Information Seeking Behavior of Law Students in Pakistan

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Abstract: The major goal of this empirical study is to determine how undergraduate law students obtain legal knowledge. A survey research design was adopted, and a structured questionnaire was distributed through convenient sampling among the law students (n=257) of two participating public universities, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur and Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan. The questionnaire was first pre-tested by two experts and then pilot-tested among the 15 respondents. The statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science V 23) is used to evaluate data, which is then displayed in tables with frequencies, means, modes, and percentages. Respondents frequently encountered Content, efficacy, and availability barriers, such as 'no access to full text once references are identified' (M= 3.67, SD= 3.388), 'doubt about the existence of relevant information (M=3.54, SD=2.451), 'it takes too long to find the answers' (M=3.66, SD=1.617), and 'it is easier to ask a colleague' (M=3.63, SD=1.221). The study concluded that the use of university law libraries among students is not popular. Only 4.6% of students consider the law library as the first source of information when they face a difficult legal question.

Key Words: Law Students, Information Seeking, Library, Online Sources

Introduction

"Information seeking is the ability to efficiently scan literature using manual or computerized methods, to identify as a set of useful articles and books" (Taylor and Procter, 2005).

The role of information seeking is vital in the legal field as law professional depends upon the correct and efficient legal information for their cases. Judges, attorneys, and law students, as Igbeka and Atinmo (2002) correctly observed, require knowledge in their daily duties. Judges need legal information for the decision of cases, lawyers need legal information for arguments in the cases, and law students need legal information for passing examinations. Walonick (2004) underlined the importance of legal information, stating that legal information is vital for legal practitioners in modern legal societies who make significant choices based on it. Hence accurate information can lead to good decisions, while inaccurate information can lead to bad decisions.

The role of the law library is very important for law students during their law graduation. In his research, Kadi (2015) emphasized the relevance of academic staff and law library collaboration for law students. He rightly pointed out that since the academic staff is the main information provider to the students hence their connectivity with the librarian is of paramount importance. They can better help pupils to develop their information skills if they are well educated about information and library sources.

As Igbeka (1995) pointed out, libraries are the greatest agents for providing services and information sources to law students, which aids them in dealing with the weight of their academic work. Although law students use the law library for different purposes, Oke Samuel (2008) described examination preparations, assignment preparations, and thesis writing as the main reasons why law students visit the library. Oke Samual (2011) rightly pointed out that law students are taught different law courses such as Constitutional Law, Contract Laws, and Civil Laws, etc., so to succeed in these courses, legal students must make use of the library's facilities and online resources.

According to Watt (2004), law students require more refined research skills because a lawyer should have the skill to find the law in the

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right place. He quoted King George III on the importance of the role of the lawyer, "a lawyer is not the one that knows the law but the one who knows where to find the law".

Many law students and legal professionals around the world are relying more and more on electronic resources nowadays. To get accurate information from the electronic resources, they must know how to extract that information in complex situations. Attorneys/legal practitioners prefer digital information in online libraries in the shape of case laws and statutes. Information seeking behavior of attorneys is adversely affected by the use of informal information in difficult situations (Kim and Seo, 2015).

Literature Review

A great deal of work is done on information and information-seeking behavior around the world; however, there is still a lot to learn about legal information-seeking behaviour. The literature is extremely scarce when it comes to legal information-seeking behavior in Pakistan and other developing countries.

In their study, Singh and Mann (2015) found that law library personnel need to take a proactive approach in order to fulfill the rising demands of lawyers. Under the impact of Information and Communication Technologies, they discovered that the majority of law professionals use internet-based information (ICT). Their research also found that the print format is still vital, with three-quarters of respondents preferring both print and electronic information.

Jamshed and Naeem (2020) reported in their study that there is a declining trend among legal practitioners to visit the law library. Among other reasons, the study found out that one important reason is the non-availability of trained law librarians in the library and also lack of professional training among the lawyers regarding their information-seeking skills. Another important factor highlighted by this study is the lack of sufficient resources in the law library, which discourages the lawyers from visiting the law library frequently.

