

REINVENTING LEGAL RESEARCH THROUGH HYBRID METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK IN NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

Legal research in Nigeria has historically been dominated by the doctrinal method, a legacy inherited from colonial jurisprudence and sustained by academic conservatism. Generally, doctrinal research provides clarity, consistency, and certainty in legal reasoning, however its limitations are inherent in its ability to address the complex realities of law in society. Doctrinalism is typically described as law-in-books and not law-in-action. This research study argued for the adoption of a hybrid methodology framework that would integrate doctrinal, empirical, and socio-legal approaches. Relying on comparative insights from jurisdictions such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, South Africa, India, China, as well as Ghana, and Kenya, the study examined the limitations of doctrinal dominance, highlighted the global shift toward methodological pluralism, and outlined the structural barriers to reform within legal education in Nigeria. The paper proposed a four-pillar framework consisting of curriculum reform, faculty development, technology integration, and institutional collaboration designed to reposition research as the foundation of legal education. By adopting this framework, Nigeria can produce graduates who will be doctrinally rigorous, empirically competent, and digitally literate. The study concludes that reinventing legal research is not an option but a critical step towards aligning legal education in Nigeria with global standards and equipping graduates for diverse professional realities.

Keywords: *Doctrinal Legal Research; Hybrid Methodology; Socio-Legal Studies; Legal Education Reform; Nigeria*

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1.1 Introduction

Legal research is at the heart of legal education and practice. Lawyers, judges, and policymakers apply research to interpret regulations, resolve disputes, and propose reforms. In every jurisdiction, the method of research employed influences the type of legal system that emerges. Nigeria, like many postcolonial states, acquired a legal research heritage that is mostly doctrinaire in nature. The black-letter approach, often referred to as doctrinal research, focuses on legislation, precedents, and formal doctrines and offers a specific analysis of the structural foundation of the law.¹ This approach has created generations of litigation experts, but it has also limited the scope of Nigerian legal education and undermined its response to broader social concerns.

The doctrinal tradition is a colonial heritage. The Council of Legal Education and the Nigerian Law School were created in 1962 with the goal of replicating the English legal school model.² That program emphasized doctrinal study and courtroom advocacy, educating students largely for litigation. Oba claims that this transplant neglected Nigeria's own legal peculiarity, which blends common law, Islamic law, and customary law.³ Despite this mismatch, the doctrinal framework became orthodox, influencing curriculum, faculty training, and professional expectations for decades. Whereas doctrinal clarity has indisputable significance, particularly in stabilizing a plural legal system, its limitations have become increasingly apparent in the twenty-first century.

According to Banakar, an overreliance on doctrinal reasoning results in lawyers who are skilled at technical debate but are unprepared to deal with complicated social problems.⁴ Kharel emphasizes interpretive subjectivity, by pointing out that the same constitutional provision might justify opposing judgments.⁵ In Nigeria, this constraint has manifested itself in electoral matters, in which

¹ P I Bhat, 'Doctrinal Legal Research as a Means of Synthesizing Facts, Thoughts, and Legal Principles,' in P Bhat (ed) *Idea and Methods of Legal Research* (Oxford; Oxford university press, 2020) <https://academic.oup.com>.

² J J Dawuni, & R E Badejogbin, 'Transplantation and Domestication of American Models of Legal Education in Nigeria.'

In S Bartie & D Sandomierski *American Legal Education Abroad* (New York; New York press, 2021) 139-165. DOI:[10.18574/nyu/9781479803583.003.0007](https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479803583.003.0007).

³ A A Oba, 'TOWARDS RETHINKING LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA' (2008) 6 *Journal of Commonwealth Law and Legal Education*, 97-114.

⁴ R Banakar, 'Having one's cake and eating it: the paradox of contextualisation in socio-legal research' (2011) 7 *International Journal of Law in Context*, 487 - 503.

⁵ A Kharel, 'Doctrinal Legal Research'. *Social Science Research Network* (2018) <https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.3130525>.

courts have been called to handle political crises using rules never intended for such situations. Globalization and technical advancements have exacerbated these flaws. Legal practice is no longer limited to the courtroom. Today's graduates must have the ability to advise international firms, contribute to regulatory design, engage in alternative dispute resolution, and conduct virtual client interviews.

Many authors⁶ allude to the fact that legal education in the United States, United Kingdom, and South Africa has already responded to these demands by combining doctrinal, socio-legal, and empirical methodologies. Nigeria's continuous dependence on doctrinarism risks making its graduates globally uncompetitive. The COVID-19 epidemic drew these issues into clear focus. As courts contemplated online sittings, established procedural norms that had previously been considered fixed were abruptly suspended or reviewed. Doctrinal research, which relied on precedent, provided little direction on justice, access, and legitimacy in this new setting. As Ngwoke, Mbano and Helynn observe, empirical and socio-legal methodologies would have been more appropriate for evaluating the effects of virtual hearings on litigants and communities.⁷ This moment brought to light a deeper truth: doctrinal analysis can describe written law but struggles to explain the actual reality of law.

