

Utilization of Law Library Resources by Undergraduate Law Students in Three Selected Universities in South-East Nigeria: Attitudes and Challenges

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Abstract

The study and practice of law are essentially library-based. The law library in the faculty of law of a university is an important resource centre for the law students and lecturers, and promotes studies and research. This study investigates the attitudes of undergraduate law students in the utilization of law library resources in three universities in Nigeria and the challenges faced by them. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The research involved 200 level to 500 level undergraduate law students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, and Madonna University, Okija, during the first semester of 2019/2020 academic session. Purposive sampling technique was used which sampled 50 students in each level, totaling 600. A self-structured questionnaire was distributed to the students. A total of 540 completed copies of the instrument were returned, giving a response rate of 90%. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The result of the study showed that the attitude of the law students in utilization of law library resources was not encouraging due to certain challenges such as outdated law materials, lack of inadequate accommodation and lack of internet access. The study affirms that attitude has positive and negative relationship with the utilization of law library resources. Recommendations were made which advised law librarians to organize seminars for law students on the usefulness of law library to them, and that the university management should equip the law library with adequate and current law materials, among others.

Keywords: Law library resources, undergraduate law students, attitudes, utilization of law library, faculty of law library.

Introduction

Law library, according to Okafor (2011), is a building containing a collection of law books, law reporting, law journals, pamphlets and documents which deal with

law, as well as non-book materials and non-law books. Precisely, Ukpanah and Afolabi (2011) define law library as a collection of legal information organized for use of those seeking to qualify as or who have qualified as lawyers.

In essence, the study and practice of law are essentially library-based. This is because a law library is to a lawyer what the laboratory is to a scientist. Both students of law and law lecturers spend a great deal of time in faculty of law library because it is an important intellectual resource centre of the faculty and promotes studies and research (Idowu, 2013). In the same vein, Azino (2006) states that libraries are important agents in the pursuit of academic excellence. Their main goal is to support the objectives of the host institution, which has to do with teaching, learning, research and services.

It is believed that the establishment of law institution is basically to achieve a certain goal, in legal education, which law library help to accomplish. Clinch (2018) summarised the goals of legal education thus: imparting to the students an understanding of the fundamental principles and concept of law; develop the skills needed to solve legal problems; provide a rigorous analytical and theoretical education to assist the students in developing constructive and critical approach to the processes of law; assist the students in seeing law within its social, economic, political, historical, ethical and cultural concept; and a comparative analysis of other legal systems, especially civil law and relevant international law systems.

There is no library of whatsoever kind of nature which so directly pertains to the interest which it is designed to serve as the law libraries in the universities (Akinwumi, 2017). He further asserts that most undergraduate law students do not make use

of the libraries in their faculties, while some only visit the libraries during the period of examinations and asked law librarians to encourage undergraduate students to utilize the law library resources.

It is against this background that this study investigates the attitudes of undergraduate law students towards law libraries in their faculties, and challenges faced by them in the utilization of the law libraries in three selected universities in South-East Nigeria. The universities are: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, and Madonna University, Okija. These are federal, state and private universities respectively.

Statement of Problem

Legal experts have argued that well-equipped law libraries in the universities are sine qua non in successful academic performance of law students. They attribute law libraries to aid legal studies and research in all ramifications. However, despite the immense benefits of law libraries in legal education, observations by the researchers undertaking this study have shown that faculties of law libraries in some universities seem to be underutilized by law students, which is the motivation for this research. Therefore, the study investigates the attitudes of undergraduate law students towards faculty law libraries and the challenges they face.

Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To determine the attitudes of undergraduate law students towards utilisation of law library resources in the faculties of law in the universities in South-East Nigeria.
2. To determine the challenges faced by undergraduate law students in utilisation of law library resources in the faculties of law in the universities in South-East Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of undergraduate law students towards the utilisation of law library resources in the faculties of law in the universities in South-East Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges faced by undergraduate law students in utilization of law library resources in the faculties of law in the universities in South-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

Law libraries have been recognized as the heart of every law faculty in all universities. It is the pivot on which the faculties revolve for attainment of their educational excellence, goals and objectives (Ugboma, 2016). The quality and quantity of law library resources in the faculty of law are necessary if the objectives of the library are to be achieved. However, this is not without disadvantage as most law students stick to using the abundant resources and neglect to make use of other libraries to widen their knowledge in other fields (Khan & Bhatti, 2012).

