A COMPARISON OF THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF LAW STUDENTS STUDYING IN ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY AND SULTAN SHARIF ALI UNIVERSITY (UNISSA).

Muhammad Hafizuddin Abu Hasrah
Brunei Darussalam

Abstract

This study aims to compare, identify and determine the information needs and seeking behaviour of law students studying in Aberystwyth University and law students in Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). To collect data, the study used an online questionnaire (Survey Monkey) and it is distributed to law students via email through the law department of law and criminology of Aberystwyth University as well via social media (Facebook). However for the case of UNISSA, paper questionnaire were distributed to the student and the data from these questionnaire were entered manually to survey monkey.

It was found that a majority of the law students seek information mainly for doing assignments and seminars with a total of 85.48% (53) and 75.81% (47) respectively. It was found that the internet, library books and online database are the top three popular information sources that they rely most for various kind of works, followed by journals, google scholar and law reports. There were mixed review and opinion of their preferences on either paper based or electronic resources. In addition, it is found that most of the respondents often uses the law online databases and were very familiar on using them, with a majority of the respondents indicated that e-resources saves time, easy to use, able to decide what databases to use for different purposes and online resources lead them to find other relevant and interesting information. Findings indicate that the law students preferred to first consult their friends, followed by online searching and consulting their lecturer whenever they seek help in obtaining information. The research also found that they are low utilisation of the reference and subject librarian by the law students in seeking for help.

1.0 Introduction

In this so called modern era, every society in the world needed information for any day to day activity. As the need for information varies between different individuals, information has to be attained, processed, stored, retrieve and distributed for communication whether it is for business, education, research and development. The effectiveness in running these activities efficiently depends largely on the availability and amount of information gathered at the right time. Information becomes central to the advancement of knowledge and the development of the knowledge society and it is one of the most important elements to thrive in the modern era. The needs for such information are supported by the development of information behaviour that is going on rapidly. Among these are advances in Internet facilities, development of information technology, improvements in communications multimedia and sophistication.

However, the information need of an individual varies from each other. This due to the fact that each individual has their own information needs and purposes. According to Bernal (1960) the research on information needs and seeking behaviour started off when he and other researchers present their research paper on scientific information at the 1948 Royal society conference. From then on for the past few decades there has been increasing production of information seeking literature that deals with information needs and seeking behaviour of different fields and groups in a variety of context (ANWAR, AL-ANSARI, & ABDULLAH, 2004). Case (2002) explains that in the 1990’s alone the number of publication that has been carried out on information seeking behaviour were more than ten
thousand. Thus this shows that there are growing amount of individual having interest in conducting such research.

Through the extensive research there have been numerous definitions for information behaviour given by researchers. Wilson (2000) defines information behavioural as to human behaviour in different sources and channels of information, whether passive or active. According to his Behavioural Model of Information (1996), behavioural information consists of three basic elements: 1) the need for information and enabling factors. 2) Factors that give rise to the need for information, 3) Processes and activities involved in seeking information (Wilson, 1999). To Krikelas (1983) information behaviour is any kinds of activity that is undertaken by the individual to identify a message that could satisfies their perceived needs. This means that’s user will start to look for information when they realised that the information and knowledge that they possessed originally is less than that needed to deal with some issue.

Therefore it can be said that information behaviour research is a study that explains how a person is affected by their behaviour towards their quest in seeking for information. It is an interesting study because we can see how an individual or a group based acquired information based on the available theories of information seeking behaviour information. In other words, the outcomes of this study provide insight into the behaviour of behaviour student information. It shows how students access information, types of strategies they use to look for information, information channels that people used in obtaining information and the problems they encountered during seeking for information. Therefore, it can be relied on studies elsewhere on information behaviour.

1.1 Aims

The aims of the research:

Based on the background of the study, the researchers aims to study the information needs and seeking behaviour of undergraduate law students in Aberystwyth University and Sultan Sharif Ali University (UNISSA).

1.2 Research Questions:

1) To investigate the purpose of the law students in seeking information?

2) What types of information resources are consulted by the undergraduate law students for all various kinds of works?

3) To what extent does the law students used the current range of online database resources that is available to them?

4) Do they prefer print or online resources as information medium?

5) To find out their familiarity with the attributes of Printed and Electronic Information Sources.

