

THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF LEGAL INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR ENHANCED ACCESS IN ACADEMIC LAW LIBRARIES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The paper explores the challenges associated with the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in Nigeria. The population of the study is Faculties of law Libraries in the six geo-political zone in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which include federal universities, state universities, and private universities. The major challenges associated with the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in Nigeria university are inadequate funding of academic law libraries, inadequate professional librarians engaged in organising legal information resources, a nonchalant attitude of law librarians towards organisation of legal information resources, and low job satisfaction among librarians. The article recommends that the management of the faculty of law libraries should source funds to acquire and subscribe to more online law databases. There is an urgent need to provide more funding for the academic libraries to acquire more updated and current tools for organization of legal information resources and to also employ more professional staff with technical skills in organization of legal information resources.

Keywords: Online Library, Academic Law Libraries, Legal Information, Enhance Access

Introduction

Academic law libraries are the type of law library that are established and managed by any institution of higher learning, designed for the training of legal practitioners. These are libraries established in the faculty of law in universities, law schools, or institutions of legal studies, among others, to facilitate teaching, learning and research related to law. According to Owoeye (2019), academic law libraries are special libraries with special collections for a specialized field or discipline established to serve specific professionals and researchers who are law students, law lecturers, legal researchers and other faculty members. The Academic Law Library is the nexus and the heart of any faculty of law; it is a pivot upon which legal education is built (Oseghale, 2018).

The notion and vision of the academic Law Library was first conceived by Charles Eliot, who was the President of Harvard University from 1869 to 1999. He propounded that Law Schools (Faculties of Law) should not open at all without having in place a well-established law library as an integral part and the heart of a law school or Faculty of Law. According to Urhibo (2017), the academic law library, which is established in legal institutions, faculties

and schools are vital for the provision of legal information service to law students. The library is undoubtedly relevant for the legal body, for equipping students with the most appropriate information on legal proceedings and the profession as a whole. The law library is of utmost importance because it is the bedrock of legal education the world over. The primary duties of any academic law library are to curate, collect, control, and maintain legal information resources to support legal education in learning, teaching, and research, as well as supporting the work of judges, lawyers and all stakeholders in the profession of law (Owoeye, 2019).

An academic law library is viewed as any library located or situated within the faculty of law with its authority in a law degree awarding university, with the primary aim of serving the students, lecturers and staff and the entire faculty members of that and other academic institutions with legal information resources and services by physical or digital means to make references or borrow in order to satisfy their legal information needs. (Harande & Umar, 2021). The academic law library brings law and law-related or legal information resources to the law faculty or the institution at large. Without these libraries, the faculties of law in universities could not engage in any informed action in furtherance of their mission and so would not ensure professional development and service excellence. The faculty of law in a university is dependent on its library for its own survival. Since the law library is embedded within the law faculty, the faculty of law obviously cannot continue without its law library. Indeed, the faculty of law provides the reason and focus of the library's existence in both the legal academy and the greater university setting.

Legal information resource is the generic name for print and electronic information carriers that contain legal information required to meet the need of legal information needs of users. Ejimofor (2019) referred to legal information resources as embodying, interrelated or structured data used for the practice of law, teaching and study of law, as well as for the conduct of legal research. Legal information resources comprise federal legislation, state laws, foreign law publications, government publications, law reports, law journals, Hansards, Gazettes, and databases (Ainoko, 2016). This implies legal information resources are resources that provide law-related information. According to Oriogu (2018) legal information resources (print or non-print) are the ultimate sources of all legal knowledge; any law student who seeks mastery of law must rely on these vital sources for professional development.

Legal information resources are essential ingredients for effective legal education. Legal information resources could be referred to as legal literature, such as law books, law reports, legislation and statutes, legal periodicals, government publications, reference materials and other interrelated non-legal books, e-resources, unpublished works of law, for example, conference papers, theses on law, and so on (Umar & Sokari, 2020). Legal information resources, according to Mabawonku (2014) could be referred to as legal literature such as law books, law reports, legislation and statutes, legal periodicals, government publications, reference materials and other inter-related non-legal books. In addition, E-resources include

unpublished works of law, such as conference papers, theses and dissertations on law, students' project reports on law and so on.