According to Tuyó (2007), a law library that intends to be relevant in any academic institution must ensure that its collections are adequate. He mentions some of the basic reference titles that a law library is expected to have in its collection as, complete sets of up-to-date laws of the federation, and laws of the states; law reports of the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, Federal High Courts and the State High Courts; law reports of at least Commonwealth countries; secondary works that are needed to support the teaching of subjects especially the core ones; precedent books of foreign countries such as Britain, America and some Asian countries; legal dictionaries and other dictionaries; Thesaurus legal bibliographies and both legal and general encyclopedias. These collections are mainly for the service of law students and law lecturers.

The services of the law library, no doubt, are tailored along the line of the services of every main library. Such services include routing of current law journals, selective dissemination of information, abstracting and indexing services, bibliographies, reading lists, reference and services.

In some law libraries, circulation services obtain, while others operate close access (Anyagú & Agidi, 2013). On the other hand, Bradley, Cownie, Masson, Neal & Newell (2005) listed such services to include: finding cases, using law reports, updating cases, electronic retrieval facilities (Lexis Nexis, Westlaw, Hein Online, etc), finding and updating statuses.

Olurunsola (2009) enumerated some factors that motivate readers to use the libraries. These are: the size and currency of the collection; conducive learning environment; availability of information and communication technology (ICT), and well-trained and behaved staff. In the same vein, Nigerian law students, as asserted by Olorunfemi (2015), are expected to utilize electronic law libraries to access the law sources and resources for legal research. The law databases and internet are fundamental and relevant to lawyer education. With the development and application of ICT, the libraries have shifted from the traditional library system to hybrid library, then automated library, digital archives stages, library 2.0 and mobile phone services (Parvez, 2011).

The research of Olorunfemi (2015) reveals that furthering of legal knowledge is the major reason why the students use the law sources in the law library. This might not be far from the saying that knowledge is power. Furthermore, the study discovers that the purposes of using the library by law students are: to write assignments, be informed about latest developments of law, supplement lecture notes and study the outcomes of court cases.

Okereke, Onoyeyan & Ogbuiyi (2014) list some factors that are capable of affecting adversely the use of library, to include unconducive environment and lack of written procedures and manuals that can direct non-trained library staff, the latter leading to frequent improper shelving of library materials and lack of commitment in desk work.

The study by Dina, Akintayo & Ekundayo (2013) reveals that lack of sufficient law sources is the major obstacle facing law students in harnessing law sources in the law library. This corroborates the study of Fariss (2012) who finds out that lack of latest and current legal sources are the major problems militating against the development of legal research. According to Fariss, the law libraries are facing new challenges that evolve from processes of legal research, which include inadequate space and budget constraints.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The research was conducted among the 200 level to 500 level undergraduate law students during the first semester of 2019/2020 academic session in the three universities of study. An attitude and use questionnaire was developed and adopted for the study. It has two sections - section A and section B. Section A comprised items on demographic data of the respondents, while section B consisted of 20 items. Section B was to elicit information on the attitude of the law students in the utilization of law libraries and challenges faced by them. Purposive sampling technique was used which sampled 50 students in each level in the universities of study, giving 200 in each university and totaling 600 on the whole. A self-structured questionnaire was distributed to the students in the faculties of the law of their respective institutions through the course representative in each level, who cooperated with the researchers. The questionnaire was rated on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly agree (SA), Agree

(A) Disagree (D) and Strongly disagree (SD). The completed questionnaire was collected between January and March 2020. A total of 540 completed copies were

returned, giving a response rate of 90%. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18 – 20	159	29.4
	21 – 30	218	40.4
	31 – 40	101	19
	41 and above	62	11.2
Gender	Male	297	55
	Female	243	45
Marital status	Single	424	78.5
	Married	116	21.5

Population of Students by Levels

	200 level	300 level	400 level	500 level	Total
Nnamdi Azikiwe University	50	47	42	40	179
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University	50	50	50	45	195
Madonna University	43	41	40	42	166

Presentation of Results

The presentation of results is guided by the two research questions raised.

