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POSTGRADUATE LAW STUDENTS  
INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING  
BEHAVIOUR: IMPLICATIONS FOR  
IMPROVED PROVISION OF RESOURCES  
AND SERVICES IN NIGERIAN INSTITUTE  
OF ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES LIBRARY  
IN LAGOS STATE

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# **POSTGRADUATE LAW STUDENTS INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR: IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVED PROVISION OF RESOURCES AND SERVICES IN NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES LIBRARY IN LAGOS STATE**

**BY**

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**KEY WORDS:** Information needs, information seeking behaviour, Postgraduate

Law students, Resources, Services, Research, Lagos State

**ABSTRACT:** *Adequate knowledge about the information needs and seeking behaviour of users is vital for developing library resources, services and facilities to meet their information needs effectively. The purpose of this study is to find out the various legal resources available to Postgraduate law students; their information needs and seeking behaviour; the sources/services utilized by them and their level of satisfaction with the information obtained from the sources in the library. The population of study consists of 323 Postgraduate law students registered at NIALS library since year 2013. Total enumeration sampling technique was used to select all the registered students. A self-developed questionnaire titled Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Postgraduate Law Students (INSBPLS) scale was used to collect data. In all, 323 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to Postgraduate law students, out of which 204 copies were returned and were usable for analysis. The study revealed that law books were mostly available in NIALS library with a frequency score of (F= 204), followed by law reports (F= 200). The research also found out that the major information need of the Postgraduate law students is to obtain academic information in the library. This was confirmed by 80 students representing 39.2%. The study revealed that the sources of obtaining academic information by students includes browsing on the shelves (204 respondents representing 100%) and subject/author/title catalogue (187 respondents representing 91.6%). Based on the findings, It is recommended that frequent enquiry into the legal information needs of users should be adopted.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Researchers have frequently examined the information seeking behaviour of particular professional groups in an effort to assess the ways and patterns of locating and utilization of information so as to enhance information provision to these groups. Information needs and seeking activity differs from one profession to another. Thus, adequate knowledge of the information needs and seeking behaviour of Postgraduate Law students is imperative for law libraries to support their research activity. Such an understanding will help law libraries to develop library collections and services that are more likely to satisfy users' information needs. This is because the success of a library in meeting the information needs of its users will determine the number of future library use by the users'. The study aims at accessing the pattern and use of library information resources by Postgraduate law students in Nigerian Institute of Advanced Library Studies library, Lagos, Nigeria.

### **Problem Statement**

In assessing law libraries in Lagos State, no effort has been made to find out how knowledge of the information needs and seeking behaviour of Postgraduate law students in research law libraries could lead to provision of current and up-to-date legal materials as well as adequate utilisation of legal materials for improved legal research. It was in the light of this that this study investigated information needs and seeking behaviour of Postgraduate law students in NIALS library, Lagos.

### **Objectives:**

The objectives of the study are to

1. find out the legal information resources available to Postgraduate Law students;
2. find out the information needs of the students;
3. find out the sources of obtaining academic information by students;
4. find out if students get their required information from the identified sources;
5. find out how students rate the general availability and access to information in the library

### **Research Questions**

Specifically, the following research questions were addressed in the study:

- 1 What are the legal resources available to Postgraduate law students?
- 2 What are the information needs of the students?
- 3 What are the sources of obtaining academic information by students?

- 4 Do students get all the information required from the identified sources?
- 5 How will student rate the general availability and access to information in the library?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A significant body of literature exists on the information needs and seeking behaviour of different user groups across disciplines. According to Bates (2002) “Information could be defined in terms of tools, processes or knowledge”. Postgraduate Law students seek information for several purposes and like any other user, they experience considerable problems in satisfying. Thus, everything the students do, whether providing legal advice, drafting a legal document or conducting a legal research requires information (Otike and Mathews, 2000). Law is a highly knowledge-intensive domain and obtaining accurate and up-to-date legal information can improve the legal information needs of postgraduate law students.

