

# Pilot Survey of User Needs in the Law Library, University of Malaya

Zaiton Osman      Sharipah Hanon Bidin  
Chan Sai Noi      Molly Chuah

*Abstrak: Tujuan membuat kajian mengenai keperluan pengguna di Perpustakaan Undang-undang ini adalah untuk mendapatkan maklum balas mengenai empat aspek penggunaan perpustakaan, iaitu corak dan tingkah laku pengguna; kecukupan koleksi yang ada sekarang; cara mendapatkan bahan-bahan dan penggunaan kemudahan-kemudahan yang disediakan. Tinjauan ini cuba mengukur keberkesanan peranan Perpustakaan Undang-undang dalam memenuhi keperluan pengguna-pengguna. Keputusan-keputusan kajian dibincangkan dan beberapa cadangan bagi memperbaiki koleksi dan peningkatan perkhidmatan serta cara penggunaan bahan-bahan yang lebih berkesan disyorkan.*

*Abstract: This survey of user needs in the Law Library, University of Malaya, was undertaken to obtain feedback on four aspects of library use, namely, user pattern and behaviour; adequacy of the existing collection; retrieval strategies and usefulness of library services. It was an attempt to assess how effective the Law Library has been in meeting the needs of its users. The results of the survey are discussed and recommendations made for improvement of collection and services and more effective utilization of resources.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Law Library of the University of Malaya was established in 1972 and has a collection of approximately 65,000 volumes comprising statutes, law reports, journals, textbooks, theses, government gazettes and parliamentary papers. While the professional staff in the Law Library have made every effort to provide catalogues, indexes and guides for the exploitation of this rich collection, they have observed from reference inquiries that perhaps the retrieval tools mentioned are not effectively utilized. Hence the need for a pilot survey to obtain feedback on the adequacy of existing facilities and services offered by the Law Library.

## 1.0 RATIONALE

1.1 From a random observation of user behaviour and the nature of inquiries received, the professional staff of the Law Library made certain assumptions about the Law Library usage, namely:

1.11 Users are generally not capable of undertaking independent search in locating and retrieving materials.

This would imply that users:

- a) are not conversant with the catalogue as a tool for retrieval of legal materials,
- b) tend to locate materials through trial and error,
- c) are not familiar with the indexes to statutes, law reports, and journals, and
- d) are not aware of the existence and use of the Visible Index which holds information of the serials collection.

1.12 Users are not fully aware of the entire range of services offered.

1.13 The collection is not fully exploited for the purpose of teaching, learning and reference.

1.2 Convinced that the Law Library, like most libraries, exists on assumptions and presumptions (the assumption that librarians know exactly what their users need and the presumption that the

library system and processes make library use much easier for users), the professional staff decided that a pilot survey be undertaken of several aspects of library use to obtain feedback on how effective the Law Library is in meeting the needs of its users.

The survey concentrated on 4 main aspects, namely:

- a) The nature and pattern of library use.
- b) The adequacy of the collection.
- c) How users locate and retrieve materials.
- d) How useful and relevant are library services.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

This survey is a descriptive survey. It was originally intended to be undertaken by means of questionnaires and personal interviews with the sample selected. However, workload and timetable constraints of both the professional staff and the users (students, lecturers and the legal practitioners) made interviews impossible, leaving the Law Library with no option but to confine the survey to the questionnaire method.

### 2.1 Population Sampling

The Law Library has a population of 554 registered users, comprising 3 different categories:

- a) Students of the Faculty of Law, totalling 400;
- b) Lecturers of the Faculty of Law, totalling 34;
- c) External members (legal practitioners, law librarians, other Faculty members, etc.), totalling 120.

2.1.1 Using the membership register as the sampling frame, a random sampling of all 3 categories was made. Bearing in mind that the sample has to be big enough for failure or incompleteness of response to be insignificant, 50% of the students (50 students from each year of study) and all lecturers (34) were selected. Out of the 120 external members, which include 50 legal practitioners and 3 law librarians, 25 (50%) of the practitioners and all 3 law librarians were selected.

