

## Utilization and Challenges of Electronic Library Services in a Nigerian Law Library

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### Abstract

The study examined the current state of electronic library services in the law library of the Akwa Ibom State High Court. The research was guided by four objectives and utilized a descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of 35 registered users of the law library, with a census sampling technique employed due to the manageable population size. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that legal professionals frequently utilized services such as online research guides, electronic reference services, legal forms, and digital archives. However, services like online legal journals, publications, and e-books were less frequently used. Key challenges identified included high subscription costs, inadequate digital literacy among users, poor internet connectivity—especially in rural areas—limited awareness of available services, and a lack of Nigerian-specific legal resources in digital formats. The study, among others, recommends that law libraries should invest in reliable, high-speed internet infrastructure to facilitate seamless access to electronic resources; efforts should be made to negotiate lower costs for subscriptions to legal databases.

**Keywords:** electronic resources, library services, law library, legal publications.

### Introduction

The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) across various sectors has revolutionized service delivery and access (Bharti & Verma, 2021; Okeji et al., 2020). Libraries, as pivotal centers for information dissemination, have embraced this transformation. The evolution from traditional physical libraries to electronic libraries (e-libraries) marks a significant advancement in improving information access, streamlining resource management, and addressing the dynamic needs of users more effectively.

Law libraries, in particular, play a vital role in supporting legal professionals by providing specialized collections of legal texts, case reports, statutes, and journals essential for legal practice (Yemi-Peters et al., 2024). The introduction of electronic library services has empowered these

libraries to offer more advanced, timely, and accessible resources to their users, including judges, lawyers, law students, and researchers. The increasing complexity of legal information and the demand for fast, accurate, and reliable sources have underscored the critical importance of e-libraries in the judicial sector. These libraries not only provide access to extensive legal resources but also enhance legal decision-making by ensuring that practitioners have up-to-date and comprehensive information at their fingertips.

The concept of electronic libraries, or e-libraries, arose to address the challenges of managing vast amounts of information in an increasingly digital world (Bentil et al., 2022). Traditionally, libraries were defined by physical collections of books, journals, and other printed materials, often constrained by space, location, and resource availability. The advent of electronic resources has transformed library services, offering access to digital databases, e-books, e-journals, and multimedia content that can be accessed remotely, anytime and anywhere (Edem & Egbe, 2016; Yemi-Peters et al., 2022, Wiche et al., 2023). This shift has introduced innovative service delivery models that prioritize user convenience, enhanced resource accessibility, and improved library management.

In law libraries, this transition has revolutionized legal research. Legal practitioners who once depended on printed casebooks, law reports, and statutes now benefit from electronic databases that provide not only comprehensive legal texts but also advanced search capabilities, annotations, and cross-references (Akande, 2023). This has streamlined legal research, enabling justices, lawyers, and law students to access relevant information in significantly less time compared to traditional methods. Moreover, the integration of electronic resources ensures continuous updates, keeping legal practitioners informed of the latest cases and statutes. Law libraries play a crucial role in the judicial system, serving as indispensable repositories of legal knowledge that support legal practice and the administration of justice. By providing access to essential resources such as legal texts, case law, legislation, and scholarly commentaries, these libraries are vital to the day-to-day operations of the courts (Akande, 2023). The availability of accurate and up-to-date legal information is essential for informed decision-making, underscoring the indispensable role of law libraries in ensuring access to reliable legal resources (Yemi-Peters et al., 2024).

The adoption of electronic library services in law libraries presents numerous benefits, including improved access to legal resources, enhanced user convenience, and streamlined library collection management. Manzo and Kannan (2020) highlighted that electronic libraries grant users remote access to an extensive range of legal information, which is particularly advantageous in law libraries where comprehensive legal texts and databases are crucial for research and practice. Temim et al. (2021) emphasized that transitioning from physical collections to digital resources enables more efficient management of library collections. Electronic resources are easier to catalog, index, and retrieve, significantly reducing the time and effort needed for collection maintenance. Furthermore, this digital shift ensures that libraries can provide users with the most current and relevant legal information, as electronic resources can be continuously updated with the latest case law, statutes, and legal commentaries.

