

A contextual study of the information literacy of aspirant barristers in Nigeria

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The study upon which the article is based investigated the information literacy of aspirant barristers in Nigeria and examined the efforts undertaken to restructure the legal education system in Nigeria. It explored the connection between contextual influences and professional development, particularly with respect to the concept of legal information literacy and the value of acquired educational skills in the context of legal practice in Nigeria. Data were obtained using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Key findings from the study were supportive of the importance of information literacy as central to the development of professional competence of the aspirant barristers which can be achieved through re-structuring the teaching methods and curricula of the Nigerian Law School (NLS). The study makes recommendations for the adoption and integration of information literacy as a conceptual framework by which skills training can be developed into the curriculum of the Nigerian Law School.

Keywords: Barristers, information literacy, legal education, Nigeria Law School

1 Introduction

In the past few years, the legal profession in Nigeria has witnessed significant changes. Some of these have been attributed to the competitive nature of legal practice as a result of the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the increasing complexity of legal information resources and the need for high quality legal services in such specialised areas as petroleum law, copyright and intellectual property law, communication law, competition law, maritime law, space law, entertainment law, etc. (Akoko 2009). The increasing demand for skilled expertise in these fields has indicated that the legal profession in Nigeria is in transition and has compelled legal practitioners to reassess their techniques and strategies of legal practice in order to compete at the global level (Owasanoye 2000: 175; Mamman 2009:

2). Within the context of these changes, there have been increasing concerns about the role of legal educational institutions in instilling generic and specific skills for qualitative legal practice. In this regard, attempts have been made to develop learning strategies in legal education based on pedagogical models that convey principles about information search techniques that are transferable to the workplace.

2 Literature review

The literature review conducted as part of the study revealed key issues which had a bearing on the study and the way it was approached. The first issue discussed in this section is the concept of information literacy and how it relates to legal information literacy and the emerging concept of workplace information literacy. Another key component of the review concerns legal education in Nigeria.

The theoretical framework used for the study is described in section three.

2.1 Information literacy and legal information literacy

Since its emergence in the 1970s, information literacy has been variously interpreted by different authors. Theoretical understandings of the concept that have been expounded have emanated mostly within the higher education sector, prominent of which is the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) definition of Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, 2000 which defines the quality of an information literate person as being the ability to:

- Determine when information is needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

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- Understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and access and use information ethically and legally.

Similar frameworks have also been developed by the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, which have served as guiding principles for various educational institutions. However, criticisms of the concept are rooted in arguments which suggest that such conceptualizations of the term tend to place more emphasis on the individual rather than groups, are pre-occupied with the measurement and assessment of skills and seem to ignore the environment or context in which learning occurs. Further, some commentators argue that much of the literature of information literacy practices tends to exclude its ideological, historical and cultural context of information knowledge and production (Tuominen, Savolainen & Talja 2005: 330). The importance of IL can be measured by the attention it has received at the global level as a fundamental factor in improving teaching and learning in higher education, improving professional skills in the workplace and encouraging an informed citizenry and governance in a democratic society.

The emergence of information literacy within the past few decades has triggered considerable debate about the role of information in developing a knowledge driven economy specifically in higher education. This has also given rise to a number of related concepts aimed at developing an awareness of the importance of information within specific disciplines. In recent years, commentators have noted a convergence of literacies such as media literacy, computer literacy, health information literacy, etc. with information literacy being the focal point of other related disciplines and a “meta-competency” for various information-related skills and abilities needed for information use (Hoffman & Blake 2003: 226-227; Lloyd 2003: 87).

2.2 Legal information literacy

As with other related concepts of information literacy, legal information literacy refers to the ability to find, use, analyse and critically evaluate legal information. Its uniqueness lies within the disciplinary context of the legal profession itself, that is, the form, organisation, access and distribution of legal materials, which has been central to the development of law as a discipline (Hanson 2002: 572). Hanson (2002: 565), in an analysis of legal materials, notes that in law the principle of legal reasoning proceeds largely by drawing analogies between the past and the present; the doctrine of *stare decisis* emphasises finding cases that modify a principle, enunciate a new principle, settle a doubtful question or are distinctively instructive to serve as a precedent in solving a particular case. In the legal field, the current landscape of legal information, which encompasses a range of materials and collections containing more than one format, has redefined legal research with a focus on and about the materials of law (Hanson 2002: 577). The changing legal information environment has therefore had a profound influence on legal research, especially with regard to the issue of skills acquisition.