Ramachandrappa (2017) discloses in his study that to communicate and transmit legal information more accurately and effectively, the use of computers and relevant software is of paramount importance for lawyers. It helps them to access law collection, law libraries, electronic resources, and process communication.

A study of the information-seeking behaviour of law students at Nigerian universities was undertaken by Olorunfemi and Mostert (2012). They discovered that law students at Nigerian universities lack the ability to use information technology for legal research and so choose conventional means of obtaining legal knowledge over current information technology approaches. The study also revealed that law students face problems like inconsistent electricity availability, the dearth of experienced and professional staff, no proper maintenance of Technology equipment, unskilled library staff, and lack of personal skills of information technology usage. They suggested measures to improve the information-seeking behavior of law students, which includes that government should provide more funds for the improvement of libraries, provision of air-conditioners due to harsh weather, training of library staff, and training of law students.

Kerins, Madden, and Fulton (2004) studied the information-seeking behaviour of law students at Irish universities. They found out that there is a growing tendency of information technology use among graduate and undergraduate law students. They suggested that teaching staff of universities should be more trained as they are the key to the students for learning and seeking legal information (as they described them as information gatekeepers for the students). In their study, they also suggested that the librarian should play a leading role in imparting knowledge to law students regarding the usage of information technology.

Kadli and Hanchinal (2015) performed research on the information-seeking behaviour of Indian law students. They discovered that most law students prefer physical books to internet resources when looking for knowledge. The survey also showed that while the majority of students were familiar with the usage of online resources and legal databases, they faced challenges such as a lack of skills for conducting effective legal information searches and information overload on the internet. The study suggests some measures for the improvement, which include pieces of training of librarians, better services and facilities at libraries, and collaboration between law libraries and teaching faculty to enhance the information-seeking behavior of law students.

Odusanya and Amusa (2003) identified four distinct aspects of education related to law students' information needs: first, information about innovative ideas, second, fresh information on law research findings originating from workshops and conferences, etc., third, required legal information, and fourth, general knowledge and everyday affairs.

Majid and Kassim (2000) investigated the

Information-seeking behaviour of law faculty members at the International Islamic University Malaysia. They observed that respondents preferred printed literature to electronic formats, and that they valued their collection over other information-gathering options. The same view is endorsed by Kuhlthau and Tama (2001), who concluded their study that advocates and law students choose printed text over online resources.

Adetunmisi (2005) performed research on law students' and attorneys' information-seeking behaviour and identified certain elements that have a negative impact on them. These factors include insufficient information centers or libraries with untrained staff, absence of concerned and up-to-date resources, economic constraints, lack of skills about the usage of online resources to obtain the required information, and non-conductive operational hours.

Ossai (2011) investigates how law students use the law library's information resources. She came to the conclusion that during their academic programs, the majority of law students spent more time at the law library. She observed that most students had trouble finding and identifying appropriate library information sources for case laws, legislation, and academic papers. She observed that most students had trouble finding and identifying appropriate library information sources for case laws, legislation, and academic papers. She believes that law students should be encouraged to spend more time at the law library since it may help them improve their ICT skills and knowledge of a wide range of topics.

Thanuskodi (2009) concluded that IT-based library resources are not used by the majority of respondents who prefer printed sources. According to the findings, better-trained and better-equipped library personnel can help law students and faculty members enhance their legal information-seeking behaviour.

Aim of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to learn more about law students' legal information-seeking habits. The following are the study's major objectives:

- To determine the frequency and purpose of law students' visits to the law library, as well as their information needs.

- To understand the skill level of law students regarding the usage of computers the internet for legal research.
- To identify the resources used by law students for seeking legal information.
- To determine the amount of time spent looking for information
- To identify the issues that law students experience when looking for legal knowledge
- To make recommendations for ways to enhance law students' information-seeking behaviour.

Methodology

The undergraduate law students of the Law Department, Islamia University of Bahawalpur, and Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan participated in this quantitative study, which used a survey design and a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was pilot tested among 15 law students for the first time. Following that, the questionnaire was slightly tweaked depending on the results of the pilot testing.