Law faculties in Nigeria remain highly focused on doctrinal training. The curriculum emphasizes legal interpretation and case-law analysis, with socio-legal or empirical courses frequently reserved for electives.⁸ Faculty members are typically trained in doctrinal approaches, which limits their ability to supervise empirically based projects.⁹ Underfunding in universities makes resource-

⁶ J M Krannich J R Holbrook & J J McAdams, 'Beyond Thinking Like a Lawyer' and the Traditional Legal Paradigm: Toward a Comprehensive View of Legal Education' (2009) 86 (2) *Denver Law Review* <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/dlr/vol86/iss2/3>; L McNamara, 'Understanding Research Impact in Law: The Research Excellence Framework and Engagement with UK Governments' (2018) 29 *King's Law Journal*, 437 – 469; F Ruffin, 'Indigenisation and Africanisation of Legal Education: Advantaging Legal Pluralism in South Africa. Alternation' (2019) *Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*.

⁷ R A Ngwoke, I P Mbano, & O Helynn, 'A Critical appraisal of doctrinal and Non- doctrinal legal research methodologies in contemporary times' (2023) 3(1) *International Journal of civil law and legal research* 8-10. <https://www.civillawjournal.com>.

⁸ O V Ikpeze, 'Legal Education in the 21st Century Nigeria: Need for Diversity in Content Paradigm' (2015) 39 *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 63-77.

⁹ O N Camillus, I Chibuzo, J E Ighoroje, U M Cyriacus, O Martins, J C Okafor, A I Onwuta, F A Okpara, A S Chibunna, I E Emeka, J Temuhale, O I Juliet, N C Justin, & I P Nnamdi, 'Research Ideologies among Legal Scholars and Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Academic Research Approaches' (2024) 3(3) *Journal of Ecohumanism* 7-10. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i3.3458>.

intensive socio-legal research harder.¹⁰ Regulatory agencies such as the Council of Legal Education and the National Universities Commission support this viewpoint, linking doctrinal competence with professional preparation. These overlapping elements feed a cycle that maintains doctrinal dominance while marginalizing valuable alternatives.

Against this backdrop, the focus of this article is clear: it is time for Nigeria to discard its inherited reliance on doctrine and embrace a hybrid framework for legal research; such a paradigm would maintain the clarity of doctrinal reasoning while embracing empirical findings and the social responsiveness of socio-legal techniques. Without this transition, Nigerian legal education risks becoming outmoded in a rapidly globalized society.

This study has three objectives. It examines the historical domination of doctrinarism in Nigeria, including its strengths and limitations, thereafter, it conducts a comparative review of selected jurisdictions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, India, China, Ghana, and Kenya, that have adopted methodological pluralism. Finally, it proposes a reform framework which, if implemented has the potential to enhance legal research.

The study's significance lies in its timeliness. As the legal profession develops and global concerns rise, Nigerian law graduates must not limit themselves to legal practice at the local level but must be prepared to tackle the challenges in the new world of work. A new approach to legal research is required not only for academic purposes but also for national development; by setting Nigeria's difficulties within global debates and providing a context-specific paradigm, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about how legal education can be both rigorous and socially responsive.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

This section will therefore present an overview of the three basic ideas: legal research, non-doctrinal (socio-legal) research, and research methodology. They provide the conceptual framework for the study.

¹⁰ K M Owolabi, 'Impacts of Covid-19 on Development of Legal Research in Nigeria' (2022) 4(1) *GLS Law Journal* 37-53. <<https://doi.org/10.69974/glsjournal.v4i1.58>>

2.1.1 Legal Research

Legal research is the systematic examination of legal sources in order to answer specific issues. Vibhute and Aynalem¹¹ share the opinion that a systematic technique of finding, interpreting, and applying relevant legal data to a particular subject describes the concept of legal research.

Gasiokwu¹² highlights its predictive aspect, stating that legal research is not only about discovering existing legislation, but also about detecting trends that affect how law may evolve. Legal research can also be defined as the identification and interpretation of statutes, case law, and secondary sources while Anasi¹³ defines it in terms of efficient library use. This narrative follows the doctrinal tradition, in which the goal of study is to "find the law" inside authoritative sources. However, other definitions suggest that legal research extends beyond mere collection. It is an organized reasoning exercise that involves identifying relevant rules, contextualizing them, checking their relevance, and occasionally proposing reforms. It is also a professional skill that supports courtroom representation, legislative drafting, policy advice, and scholarly research.

2.1.2 Non-Doctrinal Research

Non-doctrinal study, often known as socio-legal or empirical legal research, views law not as a set of rules but as a social phenomenon; instead of asking what the law is, it enquires as to how it works and why specific outcomes occur. According to Disemadi,¹⁴ non-doctrinal approaches usually use empirical methods¹⁵ to show how rules of law are used in practice. Chakraborty notes that unlike doctrinal study, which examines the law as written, socio-legal inquiry focuses on how the law is actually utilized and experienced in society.¹⁶ While doctrinal studies of election law may clarify the authority of electoral commissions, a socio-legal study may examine how voters perceive registration processes or how court interventions affect public trust. Similarly, doctrinal

¹¹ K Vibhute and F Aynalem, 'Legal Research: Teaching Materials (2009) Justice and Legal System Research Institute' <https://www.academia.edu/93405567/Legal_Research_Methods_Teaching_Material_Prepared_by_Prof_D_r_Khushal_Vibhute_and_Filipos_Aynalem

¹² M Gasiokwu, *Legal Research and Methodology* (Enugu: Chenglo Limited, 2004) p3.

