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AVAILABILITY AND UTILISATION OF ELECTRONIC RESOURCES BY LAW STUDENTS UNIVERSITY OF UYO, UYO, NIGERIA

By

Mbuotidem, Umoh*

Abstract

This study investigated the availability and utilisation of electronic resources in the University of Uyo Law Library. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto design was employed, and the population for the study was 198 registered law students. Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study. A structured questionnaire entitled "Availability and Utilisation of Electronic Resources Questionnaire (AUERQ) was used to gather data for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions, while independent t-test statistics was used in testing both hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was a significant influence of availability of electronic information resources on utilisation by the Law students in the University of Uyo Law Library. It was also found that availability of legal databases significantly influences students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library. The study concluded that availability of electronic information resources significantly influenced utilisation in the Law Library. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the Law Library should have an enabling environment for access and utilisation of electronic resources.

Keywords: *Availability, Electronic resources, Utilisation, Nigeria*

Introduction

Academic law libraries belong to the class of libraries called

special libraries within the academic environment. They collect and hold predominantly legal information.

Law libraries are to the legal professionals, what the stethoscope is to medical doctors and laboratories to scientists. A law library is a basic principle of legal education and it is the heart of a law school and university law faculties. It is also a prime requirement by the Council of Legal Education that every Faculty of Law should have a well stocked law library (rich in print as well as electronic resources) which is distinct from the university library; and should be administered by a Law-Librarian who is a dual professional – a barrister and Solicitor and a certified librarian. Academic law library occupies a unique and important place in the university community. The main purpose is to provide the institution to which they belong the best library and information resources within the scope of its teaching and research activities. Law resources are undoubtedly the raw materials through which legal frameworks are made.

The Law Library of University of Uyo is an academic library, a faculty resource centre which caters for the information needs of the law students, law lecturers, and other legal researchers. They provide research aids to the above mentioned groups of people and also support learning through teaching, thereby enabling the users to attain information literacy.

The rapid growth of new technologies has changed the communication process and reduced the cost of communication and information service for students. Electronic resources can be seen as the most recent development in information technology and are among the most powerful tools invented in human history. Electronic resources are becoming more and more important for academic community (Adegbore, 2011).

Faculty of Law, University of Uyo fortuneumoh@yahoo.com

Electronic resources which represent an increasing important component of the collection-building activities in libraries refers to those materials that require computer access, has a wide range of data and significant information, and can be accessed remotely from the internet or physically by going to the library. Electronic resources provide convenient and continually improving access to a massive and expanding pool of information: not only has it improved access to existing information sources, but it has also become a valuable medium for the publication and retrieval of up-to-date and often free information from a range of academic institutions such as universities and research institutions. Electronic resources information include: e-journal, e-book, databases, etc.

The concept of utilisation of information resources is the exploitation of the information resources to satisfy information needs. Buckland (2005) identifies utilisation as activity which measures the worth of the item to a library or information system. Utilisation is a single criterion which is used to determine the reason for retaining a document within the collection of a library. Utilisation is essential in guiding the collection development effort of a library. Haruna and Mabawonku (2001) investigated the relationship between information resources utilisation and professional effectiveness attributes of legal practitioners in Lagos, Nigeria and concluded that acquisition and utilisation of relevant, precise and timely information had contributed to effective legal practice of the practitioners in Lagos State, Nigeria. Utilisation of information is goal oriented with the aim of solving a problem, and having a better understanding of previous knowledge and situations (Uhegbu, 2002). The utilisation of these information resources therefore, to a large extent depends on the availability of these resources in the law library. It is against this background that this study sought to investigate the availability and utilisation of electronic resources and databases in the University of Uyo Law Library.

Statement of Problem
The success of every academic institution depends largely on a functional and dynamic library that strongly supports the institution's goals as libraries do not only complement the class room teachings but also provide reliable information resource for research and advanced learning. The availability of these resources in the library makes the library relevant to its clientele. The law library houses legal information electronic resources and the power and role of information for legal research is as strong and important as the quest for justice itself. However, it is worthy of note that despite the information resources that are available in the law library, the question of appropriate utilisation still exist. This may be as a result of inadequate awareness of the availability of these electronic resources by law students. Students will rather come to the library with their books to read, with the perception that library electronic resources are not available. Furthermore, inadequate information literacy and retrieval skills may cause a whole lot of problems to the utilisation of the available legal electronic resources in the University of Uyo law library as some users will like to use the resources but do not have adequate skills in information retrieval. It could also be deduced that the ongoing automation in the law library may also pose a problem of utilisation of electronic resources by students in the University of Uyo Law Library. Hence, this research seeks to establish the level of availability of electronic resources in the University of Uyo Law Library and if these resources are available, are they utilised by law students of the University of Uyo.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to establish the influence of availability on utilisation of electronic resources by law students in the University of Uyo Law Library.