Within the Akwa Ibom State High Court, the law library functions as a critical support system for the court's legal operations. It provides essential services such as legal research assistance, access to legal databases, and reference materials crucial for preparing legal opinions, judgments, and casework. However, the increasing volume of legal information and the complexity of modern legal cases have rendered traditional library services inadequate for addressing the diverse needs of contemporary legal practice. To bridge this gap, the adoption of electronic library services has become imperative, enabling legal professionals to efficiently and effectively access comprehensive legal resources. The State High Court's law library remains an indispensable resource for justices and other legal practitioners, offering access to legal texts, case law, statutes, and legal commentaries essential for rigorous legal research and informed decision-making.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The law library is essential for supporting legal research and decision-making by providing access to legal texts, case law, statutes, and other critical resources. However, the increasing complexity of legal information and the rising demand for timely and accessible materials have highlighted the limitations of traditional library services in meeting the needs of modern legal professionals. The introduction of electronic library services offers an opportunity to enhance the efficiency, accessibility, and overall effectiveness of law libraries.

Despite these advantages, the extent of integration and utilization of electronic library services in the law library of the Akwa Ibom State High Court remains uncertain. Preliminary observations indicate that challenges such as limited infrastructure, financial constraints, insufficient training, and other barriers may impede the full adoption and use of electronic resources. As a result, legal professionals might lack access to the timely, accurate, and comprehensive legal information required for effective decision-making. This study aims to evaluate the current state of electronic library services in the law library of the Akwa Ibom State High Court, identifying key gaps and exploring strategies for improvement. Therefore, the following specific objectives were formulated to:

1. Identify the types of electronic library services available in the law library
2. Determine level of utilization of electronic library services by users.
3. Identify the challenges affecting the utilization of electronic library services in the law library.
4. Suggest strategies for enhancing the utilization of electronic library services in the law library

### **Literature Review**

Akande (2023) conducted a study to explore the impact of attitudes and ICT proficiency on the utilization of electronic information resources among postgraduate law students in two Nigerian universities. Using a survey research design, the study sampled 200 postgraduate law students through a structured questionnaire. Results revealed that while students exhibited a positive attitude toward e-resources and reported high ICT proficiency, their actual usage of these resources was notably low, with an overall mean score of 2.42, falling below the criterion mean of

3.5. The findings indicated that students' attitudes toward e-resources were not a significant predictor of usage, whereas ICT proficiency significantly influenced e-resource utilization. To address this gap, the study recommended improving remote access through authentication systems, integrating e-resource links into online public access catalogs, and fostering awareness through faculty collaborations and targeted training programs to align attitudes and skills with actual usage.

Leonard et al. (2020) examined the use of electronic resources by law academics at the University of Namibia, employing a mixed-methods approach with a sample of 12 academics selected from a population of 17. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study found that while most academics were aware of the available e-resources and recognized their usefulness, barriers such as irregular training, bandwidth limitations, and inadequate searching skills hindered effective utilization. The study underscored the importance of regular training programs and enhanced infrastructure to improve e-resource usage. Similarly, Momoh and Gomina (2023) investigated the use of electronic resources among undergraduate students at the University of Abuja. A descriptive survey research design was used to sample 352 students from the Faculty of Science and 375 students from the Faculty of Arts. The study reported moderate usage of electronic resources, with challenges including insufficient ICT infrastructure and restricted access to resources. Notably, no significant differences were observed in e-resource usage between students from the two faculties. The study recommended strengthening ICT infrastructure, expanding the library's digital resource offerings, and implementing continuous training initiatives to enhance effective utilization of electronic resources.

Umar and Yahaya (2020) examined the use of legal information resources among postgraduate law students in federal universities in Northern Nigeria. Their quantitative study, which sampled 308 students from a population of 1,348, employed a cross-sectional survey design. Findings indicated that while print resources were frequently used, electronic resources and online databases were underutilized due to limited access and awareness. The study recommended increasing funding for law library activities and enhancing the availability and promotion of electronic resources to improve their usage. Similarly, Dubale et al. (2021) investigated the utilization of electronic information resources at the UNECA Library in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A quantitative survey with a sample of 120 users (20% of a population of 600) revealed that 92% of respondents were aware of the e-resources, 94% found them useful, and 84% found them easy to use. Despite high satisfaction, challenges such as information overload, access restrictions, and inadequate training were identified. Recommendations included providing comprehensive information literacy training and addressing technical challenges to enhance resource accessibility and discoverability.

Abubakar and Yar'adua (2021) studied the use of electronic information resources in academic libraries in Katsina State, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey design and a sample of 247 from a population of 9,175, the study found that while e-resources were widely used, challenges such as slow internet connectivity and inadequate infrastructure impeded effective utilization. The study recommended improving ICT infrastructure, increasing internet bandwidth, and providing alternative power supplies to support e-resource usage. In another study, Adenariwo

(2022) investigated the awareness and usage of electronic resources among undergraduates at Fountain University, Osun State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey design with a sample of 1,000 undergraduates, the study revealed high levels of awareness and utilization of e-resources. Students demonstrated proficiency in using these resources, which were found to significantly contribute to their academic success. The study emphasized continued support for e-resource access and skills development.