6) To find out to whom do they go to when seeking for help?
2.0 Information seeking behaviour and its relation to law studies.

Bates (2010) indicated that most of the earlier studies and research on information needs and information seeking behaviour primarily focus on health science and engineers to assist in building their information resources and system to effectively meet their information needs. But this trend has now changed as more and more people are interested in investigating the information behaviour of people. As what Majid and Kassim (2010) explains the scope of information seeking behaviour is expanding to include scholars and academics from other disciplines.

Reddy and Gulbarga University (2010) in their research propose that information is critical resources to make decisions. Thus the concept of having information needs in legal practice is vital to people such as judges, lawyers, and law students. They particularly require information to complete their assignments, getting ready for examinations and searching for new information based on the available literature. In a study of information seeking behaviour of final year law students in South Western Nigerian Universities conducted by Chidinma Onwuchekwa, and ogba (2013) found out that most of the final year law students seek information for project writing with frequency of 188, exams (156), while assignments (95). Chidinma Onwuchekwa, and ogba (2013) stated that Studies done by many researchers have indicated that student use various sources for their information needs, ranging from Public access catalogue (OPAC), Internet and databases. However these finding were carried in the United States of America where they are technologically advanced. Other studies done by Ossai (2009) found that the less advanced technological country such as Nigeria, the students have very limited access to information, where they often rely heavily on search engine, and most of the time students were found to prefer print copies over electronic ones.

As law is an information profession, the ability to look for both law and accurate information is very crucial for legal problem solving, in making decision and for lawyer’s ability to function competently. Barkan (2007) defines legal research as a process of identifying and retrieving law related piece of information that is necessary to support legal decision making. He further elaborated that the legal (and law related) should be differentiated from other research (medical, technologies, factual, etc.) necessary to support legal decision making. An example of that can be seen by the statement of Olorunfemi and Mostert (2012) as they indicated that lawyers and law students requires information to fulfil their information needs of day to day activities. They further reported that in the modern legal society, information is a vital instrument that is required to make vital and rational decisions that may affect human life. Such activities are when they need information to make decision about a case (judges) and to argue or represent cases to a client before the law courts (lawyers).

Ajiboye and Tella (2007) used a questionnaire to study the information seeking behaviour of 2000 undergraduate students of whom they randomly selected from across six faculties in the University of Botswana. It was found that the respondents preferred the internet as their number one major source of obtaining information. This is followed by lecture notes and hand-outs, school library, textbooks, thesis/dissertations and newspapers. The study also revealed the lesser used of electronic resources, consulting colleagues notes, university bookshop, and print journals.

Ossai (2011) have conducted a study on how the law students of University of Benin in Botswana utilize the information resources in the law library. She reported that most of the law students have been identified to make full use of the available library resources in complying with their academic programs. Nonetheless even though they utilises the library
resources, her study reveals that most of the law students have difficulty in locating and finding the suitable library information sources for legislation, case law and journal articles. She further stated that the university authority should be obligated to make information research skill training as a part of legal training to enhance their information research abilities. This would enable the law students to make full use of the available IT resources and services which will then lead to an increase in their IT skills and better usage of the information retrieved (Ossai, 2011).

However Callister (2003) cited by Makri et al. (2006) specified that lawyers ever since the early twentieth century has been regarded to have a very poor research skills when seeking information. To corroborate this statement, a survey of law firm librarians throughout United States to collect empirical data about the quality and research skills of summer clerks and first year associates, that is done by Howland and Lewis (1990) have found that the graduates students from law school were unable to effectively and efficiently attack legal research problems. They were also unable to plan a proper research strategy and thus usually just jump into a various resources without knowing where to go.

3.0 Methodology
3.1 Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to explore the various past studies on the issue of information behaviour. The literature review forms an important part of this research of which its purpose is to provide background and to justify the reason for this research to be undertaken.

3.2 Questionnaire and the use of Survey monkey

For the purpose of this research, this study would use a questionnaire-based survey method which has been used by many similar studies conducted by past researcher for data gathering. Questionnaires are thought to be simple, cheap and quick method of soliciting survey question to a large number of people (Walliman, 2004). The target population for this study is the student from first, second and third year (including fourth and fifth year for UNISSA) of law students studying in Law courses in Aberystwyth University and law student from UNISSA.