The following are the specific objectives:

To determine the influence of availability of legal electronic resources on utilisation by law students' in University of Uyo Law Library.

To determine the influence of availability of legal databases on utilisation by law students in the University of Uyo Law Library.

Research Questions

a. How does availability of legal electronic resources influence students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library?

b. How does availability of legal databases influence student utilization in University of Uyo Law Library?

Hypotheses

a. Availability of legal electronic resources does not significantly influence students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

b. Availability of legal databases does not significantly influence students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Review of Literature

A library is not only made up of print information resources but also electronic resources (e-resources). It is a known fact that a large number of organisations, agencies and scholars are involved in generating volumes of information presently. Consequently, information resources are being produced in a variety of formats which therefore calls for effective planning and coordination of information management which should recognise the relevance of electronic resources.

It has been pointed out severally that law on pages of paper has remained a difficult challenge to most law students and notes that in the light of this, electronic resources are ways of boosting acquisition of resources in law libraries, as well as facilitating research undermining cost and paucity of their resources. Dina, Akintayo and Ekundayo (2013) note that law libraries are shifting from the traditional form of manual services to electronic delivery system through internet connection to computer work stations network for effective and efficient service deliveries. The authors postulate that electronic resources in law libraries are important factors that have brought changes to the mode of legal research within the university environments. Mahmood, Hartley, and Rowley (2011) state that access to information resources through electronic resources accelerate efficient use of research products and services. The level of availability and utilisation of electronic resources in any university library may influence the information services provision to students in that library. Adedeji (2000) notes that the level of electronic resources available to any university library and the degree of use to which they are put, determines the information services delivery of the library. However, electronic resources when available and skillfully used, influence information services provision by making them more meaningful. Gakibayo and Ikello-Obura (2013) in support of the foregoing premise listed the merits of electronic resources over printed ones to include the following:

a. Speedy access
b. Ease of use
c. Ability to search multiple files at a time
d. Ability to access documents from outside the university library

The authors further explained that for students to utilise the growing range of electronic resources, they must acquire and practice the Information Technology (IT) skills necessary to exploit them. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) resources may be available in Nigerian university libraries and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one's subject of interest, but the user may not be able to lay hands on them because they are not accessible to users which hindered utilisation. One may identify citations in indexes, but may not have access to the sources containing the relevant articles. The more available and accessible electronic resources are, the more likely they are to be used. The shift from print on papers resources to electronic resources and databases for effective services delivery in today's library. Legal databases are fundamental and relevant to law students' these sources can be used to access judicial decisions electronically stored through ICT facilities. Legal databases include Lexis-Nexis, Westlaw, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Compulaw; Hein Online, Law Pavilion etc. Databases also provide the platform through which law information sources are transmitted in law libraries, among colleagues and other information systems. Similarly, Amadi, Nnadozie and Osoi-Onah (2011) see a database as a structure that can store information about multiple types of entities, the attributes of those entities, and the relationships among the entities.

Doren (2015) carried out a study on the use of law information sources in legal research by Nigerian University law students. The researcher investigated the law information sources used in legal research among undergraduate law student in Nigerian Universities. Twelve faculty of law libraries were purposively selected from among the thirty four universities that offer law in the country. In all, One Thousand five hundred and Thirty Four (1534) law students were randomly selected from the total population of 7219 Seven Thousand Two Hundred and Nineteen registered law students at the time of the study. A descriptive survey method was used to obtain open and close ended data from law students; the finding revealed that primary and secondary law sources in both print and electronic formats were available in Nigerian university law libraries. It was also found that print law sources were mostly available in the law libraries which the law students frequently used in legal research to access law related information. The study recommended that the university managements should provide relevant information sources especially electronic resources to enable legal research in the law libraries.

Methodology
An Expo-Facto design was used for this study. In this type of design the researcher cannot manipulate the effect on the dependent variable but just obtain the effect already existing in the natural course of events. The research area for this study was Uyo in Akwa Ibom State. The population consisted of all the year three, four and five (3, 4 and 5) law students of University of Uyo in 2014/2015 academic session who had registered with the library. They are one hundred and eight (198) in number. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in the study. The rationale for using the above named sampling

technique was on the ground that the population was small and the respondents were easily accessible.

