



## **Barriers to information resource utilization and information-seeking behaviours among law students at the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the problems militating against the utilization of information resources / services by undergraduate law students of University of Benin, Benin City. The sample population consisted of 230 undergraduate law students randomly selected from the first to fifth year of study from a population of 1145. Their information seeking activities were tested to discover how undergraduate law students seek information. This is a descriptive survey research; therefore, the researcher employed a descriptive design. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire and percentage. The Simple Percentage Analysis and the Z-Test analysis were used in data analysis. The study found that male students consult the librarian, there is no difference in the information seeking pattern of male and female law students, and law students have inadequate ICT skills. The recommendation include: that school authority stock the library with relevant and up-to-date materials, and ICT should be made a core part of law student's curriculum.*

**Keywords:** Law, Law Students, Information Resource, Information-Seeking Behaviour, University of Benin

### **Introduction**

In the legal profession, access to accurate and timely information is indispensable for academic and professional excellence. Law students, as future legal practitioners, require robust information-seeking skills and access to comprehensive information resources to support their learning and professional development (Ishola & Adu, 2021). Information resources in law libraries and electronic databases are integral in facilitating legal research and decision-making processes. However, various barriers hinder students from effectively utilizing these resources, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria (Olorunfemi, 2015). Understanding these barriers and the information-seeking behaviors of law students at the University of Benin, Benin City, is crucial for addressing the gaps in resource utilization and improving academic outcomes.

The University of Benin is one of Nigeria's leading institutions for legal education, with its Faculty of Law producing graduates who contribute significantly to the legal profession. However, law students face challenges in accessing and utilizing information resources due to infrastructural deficiencies, limited training, financial constraints, and systemic issues in library management (Sokari, 2019). This study seeks to explore the barriers to information resource utilization and examine the information-seeking behaviors of law students at the University of Benin.

The concept of information-seeking behavior refers to the strategies and processes individuals adopt to find and utilize information that meets their needs (Tenopir, Volentine, & King, 2016). For law students, effective information-seeking behavior is essential, as their education relies heavily on legal materials such as statutes, case law, and academic journals. Globally, research has shown that information-seeking behaviors among students are influenced by technological access, information literacy, and the availability of resources (Cvetkovic & Menchaca, 2019).

In the Nigerian context, law students face unique challenges that hinder optimal information resource utilization. Libraries often suffer from inadequate ICT infrastructure, outdated collections, and financial constraints, which limit students' access to relevant and current legal information (Ubwa, 2021). Sokari (2019) emphasized that students in Nigeria often struggle to afford textbooks or gain access to paid legal databases such as LexisNexis or Westlaw. Moreover, inadequate information literacy skills exacerbate these challenges, as many students lack training in navigating electronic resources (Anunobi, 2013).

While the challenges facing Nigerian law students mirror those faced by students in other developing countries, they are compounded by the specific socio-economic and infrastructural deficits prevalent in Nigeria (Olorunfemi & Mostert, 2013). For example, research by Boateng and Dwomoh (2020) in Ghana indicated that the unavailability of trained personnel to guide students further limits their ability to maximize information resources. Similarly, Sharma (2018) reported similar barriers in India, highlighting how underfunded libraries fail to keep pace with the growing demand for quality legal information.

The information-seeking behaviors of law students also reflect their coping strategies amidst these barriers. Studies in South Africa and Kenya have found that students often resort to peer assistance, reliance on printed materials, and personal networks when formal resources are inaccessible (Kamau & Ndungu, 2020; Mthethwa & Van der Walt, 2019). In Nigeria, Olorunfemi (2015) observed that law students develop self-reliance in ICT skills due to limited institutional support. These behaviors underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve access and literacy.

This study focuses on the University of Benin as a case study to explore these phenomena. By understanding the barriers to information resource utilization and the information-seeking behaviors of its law students, the findings aim to inform strategies for improving resource access, infrastructure, and training to enhance legal education outcomes.

## **Literature Review**

The utilization of information resources and services by undergraduate law students is critical for their academic success and professional development. However, various factors impede effective information-seeking behaviors among these students. This literature review examines studies conducted between 2017 and 2024, focusing on the challenges faced by undergraduate law students in accessing and utilizing information resources, with a particular emphasis on the Nigerian context.

