

Impact of Rising Legal Resource Costs on Legal Education Libraries in Western Maharashtra

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Abstract

Rising costs of legal resources pose significant challenges to legal education libraries in Western Maharashtra. Escalating prices of print materials and subscription-based online legal databases have strained library budgets, affected collection development, and limited user access to essential legal information. This study examines the impact of increasing legal resource costs on library services, access patterns, and user experiences. Using a mixed-method approach involving budget analysis, surveys, and librarian interviews, the study finds reduced acquisitions, selective subscriptions, and increased reliance on open-access resources. The paper highlights the need for collaborative procurement, improved funding support, and sustainable resource management to ensure effective library services in legal education institutions.

Keywords : Legal education libraries; Rising costs; Legal resources; Print and digital materials; Library services; Collection development; User access; Western Maharashtra; Library economics.

Introduction

Legal education depends fundamentally on access to reliable, current, and comprehensive legal information. Legal education libraries support academic instruction, research activities, moot courts, legal drafting, and professional training by providing access to statutes, case laws, commentaries, journals, and online legal databases. In India, particularly in regions such as Western Maharashtra, legal education libraries cater to diverse institutional settings, including government law colleges, private law schools, and university-affiliated departments.

Over the last decade, the cost of legal resources has increased significantly. Print legal publications, especially multi-volume commentaries and law reports, have become increasingly expensive due to higher production costs and frequent updates. At the same time, online legal databases now indispensable for modern legal research have adopted subscription models with high annual price increments and restrictive licensing terms. These rising costs place considerable financial strain on legal education libraries, affecting their ability to provide equitable and adequate services to users.

This paper explores how escalating legal resource costs influence the functioning of legal education libraries in Western Maharashtra and assesses their impact on users, including students, faculty members, and research scholars.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the trend of rising costs in legal print and digital resources.
2. To examine the impact of increased costs on library budgets and collection development.
3. To study the effects of cost escalation on library services and user access.
4. To understand changes in user behaviour and resource usage patterns.
5. To suggest strategies for sustainable management of legal resources in legal education libraries.

Review of Literature

Previous studies in library and information science indicate that the cost of scholarly publications has risen steadily across disciplines, with law being among the most affected due to specialised publishing and proprietary databases. Research highlights that digital legal databases, while

improving accessibility and efficiency, impose substantial financial burdens on academic institutions. Indian studies emphasise regional disparities, noting that smaller and government-funded law colleges often struggle to maintain comprehensive collections. Literature also suggests that restricted access to legal resources can adversely affect teaching quality, research output, and student learning outcomes.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method research design to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Analysis of library budgets and acquisition records from selected legal education libraries in Western Maharashtra. Surveys administered to students, faculty members, and research scholars. Interviews with librarians and library administrators.

- **Sampling Method**

Purposive sampling was used to select government law colleges, private law colleges, and university law departments across Western Maharashtra.

- **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, while qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify recurring challenges and perceptions.

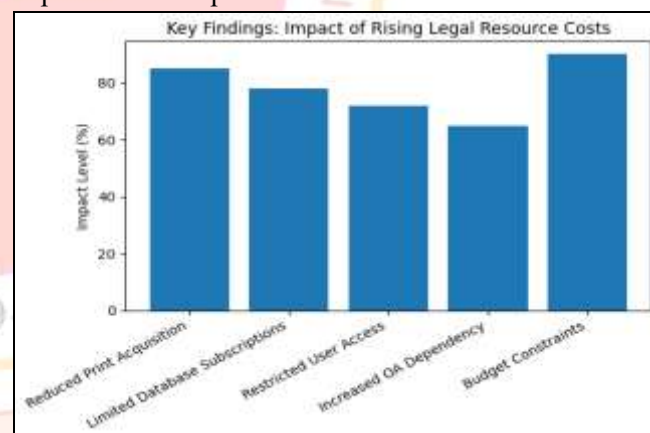
Findings and Analysis

The findings indicate that rising legal resource costs significantly affect the efficiency and equity of legal education libraries in Western Maharashtra. While digital resources have transformed legal research, their high costs and restrictive licensing exacerbate inequalities among institutions. Libraries are compelled to make difficult choices between maintaining print collections and ensuring digital access, often at the expense of comprehensive user services.

- The study found a consistent increase in the prices of legal textbooks, commentaries, and law reports. Online legal databases recorded annual subscription increases ranging from 10% to 25%, placing significant pressure on library budgets.

- Libraries have reduced the purchase of print materials and limited acquisitions to essential syllabus-oriented books. Many institutions have discontinued subscriptions to secondary databases or international journals due to cost constraints.
- Restricted budgets have led to limited digital access, fewer simultaneous users, delayed procurement of new editions, and reduced availability of research support services.
- Students increasingly depend on free online resources, which may not always be reliable or comprehensive. Faculty members adapt teaching materials based on available resources, while research scholars face difficulties accessing advanced or comparative legal materials.

This chart visually represents the major impacts of rising legal resource costs on legal education libraries, such as - Budget constraints, reduced print acquisitions, Limited database subscriptions, Restricted user access, Increased dependence on open-access resources.



(Figure-1)

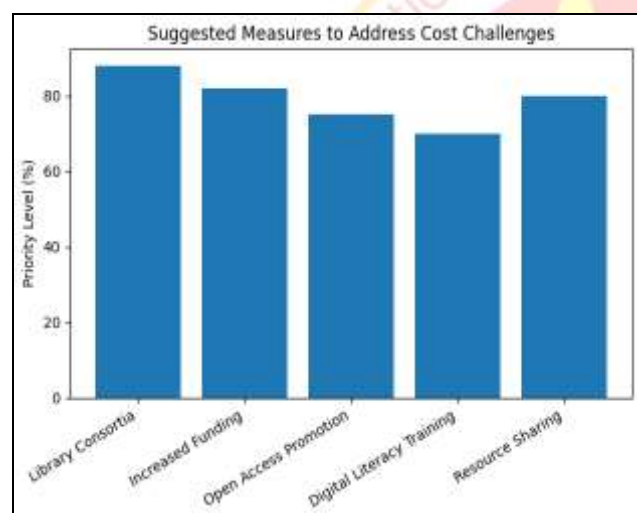
Figure 1- illustrates the key findings of the study, showing that budget constraints and reduced print acquisitions have the highest impact on legal education libraries in Western Maharashtra, followed by limitations in database subscriptions and user access.

Recommendations

1. Formation of regional or state-level consortia to negotiate better pricing for legal databases.
2. Increased financial support from institutions and government bodies for library resources.

3. Promotion of open-access legal resources and institutional repositories.
4. Adoption of evidence-based collection development practices.
5. Strengthening digital and legal information literacy among users.
6. Expansion of resource-sharing and inter-library cooperation.

This chart highlights the priority level of suggested measures to overcome economic challenges, including- Formation of library consortia, increased institutional funding, Resource sharing among libraries, Promotion of open-access resources, Digital literacy training.



(Figure-2)

Figure 2- presents the priority-wise suggestions proposed by respondents, indicating that collaborative procurement through library consortia and increased funding are considered the most effective strategies.

Conclusion

Rising legal resource costs pose a serious challenge to the sustainability of legal education libraries in Western Maharashtra. These cost pressures affect collection development, service quality, and user access, ultimately influencing the standard of legal education. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts involving policy intervention, collaborative procurement, and strategic resource management. Strengthening legal education libraries is essential for ensuring equitable access to legal knowledge and nurturing competent legal professionals.

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