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**Abstract**

The paper examines research from Nigerian Legal System’s prospective and explores sources of

Nigerian law as a prerequisite for effective research services in law libraries. It coherently, explains the concept of legal research, and also law library as a centre for legal research and depository of information resources. Different kinds of legal resources available in Nigerian Law libraries were identified including various research-support services in law libraries. The study adopted simple explanatory method to enhance comprehensiveness of the content.

**INTRODUCTON**

Legal research as a primary objective for setting up a law library reflects the synch between research, legal profession and library in a bid to actualise the very purpose of regulating human conduct, governing the society (politically, economically, socially, culturally) and adjudication of justice. This tells how important it is to have a grip understanding of the legal system of the country, sources of law and information resources containing the law in the library. With this understanding, both the librarian and researcher can make a better use of the library to achieve research objectives. Being able to research in an effective manner is an essential skill whether you are a student or in practice. The primary aim of conducting clear and methodical legal research is finding the answer to a legal question in the most time effective way and knowing that you have searched in all the relevant sources (Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, 2019).

**CONCEPT OF LEGAL RESEARCH**

Legal research is the systematic process of conducting enquiry by identifying and retrieving information to support or make rational legal decision. In its broadest sense, legal research includes step by step approach of discovering the fact, evaluating of the facts and application of the fact in solving legal issues. Legal research is holistically, the process of finding an answer to a legal question or checking for legal precedent that can be cited in a brief or at trial. Black Law Dictionary defines legal research as the finding and assembling of authorities that bear on a question of Law. Sometimes, legal research can help determine whether a legal issue is a "case of first impression" that is unregulated or lacks legal precedent. Virtually every lawsuit, appeal, criminal case, and legal process in general requires some amount of legal research (Findlaw, 2019). Moreover, most legal systems rely so much on precedent — that is, decided court cases — in conjunction with statutes and common law. Meanwhile, the function of legal research typically is to find out how previous courts have decided cases with similar fact patterns.

Understanding legal research is quite a great deal of task that both the lawyers and librarians in law libraries must make a priority. Literally, legal research is concerned with finding suitable laws that answer legal queries. Researching the law means discovering or identifying the rules that govern the behaviour of man in the society. It is a prerequisite for lawyers to have firm grip on the knowledge of research if they must be successful in their profession. The reason Lawyers must have adequate knowledge of legal research is because they are often called upon to solve legal problems or give advice which require knowing the rules applicable to the different problems and how to locate them. There may be a time when a client needs the services of a lawyer in pursuit of a remedy for a bad situation, or perhaps files a court process concerning a particular outcome, which will require a lawyer to undertake research in order to find out laws that handles the matter. Perhaps, a lawyer may be asked to offer an advice to the client on a new business initiative such as registering of business name, contract agreement or buying a piece of property etc., and to handle that appropriately, the lawyer needs to know the clients' rights and responsibilities, as defined by legal rules and procedures. However, the law library provides lawyers with research assistance and information resources pertinent to their research queries. Law library houses different sources of legal rules.

**Nigerian Legal System**

The concept of legal system in a general terms involves a holistic legal manner, pattern and philosophy of a particular society. This includes the set of principles , rules, doctrines, concept, procedures, standards and theories of law adopted and practice by the society. The Nigerian legal system is carved out of out the English common law legal tradition by the reason of colonization and the attendant incidence of reception of English law through the process of legal transplant (Dina, Akintayo and Ekundayo, 2005)

According to Beredugo (2009), Nigerian legal system connotes the totality of the law or legal rules and the legal machinery, which cover the constitution, political structure, government, legislature, the judiciary and the justice delivery system, the administrative agencies and even the legal profession that are extant in the country. Nigerian legal system also covers the historic perspective of the transformational legal form that evolved from pre-legal society to a plural legal system which have undertone of various distinct systems of law including the indigenous customary law, the received English law and local or municipal legislation.

To understand Nigeria’s legal system, it is imperative to view through pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial legal transitions. However, in the pre - colonial era, the ethnic nationalities that later formed Nigeria practiced native or customary laws which were used to regulate the conduct of the society and to govern the affairs of the people. By the time Nigeria was under the colonization of Britain, English legal system was introduced the colonial powers, comprises colonial statutes, the common law and the principles of equity into the country. With this and the pre-existing customary law system, the Nigerian legal system doubled. Furthermore, at Independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria (inherited) adopted the English legal system as part of her legal system. Post-colonial government was not left with no room of introducing additional system of law. Meanwhile, Beredugo (2009) stated that “the has from municipal legislative enactments and case law created and developed a national legal system that is anchored on Nigerian precepts of law and justice

**Sources of Nigerian Law**

Legal research is concerned with finding information contained in authoritative sources of law. The sources are where the original fact, information and rule of law could be derived. The law library has a depository of numerous legal sources. The legal sources literally refer where, how and by what authority a particular rule of is made and becomes legally effective to regulate human conduct.