Otike (2000) explored the legal information needs of lawyers in Kenya. It was noted that a lawyer's work is determined by the legal needs of the clients, which, in turn, influences the information needs of the lawyer. The lawyers seek assistance from the High Court library or collections in other law firms. Haruna and Mabanwonku (2001) examined the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers in Lagos, Nigeria. The study revealed that many lawyers perceived the need to know the latest decisions of superior courts as their greatest professional information need. Other expressed needs include knowing recent legislation, obtaining information on local and international seminars and conferences, and on acquisition and application of legal “know-how”. These legal information needs are met through a number of sources. Another study by Kuhlthau and Tama (2001) also found out that lawyers expressed a preference for print texts over computer databases for more complex tasks. The legal profession continues to rely heavily on printed media. Electronic media is used only as a last resort. Changes in the information environment have influenced the information behaviour of students and the way in which they seek, find and use information resources for learning (Prensky,2001).

Otike (2002) investigated the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers in England in the United Kingdom and found out that lawyers information needs are greatly influenced by the nature of the work they do. Oyediran-Tidings (2004) studied information needs of library users at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, and observed low use of the

library by the students, which was “attributed to the expressed unavailability of desired information resources.” Fulton, Kerins and Madden (2004) report the results of two empirical studies which explored the information seeking behaviour of engineering and law students in Ireland. The findings reveal similar patterns in the information seeking behaviour between students studying to become professionals and information seeking patterns of these groups. Students learned their information seeking strategies, including effective and less effective approaches, from educators. Misperceptions of the role and value of libraries and information professionals in their studies were common, and as a result, students often adopted information seeking strategies that excluded libraries and library staff. The two studies suggest that engineering and law students in Ireland could benefit from greater information literacy training and awareness, enabling them to acquire the information skills they need to function effectively and efficiently in their future professional work lives. In 2005, Oyesiku, in her study, pointed out that the information needs of law lecturers cut across educational, psychological and social needs like every other profession. While this might be the case, however the information needs of law lecturers specifically deal with research and teaching in matters relating to law and recent enactments, research findings arising from conferences, seminars, workshops, and academic journals. The library is the store house of knowledge and information, it provides both access to information resources and the information itself. Library help the nursing schools to achieve the objectives of producing nurses that are information literate and are prepared for lifelong education. In a study conducted by Kerin et al (2004) on information seeking behaviour among law students of Irish University, it was reported that most students claimed to use the resources of the library heavily over the course of their academic programmes. Ubogu (2006) stated that libraries should provide access to information resources; expert professional support to facilitate thorough and accurate use of all library resources, access to library materials and services to the community”. Also, information that has to do with current affairs, business and economic matters, health and good living, public administration, governance and general knowledge constitute information needs of lawyers.

As regards the sources of information used by lawyers, Wilkinson (2001) studied information sources used by lawyers in problem solving and found out that lawyers overwhelmingly preferred informal sources when seeking information. In addition, they preferred sources of information internal to their organizations rather than external sources. Tuhumwire and Okello-Obura (2010) asserted that lawyers used sources of information in

different ways throughout the process of construction within a complex task. At the start of the lawyer's search for information, some sources provide an overview and background knowledge. Then, some sources enable them to construct a theory or strategy in the case. Finally, they complete their work when they are determined they had used sufficient legal information resources to write a persuasive research paper. Thus, access to the right kind of legal information resource is viewed as the bedrock for effective legal research.

Hinson et. al (2007) pointed out that seventy-eight percent of the lawyers were found agreed that the internet improves their productivity. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents indicated that the internet is useful as a communication tool, whilst 76 percent of the respondents considered the internet to be very important for getting information. Makri (2009) in his doctoral thesis studied lawyer's information behaviour leading to the development of two methods for evaluating electronic resources. Overall, findings were positive regarding both methods and useful suggestions for improving the methods were made. Also, in a study carried out in Law Faculty at Central Law College, Salem, India by Thanuskodi (2009), it revealed that the respondents use Information Technology-based library sources and facilities less frequently compared with printed sources. The study conducted by Adeoye and Popoola (2011) revealed that majority of the respondents use the library for research and preparation of notes for their students. Majority of the respondents indicated that they search for library information resources by browsing through the bookshelves while some consult library staff for assistance. This was as a result of non availability of library catalogue in most of the libraries studied except U.C.H. Ibadan, Nursing School library.