Atanda, Owolabi, and Ugbala (2021) explored the professional competence and attitudes of library personnel towards digital services in selected Nigerian university libraries. Using a total enumeration sampling method with 196 library personnel, the study found that while most staff had basic computer skills, challenges such as inadequate power supply hindered effective digital service delivery. The study highlighted the need for improved infrastructure and ongoing professional development to enhance digital library services. Bankole and Nasir (2020) assessed undergraduate students' perceptions of electronic resources at Kwara State University. With a descriptive survey design and a sample of 152 respondents, the study revealed that students perceived electronic resources as insufficient, with electronic journals being the most available. Challenges included difficulty in identifying relevant materials. The study recommended improving the availability and accessibility of electronic resources to better meet user needs.

Additionally, Tofi, Agada, and Okafor (2020) investigated the utilization of digital reference resources and services by postgraduate students in universities in Benue State, Nigeria. A sample of 269 postgraduate students and nine digital reference librarians revealed high utilization of digital reference resources but low usage of digital reference services. Challenges included inadequate funding, lack of technical skills, and maintenance issues. Recommendations included increased funding for digital resources, up-to-date ICT training, and in-service training for librarians. Finally, Azonobi, Uwaifo, and Tella (2020) explored the determinants of postgraduate students' use of electronic information resources in federal universities in Southern Nigeria. Based on a sample of 591 postgraduate students, the study identified self-efficacy, trust in information sources, and social referrals as significant factors influencing e-resource usage. Recommendations included enhancing subscriptions to high-impact e-resources and supporting user self-efficacy to improve utilization.

Most of the reviewed studies, including those by Akande (2023), Momoh and Gomina (2023), and Umar and Yahaya (2020), focus on academic libraries in Nigerian universities. While the studies by Leonard et al. (2020) in Namibia and Dubale et al. (2021) in Ethiopia extend beyond Nigeria, they also center on academic or regional libraries. This highlights a research gap regarding court law libraries, particularly in Nigeria. The present study adopts a survey-based design similar to the reviewed studies but focuses on a specialized context—law library services in a judicial institution—which remains underexplored in the existing literature.

## **Methodology**

The research adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Connaway and Radford (2021), a descriptive survey design is used to comprehensively gather information about opinions, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors of a target population through the administration of questionnaires,

interviews, and observations of a relatively large and representative sample. The study was conducted at the Akwa Ibom State High Court, Uyo, located in the South-South region of Nigeria, which serves as a critical judicial hub. The population for this study included all 27 registered users of the law library at the Akwa Ibom State High Court, Uyo, as documented in the Circulation Register of the Law Library Department. Since the population size was small and manageable, a census sampling technique was employed, involving all 35 registered users as the study sample.

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire and an observation checklist. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the study's objectives, research questions, and insights gained from the review of related literature. It was divided into two sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic information, while Section B addressed the four research objectives. The questionnaire was validated by experts in Library and Information Science, who reviewed it for grammatical accuracy, logical sequencing, and the appropriateness of response options. The researchers personally distributed the 35 questionnaires to the respondents, allowing five working days for their completion and retrieval. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The arithmetic mean, based on a 4-point Likert scale, was used to interpret the responses. The response options were assigned values as follows: Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2), and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1). A mean score of 2.50, derived from the midpoint of the scale, was used as the benchmark. Items with a mean score of 2.50 or above were considered "agreed," while those below 2.50 were regarded as "disagreed." In addition, out of 35 questionnaires administered to respondents, only 33 copies were successfully retrieved and completed by the respondents, making a 91.4% return rate.

## Findings

The findings of this study are presented according to the research questions which guided the study.

**Table 1:** Types of electronic library services available in the law library

| S/N | Services available                     | Available | Not Available |
|-----|----------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1.  | Electronic law review                  | √         |               |
| 2.  | Lexis-Nexis                            | √         |               |
| 3.  | Electronic legal databases             | √         |               |
| 4.  | Online legal journals and publications |           | √             |
| 5.  | E-books                                |           | √             |
| 6.  | Electronic document delivery           | √         |               |
| 7.  | Online research guides                 | √         |               |
| 8.  | Electronic reference services          | √         |               |
| 9.  | Online course materials and webinars   |           | √             |
| 10. | Electronic legal forms                 |           | √             |
| 11. | Digital archives                       | √         |               |

Table 1 highlights the range of electronic library services offered at the law library of the Akwa Ibom State High Court. The findings revealed the availability of services such as online research guides, electronic reference services, electronic legal forms, digital archives, electronic law reviews, Lexis-Nexis, electronic legal databases, and electronic document delivery. However, the study also identified that online course materials and webinars, online legal journals and publications, and e-books were not available in the library.