Survey monkey have been used for this research due to its ease of use, variety survey templates, ability to disseminate survey via online (email social media such as Facebook) and most importantly it is free. (SurveyMonkey Inc).

After permission was granted, a link to the questionnaire is then emailed to the Law and Criminology department who then distribute the link via email to all students who are taking Law courses in Aberystwyth University. Except for the case of UNISSA University, where the researcher personally distributed a physical survey forms to the UNISSA law students, and a total of 50 surveys forms were distributed. The data gathered from the surveys is then manually entered to survey monkey to generate the data into required information (e.g. Tables and graphs).

4: Survey Results

4.1 Respondents Profile
At this part of the paper it will discuss the response rate of the questionnaire and the demographic information of respondents which includes their year of study, gender and age. A total of 70 responses were received for this research but only 63 respondents completed the whole questionnaire in Aberystwyth University. It is found that that 36 (51.43%) respondents who answered the questionnaire were by the third year students, 19 (27.14%) respondents were mostly from second year and 15 (21.43%) by students from the first year. However for UNISSA University, out of the 50 questionnaires distributed to the students a total of 48 forms were answered. It is also found that 17 (35.42%) respondents were from second year and 15 (35.42%) by the students in their first year. A total of 11 (22.92%) and 5 (10.42%) of the questionnaires were answered by the fourth and fifth year students respectively.

From Aberystwyth University, the largest number of respondents which amount to 46 (65.71%) were female students In contrast to the remaining 24 (34.29%) of the participants were male students. Similarly for UNISSA University, most of the respondents were female students with an amount of 38 (79.17%) and males were 10 (20.83%).

In Aberystwyth University, the majority 61 (87.14%) of the respondents were in the age group of 18 to 24 years, 5 (7.14%) of the participants in the age between 25 to 34 years old. About 3 (4.29%) was the in aged between 35 to 44 years old. While for the age group between 45 to 54 years old there were only 1 (1.43%) participants while there were none participants for age group of 54 and above. However from UNISSA University 48 (100%) of the respondents were from the age of 18 to 24.

4.2 How often do you visit the library?

In this section there are only a total of 63 participants answered while the remaining 7 skipped the question from Aberystwyth University. It is found that 34.92% (22) and 21 (43.75%) from Aberystwyth and UNISSA respectively indicated that they ‘often’ went to the library and a total of 33.33% (21) from Aberystwyth and 12 (25%) from UNISSA indicated ‘sometimes’. The percentage of respondents ‘very often’ and ‘never’ in visiting the library were 26.98 % (17) and 4.76% (3) respectively. While from UNISSA 15 (31.25%) students indicated that they went to the library ‘very often’. And 0 (0%) stated that they have never been to the library. Thus the data analysis shows that most of the law students from both universities visit the library often.

4.3 Purpose of information seeking.

The students were asked to indicate their purpose for information seeking. Here they were allowed to indicate more than one response to the items in the survey. It was found that 85.48% (53) from Aberystwyth and 48 (100%) from UNISSA seek information mainly for assignments and a total of 75.81 % (47) from Aberystwyth and only 1 (2.13%) from UNISSA seek information resources for seminars. The third highest reason for seeking information by the law students is for examinations purposes with a total of 69.35% (43) from Aberystwyth University and 35 (74.47%) from UNISSA. While there were only 29.03% (18) from Aberystwyth seek information for dissertations and 2.13% from UNISSA. In the comment boxes there were responses indicating that they seek information for general study, general reading for each module, group discussion, buying books and curiosity.
4.4 Source of information the students rely most for various kind of works.

The participants were asked what sources of information they rely most for various kind of works. It is found that the internet (google) is famous among the law students. This is confirmed by the overwhelming majority of the participants reported ‘very often’ using it amount to 55.56% (35) and 62.50% (30) from Aberystwyth University and UNISSA. This is followed by library books by a score of 53.97% (34) from Aberystwyth and 60.42% (29) from UNISSA. Online database were rated as the third source of information most consulted by the law students with 52.38% (33) in Aberystwyth. While In UNISSA it is 27.08% (13). Journals and Google scholar were at the 4th and 5th place with 36.51% (23) and 20.63% (13) in Aberystwyth, while in UNISSA it is 14.58% (7) and 20.83% (10).