### 2.2 Administration of Questionnaires

The distribution of the questionnaires was undertaken during the last week of November 1986 before lectures. Before distributing them, the pro-

fessional staff explained the purpose of the survey and stressed on the importance of having the questionnaires returned promptly. The questionnaires were delivered to lecturers by hand while those meant for external members were posted, accompanied by a covering letter specifying the purpose of the survey as well as a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

### 2.3 Response Rate

The questionnaires were returned one month after the date of distribution. The persistence and perseverance on the part of the professional staff resulted in 187 students (95%) returning their completed questionnaires. They were not so lucky with the lecturers, 24 of whom (71%) returned the questionnaires. Out of a total of 28 questionnaires sent to external members, 17 (61%) were returned to the Law Library. Thus out of a total sample of 262 users, 228 (87%) responded to the survey.

## 3.0 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

For the purpose of this report, the results are categorised under 4 headings:

- 3.1 Library use
- 3.2 Adequacy of library collection
- 3.3 Retrieval strategies
- 3.4 Library services.

### 3.1 Library Use

#### 3.1.1 *Reasons for using the library*

As shown in Table 1, the two reasons ranked as most important by the highest percentage of the respondents were:

- (i) Looking up authorities (44%)
- (ii) Using reference materials (44%).

Analysing by category of users, the table shows that in the case of lecturers, a greater percentage (67%) considered *looking up authorities* more important than *using reference materials* (33%). In the case of external members, both reasons were given equal weightage (41%). Although the difference is marginal (4%) in the case of students, *using reference materials* (46%) seemed more important than *looking up authorities* (42%).

Table 1: Library Use (Based on First Ranking Order)

REASONS	RESPONDENTS							
	Students		Lecturers		External Members		Total	
	(N = 187)	%	(N = 24)	%	(N = 17)	%	(N = 228)	%
a) Browsing	1	0.5	—	—	—	—	1	0.4
b) Borrowing books*	2	1	5	21	—	—	7	3
c) Looking up authorities	78	42	16	67	7	41	101	44
d) Leisure reading	3	2	—	—	—	—	3	1
e) Using reference materials	86	46	8	33	7	41	101	44
f) Photocopying	19	10	1	4	1	6	21	9
g) Working/Studying without using library materials	7	4	—	—	—	—	7	3
h) Discussions	1	0.5	1	4	—	—	2	0.9

(\*Borrowing facilities are not extended to external members. Students are allowed very limited borrowing privileges, e.g. non-legal materials.)

Note: Since the respondents were allowed more than 1 response, the percentage of the response will not total 100%.

### 3.1.2 Frequency of library use

Table 2: Frequency of Use

FREQUENCY	RESPONDENTS					
	Students		Lecturers		External Members	
	(N = 187)	%	(N = 24)	%	(N = 17)	%
a) Several times daily	96	51	6	25	1	6
b) Once daily	46	24	3	13	1	6
c) More than twice a week	31	16	9	38	2	12
d) Once a week	8	5	4	16	5	29
e) Once a month	—	—	—	—	7	41
f) Others	3	2	—	—	—	—
Non-response	3	2	2	8	1	6

Table 2 refers to the frequency of use by respondents. It shows that 51% of the students and 25% of the lecturers used the library several times daily. In the case of the lecturers, the greatest percentage of respondents (38%) indicated that they used the library more than twice a week, while in the case of external members, the

greatest percentage of respondents (41%) indicated using it once a month. As a group, the students tended to use the library more often than lecturers and external members, with 173 (91%) of them using it at least more than twice a week, compared with 18 (76%) of the lecturers and 4 (24%) of the external members.

### 3.1.3 Difficulty of using the library

Table 3: Difficulty of Use

USERS	DIFFICULT		FAIRLY DIFFICULT		NOT DIFFICULT	
	No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%
Students (N = 187)	2	1	47	25	135	72
Lecturers (N = 24)	—	—	4	17	19	79
External members (N = 17)	—	—	1	6	16	94

Note: Non-response rate: Students 2%, Lecturers 4%

As shown in Table 3, the majority of the respondents in all 3 categories of users did not find the Law Library difficult to use. It can also be seen that among the categories of users, students (26%) seemed to have more difficulty using the library than lecturers (17%) or external members (6%).