A total of 300 questionnaires were sent to participants using non-random, convenient selection, and 257 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding an 85 percent response rate. When distributing surveys, the effort was taken to ensure that users of various genders were sufficiently represented in the population. The completed surveys are gathered and numbered in the order in which they were received. SPSS was used to examine the information gathered (Statistical Package for Social Sciences V-23). The data were examined with descriptive statistics and given as mean, standard deviation, frequencies, and distributions.

Results/Findings
Participants' Biographical Information (Table 1)
A total of 257 law students from two institutions were contacted and asked to participate in the study via a questionnaire. Of the 257 (100%) respondents, the majority, 201 (78.21%), were male. The majority, 228 (88.71%) of the respondents, were aged between either less than 20 years or between 21-25 years of age. The majority of 243 (94.55%) respondents qualified at the LLB level (Table 1).

Table 1. General Information of Participants

		IUB	BZU	Total
Gender	Male	59 (29.4%)	142 (70.6%)	201 (100%)

	Female	25 (44.6%)	31 (55.4%)	56 (100%)
	Total	84 (32.7 %)	173(67.3%)	257(100%)
Age Group	20 & Below	57 (58.2%)	41 (41.8%)	98 (100%)
	21-25	15 (11.5%)	115 (88.5%)	130(100%)
	26 & Above	12(41.4%)	17 (58.6%)	29 (100%)
	Total	84 (32.7%)	173 (67.3%)	257 (100%)
Qualifications	LLB	84 (34.6%)	159 (65.4%)	243 (100%)
	LLM	0 (0%)	14 (100%)	14 (100%)
	Total	78 (32.7%)	173 (67.3%)	257 (100%)

Seeking Legal Information (Table 2)

The majority of 218(84.82%) respondents reported that they prefer books while obtaining legal information. The university legal library is used by 70 (27.23 percent) of respondents for research, book borrowing (50 (19.45 percent), and literature search (43 (16.73 percent), among other things. Most of the respondents reported that they consult a teacher 94(36.57%), 93 (36.18%) reported that they use the internet when they are faced with a difficult legal question. However, only 12 (4.66%) respondents reported that they go to the library to find the answer to difficult legal questions (Table. 2)

Table 2. Seeking Legal Information

Statements		University		
		IUB	BZU	Total
What printed sources you prefer while obtaining legal information	Books	77 (35.3%)	141 (64.7%)	218 (100.0%)
	Journals	7 (18.4%)	31 (81.6%)	38 (100.0%)
What is the main purpose of using the University Law Library	Assignment	18 (25.7%)	52 (74.3%)	70 (100%)
	General Book Borrowing	14 (28.0%)	36 (72.0%)	50 (100%)
	Law Literature Search	20 (46.5%)	23(53.5%)	43 (100%)
	For Knowledge	14(24.1%)	44(75.9%)	58(100%)
	Reading Room	11(50%)	11(50%)	22(100%)
	Others	7(50%)	7(50%)	14(100%)
What you do first when faced with a difficult legal question?	I Consult Teacher	30(31.9%)	64(68.1%)	94(100.0%)
	I Consult Friend	18(31.0%)	40(69.0%)	58(100.0%)
	I Use Internet	32(34.4%)	61(65.6%)	93(100.0%)
	I Go to Library	4(33.3%)	8(66.7%)	12(100.0%)
How would you prefer to receive your legal information	Electronic	4(9.8%)	37(90.2%)	41(100.0%)
	Printed	32(35.2%)	59(64.8%)	91(100.0%)
	Both	48(38.7%)	76(61.3%)	124(100.0%)
What type of electronic resources you prefer while obtaining legal information	E-Mail	23(24.2%)	72(75.8%)	95(100.0%)
	Internet/ Website	55(39.3%)	85(60.7%)	140(100.0%)
	Online Database	5(25.0%)	15(75.0%)	20(100.0%)
	CD/DVD	1(50.0%)	1(50.0%)	2(100.0%)

Barriers to Obtaining Legal Information (Table 3)