4.5 The use of law online database

Respondents participating in the survey were asked to indicate how often they use the law online database. Among the law online database described in the questionnaires, the law students In Aberystwyth University ‘very often’ used the Westlaw database more frequently with a score of 44.26% (27). This is closely followed by Lexis Nexis with 35.48% (22) of the respondents using it very ‘often’. Hein online and Jstor were at the 3rd and 4th place with a 19.67% (12) and 8.47% (5) respectively. While this is different in the case of UNISSA University, where it is found that most of the students only used Lexis Nexis and VILIS databases. This is due to the fact that Lexis Nexis and VILIS are the only available databases that the students could use.

4.6 Law students preferences on printed and electronic information sources

In this section, the students were asked to indicate whether they prefer the information source to be in the form of printed or electronic based. It is found that a majority of the law students preferred books to be paper based with 88.89% (56) and 85.42% (41) from both Universities respectively. While an average of 14% of the respondent’s from both university preferred books to be online. For law reports, 52.38% (33) from Aberystwyth and 31.25% (15) from UNISSA preferred it to be online whereas 47.62% (30) from Aberystwyth and 68.75% (33) from UNISSA indicates that they prefer the law reports to be print based. Also for Journals, 49.21% (31) from Aberystwyth University preferred them print whereas UNISSA student 62.50% (30) respectively. A total of 50.79% (32) from Aberystwyth University and 37.50% (18) from UNISSA preferred journals to be online based. Then when asked about their preferences of information sources for theses and dissertations, 50.85% (30) from Aberystwyth and 82.98% (39) from UNISSA preferred it to be printed format while 49% and 17% from Aberystwyth and UNISSA preferred it to be online.

From the data analysis, law students from Aberystwyth University indicated that there is a wide gap between the preferences on paper and online based for conference proceedings with only 34.48% (20) favoured print while 65.52% (38) preferred it to be online. Whereas the law students from UNISSA preferred them to be in the form of print with the score of 65.96% (31).

4.7 Preferences on printed and electronic information sources

This is to explore further the purpose of the law students in preferring different formats of information sources between online and electronic based. The researcher decided to use a set
of 12 statements. For this question, the question has been taken from a previous study that has been done by Majid, Hayat, Patel, & Vijayaraghavan (2012). It was found that most of the respondents with a number of 46.03% (29) from Aberystwyth and 58.33% (28) from UNISSA agreed with the statements that they use printed sources because it causes less strain to the eyes. In addition, a majority of the respondents 49.21% (31) from Aberystwyth and 70.83% (34) from UNISSA strongly agreed with the statement that they generally prefer print sources as it enables them to make highlights as well as jotting down notes on a paper document. The data analysis also showed that an average of 70% of the participants from both university agreed that electronic resources save time and easy to use.

Over 80% of the respondents from both university either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement that online search capabilities make it easy to locate relevant information. There is total of 33.33% (21) from Aberystwyth and 52.08% (25) from UNISSA of the respondents ‘neither agree nor disagree’ with the statement that they usually find it difficult to use the search features of database. The analysis also showed that there is 44.44% (28) from Aberystwyth student ‘disagree’ when they were asked if using the database instruction is complex or time consuming. However it is different for the law student from UNISSA where it is found that 52.08% (25) of the respondents indicated that they ‘neither agree nor disagree’. Also the participants were asked if they were able to decide which database to use for different purposes and about 46% from Aberystwyth stated that they ‘Strongly agree and agree’. While 50.00% (24) from UNISSA stated that they ‘neither agree or disagree’ with that statement.

Around 76% from Aberystwyth and 77% from UNISSA indicated either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement that they prefer electronic articles because it allow them to print, download the articles. Also, 66% from Aberystwyth and 70% from UNISSA indicated either ‘strongly agree ‘ or ‘agree’ with the statements that electronic article allow them to cut and paste text easily. Lastly, over 52.38% (33) from Aberystwyth and 47.92% (23) from UNISSA indicated that they ‘agree’ with the statement that searching online resources lead them to find other relevant and interesting information.
4.8 To whom do they usually go to when seeking for help?

Students were allowed to indicate more than on response to the items in the survey. It was found that a majority of the law students 77.78% (49) from Aberystwyth And 87.50% from UNISSA seek help from their friends whenever they need help for information. Second to this, there are about 69.84% (44) from Aberystwyth and 83.33% from UNISSA use online searching. Over 38.10% (24) from Aberystwyth and 66.67% (32) from UNISSA indicated that they seek help from their lecturer. Reference librarian and subject librarian were ranked 4th and 5th with the score of 25.40 % (16) and 12.70% (8) for Aberystwyth law students and 41.67% (20) and 12.50% (6) from UNISSA respectively.