2.3 Workplace information literacy

Information literacy initiatives undertaken in the workplace context in the United States, South Africa, Singapore, Europe and Australia have revealed that information literacy is economically necessary and is one of the essential competencies for solid job performance (Cheuk 2002: 1). In an educational setting, information literacy is conceived as a tangible process that requires the attainment of certain skills and competencies for independent lifelong learning. Workplace information literacy gives an alternative view as it provides a context for developing collective competency skills which may not be reliant solely on formal educational settings (Lloyd 2005: 82-83). The literature of IL has in the past few years advanced to include recommendations on the need for work-related skills to address changes in the global economy. Current research in IL skills training is exploring how learning in the workplace environment can be more contextualized to reflect professional skills. Experiences on the impact of IL in the workplace indicate a greater need for professional skills to meet new and undefined situations. Changes in the global business environment mean that the contemporary workplace setting requires the employee to develop the ability to access, manage and use a wide range of information delivered in a variety of formats and through multiple channels (Cheuk 2002: 2).

2.4 Legal education in Nigeria

Debates on the content and curricula of the legal education system in Nigeria have been an issue of growing concern among the judiciary, legal professionals and law teachers. Among the issues of interest was that the curricula of the Nigerian Law School, a vocational institution responsible for the education and training of prospective legal practitioners in Nigeria, were highly content driven and skills acquisition was not integrated into the context of professional practice; teaching methods were not student-centred and encouraged a regurgitative approach to learning (Grimes 2009). Another area of concern was that there was a disconnection between the programmes of university law faculties and those executed by the Nigerian Law School in the sense that programmes offered by the universities were mostly theoretical and devoid of necessary research skills (Network of University Legal Aid and Institutions 2006: 4-5; hereafter

called NULAI). Calls were made to address the following issues:

- Curriculum reform at both university level and in the Law School in order to give more attention to skills-based programmes.
- The need to alter teaching methods at both the university and Law School levels from mere note-taking exercises to full participatory learning processes.

Consequently, a committee was set up by the federal government of Nigeria in October 2006-2007. A parallel committee was also set by the Council of Legal Education with the objective to review the curriculum and teaching methods of the Nigerian Law School towards implementing programmes that are more practical and interactive. A draft document for minimum academic standards for legal education was thus developed by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The document outlined benchmarks on learning outcomes and attainment levels for law students such as knowledge and skills, practical skills, communication and literacy skills, computer and numeric skills, lifelong capabilities and behavioural attributes. The document produced by the Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI), which outlined benchmarks on learning outcomes and attainment levels for law students in Nigeria, adopted the principles of best practices for legal education outlined in the American Bar Association's Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, Legal Education and Professional Development of 1992, also known as the MacCrate Report of 1992 (American Bar Association 1992; Network of University Legal Aid and Institutions 2006: 7).

The changes advocated were initiated by domestic institutions and other individuals in collaboration with international organisations such as the British Council, the World Bank and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development under their Security, Justice and Growth Programme. Under the Council of Legal Education of Nigeria, the project was undertaken by the Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI) in collaboration with the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) with financial assistance from the Open Society Institute (Grimes 2009). The expectations from these reforms are that the processes of clinical legal education will:

- Provide professional skills instruction in such areas as interviewing, counselling and fact investigation.
- Teach methods of learning from experience.
- Instruct aspirant barristers in professional responsibility by exposing them directly to the ethics of the profession.
- Expose aspirant barristers to the demands and methods of acting in the role of attorney
- Provide opportunities for collaborative learning.
- Impart the obligation of service to clients, information about how to engage in such representation, and knowledge about the impact of the legal system on poor people.
- Provide the opportunities to examine the impact of doctrine in real life and provide a laboratory where students and faculty study particular areas of law.
- Expose teachers to a wider experience in lawyering skills and legal practice, which is fundamental to their development.

The current pedagogic methodology at the Nigerian Law School which was adopted from October 2008 places greater emphasis on the application of knowledge, the application of skills and the appreciation of values (Grimes 2009; Council of Legal Education 2009/2010: 5).