Legal information resources are classified into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include all legislative enactments of all houses, whether federal, state, local, administrative and as well as sub-legislations from administrative/regulatory agencies of the government. While the secondary sources, on the other hand, are not the actual law itself but an interpretation of the law or a commentary on the law, which include law textbooks such as books on labour law, constitutional law, environmental law, oil and gas, family law, law of evidence, banking law, customary law, electronic legal information resources, etc. (Owushi, 2021). According to Olorunfemi (2015) legal information resources are the lifeline upon which legal practice and scholarship rest. Ogunfolu (2016) emphasized the importance and indispensability of legal information resources to legal practice by terming the law library as the laboratory for the legal profession. Organization is the act of coordinating things or logically formatting things, organization of legal information resources is the cataloguing and classification of library information resources for easy access and retrieval. Organization of legal information resources in academic law libraries is the only method through which users of the library can have access to the information resources they desire to support their academic activities of teaching, learning and research. It is a fact among scholars and practitioners that without effective organization of information resources in any library collection, access will be difficult if not impossible. Hence, effective organization of legal information resources has the potential to facilitate enhanced access to legal information resources in academic law libraries.

Organization of information resources in the academic law libraries will make the resources more accessible. According to Ishola and Zaccus (2015), organizing objects in one's environment, especially those that are used frequently, is common in any human setting. This makes it easier to retrieve the item whenever it is needed; this is the organizing principle. There are many types of law libraries; these can be categorized into private law libraries, public law libraries and academic law libraries. Private law libraries include private libraries owned by legal practitioners such as lawyers, judges, etc. Public law libraries include law libraries established in Courts, judiciary and legislative institutions, eg, High Court libraries, House of Assembly Library, etc, while academic law libraries are the type of law library established in law schools to provide legal information resources and services to facilitate teaching, learning and research in any institution of higher learning design for the training of legal practitioners. Similarly, the American Association of Law Libraries (2023) identified government (public) law libraries, private law libraries, and academic law libraries as the categorizes of law libraries.

Organizing legal information resources saves time for both the user and the information professional. Organization of information, according to Hjørland (2019), is about the professional activities such as cataloguing and classification, indexing, bibliographies, abstracting and others that are aimed at making information resources easily accessible for

users. In the library parlance, Organization of information resources are the set of practices that help to make the accessibility and retrieval of information resources easy and possible. In this 21st century. Libraries of every type should adhere to this organizing principles so as to enhance access to information resources in their collections. Ekere and Mole (2015) stated that organization of information is one of the major factors that differentiates a library from other information centers. For the authors, a collection of information resources (books and non-book materials) does not become a library until the information resources are organized in a systematic and pre-determined way for easy access and effective utilization. It is organization of information resources that makes libraries, including academic law libraries, sophisticated; without organization of information, users may wallow aimlessly and come out of the library frustrated and even conclude that there are inadequate information resources that are relevant to them in the collections.

The major processes involved in organizing the information resources of an academic law library are through cataloguing and classification.

Cataloguing and classification are the hub of information organization in university libraries. Ajani, Amzat, James, and Sulyman (2022) argued that cataloguing and classification provide means of having easy access to and retrieval of information. This implies that, without cataloguing and classification, access to information resources in the library collections is difficult if not impossible. Both professional practices provide all the descriptions of information resources that make their retrieval and access easy for users of the library. Cataloguing and classification are different but interrelated activities performed in academic law libraries to ensure adequate bibliographic descriptions of information resources. The difference between the two concepts is that cataloguing is a process of preparing a catalogue, which will contain the physical details of the bibliography description of information resources, while classification is the art of arranging or organizing information materials based on their common characteristics, and assigning codes as notations to identify, locate and retrieve information resources (David-West & Angrey, 2018). An abstract is a summary of the contents of information resources, and indexing is an alphabetical list of subjects.

Information organization is the core function of any library, including academic law libraries. The need for organization is necessary to accomplish a planned library's goals. An effective organisation provides effective access, retrieval and use of the information resources and also saves time for both the user and the information professional (Barkindo and Ibrahim, 2021). The value of information resources in any given library depends on the degree of order in which it is organized (Alderman, 2014). In another view, Hill (2018) reported that information resources should be organized in accordance with the accepted principles of their respective libraries. This implies that academic law libraries should organize their information resources based on the general practice of organizing information resources in academic law libraries to enhance access to the resources. Access means the right or freedom to access information without difficulty. Access to information resources is difficult if not impossible without effective organisation. Efforts must be put in place to facilitate the

effective organization of information resources in the academic law libraries in South-South, Nigeria. It is from the foregoing that the present study seeks to examine the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in Nigeria university.