**Table 2: Extent legal professionals utilize electronic library services**

| S/N | Extent of Utilization                  | N  | Mean | Std Dev | Decision |
|-----|----------------------------------------|----|------|---------|----------|
| 1   | Online research guides                 | 33 | 3.19 | 1.08    | Accept   |
| 2   | Electronic reference services          | 33 | 2.96 | 0.94    | Accept   |
| 3   | Online course materials and webinars   | 33 | 3.37 | 0.93    | Accept   |
| 4   | Electronic legal forms                 | 33 | 3.22 | 0.97    | Accept   |
| 5   | Digital archives                       | 33 | 2.89 | 1.12    | Accept   |
| 6   | Electronic law review                  | 33 | 2.96 | 0.98    | Accept   |
| 7   | Lexis-Nexis                            | 33 | 2.70 | 1.03    | Accept   |
| 8   | Electronic legal databases             | 33 | 2.86 | 1.15    | Accept   |
| 9   | Online legal journals and publications | 33 | 2.26 | 0.96    | Reject   |
| 10  | E-books                                | 33 | 1.93 | 0.96    | Reject   |
| 11  | Electronic document delivery           | 33 | 3.11 | 1.09    | Accept   |

The data in Table 2 reveals the frequency with which legal professionals use various electronic library services. Among the most utilized services are online research guides, with a mean usage score of 3.19. This indicates a generally high level of use, though the standard deviation of 1.08 reflects significant variability, suggesting differing reliance among professionals. Electronic reference services also show moderate usage, with a mean of 2.96. Online course materials and webinars, however, stand out with a higher mean score of 3.37, highlighting their popularity. Similarly, electronic legal forms are regularly used, with a mean of 3.22. Digital archives and electronic law reviews demonstrate moderate levels of utilization, with mean scores of 2.89 and 2.96, respectively. The use of Lexis-Nexis (mean = 2.70) and electronic legal databases (mean = 2.86) is slightly lower, suggesting these services are not accessed uniformly by all professionals. This variation may stem from differences in awareness or access. Notably, online legal journals and publications (mean = 2.26) and e-books (mean = 1.93) rank as the least utilized services. Finally, electronic document delivery shows moderate usage, with a mean score of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 1.09. While many professionals use this service regularly, a significant portion appears to use it less frequently.

**Table 3: Challenges that hinder the utilization of electronic library services in the law library**

| S/N | Statement                                              | N  | Mean | Std Dev | Decision |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------|----|------|---------|----------|
| 1   | Lack of adequate internet connectivity affects usage.  | 33 | 2.81 | 1.04    | Accept   |
| 2   | High cost of subscribing limits usage.                 | 33 | 3.33 | 0.83    | Accept   |
| 3   | Insufficient digital literacy limits effective use.    | 33 | 3.19 | 0.83    | Accept   |
| 4   | Lack of awareness of available electronic services.    | 33 | 3.07 | 0.96    | Accept   |
| 5   | Difficulty in navigating electronic services.          | 33 | 2.11 | 1.01    | Reject   |
| 6   | Insufficient technical support hinders usage.          | 33 | 3.04 | 0.90    | Accept   |
| 7   | Lack of Nigerian legal resources in electronic format. | 33 | 3.41 | 0.89    | Accept   |

Table 3 highlights the challenges faced by legal professionals in utilizing electronic library services. The most significant issue identified is the high cost of subscribing to electronic legal databases, which has the highest mean score of 3.33. This indicates a strong consensus among respondents that cost is a major barrier, further supported by a low standard deviation of 0.83, reflecting widespread agreement. Another key challenge is insufficient digital literacy, with a mean score of 3.19, suggesting that many professionals struggle to acquire the skills needed to use these services effectively. Additionally, inadequate internet connectivity was highlighted as an issue, with a mean score of 2.81. The lack of awareness about available electronic services also emerged as a moderately impactful challenge, with a mean of 3.07, indicating that many respondents feel they are not fully informed about the resources at their disposal. In contrast, difficulty navigating electronic services received a lower mean score of 2.11, suggesting mixed opinions—while some users find navigation challenging, others do not face significant issues. The need for better technical support was another concern, with a mean score of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 0.90, pointing to a general agreement that more support is required. Finally, the lack of Nigerian-specific legal resources in electronic format was a prominent issue, with a high mean score of 3.41 and a standard deviation of 0.89, emphasizing this as a major concern for many respondents.