For the purpose of analysis, since much of the document which outlines the benchmarks for professional skills development produced by the Council of Legal Education of Nigeria and the Network of Nigerian University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI 2006) was drawn from the MacCrate Report, it was considered that adopting the Statement on the Fundamental Lawyering Skills and Professional Values of the Report will be appropriate in evaluating the competencies of the aspirant barristers as the study population for this study. The MacCrate Report is a comprehensive study of lawyers' educational and professional needs. It consists of a list of ten skills and four professional values needed for legal practice (Rose 1994: 550). The premise for the development of the report was a realisation by the American Bar Association that a gap existed between legal education and practice in the United States. The report recognises that the skills and values of a competent lawyer develop along a continuum that starts from pre-law school, reaches its formative stage during the law school experience and continues throughout the professional career (American Bar Association 1992). For the purpose of the study, however, emphasis was placed on the second part of the report comprising the "Statement on the Fundamental Lawyering Skills and Professional Values" which identified ten lawyering skills and four professional values that are fundamental for legal practice. These skills are inter-related and consideration was given to the organisation of the skills and values in the context of specialisation within the legal profession.

The composition of the skills and values shows that congruence can be drawn with those of information literacy skills. Also, the recognition by the Report that the process of learning and refining of professional skills development occurs

along a continuum aligns with the concept of life-long learning in information literacy and reflects a pioneering effort at drafting information literacy expectations and forms a basis for the development of legal information literacy skills within a curriculum (American Association of Law Libraries 2009: 3). Therefore, the application of the outlined skills of the MacCrate Report to the analysis of the data will be helpful in ascertaining the gaps between what the aspirant barristers at the Nigerian Law School have been taught and its relation to the actual context of legal practice in the workplace in Nigeria.

3 Theoretical framework used for the study

The theoretical framework employed for the study included Kuhlthau's (1993) Information Search Process (ISP) model and Bystrom's (1999) theory of information activity.

Kuhlthau's model was the dominant model and provided insights into issues of uncertainty and task complexity. Since its conceptualisation, the ISP model has been employed as a diagnostic tool for understanding the information search experiences of people in diverse contexts including education, work and everyday information seeking (Kuhlthau, Heinström & Todd 2008). The application of the stages of the ISP model is holistic and encompasses the three realms of activity, that is, the physical – actions taken – the affective – feelings experienced – and the cognitive – thoughts about processes and content (Byström & Jarvelin 1995: 192). The model involves six stages:

- Initiation – an awareness of lack of knowledge.
- Selection – identification of a topic to begin the search process.
- Exploration – when inconsistent or incompatible information is encountered.
- Formulation – forming a focused perspective to the problem.
- Collection – gathering information on the identified problem.
- Presentation/assessment – when a search is completed with a new understanding of the problem, enabling the user to explain his/her learning to others.

Analysis of the model shows that the different stages of the ISP model reflect a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting at each point of the process (Kuhlthau 2004: 185). The application of the model to the study served to provide a better understanding of the stages of professional development in legal practice among the aspirant barristers. Investigation into the relevance of their educationally acquired skills in solving complex tasks in the workplace has shown that there is a connection between formal legal education and work related information literacy skills.

Byström's (1999) theory of information activity in work provides an understanding of work tasks of varying complexity especially in information intensive environments and is applicable to real-life work contexts where information activities occur. The basic assumption of the theory is that the information activities of professionals are affected by individual as well as contextual characteristics. The theory is useful in analysing user information activities in work situations and is helpful for developing and designing information management systems in work organisations. It has been used in relation to studies in task complexity, uncertainty and analyzability and as a conceptual framework in addressing gaps in studies of information seeking and retrieval. The application of the theory to the study also served to show the relationship between information seeking and task complexity as experienced by the aspirant barristers by providing evidence that increased task complexity and uncertainty lead to greater use of multiple sources of information (Byström 1999: 18-21).

4 Research objectives and questions

The objectives of the study included, among other things, the need to examine evidence of information literacy related practices in the legal workplace in Nigeria and to investigate outcomes of information literacy training in relation to current legal practice. It also aimed to identify the extent to which professional legal training by the Nigerian Law School equips aspirant barristers with competencies for the legal workplace and to assess the level of transferability of professional legal training to the workplace in Nigeria.