## **Methodology**

This is essentially a survey study. The population of study consisted of 120 Postgraduate law students (from Faculty of Law, University of Lagos and NIALS) registered in the library between year 2013 and 2014. Total enumeration sampling technique was used to select all the students from the two departments of law. A self-developed questionnaire titled Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Postgraduate Law Students (INSBPLS) scale was used to collect data. The questionnaire had a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85. The researcher and two trained research assistants administered the questionnaires. A total of 204 Postgraduate law students out of 323 students sampled responded and the copies of their questionnaires were found valid for analysis, given a response rate of 62%. The data

collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages. The distribution of returned copies of the questionnaires by the Postgraduate law students is summarised in Table 1.

A breakdown of the number of respondents used for this study is indicated in Table 1. The target population comprises of Postgraduate law students from university of Lagos and Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies who are library users within year January, 2013 and February, 2014. Postgraduate law students from University of Lagos (UNILAG) had the highest number of respondents (140) while NIALS had 64 representing 31.1% of the respondents.

**Table 1: Questionnaire distribution and response rate**

Department	Copies of questionnaires		Response Rate (%)
	Distributed	Returned	
<b>UNILAG</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>68.6</b>
<b>NIALS</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>31.3</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>

**Research Question 1: What are the legal resources available to Postgraduate law students?**

The overall result shows that law books were mostly available in law faculties in Nigeria with a frequency score of (F= 204), followed by law reports (F= 200), indexes and abstracts (F= 190), legal periodicals (F = 187), legislation and statutes (F=178), reference materials (F=165), government publications (F= 51), non-legal materials (F= 47), newspapers (F = 28), loose leaf (F=36), digests (F=30). E-resources and online legal databases were not available in the library as shown by their lowest scores in terms of availability. This implies that e-resources and online legal databases were not available resources when compared to other legal information considered in this study. Based on the analysis of the scores obtained, it could be deduced that law reports, government publications, non-legal materials legislation and statutes, newspapers, loose leaf, indexes and abstracts and digests were the most available legal information resources to Postgraduate law students in NIALS Library. This is indicated in table 2.

**Table 2: Availability of legal materials in NIALS Library**

S/N	Legal Information Resources	Available N%	Not Available N%
1	Law Reports	200 (98.0%)	4 (1.9%)
2	Legislation and Statutes	178 (87.2%)	26 (12.7%)
3	Legal Periodicals	187 (91.6%)	17 (8.3%)
4	Government Publications	51 (25.0%)	153(75.0%)
5	Law Books	204 (100%)	0 (0%)
6	Reference Materials	165 (80.8%)	39 (19.1%)
7	E-Resources	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
8	Online Legal Databases	0 ( 0%)	0 (0%)
9	Non Legal Materials	47 (23.0%)	157 (76.9%)
10	Indexes and Abstracts	130 (63.7%)	74 (36.2%)
11	Digests	30 (14.7%)	174 ( 85.2%)
12	Newspapers	28(13.7%)	176(86.2%)
13	Loose Leaf	36( 17.6%)	168(82.3%)

N = 204

**Research Question 2: What are the information needs of the students?**

In Table 3, the result of the findings show that the predominant information need of the Postgraduate law students is to obtain academic information in the library. This is confirmed by 80 students representing 39.2%. Other information needs of the students are: Legal information (24.5%), Information for personal development (22.5%), employment information (0.9%) and global information (11.7%). See Table 3

**Table 3 : Information needs of postgraduate law students**

S/N	Purpose(s)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Employment Information	2	0.9%
2	Academic Information	80	39.2%
3	Legal Information	50	24.5%
4	Information for personal development	46	22.5%
5	Global Information	24	11.7%
6	Entertainment/ Leisure Information	2	0.9%

**N= 204**

**Research Question 3: What are the sources of obtaining academic information by students?**

The results in table 4 show the sources of obtaining academic information by students.

**Table 4: Information Seeking Pattern**

S/N	Information Seeking Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
1	Subject/author/Title Catalogue	187	91.6%
2	Index to legal Periodicals	165	80.8%
3	Reading List	51	25.0%
4	Selective Dissemination of Information Service	47	23.0%
5	Online Legal Databases	0	0.0%
6	Professional Colleagues	187	91.6%
7	Rely on Librarians and Library Officers to retrieve materials	178	87.2%
9	Browsing on the shelves	204	100%
10.	Internet	74	36.2%

#### **Research Question 4: Do students get all the information required from the identified sources?**

Table 5 reveals that majority of the respondents confirmed that they get the required information from the identified sources.

