

**INFORMATION SERVICES IN SHARI'AH COURT LIBRARIES IN
THE NORTHERN STATES OF NIGERIA.**

BY

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Abstract

The paper identifies the information services rendered in shari'ah court libraries in the Northern states of Nigeria. It is a survey research which used questionnaire as research instrument. The population comprises of Grand Khadis, Khadis, Judges, Lawyers, Researchers, Students, Islamic scholars, Court registrars, Ulama'a, etc. The study adopted random sampling technique. It established that reference service is the major service offered by these libraries with a record of 83 (76.9%). It was revealed that, the patrons of the shari'ah courts utilized reference and reserve services which is represented by 88 (81.5%) and 35 (32.4%) respectively. This consequently, impacts on the information services in the libraries. This paper revealed that provision of adequate and relevant information is vital in speedy dispensation of justice. Moreover, adequate services could improve information provision in the courts.

Introduction

Shari'ah literally means "a way to watering place" the source of all life which signifies the way to God (Allah), as given by God. It is the way which encompasses the totality of man's life. Being God given, the Shar'ah is the manifestation of His infinite mercy. Sada (2005) defined shari'ah as, "The body of those institutions, which God has ordained in full or in essence to guide the individual relationship with God, his fellow Muslims, his fellowmen and the rest of the universe". It is the only true embodiment of, and the best way to, justice. Justice is the supreme purpose and ruling spirit of the shari'ah. It provides the framework for the entire

corpus of Islam, shaping and molding its beautiful configurations. Prophets were sent to guide man to achieve justice. Qur'an 57:25 stated that, "We sent our messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that men may conduct themselves with justice". In this regard, Gurin (2002) remarks that, "God is the supreme legislator and ultimate source of all legal and political authority in the Muslim society".

The Judiciary is a legal system which comprises of system of law being practiced by a state or a country. The shari'ah legal system in Nigeria requires relevant information to make it efficient and effective. The library plays an important role in this regard. It provides support services to the judges and other court officials. Both the judges and the court officials require steady flow of information that are relevant to their activities.

The importance and need for information services as a social function in communication is fundamental. The economics and social value of libraries/ information centers and other information systems can not be under- estimated. In this regard, libraries and other information systems should be designed to serve the actual needs as well as anticipated demands of the court.. It should not be assumed that court officials should be trained to fit into the system, rather a system is designed to fit and satisfy their needs. The Library user is interested in a system that is accurate, dependable and above all, responsive to his needs. In order to render effective services to meet these actual needs, the librarian must be technically and professionally trained.

The traditional role of the Librarian has been the provision of information services to the clientele. Law librarianship is not an exception. This age-long doctrine of library services was that a library is designed to meet the information needs of predetermined or anticipated clientele. Thus it could be said that law librarianship is designed to provide for the information needs of the legal profession. Mohammed (2005) remarks that, "Information is an indispensable, essential commodity in moving any organization forward. The Encarta Encyclopedia (2004) reported that information work for a librarian is the process of helping users find preferred document.

Indeed, legal work can not be performed successfully without the backing of a well equipped and up to date library and information services. A good information service should provide appropriate and organized information to meet the specific needs of enquirer in furtherance of his research or professional needs in any organization. Information service in shari'ah courts is, therefore to keep the Judges and other court officers abreast with current judicial information that will be helpful to them in the administration of justice. The recent trends in the Northern states of Nigeria which tend to favour implementation of the shari'ah legal system require legal information to back it up judgment. The states are expected to make provision for information systems to support the efficient and effective implementation of shari'ah law. Though libraries are attached to these shari'ah courts, the extent of utilization and nature of the services provided by these libraries are not known. Therefore there is the need to determine the types of services rendered in the shari'ah court libraries in the Northern states of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Muhammed (2002) defined information services as "Services that encompass all the activities that are carried out within the information system which involves the act of acquiring, processing, storage and dissemination of information" This is to imply that, any thing done between the input unit and that of output through the central processing unit which makes it possible for the clients to access and use the information provided, is known as information "services. Nwakaoho (1999) as cited by Esther (2005), remarks that, "Information services is set out to provide the use of documents or piece of information which could best help the user in his study, teaching or research". Information services require good planning in order to meet the desired goal of an organization. If an information product is not relevant to the needs of the users certainly it will not be utilized. Therefore, court libraries must acquired resources which are relevant to the judges and other court officers.