The ability of law students to access and effectively utilize information resources is integral to their academic success and professional preparedness. However, various barriers hinder this process, influencing their information-seeking behaviors. This review synthesizes current literature (2015–present) on the barriers to information resource utilization and the information-seeking behaviors of law students, with a primary focus on Nigeria, Africa, and relevant global studies.

### **Inadequate ICT Infrastructure**

One of the most cited barriers is the lack of sufficient ICT infrastructure. Olorunfemi (2015) found that Nigerian law libraries are often under-equipped with modern ICT facilities, hindering students' ability to access electronic resources. Similarly, Ishola and Adu (2021) emphasized the challenge of outdated or inadequate ICT systems in many African universities, which affects students' access to global legal databases. Globally, Xia and Wang (2018) observed that while universities in developed countries are better equipped, students still face challenges due to uneven technological advancements between institutions.

### Limited Access to Electronic Resources

Access to electronic legal resources remains a critical issue. Olorunfemi and Mostert (2013) revealed that Nigerian students often rely on traditional materials due to limited awareness and availability of electronic resources. In Kenya, Kamau and Ndungu (2020) noted a similar trend where students depend on hardcopy resources due to high subscription costs of electronic databases like LexisNexis. Globally, studies like that of Tenopir et al. (2016) highlighted how financial constraints affect library acquisitions in less affluent institutions, reducing access to high-quality electronic resources.

### Insufficient Information Literacy Skills

Information literacy skills are essential for effective resource utilization. Anunobi (2013) found that many Nigerian students struggle with navigating complex digital environments. In South Africa, Mthethwa and Van der Walt (2019) reported that students often lack training in advanced search strategies. Outside Africa, De Freitas and Gibson (2020) identified a similar gap among law students in Brazil, where digital proficiency varied widely, affecting the effective use of electronic legal resources.

### Inadequate Library Collections

Inadequate library collections remain a perennial issue. Ubwa (2021) noted that many Nigerian law libraries fail to provide current legal materials, forcing students to rely on outdated resources. This problem extends beyond Africa; for instance, in India, Sharma (2018) highlighted the inadequacy of regional law libraries in meeting the needs of a growing student population, a situation compounded by rapid legal reforms requiring up-to-date materials.

### Financial Constraints

Financial barriers significantly affect access to information resources. Sokari (2019) observed that Nigerian law students often cannot afford expensive textbooks or subscriptions to legal databases. Similarly, research by Afolabi et al. (2020) found that financial limitations deter students from purchasing essential academic resources. Globally, Mathews and Jorstad (2017) reported similar findings in Southeast Asia, where economic disparities restrict access to quality legal education materials.

### Information-Seeking Behaviors

#### Preference for Print Resources

Despite advancements in technology, many law students continue to prefer print resources. Olorunfemi and Mostert (2013) attributed this preference in Nigeria to familiarity and the tangible nature of books. Similarly, in India, Sharma (2018) found that students favored printed materials for ease of use, particularly for case law and statutes. Globally, studies like Cvetkovic and Menchaca (2019) have shown that while electronic resources are valued, students frequently rely on print for intensive study.

#### Self-Reliance in ICT Skill Development

Olorunfemi (2015) highlighted that Nigerian law students often develop ICT skills independently, indicating gaps in formal training. In Ghana, Boateng and Dwomoh (2020) reported similar findings, where students resorted to peer learning to navigate electronic resources. Internationally, Jansen and Reddy (2021) found that self-taught digital literacy is common among law students in underserved regions of Australia.

### Challenges with Legal Databases

The complexity of legal databases poses a significant challenge. Meend (2020) found that Nigerian students struggle with accessing and navigating online legal information due to inadequate training. This is echoed globally by Subramaniam and Subramanian (2019), who reported that Malaysian students face similar challenges despite the availability of high-quality databases.

### Cultural and Contextual Influences

Cultural and contextual factors influence information-seeking behaviors. Ahmed and Wani (2021) explored how social norms and educational expectations shape resource utilization in Saudi Arabia, a finding that aligns with studies in African contexts, such as Kamau and Ndungu (2020), where societal factors influence students' reliance on peer networks over institutional resources.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose(s) of this study include:

1. Discover the reactions of law students when their information needs are not met.
2. Unravel the problems law students encounter while seeking or using information.
3. Examine the role of gender in the information seeking pattern of law students.
4. To suggest ways of addressing the problems students encounter in the information seeking of law students

### Hypotheses

1. There is no significant mean difference in the reaction(s) of male and female law students when their information needs are not met.
2. There is no significant mean difference in the role of gender in the information resources/services utilization pattern of male and female law students.