¹³ S Anasi, 'Digital Libraries and Legal Research in Nigeria: The way forward' (2010) 3(1) *Library and Information Practitioner* 85-86.

¹⁴ H Disemadi, 'Lenses of Legal Research: A Descriptive Essay on Legal Research Methodologies' (2022) *Journal of Judicial Review* 3-4. <https://doi.org/10.37253/jjr.v24i2.7280> accessed 20 March 2025.

¹⁵ such as surveys, interviews, and ethnographic observation.

¹⁶ D Chakraborty, 'Empirical (non-Doctrinal) Research Method and It's role in Legal Research' (2015) *Advances in the Social Sciences*, 3, 23-28.

study in environmental law may uncover statutory constraints on oil development, whereas socio-legal investigation may investigate how impacted populations feel displacement or negotiate compensation. This approach is beneficial in pluralistic communities.

In Nigeria, customary and cultural norms typically regulate daily life in ways not reflected in statutes. Doctrinal research may overlook these behaviours, but socio-legal strategies may detect them. Non-doctrinal research bridges the gap between formal legality and daily experience by gathering data on how law actually works. Critics, however, point out that socio-legal research necessitates stringent standards. Roux advises that multidisciplinary research could prevent methodological laxity as long as standards are followed.¹⁷ Without a suitable design, empirical studies run the risk of yielding experiential rather than applicable results. Nonetheless, the literature agrees that the benefits exceed the risks; socio-legal methods supplement doctrinal clarity providing clear evidence of how the law interacts with society.

2.2 Research Methodology

The concept of research methodology extends beyond either doctrinal or socio-legal study. Methodology is the structured framework that governs investigation, including both methods and the reasoning behind their selection. Chegwe defines methodology as a systematic strategy for solving a research problem while maintaining validity and dependability.¹⁸ Williams-Elegbe and Ojomo add that methodology determines not just which procedures¹⁹ are used, but also why they are chosen.²⁰

In this way, methodology serves as the framework for research. It connects research topics to relevant instruments and ensures that results are both accurate and reliable. In law, methodology can decide whether a study focuses solely on legislation and case law, includes surveys of samples, or merges the two.

Methodology also links research to purpose. A study attempting to anticipate judicial outcomes may use doctrinal reasoning, but one investigating public impression of courts may involve

¹⁷ T R Roux, 'Judging the Quality of Legal Research: A Qualified Response to the Demand for Greater Methodological Rigour' (2014) 24 *Legal education review*, 173.

¹⁸ E Chegwe, *Legal research methodology and project writing* (Ekpoma-Nigeria: Ambrose Ali University press, 2016) p.23 - 24.

¹⁹ Textual analysis, interviews, and fieldwork.

²⁰ S Williams-Edefe and E Ojomo, 'Introduction to Legal Research' (2013) 1 <https://www.studocu.com>.

surveys or interviews. A hybrid approach may integrate the two, therefore guaranteeing that the analysis is both doctrinally correct and socially grounded. For legal education in Nigeria, methodological flexibility is critical. If curricula and faculty training stay focused on doctrinal methodologies, students will lack the ability to choose or mix approaches based on research needs. The core issue is about acknowledging the limitations of doctrinal research and putting it within a larger methodological framework, rather than discarding it altogether.

Legal research, in its broadest definition, is a systematic endeavour to understand and apply the law. Doctrinal research clarifies what the law states, whereas non-doctrinal research demonstrates how it works in practice. Methodology is the framework that governs the selection and combination of these approaches. For Nigeria, the challenge is both philosophical and practical. The scope of legal research has been reduced to doctrinal analysis in terms of education and practice. This made the system stable but reduced its responsiveness. A better grasp of these notions emphasizes the need for reform: legal research must be redefined to include both doctrinal and non-doctrinal dimensions, based on methodological flexibility. Only then will it be able to meet the needs of a pluralistic, globalized, and rapidly changing society.

3.1 Literature Review

Doctrinal approaches have long dominated legal education in Nigeria, as a legacy of British colonial control. Bhat stresses that doctrinalism²¹ focuses on studying statutes, court decisions, and legal theories in order to answer the question "what is the law?".²² Its essence stems from the clarity and stability it brings. Doctrinal research, which organizes legal materials into logical frameworks, enables judges, lawyers, and students to understand the law predictably and precisely. This function is especially significant in a pluralistic system like Nigeria, where common law, Islamic law, and customary law coexist. It creates a shared reference point in a fragmented terrain. The literature identifies various strengths of doctrinal analysis. But highlights its importance in

²¹ Sometimes referred to as black-letter law.