Barriers Pertaining to the Contents: Respondents were asked questions on information-seeking hurdles, and their answers were recorded on a set of five subscales. They were asked four statements to identify the barriers related to the Content, of which two statements received a mean score around 4, indicating that respondents very often faced barriers related to Content e.g., 'no access to complete text after references are discovered' [M= 3.67, SD= 3.388], and 'doubt regarding the presence of relevant information [M=3.54, SD=2.451] are two examples [Table 3]

Barriers Relating to Efficacy: Respondents were asked four questions to identify the barriers relating to efficiency, two statements on barriers related to efficiency received a mean score around 4, indicating that majority of the respondents

reported that 'it takes a lot of time to find the solutions' (M=3.66, SD=1.617), and 'easier to ask a colleague' (M=3.63, SD=1.221). (Table 3)

Barriers Relating to Skills: Of the five statements on barriers related to skills, the only statement received a mean score around 4, indicating that the majority of the respondents very often faced a barrier related to 'uncertainty about where to look for information (M=3.50, SD=2.833) (Table 3).

Barriers Related to Availability & Cost: The respondents were asked ten statements in order to identify the barriers related to availability, of which only two statements received a mean value around 4, revealing that the majority of respondents frequently encountered a barrier related to "no onsite librarian" (M=3.90, SD=) and "lack of Internet connection" (M=3.51, SD=). All the 3 statements on barriers related to cost a mean score of around 3, indicating that cost was sometimes a barrier while seeking the information (Table 3).

Table 3. Hurdles in Seeking Legal Information

Statements	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
Limitations related to Content							
No Access to full text after identification of references	18.7%	31.9%	33.1%	11.3%	5.1%	3.67	3.388
Confusion about the existence of concerned information	16.0%	29.2%	36.6%	9.7%	8.6%	3.54	2.451
Lack of confidence in the reliability of sources	18.3%	30.0%	33.5%	9.7%	8.6%	3.47	1.630
Preferred resources are not available online	16.0%	29.6%	36.6%	10.9%	7.0%	3.44	1.593
Limitation related to efficiency							
Requires long time to find the correct answers	27.6%	23.0%	35.0%	8.9%	5.4%	3.66	1.617
Easier to asks a colleague	29.6%	29.2%	24.5%	8.6%	8.2%	3.63	1.221
Unsatisfactory past results	12.1%	29.6%	35.0%	13.6%	9.7%	3.21	1.125
Geographic isolation	18.3%	25.3%	26.8%	10.9%	18.7%	3.14	1.352
Limitations related to Skills							
Uncertainty about where to look for information	22.6%	23.3%	31.1%	11.7%	11.3%	3.50	2.833
Don't know how to use online resources very well	23.3%	20.2%	23.7%	11.3%	21.4%	3.32	3.543
Problems in articulating questions while online	17.1%	26.8%	29.2%	9.7%	17.1%	3.17	1.309
Not sure how to start searching for answers	18.7%	26.1%	24.9%	12.8%	17.5%	3.16	1.349
Not aware about the website or computer usages	15.2%	22.6%	21.4%	14.8%	26.1%	3.09	3.161
Limitation related to availability							
No onsite legal librarian	28.8%	24.1%	21.4%	9.3%	16.3%	3.90	5.000
Lack of access to the internet	26.5%	25.3%	22.6%	8.9%	16.7%	3.51	2.894
Lack of legal information resources	19.8%	25.3%	33.5%	12.1%	9.3%	3.46	2.202
Lack of document delivery services	21.8%	30.0%	29.2%	10.1%	8.9%	3.46	1.195
The dearth of training on the use of resources	26.8%	26.1%	23.7%	11.3%	12.1%	3.44	1.319
Non-availability of computer whenever needed	26.1%	19.8%	28.4%	10.9%	14.8%	3.43	2.297
The dearth of up to date books and legal journals	24.5%	26.8%	26.8%	10.1%	11.7%	3.42	1.282
Lack of legal information support services	21.8%	29.2%	25.3%	13.6%	10.1%	3.39	1.249
No legal information website available	21.4%	23.0%	29.2%	10.5%	16.0%	3.23	1.335
No onsite library	26.5%	17.9%	24.5%	7.8%	23.3%	3.16	1.494
Limitations related to Cost							
Expensive online resources	19.8%	25.3%	23.7%	12.8%	18.3%	3.27	2.314
Searching cost/ cost of document	24.1%	23.0%	20.2%	12.8%	19.8%	3.19	1.446