*The formal sources of law includes the conclusion of the country, the statutory enactments , judicial precedents and local customs. The historic source of is concerned with the revolutionary process of any particular rule or principle of law , and includes customs, moral and religious beliefs, business practices, human development , conscience or reasoning, as well as social, economic and environmental factors or circumstances that influenced the origin of any particular rule or principle f law. The literary source of law is concerned with the written documents that contain authoritative rules or principles of law and refers specifically to opinions or statements of legal rules and principles by jurists in law textbooks, statute books, law journals, law reports, law digests, periodicals, encyclopaedias and legal letters. The entire body of law is derived and developed from these various sources (Beredugo, 2009).*

The entire sources of Nigerian law is classified into two which include, primary and secondary sources.

**Secondary Sources of Nigerian Law**

Secondary sources of law are the sources of law that do not carry a dominant legal weight and binding effect. The legal authorities contain in these kind of sources are diluted and persuasive which are not binding on any court of law. According to Beredugo (2009), secondary sources of law are less significance sources of law that carry barely persuasive legal authority or effect and are therefore , not binding on any court of law. Secondary sources can be useful in court of law or resorted to where the court finds the opinion or fact underlying the authority contained therein. Secondary sources can also be referred to in court if it supports the authorities of the primary sources. Examples of secondary sources of Nigerian law according to Beredugo include:

(a) Decisions of courts of foreign countries

(b) International conventions, treaties, and resolutions of international bodies;

(c) Statements or opinions of jurists and learned authors contained in law textbooks, journal, periodicals, dictionaries, letters, speeches, and interviews;

(d) Legal opinions contained in nullified judgements.

Secondary sources of law also include all sources that provide helpful introductions to legal subjects, synopses of decisions, statutes, and regulations in a given field, analyses of trends and historical background of law, explanation of new or difficult concepts, descriptions and analysis of the law and its developments and citations to primary sources through footnotes and annotations.

**Law Library as a Centre for Legal Research and Depository of Legal Resources**

As oxygen is a necessity for human survival so is the law library to research activities. Law library belongs to the special library category of library as it serves special research needs of lawyers in their day-to-day business of providing legal advice, assistance, representation and other services to the clients. Law library is the library that is found within the law firms, court, faculty of Law in Universities, Law Schools, and other legal institutions to serve as a research unit that supplies research resources, legal information services and research-support assistance to the lawyers for the day-today legal operations.

According to Gusau (2017), a law library is the library set up to provide legal materials to assist judicial officers, other members of the court and their clients in case of the court, law scholars and students in academic institutions and other law officers in ministries, police stations and other law related bodies. In the light of the core legal research, Miyetti Law (2019) defines law library as a library that serves the research needs of legal practitioners, paralegals, researchers, academic scholars and other members of the law library.

The law library is as important as the law profession itself because “Legal profession needs information on how to determine the case, argue or represent a client before the law court, and how to pass the law examination” (Olorunfemi and Mostert, 2012). Research in law library is dynamic and engaging as the quality of legal advise and opinion dispensed is rooted to the knowledge of the sources and provisions of the law. As opined by Abubakar (2005), Law library as a laboratory to the legal profession is much more concerned with current information, its mode of access, operation, preservation , dissemination, analysis and synthesisation which have a lot to offer to the legal profession in their conduct of research. However, Abubakar (2005) states that the essence of any law library is to maximise the accessibility of its resources to meet the demands of its users. The law library is very crucial in all aspect of legal profession, it encourages scholarly research by maintaining an environment conducive to study (The university of Lowa, 2019) The heartbeat of every law library is the holdings of legal information resources containing primary and secondary sources of law in its disposal.

**Information Resources in Law Libraries**

Law libraries are rich with numerous materials that contain sources of law. Both the primary and secondary sources of law are predominant in the law library for research purposes. The law library serves as a law laboratory where legal professionals resort to in search of laws or authorities without which, it is impossible to dispense right legal advice, agreement, justice, opinion and other legal transactions. Information resources in law library are in both print and electronic format which contain laws and other legal related matters. With respect to the sources of law, information resources in law library are divided into the following. categories:

• Primary Information Sources

• Secondary Information Sources

***Secondary Information Resources in Nigerian Law Libraries***

Secondary information sources are the materials that contain information derived or extracted from the primary sources of law and have undergone diluted processes or certain alterations. Akinyemi (2017) defines secondary information sources as the information resources extracted from the primary sources after they have been manipulated, diluted and rearranged. They include:

Text books (of different practice areas and others)

Journals /Law reviews

Law digests

Court forms (e.g. Atkins Court Form)

Practice notes

Magazines

Encyclopaedia

Law dictionaries, and Others.

