NOTE OF LESSON FOR LEGAL METHOD

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Legal Research, Legal Library, Cases and Law Reports

By

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1.0 Legal Research-Meaning

1.1 Legal research is the systematic process of conducting enquiry into a subject matter with a view to acquiring insight and contributing to the body of knowledge. Legal research involves 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 law to 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 research work, test/exams, brief or at trial. It is a systematic approach used to find and interpret laws, regulations, court opinions and other legal precedents relevant to a specific legal issue.

1.2 Defining the Research Question

This is the initial and most important step in clearly defining the legal question. This involves understanding the specific legal problem or issue requiring resolution, In Law questions, you first identify the issue;the central legal question(s) presented by the facts of the case;It should be concise and clear. In Research writing; A well defined question guides the entire research process. Take for instance In my Thesis- Real Property Registration in Nigeria and other

Jurisdiction- The research questions I identified were : What are principles and underlying philosophy guiding pre-title investigation; what are the current issues arising in land registration;to what extent are innocent purchasers protected by extant land registration law; what remedies are proposed for improvement of land registration. It is the research questions that guides the entire research.

1.3 Identifying Relevant Sources

Once the research question is clear, identifying the appropriate legal sources becomes crucial. This might include statutes, case law, regulations, administrative rulings, scholarly legal articles. For exam/test questions, apply the rule; state the relevant legal rules, principles, and precedents that applied to the identified issue. Cite statutes, case law or books relevant to the specific area of law. The rule section provides the legal foundation for the subsequent analysis. Application is the most critical part of IRAC method. A thorough analysis demonstrates your understanding of the legal principles and your ability to apply them to complex factual situations. Finally conclude by give legal advice.

1.4 Utilizing Research Tools and Databases

Effective legal research relies heavily on specialized legal databases and research tools. These resources offer access to a vast amount of legal information, enabling efficient searching and retrieval of relevant materials. E.g LexisNexis, Westlaw, Lawteacher.net etc.

1.5 Applying Appropriate Search Strategies

Employing effective search strategies within these databases is critical. This involves using relevant keywords and other search techniques to refine results and focus on relevant documents.

1.6 Analyzing and Synthesizing Findings

After retrieving relevant materials, the next step is to analyse and synthesize the information to formulate a well-supported legal argument. Researcher must understand the legal principles and interpret court decisions correctly. Thorough analysis ensures the arguments presented are accurate and legally sound.

1.7 Citation and Documentation

Proper citation and documentation of legal sources are vital. This ensures the credibility and reliability of the research by providing a clear trail of the sources used and enabling verification of the information presented. In law research, reliance is placed on footnotes and citation in accordance with NALT.

2.0 Law Library- Meaning and Types

2.1 The term Library is derived from the Latin word '*Liber*' meaning book. Library can be seen as collection of books and other print or non-print materials organized and maintained for reading, consultation, study, research etc. **A Library is also seen as the assemblage of knowledge in all ramifications.** We have two major types of library namely the Traditional and digital Library.

2.2 Traditional library is a physical space that primarily serve as repositories for various information resources. It is where books and information materials are accessed by manual or the catalogue system. Readers must physically visit the library to read traditional print resources in a quite study environment. Only one user can make use of the print material and traditional library requires a very large storage space to operate. Key aspects of traditional libraries include; Physical collections of books and other print materials; services and support; place for interaction, learning and community engagements.

2.3 Digital library emerged with the advent of technology in information access and management, it offers a wealth of resources often surpassing the capabilities of traditional physical libraries; its collections may be stored in digital formats (CD-ROM, databases, audio materials, video materials, micro forms among other) and is accessible with internet/computers. Digital library promotes efficient delivery of information to all users who do not need to visit the physical library space. Digital library copiously assist in advance search and retrieval. It leads to access of large amounts of information to user wherever they are and whenever they may need them. It has around the clock access and a user friendly interface. Challenges include; issues of digital copyright management; updating the vast amounts of date requires significant finances; Digital library requires consistent power supply; data and internet facilities for its smooth operation, hence where there is no power supply, this becomes a challenge and a disadvantage of that system. In recent times, most libraries stores both traditional and digital information.(Key aspects of digital libraries are accessibility and reach; diverse content; easy search and retrieval; preservation and archiving; collaboration and sharing).

2.4 Law library belongs to the special library category of library as it serves special research needs of students in their day-to-day legal training. Law libraries are specialized libraries that house legal materials. With its books suited to the interests and aptitude of students and a calm atmosphere, it quenches the taste of studious students who visit the library to read and acquire wisdom. The library is the center of intellectual and social activities of school. Law library is the library that is found within the law firms, court, faculties 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 users, students and lawyers for the day-to-day legal operations. The heartbeat

of every law library is the holdings of legal information resources containing primary and secondary sources of law in its disposal.