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of undergraduate law students towards utilization of law library resources in the faculties of law in the universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Attitudes of undergraduate law students towards utilization of law library resources in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

S/N	Attitudes	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	I do not need the law library as I am content with my lecture notes	-	-	18	10	109	60.9	52	29.1
2	I only make use of the law library during the period of examinations	5	3	10	5.5	131	73	33	18.5
3	I prefer studying in my residence to studying in the law library	36	20	85	47.5	37	20.7	21	11.8
4	Burdened with lectures I do feel tired visiting the law library	40	22.3	77	43	45	25.1	17	9.6
5	I do prefer group discussions to reading privately in the law library	23	12.1	38	21	90	50	28	16.9
6	I do not see the importance of law library to my law education	16	8.9	31	17.3	98	54.2	34	19.6
7	I am not used to going to any other library to read and widen my knowledge in other fields	114	63.8	55	30.7	10	5.5	-	-
8	I regard law library as a last resort such as consulting materials for writing projects	15	8.3	32	17.8	60	33.4	72	40.7
9	I am not of quiet type and so, cannot read in the law library often	24	13.4	37	20.7	75	41.8	43	24.1
10	I have not visited the law library since my first year till now	-	-	-	-	14	7.9	165	92.1

Table 1: shows that majority (90%) of the undergraduate law students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University disagree with the following statements: that they are content with lecture notes and do not need the law library; that most of the law students only make use of the law library during the period of examinations, 91.5%; that they do

not see the importance of law library to law education, 73.8%, while all the respondents (100%) disagree that they have not visited the law library since their first year till now. On the other hand, 94.5% agree that they are not used to going to any other library to widen their knowledge in other fields.

Table 2: Attitudes of undergraduate law students towards utilization of law library resources in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam.

S/N	Attitudes	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	I do not need the law library as I am content with my lecture notes	10	5.1	94	48.2	33	16.8	58	29.9
2	I prefer studying in my residence to studying in the law library	99	50.7	80	41	11	5.6	5	2.7
3	I only make use of the law library during the period of examinations	120	61.5	57	29.2	6	3.1	12	6.2
4	Burdened with lectures I do feel tired visiting the law library	65	33.3	101	51.1	19	10.5	10	5.1
5	I do prefer group discussions to reading privately in the law library	72	36.9	55	28.2	37	18.9	31	16
6	I do not see the importance of law library to my law education	66	33.8	81	41.5	30	15.3	18	9.4
7	I am not used to going to any other library to read and widen my knowledge in other fields	100	52.2	44	22.5	31	16	20	9.3
8	I regard law library as a last resort such as consulting materials for writing projects	36	18.4	51	26.1	73	37.4	35	18.1
9	I am not of the quiet type and so, cannot read in the law library often	11	5.6	49	25.2	55	28.2	80	41
10	I have not visited the law library since my first year till now	4	2.2	13	6.6	90	46.1	88	45.1

Table 2 shows that majority of the undergraduate law students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University agree that they only make use of the law library during the period of examinations, 90.7%; that they are not used to going to any other library to widen their knowledge in other fields, 74.7%; that burdened with lecture notes, they feel tired visiting the library regularly, 74.4%; and that they prefer studying in their residence to studying in the law library, 65.1%.

Table 3: Attitudes of undergraduate law students towards utilization of law library resources in Madonna University, Okija.

S/N	Attitudes	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	I do not need the law library as I am content with my lecture notes	22	13.5	28	16.8	79	47.5	37	22.2
2	I only make use of the law library during the period of examinations	-	-	-	-	15	9	12	7.2
3	I prefer studying in my residence to studying in the law library	8	5	35	21	71	42.7	52	31.3
4	Burdened with lectures I do feel tired visiting the law library	31	18.5	70	42.1	36	21.6	29	17.8
5	I do prefer group discussions to reading privately in the law library	20	12	27	16.2	54	32.5	65	39.3
6	I do not see the importance of law library to my law education	15	9	12	7.2	73	43.9	66	39.9
7	I am not used to going to any other library to read and widen my knowledge in other fields	120	72.2	33	19.8	13	8	-	-
8	I regard law library as a last resort such as consulting materials for writing projects	19	11.4	22	13.2	80	48.2	45	27.2
9	I am not of the quiet type and so, cannot read in the law library often	4	2.4	10	6.2	50	30.1	102	61.3
10	I have not visited the law library since my first year till now	-	-	-	-	61	36.7	105	63.3