### Discussion of the Findings

The findings indicate that legal professionals frequently use online research guides, electronic reference services, electronic legal forms, and digital archives. This is consistent with the study of Akande (2023) who highlights the growing reliance on electronic services by law libraries to ensure timely and efficient access to legal materials. Similarly, Leonard et al. (2020) emphasize the critical role of electronic legal databases in Nigerian law libraries. Regular use of services like Lexis-Nexis and electronic law reviews further supports the observations of Yemi-Peters et al. (2024), who stress the importance of platforms like Lexis-Nexis for conducting legal research across jurisdictions. Conversely, services such as online legal journals, publications, and law-related e-books were found to be underutilized. This finding contrasts with Bentil et al. (2022), who observed that e-books and e-journals are increasingly becoming essential resources, especially for remote access. The lower usage of these digital formats may stem from a lack of awareness or a continued preference for printed materials. Nevertheless, the potential of these resources in legal education and research remains substantial. Bharti and Verma (2021) highlight

their value in overcoming physical storage constraints and enabling remote accessibility, underscoring their significance in modern legal practice.

The study reveals that online research guides, electronic reference services, and legal forms are among the most frequently utilized electronic services. This aligns with Temim et al. (2021), who noted the significant benefits Nigerian legal professionals derive from electronic tools for legal research. Additionally, Manzo and Kannan (2020) underscore the importance of legal databases like Lexis-Nexis for keeping legal professionals informed about legislative changes and court rulings, which supports the study's findings of moderate use of legal databases. However, the lower utilization of online legal journals, publications, and e-books contrasts with findings by Umar and Yahaya (2020) and Akande (2023), who highlight the growing importance of these resources in legal research. This disparity may stem from challenges faced by Nigerian legal professionals, such as limited access to technology and infrastructure. Morstert and Olorunfemi (2013) emphasize that digital literacy and internet access are critical factors influencing the adoption of e-books and e-journals, particularly in rural areas, where these limitations are more pronounced.

Finally, the study highlights several key challenges faced by legal professionals in utilizing electronic library services. A major obstacle is the high cost of subscribing to premium electronic legal databases, a finding consistent with Atanda et al. (2021), who observed that subscription fees for many legal databases are often prohibitive for smaller law firms, independent practitioners, and public law libraries. Similarly, Bankole et al. (2020) confirmed that financial constraints create disparities in access to essential legal resources, with well-funded institutions having a distinct advantage over those operating on limited budgets. Another significant challenge is the lack of digital literacy among legal professionals. This aligns with findings by Tofi et al. (2020) and Akande (2023), who noted that while electronic resources are increasingly available, many professionals struggle to use them effectively. The transition from traditional print-based research to digital platforms requires technical skills that some practitioners, particularly those trained in a pre-digital era, may lack, as also noted by Mostert and Olorunfemi (2013). Inadequate internet connectivity is another critical issue, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is underdeveloped, as highlighted by Adenariwo (2020). Even in urban areas, inconsistent internet quality and frequent disruptions hinder the effective use of electronic library services. Furthermore, the study finds that many legal professionals are unaware of the electronic services available to them, a challenge also identified by Mostert and Olorunfemi (2013). The lack of Nigerian-specific legal materials in digital formats is also a significant concern. Uno et al. (2021) pointed out that while institutional repositories and digital archives are valuable for academic researchers, they often lack the relevance needed for day-to-day legal practice. Lastly, the study indicates that insufficient technical support further exacerbates these challenges. Atinmo and Isiaka Amusa (2016) emphasized the critical role of law librarians in guiding users through electronic resources, but inadequate support systems hinder their ability to provide effective assistance.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study investigated the electronic library services offered by law libraries, their usage patterns, and the challenges limiting their effective use. Legal professionals frequently use services such as online research guides, electronic reference tools, legal forms, and digital archives. However, services like online legal journals, publications, and e-books are less commonly utilized. The key challenges identified include high subscription costs, insufficient digital literacy, and poor internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, many legal professionals are unaware of the available services, and there is a notable scarcity of Nigerian-specific legal resources in digital formats. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Law libraries should invest in reliable, high-speed internet infrastructure to facilitate seamless access to electronic resources.
2. Efforts should be made to negotiate lower costs for subscriptions to legal databases, ensuring more equitable access for smaller law firms and independent practitioners.
3. Law libraries should conduct awareness campaigns and workshops to promote available electronic services, ensuring that legal professionals are informed of all the resources at their disposal.

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