Access refers to the amount of admittance allowed to a given entity. Abdulsalami (2013) defined access as the condition of having the opportunity to retrieve and use something. Access to legal information resources entails having the opportunity to retrieve legal information resources in the law libraries. The concept of information access means that there are some information resources that have been organized in an orderly manner suitable for easy retrieval (Barkindo & Ibrahim, 2021). The authors further stated that the organization of library resources is basically for the enhanced access. According to Ndagana (2015), access refers to one or more aspects of providing the means of access to information in a fuller sense to knowledge. Access to information resources is an important recurring theme in the library. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2012), resources may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one's subject of interest, but the user may not be able to lay their hands on them. The more accessible information sources are the more likely to be used.

Access to information refers to the means and mode through which information is made available by providing an entire range of possibilities for making information and information services available to the public (Tuyo, Ali & Shehu, 2018). What this means is that the availability of information does not necessarily mean it's accessible. Access to information ensures that access to all library and information sources, no matter the format, should be made available to users. Accessing information invariably means bridging the gap between the developed and the developing nations. Oyeronke (2012) confirms that access to information is very crucial; it accelerates the level of individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Access to information has been viewed as a right to information.

The availability of legal information resources does not necessarily imply their accessibility, because the source may be available, but access to it is prevented for one reason or another. Garba (2019) posited that information resources can be accessible through the use of telecommunication and information technology. It enables access to information and services by minimizing the barriers of distance and cost as well as the usability of interference. Bayraktaroglu and Ozgen (2018) define access as the way, means, or methods used to locate the acquired legal information in the library. Osudina (2014), in his studies, the relationship, accessibility and library use by undergraduate in Nigeria, notes that the problem of Nigerian students is not the question of the problem of wanting to use the library, but whether or not the library can provide for their needs and whether there is access to what is provided. Abdulsalami (2013) further identified natural and artificial barriers to free access to information. The library's poor reputation was attributed to a lack of accessibility to

information sources. Aguolu and Aguolu (2012), reveal that efforts are being made worldwide to promote access to information in all formats.

Access to information is the freedom or the ability to identify, obtain and make use of data or information effectively. Olowu (2014) avers that libraries provide access to information to satisfy the user's information needs. Libraries must develop several other access points through which their users can locate the needed information. Access to information is a human right endowed upon global citizens through Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. One of the conditions for information use is accessibility (Oyeboade, 2019). The chain of information retrieval and use begins with availability, awareness, accessibility and utilization.

Preliminary observation of the state of organization of information resources in academic law libraries in Nigeria is geared towards inadequate access to legal information resources, possibly the frustration of users due to the inaccessibility of legal information resources. This has made access to information resources difficult for users of the academic law libraries in Nigeria. Personal observation by the researcher, who is a staff member in one of the academic law libraries in Nigeria, shows that the majority of these libraries have no functional Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and are yet to upgrade to the latest edition of the cataloguing rule or classification scheme. The implication of this situation is that organization of information resources will be ineffective, which will waste the time of the users when they seek to access the collection. This situation will also reduce users' satisfaction and portray a negative image and perceptions of the academic law library among the law students and lecturers who are the primary users of the academic law libraries in the region.

Studies on Challenges Associated with the Organization of Legal Information Resources

Umar and Sokari (2020) carried out research on the challenges associated with utilization of legal information resources by postgraduate law students in Federal Universities of Northern Nigeria. The paper investigated the challenges associated with utilization of legal information resources in the faculty of law libraries in federal universities of northern Nigeria. The study employed a quantitative research method using a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised 1,348 postgraduate law students in the libraries studied. The simple random sampling equation (SRS-Equation) was used to select the sample size for the study. A total of 308 postgraduate law students was therefore the sample size chosen for the study. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. A total number of 308 copies of the questionnaire were administered personally by the author and 4 research assistants, out of which 271 were returned and found useful for further analysis. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS (v21).