²² P I Bhat, 'Doctrinal Legal Research as a Means of Synthesizing Facts, Thoughts, and Legal Principles,' in P Bhat (ed) *Idea and Methods of Legal Research* (Oxford; Oxford university press, 2020) <https://academic.oup.com>.

combining legal ideas,²³ whilst Banakar observes that its formality promotes consistency and continuity.²⁴

These characteristics enable doctrinal research to stabilize the legal system by establishing reliable rules of interpretation. It teaches students and lawyers in private practice, a disciplined style of reasoning, preparing them for courtroom advocacy and legal drafting. However, researchers recognize that these qualities conceal serious limitations. The very characteristics that make doctrinal study valuable²⁵ limit its ability to capture the dynamic interaction of law and society.

Interpretive subjectivity poses a downside to this. Kharel observes that doctrinal research frequently relies largely on doctrinal interpretation, allowing different scholars or opposing parties in litigation to infer different conclusions from the same provision.²⁶ This dilemma is illustrated in constitutional adjudication, where rival litigants routinely cite identical portions of the Constitution to support contradicting claims. This weakens the perception of doctrinal reasoning's objectivity and reveals its reliance on perspective and circumstance. The second constraint is isolationism. Griffiths criticizes doctrinal research based on its formalism, which frequently isolates law from the social environments it regulates, making research look disconnected from common reality.²⁷ This alienation is especially problematic in Nigeria, where customary and religious traditions continue to have a strong effect.

Doctrinal analysis might clarify statutory rules, but it frequently fails to explain why communities reject them or resolve disputes using local norms. The outcome is a body of study that is formally cohesive but socially disjointed. Doctrinal rigidity also reduces adaptability to change. The COVID-19 epidemic exposed how quickly procedural rules might change when faced with unusual circumstances. Courts conducted virtual hearings and suspended conventional evidentiary norms. In such cases, relying on precedent provided no data regarding justice, access, or validity. According to Ngwoke, Mbano, and Helynn, empirical and socio-legal methodologies would have

²³ n22.

²⁴ n4.

²⁵ Such as rigidity, formality and an emphasis on text.

²⁶ n5.

²⁷ A Griffiths, 'Broadening the Legal Academy, the Study of Customary Law: The Case for Social- Scientific and Anthropological Perspectives' (2017) 20 Potchefstroom *Electronic Law Journal* 1-24.

been more appropriate for investigating how these abrupt advances affected litigants and judicial decisions.²⁸

Finally, doctrinal approach may seem unconcerned with social relevance. In criminal justice, it can specify the legislative limitations of police authority, but it cannot capture the daily realities of police brutality and corruption, which were brought to the fore during the #EndSARS demonstrations. In financial regulation, doctrinal research addresses the legality of fintech operations while ignoring customer experiences with digital currency. In environmental law, it establishes statutory frameworks for oil extraction while disregarding regular problems of the Niger Delta population enduring displacement and pollution. In each situation, doctrinal analysis offers analytical clarity but little insight into how law works in practice.

The literature is becoming increasingly clear that doctrinal research cannot stand alone. Scholars contend that methodological pluralism²⁹ is required to develop socially relevant and intellectually sound conclusions. Mohammed promotes incorporating methodologies based on research issues rather than tradition, cautioning against accepting doctrinalism as the norm.³⁰ Jayeoba agrees, stating that pluralistic cultures require hybrid techniques to meet the complicated realities of law.³¹ Similarly, Ngwoke et al. conclude that empirical research must supplement doctrinalism in order for it to be legitimate in current situations.³² This shift towards pluralism is not limited to Nigeria. According to Banakar, socio-legal and empirical methodologies have emerged in several jurisdictions to challenge the exclusiveness of doctrinal reasoning.³³ What distinguishes Nigeria is the level to which doctrinal supremacy has been institutionalized through curricula, legislation, and professional culture thus making reform both necessary and difficult.

²⁸ R A Ngwoke, I P Mbano, & O Helynn, 'A Critical appraisal of doctrinal and Non-doctrinal legal research methodologies in contemporary times' (2023) 3(1) *International Journal of civil law and legal research* 8-10. <https://www.civillawjournal.com>.

²⁹ The integration of doctrinal, socio-legal and empirical approaches.

³⁰ K Mohammed, 'Combining Methods in legal research' (2016) <https://www.academia.edu>.

³¹ A Jayeoba, 'Resilience of Amalgamated Frameworks of Morality and the Law: Nigeria's Road to Recovery' (2024) 11(6) *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 5-9.

³² n28.

³³ n4.

Another noteworthy point is that training in legal research is frequently delayed until the onset of postgraduate programmes, where it is positioned as a compulsory component of study.³⁴ Students learn to understand statutes and generate case lists, but they are rarely taught how to construct surveys, conduct interviews, or assess empirical data. As a result, graduates have good courtroom argumentation skills but lack the necessary foundation for research-driven practice. This disparity hampers their competitiveness in a globalised environment where law graduates must be adaptive. According to Banakar³⁵ training that concentrates primarily on doctrinal abilities produces attorneys who are skilled at debating but unprepared for policy analysis, regulatory governance, or collaboration between disciplines. For Nigeria, the risk is that graduates will remain confined to litigation while career opportunities in corporate practice, governance, and foreign climes go unexplored.

3.2 Comparative Analysis of Selected Jurisdictions

Examining the situations in other jurisdictions³⁶ provides Nigeria with a set of adaptable models, while also emphasizing the risks of being left behind in this global age.