When the respondents were asked why the library was difficult to use, the main reasons given were:

- They did not understand the classification scheme.
- Book/stack guides were inadequate.
- Book arrangement was confusing.

### 3.1.4 Using other libraries

Table 4: Other Libraries Used by Respondents

LIBRARIES	RESPONDENTS							
	Students (N = 187)		Lecturers (N = 24)		External Members (N = 17)		Total Number (N = 228)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Main Library, University of Malaya (U.M.)	73	39	13	54	—	—	86	38
Institut Pengajian Tinggi, U.M.	8	4	1	4	—	—	9	4
Public Library/ College Library	5	3	2	8	4	24	11	5
Parliament Library	1	0.5	—	—	—	—	1	0.4
Medical Library, U.M.	1	0.5	—	—	—	—	1	0.4
Cooperative College Library	1	0.5	—	—	—	—	1	0.4
Bound Journals Section, U.M.	6	3	—	—	—	—	6	3
National Library	3	2	—	—	—	—	3	1
Own Library	1	0.5	1	4	2	12	4	2
Pusat Bahasa, U.M.	1	0.5	2	8	—	—	3	1
Hometown Library	1	0.5	—	—	—	—	1	0.4
Bar-Council, Attorney-General's Chambers Library, High Court, etc.	—	—	3	13	8	47	11	5

Note: Since the respondents were allowed more than 1 response, the percentage of the response will not total 100%.

Table 4 shows that apart from the Law Library, respondents indicated that they also used other libraries. However, the main ones used were:

- a. The Main Library of the University of Malaya
- b. Public Library/College Library
- c. Other law libraries (eg. Bar Council, Attorney-General's Chambers Library, High Court, etc.).

In the case of the Main Library, while 73 students (39%) and 13 lecturers (54%) used the library, none of the external members indicated using it. 47% of the external members however indicated that

they used other law libraries while 13% of the lecturers indicated the same. No student however indicated using other law libraries. Regarding the Public Library/College Library (most probably the National Library/Institut Teknologi MARA Law Library), 24% of external members indicated using them as compared with 3% of students and 8% of lecturers. The respondents also stated in their responses that the reasons for using these other libraries were because they had specialised materials and were convenient to use.

### 3.2 Adequacy of Library Collection

#### 3.2.1 Materials most depended upon

Table 5: Materials Most Depended Upon

MATERIALS	FIRST RANKING ORDER				SECOND RANKING ORDER			
	Students (N= 187)	Lecturers (N = 24)	External Members (N = 17)	Total (N = 228)	Students (N = 187)	Lecturers (N = 24)	External Members (N = 17)	Total (N = 228)
Law Reports	151	14	8	173	3	4	5	12
Statutes	8	6	2	16	67	7	2	76
Periodicals	10	4	4	18	68	5	2	75

*Law reports* is indicated in Table 5 as the item *most depended upon* by 173 (76%) of the respondents, while 76 and 75 (33%) of

the respondents indicated *statutes* and *periodicals* respectively as the next *most depended upon* items in the collection.

#### 3.2.2 Items that are most adequate

Table 6: Most Adequate Items

MATERIALS	ADEQUACY											
	Adequate				Fairly Adequate				Inadequate			
	TOTAL (N = 228)	S (N = 187)	L (N = 24)	E (N = 17)	TOTAL (N = 228)	S (N = 187)	L (N = 24)	E (N = 17)	TOTAL (N = 228)	S (N = 187)	L (N = 24)	E (N = 17)
Statutes	107	79	17	11	85	77	4	4	25	25	—	—
Law Reports	123	96	16	11	68	61	4	3	28	25	1	2
Parliamentary papers	63	50	8	5	84	76	4	4	30	23	4	3
Textbooks	72	58	6	8	96	78	14	4	57	52	3	2
Theses	59	43	10	6	99	89	7	3	17	15	1	1
Periodicals	62	37	15	10	107	97	7	3	22	16	4	2