Findings revealed that the printed legal information resources were highly utilized by postgraduate law students, except for e-resources and online legal databases that had low utilization. Some challenges associated with the utilization of legal resources were insufficient copies of books, inadequate reading facilities and defaced information resources; inadequate infrastructure for accessing resources electronically, insufficient computers and interrupted power supply, among others. The study concluded that, despite the technological advancement and globalization the world is experiencing, postgraduate law students in federal universities of northern Nigeria are yet to fully enjoy the vast electronic legal information resources, and this could significantly affect the quality of legal research and academic excellence in the legal profession. The two studies are related as the reviewed study focused on challenges affecting the use of legal information resources in libraries which is also one of the focus of this study, however, while the reviewed study examined the challenges associated with utilization of legal information resources by postgraduate law students in Federal Universities of Northern Nigeria, the present study focused on the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in South-South Universities in Nigeria.

Lawal and Kannan (2021) carried out research on an assessment of the challenges affecting the utilization of information resources and services by postgraduate students in agriculture university libraries in Nigeria (FUAM, MOUA and FUAA). The main objective of the study is to assess the information resources and services in Agriculture University Libraries in Nigeria with the view to examining the types of information resources and services available, the extent of utilization and the constraints associated with the use of information resources and services by Library Postgraduate students in Agriculture University Libraries under study. Postgraduate students in the agriculture university libraries in Nigeria (FUAM, MOUA and FUAA) made up the study population. Simple random sampling was used in selecting the Agriculture University Libraries from the six geopolitical zones, while questionnaires were administered to users.

The responses collected were, therefore, presented and analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages. Major findings testify that the current agricultural information resources available, accessible and utilized are insufficient in agriculture University libraries in Nigeria. Constraints affecting the postgraduate students include internet connectivity, power failure, attitudes of the staff, current information resources, particularly e-journals, e-books and loan periods, information resources related to agricultural information, such as databases, e-journals, e-books were the information needs identified are not very available. Due to an inadequate number of library staff, there was scant access to appropriate information services for the users. The two studies are related as the reviewed study focused on challenges affecting the use of information resources in libraries which is also one of the focus of this study, however, while the reviewed study examined the challenges affecting the utilization of information resources and services by postgraduate students in agriculture university libraries in Nigeria in (FUAM, MOUA and FUAA), the present study focused on the organization of

legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in South-South Universities in Nigeria.

Mamman and Abubakar (2022) carried out research on the challenges of access and use of electronic information resources among Students of Higher Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to explore the challenges of access and use of electronic information resources (EIRs) among students of higher institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study employed quantitative research methodology, with a cross-sectional survey design to elicit data from the respondents. The study population comprised the three (3) higher institutions with available and functional electronic information resources, namely: Taraba State University, Federal University, Wukari and Taraba State College of Nursing and Midwifery, with 10748 registered users who constituted the population and out of these, 370 users were selected using a simple random sampling technique. A self-developed questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The data gathered were analyzed through descriptive statistics, via the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16.0.

The results of the study revealed that various types of electronic information resources were available in the higher institutions' libraries in Taraba State. These include e-books, online databases, e-journals, and CD-ROMs. It was also found that the extent of access to the available EIRs was moderate, and also poor internet connectivity, insufficient computer terminals, and inadequacy of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills were some of the major factors working against the smooth access and use of EIRs in the institutions studied. The two studies are related as the reviewed study focused on challenges affecting the use of information resources in libraries which is also one of the focus of this study, however, while the reviewed study examined the Challenges of Access and Use of Electronic Information Resources among Students of Higher Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria, the present study focused on the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in South-South Universities in Nigeria.

Challenges

There is dissatisfaction among many users of academic law libraries in Nigeria due to some sort of difficulties in accessing legal information resources from the academic law library collections. This might be due to ineffective organization of the information resources or adoption of ineffective tools for accessing information resources in the academic law libraries in Nigeria. The implication of users complain of difficulty in accessing legal information resources is increased users' dissatisfaction which will lead to decrease in use of legal information resources in the academic law libraries, hence reducing the relevance of academic law library and exposing the students to information in other information centers which are not selected by professionals unlike those in academic law libraries which are selected based on their authenticity, relevance, author's authority among others.

This research seek to address the needs for uniformity and bridge the gap in organizing legal information materials so that a user's can also find it easier when needing consulting another academic law library Nigeria, if the above is not taking care of, then users will find it difficult to retrieve legal information and this will discourage the interest in the legal professions, It is from the foregoing that the present study seeks to examine the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in Nigeria.