The main question that the study sought to answer was the connection between formal legal education and work related information literacy skills and practices, with the aim of ascertaining the nature of transferability of graduate skills to the workplace. The research sub-questions outlined for the study include the following:

1. What is the role of formal legal education in facilitating an information literate work force in the legal profession?
1. What is the responsibility of the Nigerian Law School in increasing the efficiency with which aspirant barristers develop professional expertise in the legal workplace?
2. How have changes in current legal practice affected problems of skills deficiency in the workplace in Nigeria?
3. How do the stages of the ISP model illustrate the process of developing expertise in legal practice?

4. What is the nature of uncertainty experienced by the aspirant barristers in the course of information seeking and use?

5 Research methodology

The study employed a case study method which provided an opportunity for a thick description and an in-depth understanding of the complexity and social context of the case under study (Punch 1998: 150). The application of case study method is often dominated by the challenges of collecting empirical evidence. Even though most case studies are aligned to qualitative methods due to the nature of exploring phenomena in context, both quantitative and qualitative data can be used in the process of data collection depending on the nature of the research questions (Putney 2010: 118). Consequently, in applying mixed methods to the study, qualitative methods were used in addressing contextual issues in the study which enabled the researcher to provide a rich description and explanation of the processes of the local context being explored. Quantitative methods were then used for measuring certain factors considered important in the relevant research literature which helped in complementing the findings obtained through qualitative methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004: 19; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009: 232; Ngulube, Mokwatlo & Ndwandwe 2009: 107).

The populations for the study comprised two groups:

- The first were law graduates taking Bar examinations at the Nigerian Law School in order to qualify to practise as solicitors and/or advocates under the Nigerian legal system. This category of graduates can be equated to “trainee barristers” in the United Kingdom, “in-house counsel” in Canada (Wilkinson 2001: 262) or “candidate attorneys” in South Africa. In Nigeria they are referred to as “aspirant barristers”. A total of four thousand five hundred (4500) aspirant barristers are usually admitted for training by the Nigerian Law School for each academic year. The reason for the choice of this category of law graduates is for the purpose of determining the extent to which they are able to transfer and apply recently acquired information literacy skills from the educational to the workplace environment having recently concluded five years of undergraduate studies from the various universities. Hence it is considered that testing the aspirant barristers within the course of their vocational training (also known as “attachment”) in the workplace environment will be more effective in providing the desired outcomes for the study (Howland & Lewis 1990: 382).
- The second group of the study population consisted of selected law firms accredited by the Nigerian Law School as placement areas for the aspirant barristers within the course year. The law firms are organised in a comprehensive list that is representative of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria and are located across the thirty six states of Nigeria.
- The methods of data collection entailed the following:
 - The administration of two separate structured questionnaires to the aspirant barristers and the law firms.
 - The study also employed the use of the reflective journal produced by the aspirant barristers in the course of the attachment programme which provided access to concrete documented information of the workplace experiences of the aspirant barristers.

The process of data collection was undertaken in a successive manner in which the first phase of the data collection influenced the second phase in terms of the approach and sequence in which the data was collected. The first phase was the administration of a questionnaire to the aspirant barristers while in the second phase a questionnaire was administered to the law firms. The reflective journals which constituted the qualitative aspect of the data were also collected in the second phase of the data collection process. The timing and ordering of the administration of the first phase was necessarily undertaken in this sequence to enable the researcher to align the aspirant barristers to the particular law firm where the attachment was done for purposes of analysis. However, no changes were made to the content of the research instrument or approach in the method of data collection in the second phase, as it was not considered necessary.

6 Analysis of preliminary findings from the study

Findings from the data revealed the nature of uncertainty experienced by the aspirant barristers with respect to the construction of new knowledge as well as their pattern of information seeking processes. From the analysis (Table 1 below), the dimension of uncertainty from the responses is indicated by feelings of anxiety (34%) which is often accompanied by negative feelings of confusion, doubt, frustration, complexity and stress. Frequency distribution from the table also shows that “challenge” has the highest affective disposition by the aspirants (53%), followed by “anxiety” (34%), “confidence” (32%), “interest” (28%), “creativity” (24%), “confusion” (20%), “constructiveness” (19%), “doubt” (17%), “enthusiasm” (15%), “excitement” (15%), “stress” (19%) and “frustration and skepticism (13%).

