

HEAVENS, JEWEL JOSEPH

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MEANING OF SECONDARY SOURCES OF LAW

Secondary sources of law are materials that explain, analyse and critique the law. They discuss the law, but are not the law itself. Secondary sources of law give a general overview of the law and identify the relevant statutes, regulations, constitutional provisions and important cases that relate to a topic. These sources are available in print and electronic format and even aid in locating important case laws or legislation. They are cited in court to support the authority of the primary sources of law. These sources do not possess binding power but rather have persuasive value in the court.

TYPES OF SECONDARY SOURCES OF LAW

Secondary sources of law include:

1. Legal encyclopaedias
2. Dictionaries
3. Textbooks / Treaties
4. Law periodicals
5. Law reports

LEGAL ENCYLOPAEDIAS

A legal encyclopaedia is a comprehensive set of brief articles on legal topics or main legal issues for a particular jurisdiction, arranged in alphabetical order, with an index generally included in the final volume. These are useful as a starting point for researching unfamiliar areas of law, most of the articles in encyclopaedias focus on a case law and do not contain extensive citations to statutes or other secondary sources. This is available in hard and soft copy. Examples of legal encyclopaedias in the United States of America are American jurisprudence and Corpus Juris Secundum.

DICTIONARIES and other reference tools

A legal dictionary contains the definitions of legal terms taken from a variety of sources. They are the first place you should look when you do not understand what a legal term means. Black's Law Dictionary, Ballentine's Law Dictionary, Prince's Bieber Dictionary of Legal abbreviations and the bluebook: a uniform system of citations are popular reference tools. General dictionaries, which provide information about the etymology and use of a term in addition to the definition. The unabridged edition of the **Oxford English Dictionary** is available online and is considered the authoritative dictionary of the English Language.

LEGAL TREATIES/TEXTBOOKS

Legal treaties are single or multi-volume works that are dedicated to the examination of an area of the law. Most treaties are updated by the use of supplements or pocket part. It is single-subject focus in a particular jurisdiction and may contain checklists, tips, sample forms. This sources provides in-depth explanation of a particular area of law and has references to a few cases and statutes.

Legal textbooks written by learned scholars and jurists are also regarded as important sources of law in any legal system, including Nigeria. They are especially applied in cases that are scanty of judicial decisions. Some authors of textbooks that centre on issues of the law are Obilade; Professor Sagay for Nigerian law and Hood Phillips for English law.

LAW/LEGAL PERIODICALS

Legal periodicals are scholarly publications that give detailed discussions of narrow areas of the law and legal issues. These are generally written by law professors and practitioners. Articles in academic journals are usually theoretical whereas journals in practical

in nature. The journals generally contain substantial citations to primary and secondary sources, thereby providing access to additional information on the subject.

Periodicals are also an excellent method of locating current information, subject that are new or too specialized to be covered in books can often be found periodicals. There are numerous types of legal periodicals available, including law school journals and law reviews, bar association journals, legal newspaper and legal newsletters.

LAW REPORTS

These are series of books that contain judicial decisions and opinions from the selection of case law in agreement with the court (Supreme Court, court of appeal and high court or tribunal court). Law reports provide essays that analyse and discuss particular points of law. They focus on narrow legal issues rather than general points of law. The articles analyse and describe case from every jurisdiction that have taken a position on the topic covered. Along with critical case citations, the articles provide references to statutes, digests, texts, treaties, law reviews and legal encyclopaedias.

The first law report in Nigeria was N.L.R. (Nigeria law report) which commenced publications in 1916 but covered the period from 1881-1955. Other law reports include Nigerian weekly law report (N.W.L.R.), Supreme court of Nigerian law report (S.C.N.L.R.) etc.

Some foreign law reports are American law reports (ALR), The Weekly Law Reports of England, Common Wealth Law Reports, Victoria Law Reports