Note: S = Students L = Lecturers E = External members

Table 6 shows the adequacy of the items in the collection. The results indicated that law reports were considered most adequate by 123 (54%) of the total respondents, followed by statutes indicated by 107 (47%) of the total respondents. Items regarded as fairly adequate were periodicals as indicated by 107 (47%) of the total respondents followed by theses indicated by 99 (43%) of the total respondents. Among items that were indicated as inadequate, the highest percentage of respondents were

for textbooks. However, in analysing the responses for inadequacy of textbooks, it was interesting to note that the highest percentage of respondents were students 52 (28%).

As to why items were considered inadequate, reasons given were:

- a) There were insufficient copies of items, particularly textbooks and the *Malayan Law Journal*.
- b) Items were outdated, especially textbooks and statutes.

### 3.3 Retrieval Strategies

#### 3.3.1 Success rate of retrieval

Table 7: Success Rate of Retrieval

Categories of users	RESPONDENTS		SCALE OF SUCCESS RATE									
	Total	%	1 (seldom)	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5 (Most of the time)	%
Students	172	92	3	2	13	7	83	44	44	24	29	16
Lecturers	22	92	—	—	1	4	7	29	6	25	8	33
External Members	16	94	—	—	1	6	4	24	2	12	9	53
Total	210		3		15		94		52		46	

Note: Non-response rate: Total 18 (8%); Students 15 (8%); Lecturers 2 (8%); External Members 1 (6%)

Table 7 shows the success rate of retrieval of total respondents as well as by category of users. On a scale of success rate in ascending order, 46 (20%) of the total respondents had greatest success (5 on scale), 52 (23%) had some success (4 on scale), 94 (41%) had average success (3 on scale) and combining 1–2 on scale, 18 (8%) had little success.

When analysed by category of users, it

would appear that of the 18 (8%) respondents who seldom found items they needed, students formed a considerable number (16 out of 18). Even among students who were successful, the greatest number of them had only average success (44%), whereas for lecturers and external members, the greatest number of respondents indicated that they found the items most of the time (33% and 53% respectively).

### 3.3.2 Search strategies used in locating statutes, law reports and current journals

Table 8: Search Strategies for Locating Statutes, Law Reports and Current Journals

MATERIALS	STRATEGIES											
	Searching Shelves		Asking Friends		Asking Library Staff		Current Contents		*Searching relevant Catalogue/index		Visible Index	
	(N=228)	%	(N=228)	%	(N=228)	%	(N = 228)	%	(N=228)	%	(N=228)	%
Statutes	105	46	88	39	93	41	—	—	112	49	—	—
Law Reports	129	57	107	47	102	45	—	—	122	54	—	—
Current Journals	—	—	—	—	140	61	59	26	36	16	46	20

Notes: (i) Since the respondents were allowed more than 1 response, the percentage of the responses will not total 100%  
 \*(ii) Includes legislation index, case index, etc.

From Table 8, it can be seen that respondents located library materials by using different strategies. For statutes, the tendency was for respondents to use the *legislation index* (49%) and *searching shelves* (46%). In the case of law reports, respondents indicated that the strategies they used were *searching shelves* (57%) and *using case index* (54%). For information on

current journals, they indicated *asking library staff* (61%) as their main strategy, with only 20% indicating they used the *Visible Index*. In general it was evident that *asking library staff* and *asking friends* were two main strategies used by a high percentage of respondents to locate statutes, law reports and current journals.

### 3.3.3 Catalogue sequences most regularly used

Table 9: Catalogue Sequences Most Regularly Used

CATALOGUE SEQUENCES	RESPONDENTS									
	TOTAL		S		L		E			
	(N = 228)	%	(N = 187)	%	(N = 24)	%	(N = 17)	%		
Author sequence	76	33	63	34	9	38	4	24		
Title sequence	55	24	43	23	8	33	4	24		
Subject sequence	53	23	39	21	7	29	7	41		
Case index	46	20	40	21	2	8	4	24		
Article index	3	1	1	0.5	2	8	—	—		
Legislation index	15	7	9	5	4	17	2	12		

Notes: Since the respondents were allowed more than 1 response, the percentage of the response will not total 100%.