Table 1 Affective dimension - N=515

	Number	%
Anxiety	175	34%
Frustration	69	13%
Excitement	75	15%
Doubt	88	17%
Enthusiasm	76	15%
Confusion	105	20%
Interest	145	28%
Scepticism	65	13%
Challenge	271	53%
Creativity	121	24%
Constructiveness	97	19%
Confidence	166	32%
Stress	97	19%

Responses (Table 2 below) showed that the highest experience of changes in the affective state of the aspirant barristers was recorded at the beginning (42%) followed by 20% at all stages and 18% at the middle. According to Kuhlthau (1991: 368), the ability to cope with feelings of uncertainty will usually lead to a higher level of confidence and focus formulation in the search process. For the aspirant barristers, a shift from feelings of anxiety to confidence enabled the development of knowledge construction and creativity in handling complex tasks.

Table 2 Level of affective dimension - N=515

	Number	%
Beginning	214	42%
Middle	95	18%
End	16	3%
All stages	103	20%
Beginning and middle	4	1%
Beginning and end	8	1%
Middle and end	0	0

Consequently, findings in this regard are consistent with the beginning stages of the ISP in the sense that they confirm that the introduction of uncertainty serves as an enabling factor that can motivate new lines of inquiry, contribute to creative thinking, and spur innovation in the search process (Anderson 2006).

In the legal profession, affective learning that is similar to the stages of the ISP model is realised when the user moves from uncertainty to confidence. According to Nichols (2005: 441-442), the cognitive and affective domains constitute the centre of professional development with respect to the acquisition of intellectual skills and the development of analytical and evaluative skills in the legal profession. It is also seen from the findings that the interplay of social, personal and contextual factors such as poor legal research skills, lack of confidence and inadequacy of resources are inter-related within the complex process of knowledge construction and tend to influence the nature of uncertainty experienced by the aspirant barristers in the information seeking process (Hyldegård 2009: 143).

Kuhlthau's ISP model is a synthesis of cognitive information science and constructivist learning theory which emphasises the ability of the individual to construct meaning in a given situation. It is this ability for creative thinking that leads to an awareness of the need for information in problem solving. Accordingly, the progressive nature in the practical application of each of the stages indicates a gradual advance by the user from the state of being a novice to an expert in the effort towards attaining a "sense of ownership" in the search process (Kuhlthau 1989). Also, findings derived from analysis of the research questions have shown some similarities in the information seeking practices of the aspirant barrister-

ters with the stages of the ISP model, in terms of the processes of seeking relevant information for problem solving at the initiation and selection stage, establishing a focus by moving from uncertainty (exploration stage) to confidence at the formulation stage towards the end of the search process. Findings have also confirmed that the principle of uncertainty as propounded by Kuhlthau is the primary driver for the affective states of the user and serves as a useful variable for understanding and predicting human information-seeking behaviour (Hyldegård (2009: 157). The ISP model thus provided a framework by which the connection between learning, experience and the development of expertise among the aspirant barristers, as novice practitioners in the legal workplace, can be assessed in the study.

The application of Byström’s (1999) theory of information activity as a conceptual framework also served to show the relationship between information seeking and task complexity by providing evidence that increased task complexity and uncertainty lead to greater use of multiple sources of information (Byström 1999: 18-21). Findings from the study have aligned issues of task complexity as expressed in Byström’s theory with Kuhlthau’s ISP model specifically with respect to the Formulation stage of the model which represents a determining factor in the stages in terms of the nature of information required for problem solving and the reduction of uncertainty in information seeking. Studies conducted by Byström (1999) have identified a correlation between perceived task complexity and experiences of uncertainty which have been found to influence the individual’s experience of uncertainty and his or her information seeking behaviour (Byström 1999; Byström & Hansen 2005; Byström & Järvelin 1995).

Responses from the analysis (Table 3 below) which sought to investigate the nature of task complexity of the work in which the aspirant barristers were engaged in during the attachment showed only 18% of tasks were considered complex in nature while 72% of respondents indicated that the tasks were of a routine nature.