A questionnaire titled "Availability and Utilisation of Electronic Resources Questionnaire (AUERQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was made up of two sections, (sections A and B). Section A was used to collect information on personal data of the respondents while section B of the questionnaire was made up of three variables such as availability of electronic resources, availability of legal databases and students' utilisation of the resources. The questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher. Out of the 198 copies of the questionnaire that were administered, 145 were found to be valid while 53 copies were invalid because they were not filled properly. The 145 returned questionnaires represent 73.23% of the 198 copies of the questionnaire issued out.

The collected data were coded statistically before the statistical analysis of the data. The statistical analyses were done using mean and standard deviation in answering the research questions and independent t-test statistics for testing hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Analysis of Results

Research Question one
How does availability of electronic resources influence students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library?

Table 1
Availability and Utilisation of Electronic Resources in University of Uyo Law Library

E-resources	N	Mean	SD
Available	111	8.71	1.27
Not available	34	6.47	.896

Table 1 revealed the Mean and Standard Deviation on the influence in students' utilisation of electronic resources in University of Uyo Law Library based on availability. The result shows that students' make use of electronic resources when they are available than when they are not. This is seen in the high and low Means scores of 8.17 and 6.47 for utilisation of electronic resources when available and not available respectively. This means that availability of electronic resources influence students utilisation in University of Uyo law library.

Research Question Two
How does availability of legal databases influence student utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library?

Table 2
Availability and Utilisation of Legal Databases in University of Uyo Law Library

Legal Databases	N	Mean	SD
Available	95	9.07	.866
Not available	50	6.50	.995

Table 2 reveals the Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of availability on students' utilisation of Legal Databases in University of Uyo Law Library. It shows that students' make use of legal databases when they are available than when they are not. This is evidenced in the high and low mean scores of 9.07 and 6.50 for utilisation of legal databases

when available and not available respectively. This means that availability of legal databases influences students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Hypothesis One

Availability of electronic resources does not significantly influence students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Table 3
Independent T-test Analysis of Influence of Availability of legal e-resources on Utilisation by Law Students

E-Resources	N	Mean	SD	t-cal
Available	111	8.17	1.27	
				9.54
Not available	34	6.47	.89	

Significant at 0.5, df = 143; critical t =1.976

The result in table 3 revealed that the calculated t – value of 9.54 is greater than the critical value of 1.976 at 0.05 level of significance with 143 degree of freedom. Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that availability of electronic resources significantly influences students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Hypothesis Two

Availability of legal databases does not significantly influence students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Table 4
Independent T-test Analysis on the Influence of Availability of Legal Databases on Utilisation by Law Students'

Legal Databases	N	Mean	SD	t-cal
Available	95	9.07	.866	
				16.15
Not available	50	6.50	.995	

Significant .05; df =134; critical t = 1.976

The result in table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value of 16.15 is greater than the critical value of 1.976 at 0.05 level of significance with 143 degree of freedom. Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that availability of legal databases significantly influences students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Discussion of Finding

The result of data analysis in table 2 was significant due to the fact that the obtained t-value revealed that the calculated t-value of 9.54 was greater than the critical value of 1.976 at .05 level of significance with 143 degree of freedom. This showed that availability of electronic resources significantly influence their utilisation in university of Uyo law library. The finding is in accordance with a study by Adedeji (2000) which noted that the level of electronic resources available to any university library and the degree of use to which they are put determines the information services delivery of the library; however, unavailability of electronic resources hindered utilisation and effective information service delivery. The level of availability and utilisation of electronic resources in any university library may influence the information services provision to students in that library. The significance of the result caused the null hypothesis to be rejected while the alternative one was upheld.

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Conclusion

Consequent upon the result of this study, it was concluded that there is a significant influence of availability on utilisation of electronic information resources in the University of Uyo Law Library, and availability largely influences its consequent utilisation. Finally, the availability of legal databases significantly influences students' utilisation in University of Uyo Law Library.

Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are put forward:

i. The Law Library should have an enabling environment for access and utilisatsion of electronic resources.
ii. Law librarians should engage in advocacy, talks etc so as to enlighten users on the availability of electronic resources and also to encourage those who only prefer consulting print resources to utilise electronic resources.
iii. The University authority and the central library need to continually train lecturers and students in the use of e-resources.
iv. The University Management and Library Management should ensure that the specialised legal e-resources are made available at all times for utilisation

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