**Research Support-Services of the Law Libraries**

Law library provides myriads of services to the patrons. Based on the purpose of this study, attention should be given to research services provided by the law libraries other than the general services of the law library. Having looked at the Nigerian legal system, the sources of law and different information resources in the library, there is need to portray the basic research services of a law library. According to Cornell University Law School (2019), The law library will help you find the information you need by helping you select and use the proper sources depending on your needs, resources, and location. However, as the general rule implies, research librarians do not perform research for the users or give legal advice but only support researchers through provision of their needed information resources that facilitate their research activities. The research services of the law library include the following:

***Research and Reference***

This is the kind of services provided by the library through the law librarian. The librarian handle a wide variety of research requests, ranging from those requiring a quick or ready answer to an extensive or critical analysis or examination of issues and resources. No request is too small or too large, they all required expertise and in-depth knowledge of the sources of law and in some cases, laws itself. The university of Lowa (2019) states that reference services of a law librarian include the following: Helping patrons locate Law Library resources

• Instructing patrons in the use of library materials and electronic resources

• Suggesting appropriate resources and research strategies

• Looking up readily available information, such as legal citation verifications, addresses, or telephone numbers

• Assisting patrons with locating resources not found in the law library collection, and

• Referring patrons to other libraries or institutions for materials

Whereas Law Librarians are not allowed to perform the following services as doing these is against the ethics of the progression:

1. Conduct legal research on patron's behalf

2. Interpret the law

3. Provide legal advice

4. Read statutes, cases, court rules, or definitions over the phone

5. Confirm that resources currently are on the shelf and available to use

***Research Guidance / Training***

Law library provides research guidance and training to the legal researchers on relevant material, help develop research strategies for different kinds of research and develop research guides. The law librarians ensure that researchers are properly guided on how to navigate various legal databases, legal e-portals and offline legal tools.

***E-Resources Access Support***

Another research service of a law library is assisting researchers in both accessing and using the many electronic resources. Most law libraries in Nigeria subscribed to varieties of legal databases of both local and foreign jurisdiction including Lawpavilion, Legalpedia, Heinonline, Bloomberg, Westlaw, and LexisNexis, Practical law and so on.

***Current Awareness***

The law librarian gathers the research interest or areas of the researchers and notify them of new resources and services that may be of interest to you. Services offered may include notification of the changes in law or new publications notifications through emails, text messages, news feed, phone call, fax or by words of mouth, new acquisitions notices, routing of journals issues and so on.

***Document Delivery***

The librarian will conduct a literature search, obtain the books, articles and other materials that the researcher needs for his or her research. If such materials are not available in the Library, alternative measure might be taken to obtain the resources from another library through interlibrary loan, purchase a copy or another avenue. Once the concerned material or information is retrieved, it will be delivered to the requester either in print or electronically, according to the researchers’ preference

(Some libraries charge a fee for this service).

**Law reports**

Law reports as well as an efficient law reporting system are essential for a smooth system of judicial administration. This is because in any nation where the principle of judicial precedent is operational, like Nigeria, it is only by reference to reported cases that courts and lawyers would be able to ascertain the position of law in their areas of jurisdiction.

The oldest species of law reports are the yearbooks (1282-1537). They are regarded as the most comprehensive reports but are criticized to have been mere notes taken by students and practitioners of law for educational or professional purposes.

The first form of law in Nigeria was the Nigerian law reports which emerged in 1881 but today they have become extinct. One regrettable trend in, the law reporting system in Nigeria is the lack of sustainability. This has been the experience with most government and private initiatives in this regard.

In Nigeria today, we have quite a number of law reports in circulation, among which are the following:

1. Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (NWLR) published since 1985:
2. Supreme Court Of Nigeria Judgments (SCNJ);
3. Law Reports of the Courts of Nigeria (LRNC)
4. All Nigerian Law Reports (ALL NLR)
5. Federation Weekly Law Reports.

These, and many others, are also serving as sources of Nigerian law.

**Law texts, books and treatises**

A textbook or treatise written by learned scholars and jurists constitute a very important source of Nigerian law. It is the same experience in virtually all legal systems.

In Nigerian legal textbooks of reputable standards have been written by Obilade; Nwogwugwu; Okonkwo; Kodilinye; Aguda, among many others. Professor Sagay has written extensively on international law. All these present a potent source of Nigerian law and can be authority where there is scanty or absence of judicial decisions, in which situation they could be of persuasive authorities. Where such works are cited, the weight to be attached to then will depend on the personality of the author and the significance of the subject covered.

**Periodicals, journals and legal digests**

These are produced in various forms and colours in Nigeria. Some are professional while some are academic, and yet some are an admixture of both. For instance, in Nigeria, there exist learned journals published by different law faculties as well as private law publishers.

Some foreign legal dictionaries are also available in Nigeria. Some of these are Jowett’s dictionary of English law, Stroud’s judicial dictionary, etc. All the above provide helpful guidance in interpreting Nigerian law.

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