Table 3 Complex/routine tasks - N=515

	Number	%
Complex task	92	18%
Routine tasks	372	72%
Total	464	90%

However, further investigation on the level of variations in the complexity of the tasks below (Table 4), shows a higher percentage of complex tasks (72%) as compared to 18%, indicating that some assigned tasks were more difficult than others, requiring an increased use in various types of information sources. These findings show the nature of task complexity experienced in an information intensive environment such as the legal workplace and affirm Byström’s views that increased task complexity may lead to different kinds of information needs, including the use of people as sources (Byström 2002: 582).

Table 4 Task complexity - N=515

	Number	%
Yes	370	72%
No	94	18%
Total	464	90%

Consequently, the ability of the aspirant barristers to confront challenges in handling legal tasks by employing different sources of legal information such as print resources (28%), electronic resources (11%) and other informal sources aligns with Byström’s (1999) theory of information activity as it has helped establish a relationship between the complex nature of the tasks faced by the aspirant barristers and its effects on their information seeking needs, specifically with respect to the type of information sought and the sources of information used in handling the tasks. Findings have thus helped in examining the nature of difficulties experienced by the aspirant barristers in the use of legal information resources within the context of the workplace (Byström 2002: 581; Byström & Järvelin 1995: 193; Byström 1999: 18-21; Byström 2007).

The combination of these models as the theoretical framework for the conduct of the study therefore provided a basis for the analysis and interpretation of the data in the study. The application of the two theoretical perspectives to the study shows that a level of complementarity was achieved in their use in the sense that they both served to provide a theoretical lens by which the various issues relating to the research and objectives and questions of the study were investigated and analysed.

In the analysis of the reflective journals, data was drawn from 23 entries made by the aspirant barristers. The journals were produced as part of the requirements for the completion of the attachment programme. The purpose of the journal is to demonstrate the level of involvement of aspirant barristers in the specified programme of activities of the attachment programme and to ascertain their level of professional development and learning from experiences in the workplace. In analysing this data, a descriptive approach was employed to capture the experiences of the aspirant barristers (Hegarty 2009: 459-460). The journal entries by the aspirant barristers were analysed using a model designed by Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) and adapted by Bates (2003). The reflective journals were first organized by seeking data that tallied with certain categories outlined from the Bates' framework. They were then coded and classified according to the three campuses of the Law School from which they were obtained. A table was then created showing the most significant thing learnt as indicated by each respondent as well as the skills, knowledge and values acquired by the respondents. A provision was also made in the table by which the five categories outlined by Bates (2003: 307-311) could be used to examine evidence of reflection, learning and recognised development by the aspirant barristers.

Analysis of journal entries indicated evidence of reflection and learning based on descriptions given by the respondents of the context in which it was experienced in the following areas:

- Analysis of the “skills, knowledge and values acquired” in the course of the attachment demonstrated the development of practical skills, particularly advocacy skills, analytical skills and communication skills. Other skills include critical thinking and evaluative skills.
- The role of emotion is also demonstrated as an important aspect of learning in the journal entries. Some of the emotions expressed include feelings of “confusion”, “fear”, “anxiety”, “surprise”, “disappointment” and “interest”, all synonymous with the affective symptoms reflected in Kuhlthau’s ISP model.
- Procedural learning through the attachment programme forms an important component of legal education; it provides an opportunity for the aspirant barristers to integrate theory and practice and develop knowledge and skills that are transferable to other contexts. Evidence of the development of practical skills is seen from the analyses of experiences from the journal entries, which indicate a better understanding of how legal rules are applied in the practice of law. This component increases the potential by which skills can be transferred to other contexts through such deep learning processes (Bates 2003: 318).
- Another component of experiential learning identified in the reflective journal is collaborative learning, which suggests that individual reflection is enhanced through interaction and participation, particularly between the novice and the expert within a given Community of Practice (CoP).

From the analysis of the reflective journals, it is evident that some of the aspirant barristers were able to modify their learning task as it evolves. The ability to construct new knowledge from the learning experience in the entries of the journal analysis indicates evidence of new skills and transferability of skills to the workplace.