Statements	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
Computers are too expensive for my practice	21.0%	19.5%	24.9%	10.9%	23.7%	3.03	1.449

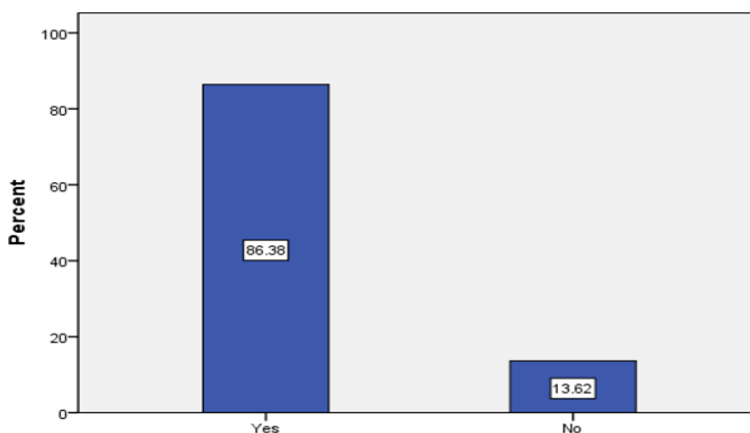*Scale: 5=Always, 4= Very often, 3= Sometimes, 2= Rarely, 1= Never*

Figure 1: Demonstrates that the Vast Majority of Respondents (86.38 Percent) are confident in using the Internet to Find Essential Information
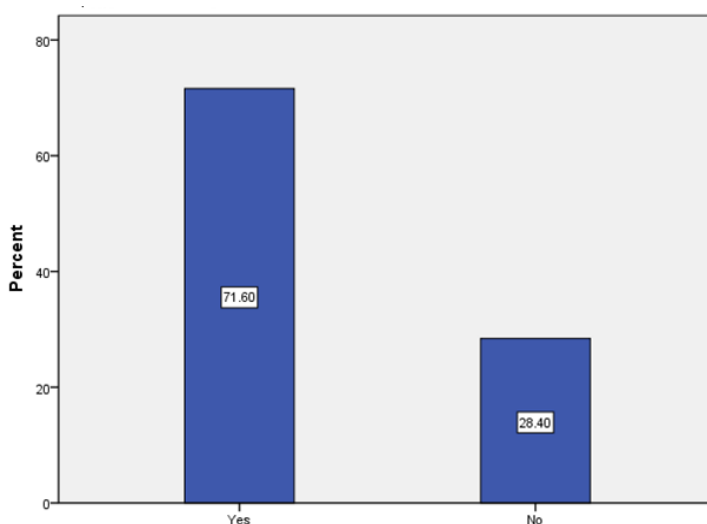

Figure 2: Twenty-eight Percent of Respondents Reported that they have never used the Website or Database for Seeking Legal Information (Fig.2)

Immediately Required Services

The respondents were asked to list the services they would require in order to obtain legal information. The majority 228 (88.7%) respondents indicated that they need access to the library, 214 (83%) indicated to have improved connectivity (internet & online resources), 202 (78.6%) needed the support of a legal librarian, and 197 (76.7%) required reference services from a library (Table 4).

