. Olorunfemi (2014) emphasized that, law students require information literacy skills to effectively cope with the workload of their academic work. They generally seek information on their courses, how to pass examinations, conduct legal research in order to write assignments-and write theses to enable them to graduate from university. However, nothing is known about IL skills and seeking strategies of law students in federal universities of Northern Nigeria. This gave rise to this study.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The frequency with which postgraduate law students seek legal information and the use of relevant information to study, when preparing for law examinations, conducting research and in writing theses, shows how skilled these students will be as legal practitioners. Wildemuth (2013) specified that, it is important to consider the context in which users require information while taking into account the specific characteristics of the library users. This becomes especially important where both print and electronic information resources are provided as sources in law libraries.

Little empirical work has been carried out on the information literacy skills of law students that appears in legal education literature, or library and information science journals. Similarly, on Nigerian law students and their information seeking strategies, not many studies have been conducted. It is based on the foregoing that the study becomes imperative for law librarians and researchers in the area of law librarianship. This led to the problem of the study which is to determine the information literacy skills and seeking strategies of postgraduate law students in federal universities of Northern Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the information literacy skills possessed by postgraduate law students and their seeking strategies in faculty of law libraries in federal universities of northern Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are:

- 1). To determine the information literacy skills possessed by postgraduate law students in federal universities in northern Nigeria.
- 2). To investigate the information seeking strategies of postgraduate law students in federal universities in northern Nigeria.

2). To find out the types of legal information resources available to postgraduate law students in the libraries under study.

3). To find out the preferred format of information resources by postgraduate law students in the libraries under study.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Information literacy (IL) is the ability to define one's information needs and then to access, evaluate, process and use retrieved information strategically. In other words information literacy skills empower the people with the critical skills which will help them to become independent lifelong learners. These skills will enable people to apply their knowledge from the familiar environment to the unfamiliar. Case (2007); define information literacy as the ability to make efficient and effective use of information sources. Information literacy includes having the skills to not only access information, but also to ascertain its veracity, reliability, bias, timelines, and context. Essential information skills required of legal practitioners therefore include the ability to locate primary and secondary material, the ability to evaluate the relevance, applicability and value of that material to the task at hand, the ability to manage that material, and the ability to use the information for a specific purpose. IL is important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferation of information resources. Information and communication technology (ICT) advancements and the use of electronic resources, especially the internet promises to improve the flow of information to research and academic communities (Manda, 2005).

Numerous studies have focused on the information seeking strategies of different users of resources in libraries, for instance, Ikoja-Odongo and Mostert, (2006), Shokeen and Kushik (2005) Ossai (2011) and Wilson (2000) These studies also provide varying definitions of

information seeking strategies, for example, Shokeen and Kushik (2005), define information seeking as the ability to efficiently scan literature using manual or computerized methods in order to identify a set of useful articles and books, while Ikoja-Odongo and Mostert (2006), describe it as the individual's process of searching for information, a process that requires the information seeker to apply personal knowledge, skills, and/or information infrastructure to solve a problem. Ossai, (2011) mentioned that information seeking is an individual's manner of gathering and sourcing information for personal use, knowledge updating and development, while, Wilson (2000) is of the view that, it is the purposive attempt to find information because of the need to meet some goals. In the process, the individual may interact with manual-based information systems such as newspapers or the library, or computer-based systems, such as, the World Wide Web to retrieve the required information. Therefore, information seeking strategy may be described as the process of obtaining information in the libraries using one's own effort by searching the manual catalogue or OPAC, Students wireless ID and/or intermediaries like the library staff.

Olorunfemi and Mostert (2012) argue that disparity in information resources and services can influence the information seeking attitude of law students to the effect that they behave differently from students in other faculties. They further add that for the effective seeking strategy of post graduate law students, they need both computer and information literacy skills to effectively use the rapidly growing and changing legal information resources. They further specified that law students require information in their day to day activities. They need current information on research findings emanating from law conferences, seminars, workshops etc. Wilkinson (2000) explains that law students mostly use information sources that are available in academic law libraries, but as they start their practice, their information seeking habits change as

they then prefer to use personal textbooks, friends, and colleagues as information sources. Majid and Kassim (2000) likewise found that lawyers and law students prefer informal and interpersonal sources of information, while Kuhlthau and Tama (2011) found that lawyers and law students prefer printed information when searching through library information resources. Legal information resources are of various types and forms.