Table 3: shows that majority of the undergraduate law students in Madonna University agree that they need the law library as they are not content with their lecture notes, 69.7%; that they are not used to going to any other library to read and widen their knowledge in other fields, 92%. However, all the respondents (100%) disagree that they mainly make use of the law library during the period of examinations, and also that they have not visited the law library since their first year till now. Also, majority of the students disagree that they are not used to going to any other library to read and widen their knowledge in other fields, 92%; and that they are not of the quiet type and so cannot read in the law library often, 91.4%; and that they prefer studying in their residence to studying in the law library, 74%.

Research Question 2:

What are the challenges faced by undergraduate law students in utilization of law library resources in the faculties of law in the universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 4: Challenges faced by undergraduate law students in the utilization of law library resources in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

S/N	Challenges	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Many law textbooks are outdated	10	5.5	50	27.9	77	43	42	23.6
2	Law reports are not up-to-date	14	7.8	65	36.3	82	45.7	18	10.2
3	Many law journals are outdated	60	33.5	73	40.8	37	20.7	9	5
4	The law library lacks enough space and seats	98	54.3	72	40.7	9	5	-	-
5	The law library is not conducive to me for studies due to occasional noise from staff and some students	21	11.7	48	26.2	80	44.6	30	17.5
6	The lighting inside the law library is poor	13	7.2	14	7.8	112	62.7	40	22.3
7	The law library has poor ventilation	5	2.7	5	2.7	93	52.2	61	34
8	Lack of internet access	85	47.4	44	24.5	29	16.2	21	11.9
9	Operational hours of the law library are not adequate	63	35.2	70	39.1	36	20.1	10	5.6
10	The law library staff manifest unfriendly behaviour to students	8	4.4	26	14.7	100	55.8	45	25.1

In Table 4, the majority of the respondents in Nnamdi Azikiwe University agree that the law library lacks enough space and seats, 94.9%. On the other hand, majority of the respondents disagree that the lighting inside the law library is poor, 85%; that the library has poor ventilation, 86.2%; and that the law library staff manifest unfriendly behaviour to students, 80.9%.

Table 5: Challenges faced by undergraduate law students in the utilization of law library resources in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

S/N	Challenges	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Many law textbooks are outdated	69	35.4	102	52.3	20	10.2	4	2.1
2	Law reports are not up-to-date	113	57.9	56	28.7	26	13.4	-	-
3	Many law journals are outdated	99	50.7	80	41.5	16	7.8	-	-
4	The law library lacks enough space and seats	18	9.2	60	30.7	83	43	34	17.1
5	The law library is not conducive to me for studies due to occasional noise from staff and some students	42	21.5	78	40.5	40	20.5	35	17.5
6	The lighting inside the law library is poor	120	61.5	51	26.1	13	6.6	11	5.8
7	The law library has poor ventilation	99	50.7	64	32.7	17	8.7	15	7.9
8	Lack of internet access	156	80	39	20	-	-	-	-
9	Operational hours of the law library are not adequate	84	43.5	81	42	20	10.2	10	4.3
10	The law library staff manifest unfriendly behaviour to students	101	51.1	70	36	21	10.7	3	2.2

Table 5: shows that majority of the respondents in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University agree that many law textbooks are outdated, 87.7%; that law reports are not up-to-date, 86.6%; that many law journals are outdated, 92.2%; that the lighting inside the law library is poor, 87.6%; that the law library has poor ventilation, 83.4%; that the law library staff manifest unfriendly behaviour to students, 87.1%; while all the respondents agree that the law library lacks internet access, 100%.