S = Students      L = Lecturers      E = External members

Table 9 shows that the *author sequence* was used most regularly by the greatest percentage of the respondents, 76 (33%), followed by the *title sequence*, 55 (24%), *subject sequence*, 53 (23%), and *case index* 46 (20%). The sequence indicated as the least regularly used sequence was the *article index*, 3 (1%).

Considering each category of users, however students and lecturers indicated using the *author sequence* most regularly (34% and 38% respectively) but in the case of the external members, 41% indicated the *subject sequence* as the one they used most regularly. The *article index* was least used by students and lecturers while external members did not use it at all.

### 3.3.4 Difficulty in using the card/microfiche catalogue

Table 10: Difficulty in Catalogue Use

TYPES OF CATALOGUE	RESPONSES								NON-RESPONSES
	Yes				No				
	TOTAL (N=228)	S (N = 187)	L (N = 24)	E (N=17)	TOTAL (N=228)	S (N = 187)	L (N = 24)	E (N = 17)	
Card	18	15	—	3	210	172	24	14	—
Microfiche	150	136	6	8	57	40	11	6	21

Note: S = Students L = Lecturers E = External members

In table 10, 210 (92%) of the respondents indicated that the card catalogue was easy to use while 18 (8%) of the respondents indicated it was difficult to use. In the case of the microfiche catalogue, 150 (66%) of the respondents indicated that the catalogue was difficult to use while 57 (25%) indicated it was easy to use. 21 (9%) of the respondents did not respond to the query about the microfiche catalogue and this could be attributed to the fact that the non-respondents did not understand or did not know what a microfiche catalogue was.

On the basis of category of users, a greater number of students 136 (73%) found the microfiche catalogue difficult to use while only 6 (25%) of the lecturers and 8 (47%) of the external members found it difficult. In the case of the card catalogue, 172 (92%) students did not find the card catalogue difficult to use while 14 (82%) of the external members did not find it difficult to use. None of the lecturers found it difficult to use.

## 3.4 Library Services

### 3.4.1 Most useful library services

Table 11: Services Considered Most Useful

SERVICES	RESPONDENTS							
	Total (N = 228)		Students (N = 187)		Lecturers (N = 24)		External Members (N = 17)	
		%		%		%		%
Loans	31	14	16	9	13	54	2	12
Reference services	140	61	111	59	18	75	11	65
Indexing	58	25	42	22	10	42	6	35
Noter-ups	27	12	17	9	5	21	5	29
Current awareness	33	14	24	13	8	33	1	6
Bibliographical searches	31	14	20	11	9	38	2	12
Photocopying services	154	68	127	68	17	71	10	59

Note: Since the respondents were allowed more than 1 response, the percentage of the responses will not total 100%.



Table 11 shows that the services considered most useful by the largest number of respondents were *photocopying services* (154 or 68%) and *reference services* (140 or 61%). The least useful was *noter-ups* (27 or 12%). In the student user category, *photocopying services* and *reference services* were also indicated as the most useful services by 68% and 59% of the respondents respectively. However, both the lecturers and external members placed *reference services* (75% and 65% respectively) as more important than *photocopying services* (71% and 59% respectively). *Noter-ups* was considered least useful by students and lecturers but for external members, *current awareness* was least useful.

#### 3.4.2 Suggestions by respondents for improvement of services

The respondents suggested the following:

- a) Provision of newspapers in Bahasa Malaysia and English.
- b) Provision of general reading materials.
- c) Better and more courteous service from library staff.
- d) Increase in the number of copies of textbooks and the *Malayan Law Journal*.
- e) Lift for users.
- f) Music/Rest room.
- g) Cleaner toilets.