According to scholars such as: Olorunfemi (2014), Uluocha and Mabawonku (2016), a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources are available within academic law libraries. These scholars undoubtedly found that faculties of law in Nigerian universities provide a variety of legal information resources such as legal periodicals, professional law digests, indexes, abstracts, monographs, law books, non-legal books, e-resources, legal data bases, correspondence, newsletters, bulletins, law reports, law reference materials, statutes, acts, decrees, research articles, theses, research reports, government publications, bibliographies, law dictionaries, encyclopedias, pamphlets and past examination papers that are kept in the reserve sections of the libraries. The information sources can be available in both print and electronic format. Hence, it is imperative for postgraduate law students to possess information literacy skills to be able to seek and effectively use the resources of their libraries with ease.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted quantitative research methodology using survey research design. The population of the study consisted of seven heads of law libraries of the Federal Universities in Northern Nigeria and one thousand three hundred and forty eight (1348) registered postgraduate law students (those who have registered for 2016/2017 in federal universities in Northern states of Nigeria. Simple Random Sampling Equation (SRS-Equation) formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size in each of the institution to arrive at the sample size of three hundred

and eight (308) postgraduate law students as recommended by Research Advisers (2006). Semi structured interview was conducted with the heads of law library to find out the types of legal information resources available in their libraries, while 308 copies of the questionnaire was administered to the postgraduate law students by the researcher and four research assistants to collect data. 271 copies of the questionnaire were returned and found useful for analysis. Narrative analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data from the interview, while quantitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics with mean and standard deviation. Table 1 shows the universities that form the population of the study and the sample size of each university.

**Table 1: Population and Sample Size of the Study**

S/N	Name of the University	Name of the Law Libraries	P.G. Students	Source	Sample Size $\frac{N}{TP} \times S$
1	University of Maiduguri, Borno	Aminu Kano Library	92	University MIS unit 2017	21
2	Bayero University, Kano	Law Library, B.U.K.	209	University MIS unit 2017	48
3	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	Law Library, A.B.U. Zaria	246	University MIS unit 2017	56
4	University of Abuja, F.C.T.	University of Abuja Law Library	205	University MIS unit 2017	47
5	University of Jos, Plateau	University of Jos Law Library	295	University MIS unit 2017	67
6	Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto	Usmanu Danfodio University Law Library	117	University MIS unit 2017	27
7	University of Ilorin, Kwara	University of Ilorin Law Library	184	University MIS unit 2017	42
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,348</b>		<b>308</b>

**Source:** Preliminary Survey, 2017.

**Key:** P.G. = Postgraduate, B.U.K = Bayero University, Kano, A.B.U = Ahmadu Bello University.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 2: Information Literacy Skills of Postgraduate Law Students**

S/N	Information Literacy Abilities	VH/H	A	L/VL
1	Ability to define your information need in the library	261 (96.3%)	10 (3.7%)	0 (0%)
2	Ability to use the card catalog, OPAC and classification numbers in the library	138 (50.9%)	33 (12.2%)	100 (36.9%)
3	Ability to locate and use primary and secondary sources	232 (85.9%)	34 (12.3%)	5 (1.8%)
4	Ability to evaluate legal and non legal information sources	225 (83.0%)	39 (14.39%)	7 (2.6%)
5	Ability to use the internet and search for legal information resources.	72 (26.6%)	92 (33.9%)	107 (39.5%)
6	Ability to search and use online legal data bases such as: West Law, Lexis Nexis, Hein Online etc	59 (21.8%)	61 (40.2%)	151 (55.7%)
7	Ability to cite online and print legal information resources correctly	69 (25.5%)	93 (34.3%)	109 (40.2%)

**Key: VH=Very High, H=High, A=Average, L=Low, VL=Very Low**

Table 2 shows that finding on information literacy skills revealed that the postgraduate law students rated their abilities to define information need, to locate and use primary and secondary sources, to evaluate legal and non legal information source and to search card catalogue, OPAC, and classification numbers as ‘high’. It was also found that, while the postgraduate law students are competent in some key issues regarding mostly of print information resources use, they are however, not competent in searching and using online legal data bases and other electronic information resources on the internet and in citing and referencing online and print legal information resources correctly. This corroborates with the findings of Olorunfemi (2014) who found that majority of the law students in Nigerian universities (70.2%) rated their information literacy skills on prints legal information resources as high, while (29.8%) of the respondents rated their IL skill on the use of electronic resources as low.



**Table 3: Information Seeking Strategies of Law Postgraduate Students**

S/N	Types of Seeking Strategies	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
1	Browsing on the shelves/racks	254	93.7	24	8.9
2	Checking the Catalogue Cards	258	95.2	13	4.8
3	Asking colleagues/Course-mates	247	91.1	17	6.3
4	Asking the library staff	260	93.9	17	6.3
5	Searching through Abstracts and indexes	239	88.2	32	11.8
6	Scanning journal titles in the library	227	83.8	44	16.2
7	Checking the On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	74	27.3	197	72.7
8	Searching the Internet	68	25.1	210	77.5
9	Searching the Intranet	61	22.5	194	71.6
10	Scanning through CD-ROM and other external devices like Flash Drives	77	28.4	203	74.9
11	Searching through virtual library	90	33.2	181	66.8

**Key:** N = Frequency, and % = Percentage

Table 3 show the strategies used by postgraduate law students in seeking for legal information resources. Findings revealed that: Asking the library staff; Checking the Catalogue Cards; Browsing on the shelves/racks; Asking colleagues/Course-mate; Abstracting and indexing; and Scanning journal title in the library were used as the seeking strategies employed by postgraduate law students in seeking for printed resources in their libraries. The above finding is similar to the following scholars: Wilkinson (2001) explained that law students mostly use information sources that are available in academic law libraries, but that as they start their practice, their information seeking habits change as they then prefer to use friends and colleagues as information sources. Majid and Kassim (2000) likewise found that lawyers and law students prefer informal and interpersonal sources of information, while Makri et al., (2008) found that law students mostly tend to rely on readily available resources. Frequently used information sources include colleagues and law textbooks and reports that are available in law libraries.