Table 6: Challenges faced by undergraduate law students in the utilization of law library resources in Madonna University, Okija

S/N	Challenges	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Many law textbooks are outdated	15	9	30	18	81	48.7	40	24.3
2	Law reports are not up-to-date	-	-	-	-	74	44.5	92	55.5
3	Many law journals are outdated	40	24	73	43.9	52	31.3	1	0.8
4	The law library lacks enough space and seats	83	50	64	38.5	19	11.5	-	-
5	The law library is not conducive to me for studies due to occasional noise from staff and some students	10	6.2	27	16.2	88	53	41	24.6
6	The lighting inside the law library is poor	7	4.2	20	12	93	56.2	46	27.6
7	The law library has poor ventilation	31	18.5	36	21.6	60	36.1	39	23.8
8	Lack of internet access	96	57.8	49	29.5	13	7.8	8	4.9
9	Operational hours of the law library are not adequate	30	18	35	21	81	48.7	20	12.3
10	The law library staff manifest unfriendly behaviour to students	-	-	7	4.2	120	72	39	23.8

Table 6: This table shows that majority of the respondents in Madonna University agree that the law library lacks enough space and seats, 88.5%; and that the law library lacks internet access, 87.3%. However, all the respondents disagree that law reports in the law library are not up-to-date, 100%; and the majority of the respondents disagree that the law library is not conducive for studies due to occasional noise from staff and some students, 77.6%; and that the lighting inside the law library is poor, 83.8%; and that the law library staff manifest unfriendly behaviour to students.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the utilization of law library resources by undergraduate law students in three selected universities in South-East Nigeria.

The findings of the study reveal that the respondents in the three universities need the law library as they are not content with lecture notes. This is in consonance with one of the findings of Olorunfemi (2015) that law students use the law library to supplement lecture notes.

The respondents in Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Madonna University disagree with the findings of Akinwumi (2017) that most undergraduate law students in the faculties of law in Nigerian universities visit the law libraries during the period of examinations to study for the examination. However, this study reveals that majority of the respondents in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University are in agreement with Akinwumi's finding. In essence, this finding implies that the law library in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University may occasionally be empty of users.

This study further found that the respondents in the three universities studied are not used to going to any other library to read and widen their knowledge in other fields. This agrees with the findings of Khan & Bhatti (2012) that most law students stick to using the abundant resources in the faculties of law library and neglect to make use of other libraries to widen their knowledge in other fields. The implication of this study is that law students do not value other libraries in the university or elsewhere whereas when they become lawyers they are addressed as learned persons.

Some challenges in the utilization of law library resources are not without what Olurunsola (2009) listed as some factors that motivate readers to use the libraries. These include the size (space), currency of collection, conducive learning environment, availability of the ICT and well-trained and behaved staff. The findings of this study agree with some and

not in consonance with some of these findings. Firstly, the study found that the law libraries in Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Madonna University lack enough space to accommodate very many students at a time, while it is not so in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. Secondly, there are many outdated law textbooks and journals, as well as, not up-to-date law reports in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University law library whereas these are not so in the other two universities of study. Thirdly, due to poor lighting and poor ventilation in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University law library, the library is not conducive to studies. Fourthly, the study further reveals that there are lack of internet access in the three universities. Lastly, the study found that law library staff in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University manifest unfriendly behaviour to students.

Conclusion

Utilization of library resources has been a subject of concern in the librarianship world. This is because libraries are meant to serve readers and utilized by them. The study has shown some in-depth knowledge of the utilization of the law library resources in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, and Madonna University, Okija. The study affirmed that attitude has positive and negative relationship with the utilization of law library resources, and exposed some challenges faced by law libraries in the faculties of law in Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

Law librarians in the faculties of law should organize seminars for law students on the usefulness of law libraries which are there to serve them. The university management should see that the collections in the law library are adequate and current. This will attract law students to utilize the law library fully and prevent them from spending their money in purchase of law textbooks, etc.

The size and space of the law library building or apartment is important so as to accommodate many law library users at a time. In view of this, the university management should expand the space for the library where necessary.

Apart from the provision of legal databases in the law library, there should be availability of internet connections to the e-library for the law students to make use of.

The law library staff should be trained and retrained on regular basis by the management for optimal services to their clientele the law students and law teachers.

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