The American example demonstrates how doctrinal traditions can coexist with significant calls for innovation. Langdell's case technique, which taught students to "think like lawyers" by examining appellate decisions, defined the legal education in the United States for many years. This theoretical foundation is still influential, but it has been steadily complemented by other approaches that adapt to changes in the profession. In the twentieth century, interdisciplinary movements such as law and economics, feminist jurisprudence, and critical race theory questioned the efficacy of doctrinal reasoning. More lately, empirical legal studies have gained traction, resulting in data-driven evaluations of how law works in practice.

According to Krannich, Holbrook, and McAdams, this growth reflects an awareness that legal education must prepare students for responsibilities other than litigation, such as policy research, corporate governance, and regulatory advice.³⁷ The American Bar Association's 2014 accreditation

³⁴ E N Chegwe & M Akatugba, 'Evaluating the Role of a Non-Doctrinal Legal Research Method on Legal Education and Practice in Common Law Africa: Nigeria as a Case Study' (2023) 30 (1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 3-4. <<https://www.northumbriajournals.co.uk>>.

³⁵ n4.

³⁶ USA, UK, China, India, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana.

³⁷ n6.

standards marked a turning point moment when it requires law schools to demonstrate that their graduates acquire both doctrinal competence and broader professional abilities, such as communication, writing, and ethical reasoning. (Hamilton and Schaefer).³⁸ This has inspired curriculum modifications that emphasise legal writing, communication, and ethical formation in addition to doctrinal study. Clinical education has been especially revolutionary, placing students in real-world settings where they interact directly with clients, courts, and communities. According to Hamilton, such integration has made US graduates more adaptable, allowing them to transition between lobbying, advising, and policy-making professions.³⁹

The American experience exemplifies a regulatory strategy: by linking accreditation to competencies, the ABA established an incentive structure that pushed institutions to broaden techniques. In Nigeria, where regulation currently encourages doctrinalism, this example highlights how monitoring bodies may operate as catalysts to bring about needed change.

Cownie and Bradney posit that for much of the twentieth century, law teaching in Britain was doctrinal, with graduates from Oxford, Cambridge, and London emphasizing textual interpretation.⁴⁰ Socio-legal studies first emerged in the mid-century, with institutional recognition from the Socio-Legal Studies Association and financing from various sources. The adoption of the Research Excellence Framework⁴¹ signaled a turning point. According to McNamara, the REF examines both the academic rigour of research and its societal benefit.⁴² Legal scholars are thus encouraged to participate in empirical research, policy discussions, and interdisciplinary analysis. The development broadened the intellectual depth of British legal education by integrating socio-legal methods alongside doctrinal method.

³⁸ N W Hamilton & S Schaefer, 'What Legal Education Can Learn from Medical Education About Competency-Based Learning Outcomes Including Those Related to Professional Formation' (Professionalism) (2015). 29 *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* 399 (2016), U of St. Thomas (Minnesota) Legal Studies Research Paper No. 15-15, <<https://ssrn.com/=2643031>>.

³⁹ N W Hamilton, 'Connecting Prospective Law Students' Goals to the Competencies that Clients and Legal Employers Need to Achieve More Competent Graduates and Stronger Applicant Pools and Employment Outcomes' (2019) 9 (2) *St. Mary's Journal on Legal Malpractice and Ethics* <<https://commons.stmarytx.edu/lmej/vol9/iss2/3/>>.

⁴⁰ F Cownie & A Bradney, 'Socio-legal studies: a challenge to the doctrinal approach' (2013). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283647065_Sociolegal_studies_A_challenge_to_the_doctrinal_approach>.

⁴¹ REF.

⁴² L McNamara, 'Understanding Research Impact in Law: The Research Excellence Framework and Engagement with UK Governments' (2018) 29 *King's Law Journal*, 437 - 469.

The British example explains how incentives matter; by rewarding impact, the REF has encouraged scholars to look beyond narrow doctrinal divergent views and initiate research that informs governance and public life. For Nigeria, the lesson is clear: evaluation regimes that prioritize doctrinal content over everything else hinder creativity. If institutions rewarded impact and interdisciplinarity, methodological pluralism would be more likely to thrive.

South Africa's approach emphasizes the importance of political environment in shaping legal research. The post-apartheid transition showed the limitations of doctrinal reasoning in addressing issues of justice, equality, and reconciliation. While doctrinal study is still required for constitutional interpretation, it has been supplemented by methodologies that investigate law's position in society. Ruffin contends that post-apartheid, South African law schools made significant modifications to incorporate African perspectives and sociopolitical realities, diminishing reliance on the Western doctrinal framework.⁴³

Law schools have responded by incorporating socio-legal research into their curricula, with students working on projects that investigate inequality, access to justice, and the real-life experiences of marginalized people. This method is consistent with the larger democratic aim, ensuring that legal education is not just technically sound but also socially responsible. The South African example is especially applicable in Nigeria. Both countries struggle with several legal systems and histories of inequity. South Africa demonstrates that doctrinal stability and socio-legal innovation can coexist if curricula and pedagogy are purposefully connected with larger political and social objectives.