### Method

This is a descriptive survey research; therefore, the researcher employed a descriptive design. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire and percentage. The Simple Percentage Analysis and the Z-Test Analysis were used in data analysis. The population of this study consisted of all the undergraduate law students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria in the 2022/2023 academic session. The population was 1,145 students in all the five levels of study. A breakdown of this population is shown as follows in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Sample of Respondents**

Year	Total Number of Students		Grand Total	Sample (20%)
	Male	Female		
One	129	115	244	49
Two	184	164	348	70
Three	126	98	224	45
Four	132	128	260	52
Five	37	32	69	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>1,145</b>	<b>230</b>

From this number there is a grand total of 1,145 students.

The sample for this study was drawn through systematic random sampling. Law students in each level were randomly presented a questionnaire. The researcher administered a copy of the questionnaire to every twentieth (20th) person that sat in the lecture room during the course of a lecture period. This was done in order to obtain 230 students that constitute 20% of the sample of the study as cited by Ofo (1994).

**Table 2: Sex and level of Respondents**

Year	Male		Female		Grand Total
	No	%	No	%	
Year I	21	9.13	28	12.17	49
Year II	37	16.09	33	14.35	70
Year III	23	10.00	22	9.57	45
Year IV	24	10.43	28	12.17	52

Year V	8	3.48	6	6.21	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>49.13%</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>50.87</b>	<b>230</b>

### Data Analysis and Discussion

The questionnaire was administered to 230 students that constituted the sample population. Data gathered from retrieved copies of questionnaires were analyzed using Z- test statistics (to test the formulated hypotheses). The data generated were collated, organized, tabulated and analyzed around the research questions and null hypothesis formulated for the study. The formula for the Z- test statistics is given below

### Reactions of both Sexes to Inability to Locate Information Resource

**Table 4. Reactions of both sexes to inability to locate information resource**

Reactions	Sex	Agree		Disagree		Undecided	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
I keep searching for information	M	96	84.86	7	6.19	10	8.85
	F	96	82.91	10	8.55	10	8.55
I sometimes feel bad	M	84	74.34	12	10.62	17	20.06
	F	92	78.63	16	13.68	9	7.69
I sometimes consult the librarian	M	80	70.80	17	15.04	16	14.16
	F	74	63.25	23	19.66	20	17.09

Table 4 contains data on reactions of both sexes to inability to locate information resource. More females keep searching for information 96(82.91 percent) as against males 96(84.96 percent), and females 74(63.25) consult the librarian less than males 80 (70.80 percent). Olorunfemi and Mostert (2015) points out that student's repeat their search for information in one form or another. The reason for the repeated or continuous search for materials corroborates.

Also, males 80(70.80 percent) and females 74(63.25) sometimes consult the librarian more than female law students may be due to cultural conditioning which agree with the assertions of Kamau and Ndungu (2020) and Ahmed and Wani (2021) that a disparity in information search of females and males is due to the cultural and structural conditions because female law students do not have the same cultural and social status as men.

### Assistance in Using the Library by Both Sexes

**Table 5. Assistance in using the library by both sexes**

Frequency	Sex	No	%
Very Often	M	7	6.19
	F	7	5.98
Often	M	2	1.77
	F	2	1.71
Sometimes	M	70	61.95
	F	70	59.83
Seldom	M	22	19.47
	F	27	23.08
Undecided	M	12	10.62
	F	11	9.40

In table 4.11 both sexes record the same number in seeking assistance in the use of the library sometimes — males 70(61.95 percent) and females 70(59.83 percent). Based on this trend, females cannot be said to be more disadvantaged in the library environment as asserted by Ahmed and Wanni

(2021) asserted that social norms are a disadvantage for females. When it comes to information, law students appear to work independently to develop their own skills without a lot of help either from law faculty members or from the library contrary (Kamau & Ndungu, 2020).