5: Discussion and Conclusion

Through this research, it is generally found that the purpose of the law students seeking information is to help them in doing their assignments, with 85.48% of law students from Aberystwyth and 100% from UNISSA respondents indicating this. The second and third highest reason for them to seek information is for seminars and preparing for exams.

Furthermore, the participants were asked to indicate the type of information sources that they rely upon most for all various kinds of work. As shown in this study, the most popular sources of information that they use for their works were reported to be the internet (google), secondly library books and online database as the third choice. Nevertheless, the high utilisation of the internet might be due to the fact that the internet is fast and easy to use to look for information. This corroborates the findings of Ajiboye and Tella (2007) where Internet search engines such as Google were found to be most popular used information channels. Thus it can be said that Internet are most helpful source of information as it provide an opportunity for users to find information from a variety of angles.

In question 7 participants were asked how often they use law databases (Westlaw, Lexis Nexis, Jstor, Hein Online and VILIS (for UNISSA student). A majority of the respondents indicated that they used Westlaw and Lexis Nexis as a prime online database. The utilisation of the law online database by the law students shows a good indication that the participants were fully aware of their existence that is provided by the University. This factor might be due to extensive library promotion and combine user education programme with the law.
The zero percentage use of Jstor, Hein Online and Weslaw by the UNISS student is due to the fact that the only available database to them is Lexis Nexis and VILIS. It is worth noting that VILIS is E-resources portal provided by the Ministry of Education Brunei aiming to provide access to thousands of electronic resources of e journals and reference resources for access to teaching and learning community in Brunei Darussalam.

Research question 8 sought to find out if the participants prefer print or online resources. Following from what has been stated above, most of the law students preferred information resources to be in electronic format especially for Journals, conference proceedings and law reports. Therefore, findings clearly revealed that there is a difference in preferences of the law students over print and online resources.

These findings also link to research question number 9, where it aims to explore further the purpose of the students in preferring different formats of information sources between online and electronic based by using a set of 12 statements. It appeared that the statement “I usually find it difficult to use search features of different databases” most of the participants from Aberystwyth University 34.92% (22) indicated that they ‘disagree’ to this statement. Whereas for UNISSA law students an average of 50% of the students ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ with this statement.

Thus this shows that most of the law students are able to handle and use the database features effectively. These findings are conflicting to the research of Makri, Blanford and cox (2006) where they stated that that law students have incomplete knowledge and poor general information skills. They have difficulty in using the digital libraries rather than from poor knowledge of electronic research. To say it in one piece, it appeared that the law students in Aberystwyth University and UNISSA were aware of the of their information needs and able to identified the benefits of printed and electronic information sources.

Lastly, the respondents were further asked to whom they usually go to when seeking for help in obtaining information. It is found that a large number of the participants 77.78% (49) from Aberystwyth University and 87.50% from UNISSA indicated that they consult their friends for help and over 69.84% (44) student from Aberystwyth and 83.33% from UNISSA seek information by doing online searching.

In conclusion, the findings in this study have confirmed some earlier research findings on student’s information seeking behaviour, which also provided the reasons, and additional knowledge on the attitude of the law students towards information seeking. The results based from the research analysis in the previous chapter clearly indicated that the law students in Aberystwyth University and UNISSA University seek for information in relation to their academic and research needs such as for assignments, seminars, examinations and dissertations. This finding affirms that the law students needed information to comply with their educational and academic needs which influences them to seek for information.

Furthermore the data gathered from this study would be useful for both universities. The large numbers of law students asking help from friends are worrying and could therefore calls for urgent actions. The reason for this to occur may be due to the fact that they are not bothered to look for information themselves and also they are expecting a very swift reply by only hoping for information from their friends. The students should be aware that the information that they acquired from their friends maybe not useful and unreliable. To gather and obtain the right information, the law students should first at least consult their lecturer, as well as reference librarian. One way to fix this problem is by promoting an extensive library
education programme to the students. This way both universities would be able to make the students aware of the benefits of obtaining the right information for their studies, research and knowledge development.

References