Brown (1980) emphasized accessed to relevant information in determining library services. Therefore, access to needed information is considered as the most important requirement for library services. Indeed if users can not access given information; it can not be useful to them. In this study, information service is viewed as any activity performed to aid access and to improve utilization of the Information resources within the library. A library provides many types of information services. These services usually depend on the level of funding of the library, the information resources available in the library and quality of the library staff. The utilization of any service will always depend on choice or performance of

the users. Library users may have preference on the form they wish information to be presented to them. Court officials/personnel may have preference in the presentation of information. Therefore, law libraries must have or cultivate fertile imagination to pilot continuously the development of their information resources in order to improve on their services towards achieving and maintaining rule of law in the country for the general happiness of the people.

Edward (1983), defined information as "Knowledge transferred from a persons' store of knowledge to another person in such a way as to encourage action by the recipient" The information and means to communicating it in order to enhance social interaction has been of long standing interest to man over several generations. It is through information that man can effectively interact with one another as well as interact with his environment for economic and political survival. For instance, business companies and individual advertise their business in media houses such as Radio stations, TV stations and Newspapers, so that general public can be informed about the said business. Also, politicians use information to sell their candidacy to the general public. Inadequate information about the re-introduction of shari'ah in the Northern states of Nigeria could be said to have been responsible for its misconception as it was tagged political shari'ah" For example, Adesina (2000), Warns that, "Shari'ah should not be mixed with politics".

Hoel (1980:2) identified the term "services" as one of those nebulous words, which imply a lot but have different meaning to different people." According to her, it could mean an ethical commitment to do the best you can or do as much as you can to help anyone who needs your expertise/. If the concept of services

is the pivot upon which librarianship and most importantly law librarianship is hinged then provision of quality services is one of the most important professional responsibilities of a law librarian. Quality services in a law library setting are synonymous with skill and professional competence.

Akinola (1985:247) stated that the quality refers to accuracy, currency and completeness of answers given to library user's inquiry as well as the speed with which the answer gets to the inquirer: Law libraries all over the world are known for the provision of effective services and have always been guided by the principle of the right book or information to the right reader and at the right time. He identifies readers' service in law libraries to be one of the important functions of any law library. Other services rendered in law libraries include:-

- (a) **Selective Dissemination of Information:** A type of service requiring the library user to give to the library the parameters of his interest and research area. The library on its part select new materials as they are received and send them continuously on the basis of the needs indicated by the user
- (b) **Indexing and abstracting services:** In order to assists the user in accessing content of a publication easily. Law libraries produce a variety of indexes to their collection as an in-house routine. These indexes are of immense help to lawyers in locating authorities to citation, etc.
- (c) **Index to law reports:** Law reports and their indexes are so vital to legal practice and to the practice of rule of law. They deserve special mention. Lack of general or subject indexes to the law reports reduces their utility. It is only

recently that law libraries have started to compile indexes to some of these reports. One important of such index is the "All Nigeria law

reports, 1961-1970 index" published by Sweet and Maxwell, London, in 1982

(d) ***Index to judgments of the superior court:*** The indexing of judgments of the superior courts deserves a separate treatment because of its importance.. This idea is being sold to other law libraries with the hope that they will accept it as a *continuous in-house routine job to enhance legal research* The reasons for undertaking the indexing of the judgment of the superior court are as follows:-

** The state of law reporting in the country leaves much to be desired. The law report is published irregularly. Moreover not all the judgments are reported. The proportion of unreported judgments cited in the book entitled law and social change in Nigeria is very high when compared to the number of reported judgments in all the various law reports cited in the same book.

** To provide access to the mass judgments emanating from the superior courts received by the institute library for the benefit of legal profession as a whole.

(e) **Compilation of bibliographies and reading list.** Bibliographies may be compiled on topical issues, at the request of library users, or as supportive service; or as a means of focusing attention on any area of the library collection.

(f) ***Reserved Book collection.*** The reserved stock consists mainly of out of print books, books which are single copies and books of popular demand of which few copies are available. In order for this collection to serve everybody, they are housed in a locked up cupboard in the Librarian's office or special location. Lending of this stock depends on the discretion of the librarian. It

is stated that these books can of course be borrowed and used within the library.

- (g) **Reference services.** A library should be well equipped with adequate and up-to-date reference materials. These include among other things legal Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Year Books and similar books of concise and summarized legal works. It should be noted that reference books may not be borrowed.
- (h) **Photocopying services.** Important official documents and information from rare books that cannot be borrowed out are photocopied.

The above listed services form the core of librarianship anywhere. Therefore, it is relevant to review the existing services in shari'ah courts with a view to determining how they are being used and their relevance in the present condition of judicial services.