India is an example of a gradual but consistent transformation. Traditionally, Indian law schools followed colonial doctrinal traditions, with a strong emphasis on laws and case study. However, reform pressures have increased as a result of social justice concerns and the demands of a constantly changing society. According to Singh, multimodal legal studies have gained popularity, albeit typically in conjunction with doctrinal training rather than fully integrated.⁴⁴ Clinical legal education has played a critical part in this development. Barry is of the view that clinics, moot courts, and experiential programs have trained students to tackle major social concerns such as

⁴³ n6.

⁴⁴ A Singh, 'The Life world of Law: Methodological Multiplicity in Legal Pedagogy' (2023) 11 *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 20 - 35.

caste prejudice, environmental degradation, and access to justice.⁴⁵ These innovations are significant not only for pedagogy but also for their political relevance, as they relate legal education to cultural issues; India's trajectory demonstrates that methodological hybridity does not necessitate urgent revision. Clinics, electives, and interdisciplinary cooperation can gradually change the legal education. For Nigeria, this recommends a realistic approach: even with limited resources, incremental adoption of hybrid aspects can provide the groundwork for greater reform.

China, although functioning under a civil law system, demonstrates how economic imperatives can drive legal education reforms. Ruhul maintains that since the 1990s, the government has made significant investments in faculty training, technical infrastructure, and international partnership.⁴⁶ Li observed an increased emphasis on applied and multidisciplinary training,⁴⁷ whilst Hai and Yang emphasize the need to train "new law talents" capable of managing digital governance and formulating environmental regulation.⁴⁸ Song and Fan agree that empirical approaches are increasingly important in bridging the gap between statutes and practice. By supporting socio-legal study that corresponds with national interests, the state has effectively promoted hybridity within a civil law framework.⁴⁹ Nigeria may learn from China's example that state priorities can influence reform without neglecting doctrinal method.

In Ghana, colonial heritage has resulted in a legal system that is formally consistent but socially rigid. Yin and Atupare contend that, despite a strong constitutional framework, the continuation of doctrinal rigidity hinders responsiveness to social circumstances. They advocate for sociological jurisprudence that integrates legal education within Ghana's cultural and political contexts.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ M M Barry, 'Clinical Legal Education in the Law University: Goals and Challenges' (2008) 11 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, 27-50.

⁴⁶ M Ruhul, A Basit, L Qu, M Feroz, X Pan, S Zaheer, & W Ullah, 'From Tradition to Modernity: China's Education System "A Product of Legal Design"' (2025) *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*.

⁴⁷ B Li, *Analysis on the Connotative Development Path of Law Education in Chinese Applied Undergraduate Universities*. (2023) Yixin Publisher.

⁴⁸ Y Hai, & W Yang, 'On the innovation of the training mechanism of new law talents based on the balance of supply and demand' (2023) *International Journal of Education and Social Science Research*. <<https://doi.org/10.37500/ijessr.2023.6213>>.

⁴⁹ Y Song, & H Fan, 'The 70 Years of Legal Education in China from 1949 to 2023: Historical Development' Current Issues and Future Innovations. (2024) 11 *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 201 - 218.

⁵⁰ E T. Yin & P A Atupare, 'Ghana's need for sociological jurisprudence: a critical application of Roscoe Pound's theory' (2025). *UCC Law Journal*. 2-3.

In Kenya, clinical legal education has emerged as a critical reform tool for bridging the gap between legal education and real-world access to justice. According to Kotonya, clinics not only teach students advocacy skills but also inculcate social responsibility, especially in instances where state-provided legal aid is severely limited.⁵¹ Kenya's example demonstrates how methodological pluralism may originate from grassroots needs. Clinical programs increase teaching while also addressing societal gaps. For Nigeria, this paradigm emphasizes the importance of linking change with pressing social demands, such as access to justice or regulatory governance.

3.2.1 Lessons for Nigeria

Nigeria's emphasis on doctrinal studies disconnects it from contemporary global developments. While other countries have adapted to new realities, Nigeria remains in a colonial-era model. The comparative analysis demonstrates that change is achievable under a variety of contexts, including wealth or resource scarcity, common or civil law, political stability. The key is the institutional commitment to combine doctrinal clarity with empirical and socio-legal knowledge. If Nigeria continues on its current course, its graduates risk becoming technically competent but globally uncompetitive. To avoid this consequence, change must draw on experiences learnt from developed climes.

3.2.2 Challenges

The first barrier is historical. During colonial authority, legal education was imported from Britain to Nigeria, with the establishment of the Council of Legal Education and the Nigerian Law School in 1962 to replicate the English model. That model prioritized doctrinal reasoning and courtroom advocacy, with little regard for socio-legal or empirical research. Designing curricula reflects this heritage. While Ikpeze frowns at the fact that courses⁵² that could broaden viewpoints are frequently electives or nonexistent in undergraduate programs, case law, statutory interpretation, and black-letter law receive a lot of attention.⁵³ Another constraint is faculty capacity. Camillus et al notes that due to their doctrinal-only training, the majority of law professors lack experience with empirical or multidisciplinary research.⁵⁴ As a result, many academics are unable to

⁵¹ A Kotonya, 'A Systematic Quantitative Review of Literature on Social Justice and Clinical Legal Education in Africa' (2023) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*. 5-6.