## 4.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To some extent the findings of the survey supported the observations and assumptions made at the outset of the survey. Discussion of the results and recommendations will focus on the following aspects:

### 4.1 Collection

Law reports were indicated as the *most depended upon* items in the collection. This tallied with the findings on library use which stated that *looking up authorities* was one of the two most important reasons for library use. The respondents also indicated that law reports were one of the two most adequate items in the collection. However some respondents volunteered information that there was a certain degree of inadequacy with regard to number of copies of the *Malayan Law Journal* made available. Inadequate titles and copies of textbooks were also cited by respondents, particularly students, while outdatedness was the chief complaint about statutes.

These findings therefore would suggest that there is a need to increase the number of copies of frequently used law reports like the *Malayan Law Journal* as well as textbooks. On the other hand a reorganization of loans and photocopying procedures may help in the more effective utilization of limited resources.

Usage of materials was concentrated on four types of materials, namely law reports, statutes, periodicals and textbooks. A utilization pattern such as this is understandable as these four types of materials form the core sources for law. The level of utilization of other materials like parliamentary papers, dissertations, digests and bibliographies, was very low. Such findings therefore supported the assumption that the Law Library collection has not been *fully* exploited, especially by students. This could be due to lack of search skills or knowledge about the availability of materials. To remedy the situation, a dynamic marketing of resources, and an in-depth user education programme are recommended.

### 4.2 Retrieval Strategies

The results of the survey did not support the assumption that users were not capable of undertaking independent search in locating and retrieving materials. The findings indicated that readers were familiar with catalogue use and they did not locate materials through trial and error.

With regard to catalogue use, the sequence they used most often was the author sequence. This finding was unexpected because the author sequence with its multifaceted mode of entry is a more complex sequence to use than the title sequence.

The results of this survey also indicated that while *catalogue use* was the most frequently used strategy, next in importance were *searching shelves*, *asking library staff* and *asking friends*. The latter three methods featured more importantly as strategies used for locating law reports and current journals. This dependence on these informal retrieval methods could be a possible explanation for the finding that many did not find the Law Library difficult to use, as often, those who resorted to such methods would receive positive assistance from staff and friends in their search.

However such dependence would indicate a need for an in-depth user education programme so that users may be able to exploit the various catalogues, particularly the Visible Index, case index and the microfiche catalogue which many indicated as difficult to use. Provision of more

stack guides as well as improvement on existing ones would be other measures to be undertaken to enable users to locate materials successfully.

#### 4.3 Services

The results revealed that users were not aware of many of the services that are provided. For example, *noter-ups service* was not indicated as a *useful service*. Respondents were probably not aware that library staff have been noting the various amendments and changes. Indexing too was considered likewise for probably the same reason.

Although they were not ranked as the *most important* reasons for using the library, the two services indicated as *most useful* were *photocopying services* and *reference services*. This is probably because the services are given directly upon request. The respondents could see the benefits immediately, unlike noter-ups and indexing.

To improve library services, respondents have suggested that facilities for leisure reading be increased, that library staff be more polite and courteous and that physical facilities be improved, like cleaner toilets and lift facilities for all users.

#### 5.0 CONCLUSION

On the whole the respondents were satisfied with the existing facilities and services provided by the Law

Library. However it must be borne in mind that the majority of the respondents were not familiar or exposed to any other large and well established law library which they could use as a yardstick to measure the services evaluated.

In analysing the suggestions made by the respondents to improve library services, it could be seen that these suggestions were mainly directed towards minor improvements. There were no suggestions to provide major improvements such as alternatives to the microfiche catalogue, creation of a database for Malaysian cases, different formats for catalogue entries, different arrangement of materials, changes in classification scheme, etc. This indicates to a considerable extent the lack of awareness on the part of the respondents of the functions and operations of a library.

The authors believe that an in-depth user education programme would provide respondents with the necessary exposure and awareness of the various aspects of library functions and services that could make them more discriminating users of the Law Library.

#### Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ng See Ngean and Encik Leonard Yong of the Faculty of Education and Assoc. Prof. Wan Arfah Wan Hamzah, Faculty of Law, for advice and assistance rendered.