Table 3. Services Needed Immediately

		IUB	BZU	Total
Access to Library	Yes	78 (92.85%)	150 (86.70%)	228 (88.7%)

	No	6 (7.15%)	23 (13.30%)	29 (11.3%)
Improved connectivity (internet & online Resources)	Yes	78 (92.85%)	136 (78.61%)	214 (83.3%)
	No	6 (7.15%)	37 (21.39%)	43 (16.7%)
Support of legal librarian	Yes	64 (76.20%)	138 (79.76%)	202 (78.6%)
	No	20 (23.80%)	35 (20.24%)	55 (21.4%)
Reference Service of Library	Yes	71 (84.52%)	126 (74.56%)	197(76.7%)
	No	13 (15.48%)	47 (27.14%)	60 (23.3%)
Legal information website access/ Paid online databases	Yes	70 (83.33%)	116 (67.05%)	186 (72.4%)
	No	14 (16.67%)	57 (32.95)	71 (27.6%)

Discussion

The outcomes of our study revealed that one of the hurdles to students' information-seeking behaviour is the lack of availability of the complete text following the identification of references. A similar finding was also reported in a study conducted by Ossai (2011) that most law students find it difficult to locate the full text of the research papers using an online search. The findings revealed that law students had difficulties accessing and identifying appropriate case law and legislative knowledge sources. The above conclusion is consistent with the findings of this study, which show that ambiguity regarding the availability of relevant information is one of the most significant hurdles to law students seeking information.

Our findings indicated that law students display poor skills while finding legal information on digital platforms. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Kadli and Hanchinal's (2015) study, which found that students exhibited poor judgment in their use of internet resources while seeking to obtain solutions.

The findings of our study revealed that law students find it easier to ask a colleague about the information they need to complete the work or assignment. Elliot and Kling (1997) also reported similar findings that law students prefer face-to-face assistance from class fellow, colleagues, and friends. However, a study conducted by Kadli and Hanchinal (2015) reported quite the opposite results to these findings, they reported that law students like to study and work independently to develop their skills. Most of the law students developed their skills through solo practice and initiatives. The study also revealed there is little to no evidence that law students consult each other in the process of information seeking. They avoid participating in group assignments and projects. These findings are quite strange.

Our findings also indicated that law students face uncertainty about the relevant places to look for the required information when they need it. Similar findings also revealed in a study conducted by Makri, Blandford, and Cox (2008) that there is a shortage of awareness among law students on how to access and use digital law libraries to access the information effectively.

One of the main barriers that prevented law students from using their departmental law libraries was the non-availability of a legal librarian who could assist law students. The Nonavailability of an onsite legal librarian and library has been reported as a barrier in several research studies (Adekunmisi, 2005). The non-availability of legal law librarians is a key issue that inhibits attorneys from using the law library, according to Jamshed and Naeem (2020) in their study regarding the lawyer's information-seeking behaviour.

Another finding that is revealed by our study was a lack of access to the internet. Many other studies also reported lack or no access to the internet as a major barrier that prevented law students from seeking legal information online (Adetunmisi, 2005; Adegbore, 2010). Due to a lack of training, the majority of legal practitioners are unable to use the internet and online resources, as well as locate the necessary case laws and legal materials (Jamshed and Naeem, 2020).

Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, students do not frequent university law libraries. Only 4.6% of students consider the law library as the first source of information when they face a difficult legal question. Students encountered a number of challenges while looking for legal information, including a lack of onsite legal librarians, Internet access, the time it took to obtain the proper answers, and confusion regarding the existence of relevant material. The study suggested access to a law library, support of legal librarians, improved connectivity (Internet & online resources), and reference services from a library.

According to the findings, LIS professionals working in law libraries should play a constructive role in encouraging students to use law libraries. It also recommends that library tours, library orientation, and information literacy programs should be organized regularly for law students. These programs will be proved helpful in

increasing the use of law libraries among students.

Implications of Study

The research aims to close a gap in the field of legal information gathering. It goes into great depth on the issues that undergraduate law students have with their law libraries. The research might aid law librarians, administrators, and professors in resolving practical difficulties that law students confront. The recommendations and suggestions given by this study can be used to improve the situation in law libraries.

Limitations

The first and one of the most important limitations of this study is the sample size which is not large enough; hence we cannot generalize the overall trend among the law students. Second, as a quantitative research approach is used along with structured questionnaires for this study hence, it lacks the in-depth viewpoint of respondents. Another flaw in this study is that it used a non-random sampling approach, which raises data error margins.

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