The study focuses on the major challenges in organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries. The study covers the legal information resources available in academic law libraries in universities; method employed for the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in universities; resources employed for organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in universities; extent to which the organisation of legal information resources can facilitate enhanced access in academic law libraries in universities; challenges associated with the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in universities; and strategies to enhance the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in universities In terms of population, the study is limited to Federal, state and private universities with faculty of Law in Nigeria.

The findings of the study revealed that, the major challenges associated with the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in Nigeria university are Inadequate funding of academic law library, Inadequate professional librarians engaged in organising legal information resources, Non-challant attitude of law librarians towards organisation of legal information resources, Lack of supervision and Low job satisfaction among librarians, Inadequate online cataloguing skills among librarians, Inadequate ICT for organisation of legal information resources, and Inadequate legal information resources. This is in accordance with that of Aname (2019), who found that the challenges associated with organization of legal information resources to support the training of law students in law libraries in Nigeria are inadequate due to many factors, which include inadequate professional law librarians, inadequate legal information resources, among others. The findings of the study are also in accordance with the earlier findings of Umar and Sokari (2020), which reported that inadequate infrastructure for accessing resources electronically, insufficient computers and interrupted power supply are the major challenges associated with the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries. Similarly, the findings are in accordance with the findings of Owuchi (2020), who found out that the major challenges are a lack of internet connectivity, poor funding, scarcity/high cost of legal materials, and inadequate subscription to online legal databases.

Conclusion

The major challenges in the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access in academic law libraries in Nigeria university is that there are more print legal information resources than electronic legal information resources in academic law libraries. Nigeria has the resources required to effectively organize legal information resources, except for Resources Description and Access (RDA). The major methods employed for the organization of legal information resources for enhanced access are Manual cataloguing and classification, Indexing, Subject registers, Display of new arrivals on racks, Authority file, and Shelve guide.

There are access to print information resources than electronic information resources in academic law libraries in Nigeria. The organisation of Legal Information Resources can facilitate enhanced Access in Academic Law Libraries in Nigeria University to a great extent. Majority of the librarians possessed moderate competencies level in the organization of legal information resources in academic law libraries in Nigeria, low competency in the cataloguing of legal information resources because AACR2 and RDA are rules guiding cataloguing of information resources and Inadequate funding of academic law library, Inadequate professional librarians engaged in organising legal information resources, non-challant attitude of law librarians towards organisation of legal information resources, and Low job satisfaction among librarians.

There is an inadequate availability of electronic legal information resources in the academic law libraries in Nigeria. These findings imply that the academic law libraries studied are not adequately meeting the 21st century information needs of the law students and staff who need more electronic legal information resources, considering the fact that they are more current, updated, and easily accessible than the print legal information resources.

The federal universities, the majority of state universities and private universities' law schools are yet to adopt the latest rules of providing bibliographic details of both print and electronic information resources, which replaced the AACR II in 2010.

Access to electronic legal information resources is low when compared to print legal information resources. The implication of these findings in the digital age is that the academic law libraries are still at the early stage of migration from complete analogue to a digital or even a hybrid information center where students and staff in the law schools can access both print and electronic legal information resources to enhance overall legal education in the country.

The majority of the librarians are less competent in the skills required to apply AACR2 rules to cataloguing of legal information resources, and the ability to apply RDA rules to cataloguing of legal information resources. The implications of these is that users waste time and find it difficult to access legal information resources in the academic law library in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are thereby made:

- ❖ The management of the faculty of law libraries should source for fund to acquire and subscribe to more online law databases. This will enhance the availability of electronic legal information resources, which will, in turn, enhance legal education in Nigeria.
- ❖ The faculty of law library management should ensure that resources for organization of legal information resources, such as OCLC, Internet connectivity, and Resource Description and Access (RDA) as they will assist in facilitating enhanced access to legal information resources.
- ❖ The academic law libraries in Nigeria should enhance access to electronic legal information resources in the library through enhanced acquisition of electronic legal information resources and by providing hyperlinks to other related sources on the library's web page.
- ❖ The management of faculty of law libraries in private, state and federal universities in Nigeria should employ more online methods of organization of legal information resources, such as computer-mediated indexing, abstracting, and content recommendation systems, among others.
- ❖ There is a need to train the librarians in academic law libraries in the skills required to apply AACR2 and RDA rules in cataloguing of legal information resources for enhanced access.
- ❖ There is an urgent need to provide more funding for the academic libraries to acquire more updated and current tools for organization of legal information resources and to also employ more professional staff with technical skills in organization of legal information resources.

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