⁵² like legal sociology, law and development, or empirical research methodologies.

⁵³ n8.

⁵⁴ n9.

supervise projects involving interviews, data analysis, or fieldwork. Sometimes resistance extends beyond conviction: empirical and socio-legal techniques are rejected as "political" or "unscientific," which makes them more difficult to incorporate. This results in a cycle of reproduction where the only approaches taught are doctrinal.

Financial limitations further complicate issues. Funding for fieldwork, data collection, and analysis are necessary for empirical research, but most Nigerian institutions lack these resources. Owolabi is of the view that many faculties find it difficult to maintain their libraries, let alone make investments in digital infrastructure due to recurrent underfunding.⁵⁵ The dearth of resources indirectly supports doctrinalism, which only requires casebooks and legislation. Although socio-legal approaches offer deeper insights, Singhal and Malik note that they require time, money, and teamwork commitments.⁵⁶ These difficulties are exacerbated by academic culture. Research is underappreciated in comparison to teaching and administrative responsibilities, and promotion schemes favour publication volume over creativity or impact on society; while Tella details how pressures have caused some academics to publish in predatory sites,⁵⁷ Adomi and Mordi demonstrate how the present system of assessment discourages younger researchers from spending time on empirical research that would not be considered for promotion.⁵⁸ Although interdisciplinarity has its benefits, Roux warns that it also comes with strict requirements; in the absence of institutional support, legal scholars frequently turn to safer, purely doctrinal avenues.⁵⁹

Another factor is professional inclination. The development of litigation lawyers remains top priority of legal education in Nigeria however, Onoyeyan & Bamgbose,⁶⁰ research report which indicates that a large number of law students now have no intention of practicing law; instead, they

⁵⁵ n10.

⁵⁶ A K Singhal, & I A Malik, 'Doctrinal and socio-legal methods of research: merits and demerits'(2012) 2(7) *Educational Research Journal* 252-256. <https://www.resjournals.com>.

⁵⁷ A Tella, 'Nigerian Academics Patronizing Predatory Journals: Implications for Scholarly Communication' (2020) 51 *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 182 - 196.

⁵⁸ E E Adomi, & C Mordi, *Publication in foreign journals and promotion of academics in Nigeria* (2003) Learned Publishing, 16.

⁵⁹ n17.

⁶⁰ G O Onoyeyan & O Bamgbose, 'Career Opportunities in Law: Some Evidence on Career Choices of Nigerian Law Students.' (2019) 47 *International Journal of Legal Information*, 132 - 140.

hope to work elsewhere.⁶¹ Another limitation is the large number of academic members who maintain a preference for paper-based research while opposing digital transformation⁶².

Even when online tools were used during the COVID-19 pandemic, their effectiveness was diminished by inadequate infrastructure and restricted internet access, according to Egielewa et al⁶³. Conducting or supervising empirical research is challenging without digital research tools, statistical software, or dependable access to online databases. Lastly, regulatory agencies such as the Nigerian Bar Association and the Council of Legal Education accept that the hallmark of exceptional legal education is doctrinal competence. Their reluctance to adopt and acknowledge socio-legal method slows down transformation. Additionally, the National Association of Law Teachers has been hesitant to officially acknowledge other viewpoints, generating additional opposition.⁶⁴ In actuality, regulators who have the ability to advocate for reform frequently uphold the status quo.

Proposed Framework for Research Methodology Reform

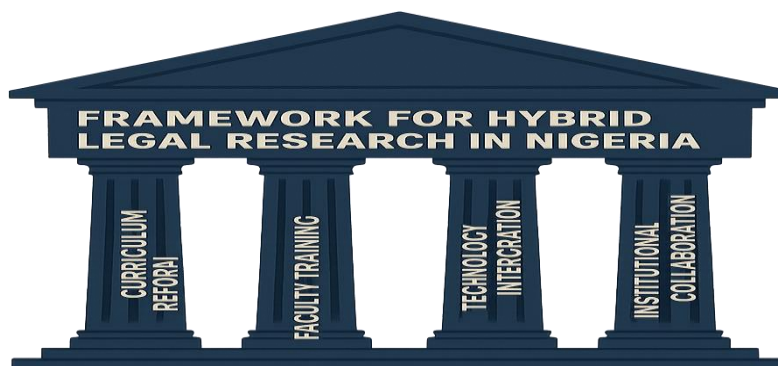


Fig 1.

Source: Author

⁶¹ corporate governance, alternative dispute resolution, academia, or international organisations.

⁶² A Alayoku & M Akinola, 'Technology and legal education in Nigeria: Marital bliss or blow?' (2023) 5 (2) *Kampala International University law journal*. <<https://kiulj.kiu.ac.ug>>.

⁶³ P E Egielewa P O Idogho, F O Iyalomhe, & G T Cirella, 'COVID-19 and digitized education: Analysis of online learning in Nigerian higher education' (2021) 19. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 19 – 35.

⁶⁴ n9.