**Table 4. 15.1 Impediments to information seeking of both sexes**

	Sex	Agree		Disagree		Undecided	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
Inadequate/lack of ICT skills	M	58	52.21	30	26.55	24	21.24
	F	42	35.89	29	24.79	46	39.32
Inadequate relevant materials in the library	M	64	56.64	36	31.86	13	11.50
	F	58	49.57	32	27.35	27	23.08
High cost of information resources	M	59	52.21	37	32.74	17	15.04
	F	51	43.59	34	29.06	32	27.35
Slow internet response	M	60	53.09	28	24.78	25	22.12
	F	59	50.43	20	17.09	38	32.48
Unconducive library environment	M	45	39.82	49	43.36	19	16.81
	F	40	34.19	53	45.30	24	20.51
Electricity interruption	M	64	56.64	27	23.89	22	19.47
	F	63	53.88	34	29.06	20	17.09
Uncooperative library staff	M	38	33.63	55	48.67	20	17.69
	F	36	30.77	48	41.03	33	28.21

In table 4.15 the impediment to information seeking by both sexes is poignant, more males 64(56.64 percent) point it to inadequate relevant materials in the library than females 58(49.57 percent). Ubwa (2021) noted that after interacting with the information sources (like in a library), what a user actually needs may not tally with what is practically available, due to constraints either within the stock or due to the user's own inability. In this case, from the table above, an impediment to information seeking is actually inadequate relevant materials in the library.

Sharma (2018) reported that in developing countries acquiring the needed information is problematic because of inadequate and irrelevant library collections, lack of information infrastructures, ineffective library services, lack of money to use fee-based information services, inadequately trained and less co-operative library staff.

Furthermore, Inadequate/lack of ICT skill is seen as an impediment among more males 58(52.21 percent) than females 42(35.89 percent). An inadequate ICT skill is a major problem in information seeking of law students (Anunobi, 2013, Mthethwa & Van der Walt, 2019). Furthermore, Gibson (2020) reveals that one impediment to information seeking of Law students is deficiency in information literacy skills.

The data collected from the questionnaires admitted to 230 respondents sampled in the study were collated and analyzed. For the purpose of clarity and logical presentation, the analysis and presentation of results were organized around the respective null hypothesis and research questions formulated in the study.

**Table 4.24. –test analysis of mean difference between both sexes with respect to reactions or both sexes to inability to locate information resource**

Sex	No.	X	SD	Df	Z-critical	Z-calculate	Decision
Male	113	7.80	1.82	228	1.96	0.09	Not significant
Female	117	7.97	1.83				



Table 4.24 shows that the calculated Z-critical value is 1.96 while the Z-calculated value is 0.09 at the degree of freedom (Df) of 228 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value is lower than the critical value, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the reaction(s) of male and female law students when their information needs are not met is accepted.

**Table 4.25**

**Z — test analysis of mean difference between both sexes with respect to assistance in using the library**

Sex	No.	X	SD	Df	Z-critical	Z-calculate	Decision
Male	113	2.67	0.98	228	1.96	0.01	Not significant
Female	117	2.66	0.98				

The table reveals that the Z-critical value which is 1.96 is greater than the Z-calculated value which is 0.01 at 228 degree of freedom (DD at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the reaction(s) of male and female law students when their information needs are not met is not significant; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

### Finding

1. Male students consult the librarian more than female students which may be due to cultural conditioning as the librarian rank low in information seeking.
2. There is no cultural barrier or disparity in the information seeking pattern of male and female law students at the University of Benin, Benin City.
3. Inadequate relevant materials as several information sources are either outdated or not available in the library.
4. Inadequate ICT skills is a barrier to information seeking as several law students prefer printed materials.

### Conclusion

Both male and female law students face similar challenges in their information seeking patterns and needs. This study has shown that no category of either male or female law students is more advantaged than the other. Problems of lack of ICT skills, inadequate library resources, independent development of information seeking skills and electricity interruption is common to both male and female law students.

### Recommendations:

1. Since both male and female law students face the same form of limitation in inadequate resources in the library, school authority should endeavour to stock the library with materials that would the information needs of students.
2. Since librarians ranked lowest in students source for locating information, the chief librarian should seek to educate find out why this is the case and put machinery in place to correct it because the library is the knowledge house of every school.
3. Since most male and female law students lack ICT kills and this hampers there information seeking, ICT should be made a core part of law student's curriculum to help students locate their needed materials easily both in school and after graduation.
4. Since electricity is a major factor in information seeking, government should endeavour to provide uninterrupted power, while school authorities should complement electricity supply with stand by generators that would help students when there is no power supply.

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