**Table 5: Getting Required Information from identified source**

<b>Item</b>	<b>YES %</b>	<b>NO %</b>
I get all the information I need from the sources identified	165 (80.8%)	39 (19.1%)
All the sources identified are very rich because I always get what I want from them at once	187 (91.6%)	17 (8.3%)

#### **Research Question 6: How will student rate the general availability and access to information in the library?**

Table 6 confirms that 102 respondents (50.0%) who constitute the majority indicated that they are very satisfied with all the information they are getting from the identified sources. Furthermore, 85 (41.6%) indicated that they were satisfied, while 9(4.45) and 8 (3.9%) indicated that they were less satisfied and dissatisfied

**Table 6: Level of Satisfaction of Information Obtained**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very Satisfied	102	50.0%
Satisfied	85	41.6%
Less Satisfied	9	4.4%
Dissatisfied	8	3.9%
Total	204	100

#### **Postgraduate Suggestions for Improving their Access to Information**

The study synthesised issues that could be addressed by the Institute Management to enhance access by Postgraduate law students to required information and asked the opinion of the

student regarding them. Table 7 shows the views of the respondents on what should be done to enhance access in the library.

**Table 7: Postgraduate Suggestions for Improving their Access to Information**

<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
Ensuring that library environment is convenient	178	87.2%
Provision of modern library facilities	200	98.0%
Provision of computers with internet facilities	204	100%
Improved power supply/ general lightning of the library	165	80.8%
Provision of index to law reports especially the missing years	187	91.6%
Provision of more copies of Laws of the Federation 2010 and latest laws	204	100%
Provision of more current legal materials	178	87.2%
Provision of electronic resources and on-line legal databases like Lexis-Nexis and Law Pavilion	204	100%
Provision of government publications	187	91.6%

## **DISCUSSION**

From the analysis of the data collected, it should be noted that the needs of the students continue to expand on a daily basis as a result of the emergence of new frontiers in law. Thus, the findings with regard to the provision of electronic resources and on-line legal databases provide a big challenge to NIALS library. If adequate access to information is to be attained in the apex law library (NIALS), a more radical and positive approach to the provision of these resources in the library must be adopted. Presently, even with the internet facilities that are available in the library, access of internet to Postgraduate law students is minimal. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted at University of Botswana by Ojedokun and Owolabi (2003). Hence, students are forced to patronise the private cybercafés within and

outside the university communities. To stem this tide and ease the problem faced by students in accessing information resources in the library, direct investment in its provision must be given priority in the library vote. This however might be a big challenge to NIALS library that is groaning under the hardship of poor economies. It therefore calls for the intervention of international donor agencies, grants, and NIALS Fellows and Alumni to salvage this present predicament facing the apex law library in Nigeria.

Whatever sources and resources available to Postgraduate law students, the issue of access is vital. It is therefore necessary to access and know the information needs and seeking behaviour of any particular group of information users of the library. Table 4 indicated that the most used means of obtaining information in the library include subject/author/title catalogue. This shows that the means of accessing resources in the library will always remain relevant even in the electronic environment. Law libraries and law librarians will remain relevant to provision of information resources as long as they become pro-active in service delivery. The law librarian could take the advantage of this preference of means of obtaining information by Postgraduate students and migrate the library resources to an on-line environment using subject / Author title format for easy accessibility.

On the level of accessibility and satisfaction with the information obtained from required sources, the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the obtained information. Positive as this may seem, it may be dangerous to dismiss the negligible percentage that were not satisfied. It therefore seems that more resources especially current materials and facilities are still needed in the library.

## **CONCLUSION**

The expanding volume of legal information resources has led to changes in Postgraduate law students' information needs and seeking behaviour, calling for the attention of law librarians and information providers. For the legal information needs of the students to be met, the right resources and sources should be availed to them and proper means of access should be taken care of in the legal information provision strategies. It is imperative that the provision of computers with effective internet access should be the nucleus of the strategies for improving access. Therefore, a well articulated and sustained effort is required to provide the needed facilities in NIALS library to ease access to its resources.

Information seeking is a complex process and, as a result, the role of librarians is correspondingly more complex and more demanding to facilitate the information seeking process. Law librarians should be proactive in service delivery. This is because many students depend on the law libraries to access information. Handy access tools should be created to facilitate access. Frequent enquiry into the legal information needs of users should be adopted.

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