Curriculum Reform: The foundation of legal education lies in the curriculum. Rethinking the design and substance of courses must be the first step towards reform. The emphasis on doctrinal analysis should remain in core courses, but they should also include required socio-legal and empirical components. Students might be required to perform field research on the practical experiences of constitutional rights as part of a course on law and society including constitutional law. Criminal law courses could also incorporate empirical investigations on policing and sentencing.

Comparative models demonstrate that this is achievable. Accreditation standards in the United States incorporate professional skills into required courses. Research evaluation systems in the United Kingdom have promoted modules that link ideology to social impact. Nigeria could adopt these strategies by mandating that academic institutions show that their graduates have received instruction in both empirical reasoning and doctrinal competency. Assessment is another aspect of curriculum improvement. Current procedures frequently encourage rote memorization of laws and court decisions. In order to promote methodological flexibility, a revised system should include project-based evaluations that require students to embark on small-scale empirical investigations. This would eventually normalize socio-legal research as a component of the law academic curriculum.

Faculty Training: Training sessions on socio-legal research techniques, backed by collaborations with foreign organizations should be organized while rethinking promotion and recruitment standards. Researchers ought to respect methodological diversity and reward works that use empirical methods just as much as those that use doctrinal reasoning. Sometimes resistance to non-doctrinal approaches is a matter of perception rather than ability. Interdisciplinary seminars, faculty exchanges, and cooperative initiatives can all contribute to the normalization of methodological heterogeneity. South Africa offers a helpful example. Deliberate attempts to retrain teachers and incorporate indigenous perspectives were part of the post-apartheid reforms. By coordinating faculty development with national concerns like regulatory governance or access to justice, Nigeria might adopt a similar approach.

By connecting faculty training to urgent societal needs, transformation would seem more like a professional requirement.

Technology Integration: In legal research, technology is no longer a choice; however, insufficient internet connectivity, inadequate infrastructure, and opposition to digital transformation continue to hinder Nigerian law education. Due to cultural commitment to old methods or a lack of training, many law schools rely primarily on paper-based resources, and when online tools are available, they are frequently underutilized. Two levels of technology integration are required. Academic institutions must first make investments in digital infrastructure,⁶⁵ also effective use of these tools requires continuous training for both teachers and students. Incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum will guarantee that graduates are capable of conducting legal research online, analyzing data, and interacting with issues related to digital governance. The COVID-19 epidemic showed how digital tools can be both powerful and vulnerable. Limited bandwidth and device access reduced the efficiency of virtual classes, even though some universities adopted it. In the future, hybrid models that incorporate digital and conventional methods will be commonplace. One way to prepare students for the hybrid character of modern legal practice is to have them participate in both in-person and virtual moot courts. The emphasis of China's reforms has been on technological proficiency as a fundamental ability for "new law talents" and provides direction on this.

Finally, cooperation between institutions is necessary if reform must take place. If the NUC and CLE updated their certification requirements to incorporate empirical and interdisciplinary capabilities, that would expedite the transformation process. Additionally, cooperation must transcend national boundaries. Collaborations with international academic institutions, charitable organizations, and trade organizations can offer education, materials, and reform models. Institutional cooperation is similarly crucial within Nigeria. Law faculties should collaborate with courts, regulatory bodies, NGOs, and community groups in order to give students chances for experiential learning. Civil society organizations might partner with clinics that deal with environmental law or access to justice, connecting academic research to urgent societal issues. In addition to improving education, these partnerships would increase the profession's legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

⁶⁵ Including dependable internet, online database access, and statistical tools for empirical research.

4.1 Conclusion

The colonial legacy of Nigerian legal education has kept it firmly rooted, giving doctrinal research precedence over methodological diversity. Although this method has provided consistency and clarity, it has also encouraged inflexibility, seclusion, and a lingering discrepancy between the law as it exists in books and in practice. Doctrinalism does not have to be abandoned, according to comparative experience in the US, UK, South Africa, India, China, Ghana, and Kenya.

This paper demonstrates that doctrinalism can be repositioned within a pluralist framework rather than being totally discarded. In the jurisdictions discussed above, it was revealed that external forces, whether sociological, political, or regulatory, forced their law school to expand its approaches in each instance, resulting in graduates who were more prepared for modern practice.

4.2 Recommendations

To reposition Nigerian legal education for contemporary relevance, the following measures are proposed:

1. Curriculum Reform –should incorporate socio-legal and empirical elements directly into doctrinal courses, ensuring that students experience methodological diversity as part of their core training.
2. Faculty Development – Provide training in socio-legal and empirical methods; revise promotion criteria to reward innovation and methodological diversity.
3. Technology Integration – Meaningful reform is also dependent on digital transformation: universities must ensure dependable internet connection, improve access to online legal databases, and train professors and students to use these resources routinely in both teaching and research.
4. Institutional Collaboration – Update accreditation standards to require pluralist methodologies; encourage partnerships with courts, NGOs, and regional law schools for clinical and experiential learning.
5. Research Culture Shift – Link research to national development priorities, promote socially impactful projects, and create platforms for interdisciplinary scholarship.

By taking these steps collectively, Nigerian legal education could move beyond doctrinal rigidity while retaining its analytical capabilities, resulting in a system which is more pluralist, balanced, and globally competitive.

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