3.0 Information Resources in Law Libraries

3.1 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 in the Law faculty serves as a law laboratory where students resort to in search of laws or authorities without which, it is impossible to understand the law, statutes, opinions of legal authors. 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:

a. Primary information sources

b. Secondary information sources

3.2 Primary Information Resources in Nigerian Law Libraries

Primary resources are legal information resources that constitute laws or ground norms, precedents and binding authorities that determine the decision or judgment of the court. They are regarded as primary resources because they contain primary sources of law. The materials contain first-hand legal information that has not been diluted. Example of primary information resources include:

a. Constitution (1999 Nigerian Constitution), Statutes, Acts, Decrees, Rules, Codes, Ordinances (Federal and State Government bodies), Parliament Debates, bills, Law Reports or Court Judgments (Supreme Court, State High Courts, Tribunals, Special Courts).

b. Citing cases: Citing cases correctly is crucial for legal scholarship and practice in Nigeria. The preferred method generally follows the guidelines established by

the Nigerian Association of Law Teachers (NALT). A case citation includes the case name, the year of the decision, the volume number, the reporter abbreviation, and the page number, the reporter abbreviation, and the page number where the case begins. *Okonkwo v Nnaemeka* (1965) 1 All NLR 123. The citation must accurately reflect the specific report used. It is also important to mention the court that delivered the judgment. This helps to establish the case's legal weight and jurisdiction. In case reporting, the date should be in round or square brackets according to the style of the law report series. (2025) or [2025]. Students are free to choose either of the two but must stick to one for consistency. Case names should be in italics and in lower case (except the first letters of the names) including the v. see example- *Bankole v Eleko.* Please note that if the name of the case is given in the text, it is not necessary to repeat it in the footnotes. When there are multiple parties in a case, name only the first claimant and add others; the first defendant and others. Where the parties are individuals, omit forenames and intials and use the surname.

c. Neutral citation is a unique number given by the official shorthand writers to each judgment issued out of all divisions of the High Court. They are a relatively recent development (2001), introduced to acknowledge the extensive use of electronic law reports, so many case law citations consist only of the case name and law report. Examples are Law Pavilion and Legalpedia case citations. For instance *Eke v Osah* (2025-05) Legalpedia 98389 (CA). the case is authority for the decision that in motions where affidavits are relied on; public document attached to affidavits need not be certified as required by law. (Every document annexed to an affidavit that is duly sworn is deemed to be evidence properly before the court.)

d. Law Reports- Law reports plays a crucial role in the development of the country's legal system and in assisting the students find indispensable resources for

legal research and analysis. It also enables the identify relevant cases and legal principles. Several law reports are published in Nigeria. Eg- ALL NLR-All Nigeria Law Report; NWLR- Nigerian Weekly Law Report; SC-Supreme Court Cases; ALL FWLR-All Federation Weekly Law Report; LRCN- Law Report Court of Nigeria; EJSC-Erudite Judgments of the Supreme Court etc. Foreign Law Report-ALL ER-All England Law Report; QB-Queen Bench Reports; KB-Kings Bench Reports; AC-Appeal Cases; WLR-Weekly Law Report; Ch-Chancery, P-Probate; AC- Appeal Cases; CLR -Commonwealth Law Reports. Law reporting provides access to case law; establish legal precedents; facilitates legal research; promote transparency and accountability within the judicial system.

3.3 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. They include text books of different practice areas and others, Journals /Law reviews, Law digests, *inter alia*. Examples include: LASU Law Journal-Lagos State University Law Journal, Uniport Law Review; Nigerian Law and Practice Journal, NBA Journal etc.

The Library also has reference books. Reference books contain information about various subjects, such as a dictionary, encyclopedia, brochure, list of statutes. The reference may be foreign or local. For instance, Halsbury's law of England, Encyclopedias of the laws of England, Index to Nigerian weekly law report etc.

3.4 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. 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:

1. Research and Reference

This is the kind of services provided by the library through the law librarian. The librarian handles 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.

2. Research Guidance / Training

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

3. Technology Support

Some libraries provide technical assistance with digital resources and educational technology used in courses. They assist 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.

4. 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.

5. 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 on request of scholar. If such materials are not available in the Library, alternative measure might be taken to obtain the resources from another library.

4.0 Finding a Book in a Library

4.1 Where a student cannot locate the book or information he wants to read, he should consult the librarian who will help him locate the book. A book has an identity. A book may be identified by name of author, title of the book, name of publisher, place of publication, cover of the book or the international serial book number.

4.2 Cataloguing is a systematic record of a collection of books. It can be a very useful tool to assist student find a book in the library. It is a way of describing materials to make them easy to identify and locate. A catalouge contains list of names of author, title/subtitle, edition, series, place of publication, date of publication, number of pages, illustrations, subject, classification number. A catalouge can take various forms such as the book catalouge, card catalouge, computer catalouge.

5.3 A **book catalouge** as the name implies is in a book form with entries arranged in alphabetical order by author, title, subject or a combination of all. It is the oldest

form. **Card catalouge** is a type of library catalouge that uses individual cards of uniform sizes arranged in some definite order in cabinets, drawers, trays or cupboard to list bibliographic information about each item in the library. It can be arranged based on author, subject matter or title. **Computer catalogue** is entries description of information in the library in the form of computer print out or can be viewed on the monitor of a computer. The three types of library catalouge helps the user know all the books or information that a library holds in stock, saves the time of checking all the shelves to locate the book you need.