**Table 4: Availability and Types of Legal Information Resources in Law Libraries under Study**

S/N	Name of Library	Availability of Legal Information Resources	Types of Legal Information Resources in Faculty of Law Libraries in Federal Universities in Northern Nigeria
1	Aminu Kano Library Maid	Yes	Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, Nigerian Law Reports, Court Cases, Encyclopedias, Science Direct, Hinary, EBSCOHOST, Law Pavilion, LegalPedia etc
2	Law library Bayero University Kano	Yes	Nigerian and Foreign Law Reports, Legal Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, Law of the Federation, States Laws, English Status, Journals, Textbook, Thesis, Law Companion & etc
3	Law Library ABU	Yes	Statutes and Statutory Instrument, Court Cases, Legal Periodicals, Treaties, Legal Dictionaries, Textbooks, Lexis-Nexis, Hen-Online, Compulaw, Land scope online, EBSCOHOST etc
4	University of Abuja Law Library	Yes	Textbooks, Journals, Thesis and Dissertation, Law Reports, Dictionaries, Access to Free and Open Database such as Nigerian Supreme Court and Court of Appeal Cases & etc
5	University of Jos Law Library	Yes	Various Law Reports, Textbooks, Status, Projects, Theses and Dissertation, Law Journals, Newspapers & etc
6	Usman Danfodio University Law Library	Yes	Nigerian Weekly Law Reports, Textbooks, Legal Dictionaries, Journals, Lexis-Nexis, Law Pavilion and Court Cases & etc
7	University of Ilorin Law Library	Yes	Supreme Court Judgments, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, Weekly Law Reports, Legal Encyclopedias and Dictionaries and Law Textbooks, Law Pavilion, Lexis-Nexis & EBSCOHOST and etc

**Source:** Preliminary Survey, 2017

Table 3 shows the availability and types of legal information resources in faculties of law libraries of federal universities of Northern Nigeria as responded by the heads of law libraries. It shows that the faculty of law libraries studied have legal information resources in both print and electronic formats. They include Statutes and Statutory Instrument; Court Cases; Legal Periodicals; Treaties; Legal Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias; Newspapers; Textbooks; Thesis

and Dissertation; Nigerian and foreign Law Reports; Lexis-Nexis; Hein-Online; Compulaw; Land scope Online, EBSCOHOST; e t c.

This finding reaffirmed the findings of Uluocha and Mabawonku (2014) on the availability of legal information in Nigerian Universities where they conclude that in all the universities studied, the availability of legal information resources was high. The high availability of these resources in the libraries imply readiness to serve their users. This is because, the quality of services rendered by libraries can be influences by its available resources.

**Table 5: Preferred Format of Information Resources by Postgraduate Law Students**

<b>Format</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Print Legal information Resources	89	32.8%
Electronic Legal Information Resources	79	29.2%
Both Printed and Electronic LIR	103	38%
<b>Total</b>	271(100.0%)	

According to the statistics presented in Table 5, majority of the postgraduate law students under study are of the opinion that they prefer to seek both printed and electronic legal information resources (38.0%). This implies that, postgraduate law student of federal universities in northern Nigeria prepared to use both printed and electronic format of legal information resources in their respective libraries. The implication of this finding is that faculty of law libraries must know the information seeking strategies of particular group of users in order to serve them. Furthermore, the postgraduate in the field of law needs to acquire literacy skills on the use of information and communication technology for them to cope with the new trend in information retrieval system.

This finding contradicts Kuhlthau and Tama (2001) who found that lawyers and law students prefer printed information when searching through library information resources.

## **Recommendations**

- 1). There is the need for postgraduate law students of federal universities of Northern Nigeria to possess more ICT skills to effectively access electronic legal information resources and on line legal data bases in law libraries.
- 2). Law librarians should on regular bases organize and provide training on information seeking and ensure that postgraduate students fully participate and master the search skills and also instils information literacy skills among the postgraduate law students. This will enable them to effectively use the legal information resources in both print and electronic format.
- 3). The university librarians and the law librarians of the institutions under study should ensure that adequate availability of legal information resources is provided in both print and electronic format in faculty of law libraries. This will enable the postgraduate law students to successfully carry out their programme and enhance legal education in general.
- 4). The Law libraries should also on regular bases organize training opportunities on information literacy for the library staff to enable them to update themselves from time to time. This will enable them to efficiently guide and assist the students in the use the legal information resources in both print and electronic format.

## **Conclusion**

The study conclude that, in order to effectively use the rapidly growing and changing legal information resources in law libraries, postgraduate law students must possessed certain information literacy skills. It is also evident that, they seek for resources of their libraries using both traditional methods and modern methods of searching for information.

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