The objectives of the study

- 1 To identify the types of information services provided in the shari'ah court libraries in the Northern States of Nigeria.
- 2 To identify the information services utilized by the patrons of shari'ah court libraries in the Northern states of Nigeria.
- 3 To recommend ways of improving the information services in the shari'ah court libraries in the Northern states of Nigeria.
- 4 To add to the existing literature in this filed of study.

Methodology

At the time of this study, there were nineteen states in Northern Nigeria and Abuja. Ten states were selected randomly as a sample for this study. However, the subjects of the study were drawn from the library staff and users such as lawyers, judges and Khadis in the judiciary. In all, 10 heads of shari'ah court libraries were selected, 50 lawyers, and 90 Khadis were also selected as subjects for the study. A total of ten shari'ah court libraries were selected randomly as sample for this study.

The libraries are shari'ah court libraries of Abuja, Bauchi, Borno, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kogi, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara. The clients of these libraries are mostly GrandKhadis Khadis, Judges, Lawyers, researchers, students, Islamic scholars, court registrars, ulama'a, Alkalis etc. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher used half of the population of shari'ah court libraries in the states of Northern Nigeria as sample size.

In this study, survey research method was used in gathering data from the research area: i.e Northern states Government owned shari'ah court libraries in terms of their information services. Questionnaires, physical observation and interview were the instruments used for data collection.

During the construction of the questionnaires 2 (two) sets of questionnaires were constructed. One for soliciting response of librarians; while the other one soliciting users responses. Physical observation was also carried out during the course of distributing the questionnaires. This aided in obtaining first hand information about the conditions in the libraries. Interview was conducted in order to clarify questions that could not be answered in the questionnaires.

Findings and discussions.

In conducting the research one hundred and fifty (150) Questionnaires were distributed to the ten shari'ah Courts mentioned above. 108(71.9%) questionnaires were returned duly completed. This is considered high enough for the study.

Table 1 Types of information services in the ten shari'ah court libraries.

Library and information service	Freq.	%
Reference Service	83	76.9
Reserve Services	35	32.4
Information Services	25	23.2
Lending Services	11	10.2
Indexing Services	9	8.3
Audiovisual Services	8	7.4
Student Orientation	7	6.5
Abstracting services	6	5.6
Bibliographical Compilation	4	3.7
Internet Services	3	2.8
Computer services	3	2.8
Photocopying services	2	1.9
Exhibition services	2	1.9

Table 1 above shows that, 83 (76.9%) of the respondents indicated that their libraries offer references services. Another 35 (32.4%) revealed that the libraries provide them with reserve book services. It was revealed by the respondents in the course of interview that the libraries serve as reference libraries and they offer lending services only on special cases.

Table.2 Information Services Utilized By Users of Shari'ah Court Libraries.

Information service	Freq	%
Reference services	88	81.5
Reserve services	35	32.4
Information services	26	24.1
Lending services	10	9.3
Audiovisual services	8	7.4
Indexing services	7	6.5
Students orientation	6	5.6
Bibliographical compilation	5	4.6
Abstracting services	5	4.6
Photocopying services	5	4.6
Internet service	3	2.8
Computer services	3	2.8
Exhibition services	2	1.9

Table 2 above, describes the information services utilized in shari'ah court libraries investigated. The analysis shows that 88(81.5%) of the respondents revealed that they enjoyed reference services in the shari'ah court libraries. Another 35(32.4%) of the respondents indicated that they use reserve services in the libraries studied. The results also revealed that 2(1.9%) of the respondents indicated that they enjoy exhibition services, other 3(2.8%) enjoy internet and computer services. The respondents were free to choose more than one item in the questionnaires.

From the history of law libraries, it can be reasonably stated that the law libraries were more or less store house with clerks or clerical assistants to look after them, often erroneously described as "librarian. The so called "librarians" could only give minimum reference services"

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that reference and reserved book services are the major services provided in the Shari'ah court libraries in the Northern states of Nigeria. Exhibition is the list services provided and utilized in the libraries investigated.

This indicates that the users of the shari'ah court libraries are missing a lot of information services by not utilizing other information services such as abstracting services, indexing services, Internet services etc..

Shari'ah implementation in Northern Nigeria may also be compromised because the libraries in the courts are not built in line with modern information services.

Based on the above findings I wish to finally, conclude that shari'ah court libraries in the Northern states of Nigeria do not meet standards required of a law library if one considers quality and quantity of their services.

Recommendation:

The libraries of the shari'ah court should provide more services for their patrons such as full lending services, Internet services, (SDI) Selective

Dissemination of Information, e t c. More research work needs to be encouraged in shari'ah court libraries. By so doing, the libraries will be current and up to date and satisfy the information requirement of their users

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