7 Recommendations

The study has identified various issues with respect to the information literacy of aspirant barristers and its relationship to the legal workplace. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- The Nigerian Law School: It is recommended that the curriculum and teaching methods of the NLS and universities be reconceptualised to align with the current context of legal practice in Nigeria. The new curriculum of the NLS should also be extended to university law faculties to ensure uniformity in professional skills training. The involvement of legal practitioners in the curriculum development of the NLS will also ensure a wider input that could influence more positive changes to the teaching methods and legal practice in Nigeria. An area of urgent consideration in the curriculum is the inclusion of legal drafting in the undergraduate curriculum which will help prepare graduate lawyers for the challenges of actual legal practice.
- Skills training: Greater integration of theory and practice is recommended in order to bridge the gap between the two stages of legal education in Nigeria. More emphasis should be placed on improving the practical skills of aspirant barristers, particularly in such areas as oral and written communication skills, legal research, critical thinking skills, problem solving and evaluative skills. Suggestions by the law firms have also indicated the need for more collaboration with the NLS in teaching specialised areas of practice in matters relating to oil and gas reserve utilisation, maritime law, aviation, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and so on.
- Legal information literacy: The assessment of the impact of changes in the composition of legal information resources to the context of legal practice in this study has reaffirmed the value of an information literacy paradigm for the legal education system in Nigeria. The rapid increase in technological advancements in the context of legal practice in Nigeria requires a high level of information literacy instruction in ensuring the effectiveness of legal research skills. A constructivist approach to information literacy provides a useful paradigm by which the development of legal research skills can be conceptualised. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy

Competency Standards, 2000, provides a workable framework that can be used for inculcating legal research skills among the aspirant barristers. Consequently, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that information literacy should be adopted and integrated into the curriculum of the Nigerian Law School.

- The attachment programme: The attachment programme of the NLS constitutes a fundamental aspect of its role as the only vocational training institution for legal practitioners in Nigeria and provides a common framework by which prospective lawyers can be prepared for the workplace. Findings from the study have highlighted areas of needed change for which the following recommendations are made:
 - * Extension of the period of attachment programme for sufficient practical training.
 - * Strict monitoring of the aspirant barristers during the attachment programme in order to curb problems of absenteeism.
 - * Greater commitment by the law firms to the practical training and involvement of the aspirant barristers in legal activities in order to encourage interest and experiential learning through the programme.
 - * Provision of a fixed allowance for the aspirant barristers during the attachment in order to help with problems of transportation, living expenses and purchase of legal materials.
 - * Shifting bar examinations which usually commence after the attachment programme to a later date to enable aspirant barristers to take the court attachment more seriously.
 - * Posting aspirant barristers to law firms with a wide variety of practice active and standardized law firms where they can gain more practical experience in the rudiments of legal practice.
 - * Regular and constant review of the list of law firms accredited for the attachment programme across the country should be made to ensure their continuing existence and functionality.

- Policies on the reforms: Findings from this study have been able to provide evidence of the importance of the role of information literacy in legal education and as a key aspect for addressing problems of gaps in the skills deficiency of aspirant barristers. The study therefore recommends for the inclusion of academic librarians and legal information specialists in the process of the reforms at the NLS where they could constitute part of the collaborative team for the design and implementation of an information literacy framework for the legal education system in Nigeria.

8 Conclusion

The study was able to investigate the impact of the implementation of the reforms at the Nigerian Law School. Contributions arising from the findings have also served to meet the outlined objectives and outcomes of the study. The novelty of the research is based on its ability to provide empirical evidence on the nature of legal information literacy as an important component of legal education in Nigeria. Few studies have been conducted in Nigeria which explored the information seeking behaviour of lawyers as practitioners (Haruna & Mabawonku 2001). Previous studies undertaken on legal education in Nigeria have paid limited attention to examining the role of legal practitioners in facilitating skills training and development in legal education. The uniqueness of this study is that it has served to provide a link between skills training in legal education and their practical application to the actual context of legal practice in Nigeria. Similarly, explorations on the value of information literacy to the legal education system in Nigeria have positively supplemented previous studies and contributed to the existing body of knowledge by assessing how the integration of information literacy into the curriculum of legal education in Nigeria can help in addressing problems of skills deficiency among graduate lawyers. Furthermore, the nature of the data collected, particularly the reflective journals, and the method of analysis employed, were helpful in providing insights into the workplace experiences of the aspirant barristers and an understanding of their learning processes within an established vocational training programme.

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