

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN HISTORICAL AND LEGAL RESEARCH: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

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Abstract

Research methodology is frequently taught within disciplinary boundaries. Historians learn to work with archives, chronology, provenance, oral tradition, source criticism and corroboration; lawyers are trained to identify constitutions, statutes, judicial decisions and other authorities. Yet historical and legal researchers frequently confront substantially similar epistemological problems. Both must determine whether a source is authentic, what it means, how much reliance may properly be placed upon it, what other evidence supports or contradicts it, and how a scholarly claim can be made capable of independent verification. Drawing upon classical and contemporary scholarship in historical and legal methodology, Nigerian land law, constitutional history, oral tradition, empirical research and recent debates concerning generative artificial intelligence, this article examines these convergences and divergences. It develops the Ifidon Research Sequence, derived from a methodological formulation associated with Ifidon's teaching, according to which the nature of the research determines the materials required and the nature of those materials determines the methodology appropriate for their analysis. The article argued that historians need not become lawyers, nor lawyers historians; where a research problem crosses disciplinary boundaries, however, familiarity with the other discipline's methods can substantially improve the interrogation of evidence. It further argues that methodology should follow an evidential sequence rather than methodological fashion: the research question determines the materials, and the materials determine the method. In an age in which information has become extraordinarily easy to produce and retrieve, the

enduring obligation of scholarship remains more demanding: interrogate the source and verify the evidence.

Keywords: Research Methodology; Historical Research; Legal Research; Source Criticism; *Ifidon Research Sequence*; Artificial Intelligence

1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF KNOWING

In April 1983, Stern announced that it possessed a remarkable cache of sixty volumes said to be Adolf Hitler's private diaries. The discovery appeared capable of altering historical understanding of one of the most intensively studied political figures of the twentieth century. Yet within days, material examination, archival criticism and textual comparison exposed the documents as crude forgeries. The German Federal Archives later explained that bindings, threads, paper and inks were inconsistent with the alleged period, while internal examination revealed chronological and historical errors. Six archivists also detected a revealing dependence upon Max Domarus's published compilation of Hitler's speeches and proclamations: errors in Domarus migrated into the supposed diaries and, where Domarus fell silent, the diaries often did likewise.¹ The episode remains a compact laboratory of historical method. Material analysis questioned the physical source; provenance and chronology were tested; internal criticism exposed error; comparison with another text revealed dependence. The decisive lesson lies not merely in the eventual discovery of forgery but in the questions by which authenticity was tested. And so, the importance of a source increases, rather than diminishes, the obligation to authenticate it.

Consider a second object: an old deed produced in a dispute over family land. The document may be physically genuine and may have been executed on the date it bears. That does not establish that the grantor possessed title capable of transfer, that the instrument conveyed the interest now asserted, or that later events did not alter the legal position. A third example belongs to

¹ Bundesarchiv, 'Pressekonferenz des Bundesarchivs zu Hitler-Tagebüchern' (discussing the April-May 1983 examination of the purported diaries and the convergence of material, forensic and archival findings).

the digital age. A citation may contain an author, title, journal, volume, year, page range and DOI and nevertheless refer to a work that has never existed. These examples arise in different disciplines and technologies, but they present the same foundational problem: how does the researcher know what he claims to know?

Historical and legal research is often taught as comprising separate methodological worlds. The historian is associated with archives, chronology, provenance, oral testimony, contextualisation and source criticism; the lawyer with constitutions, statutes, cases, treaties, regulations, hierarchy, precedent and interpretation. The separation is understandable, but incomplete. Both disciplines reconstruct propositions from evidence. Both must distinguish appearance from authenticity, assertion from proof, repetition from corroboration and citation from verification. Their divergence becomes most visible not in whether they use evidence, but in what they ask evidence to do. Historical inquiry commonly seeks a defensible reconstruction or explanation of the past. Legal inquiry may seek the content, meaning, validity or consequence of a norm. The same source can therefore be valuable to both disciplines while carrying different weight and performing different intellectual work.

This article argues for reciprocal methodological literacy: enough familiarity with a neighbouring discipline to recognise when the materials demanded by a research question cannot responsibly be interpreted through one's principal disciplinary training alone. The lawyer need not become a historian, nor the historian a lawyer. Each, however, becomes a better researcher by learning how the other interrogates evidence. The paper develops this argument through Nigerian and comparative illustrations and ultimately proposes an Integrated Research Verification Framework. Its deeper subject is not disciplinary comparison for its own sake. It is the movement from information to defensible knowledge.

1.1 Research Design and Method

This article adopts a conceptual, comparative and doctrinal-historical research design. It does not test a statistical hypothesis or claim that its examples constitute a representative sample of historical and legal research. Rather, it uses purposively selected methodological episodes and source-types as diagnostic cases: the Hitler Diaries expose problems of authenticity, provenance and dependence; *Idundun v Okumagba* exposes the distinction between evidential reconstruction and legally cognisable proof; Nigerian constitutional materials illustrate the movement between archival reconstruction and normative legal consequence; oral tradition and interviewing reveal the special demands of human-source evidence; empirical legal research tests the fitness of method to question; and generative artificial intelligence exposes the contemporary problem of bibliographical plausibility without verification. The comparative logic is therefore functional rather than jurisdictional: each example is selected because it reveals a methodological problem that can be interrogated across the boundary between historical and legal inquiry.

The article proceeds by close reading and synthesis of methodological scholarship, primary legal and constitutional materials, professional guidance and selected contemporary research on artificial intelligence. Its analytical method is iterative but proposition-led. A methodological proposition is first identified, the kind of evidence capable of supporting or challenging it is then considered, and the relevant materials are examined according to their disciplinary character and authority. The purpose is not to collapse History and Law into a single method, but to identify where their evidential disciplines converge, where their standards diverge, and what additional competence is required when a research question crosses from one domain into the other.

The literature considered in the sections that follow is rich within its respective domains: historical methodology develops source criticism, provenance, context and corroboration; doctrinal legal methodology develops authority, hierarchy and interpretation; empirical legal research develops

research design and data discipline; legal-history scholarship warns against selective historical advocacy; and research-ethics literature addresses the conditions under which human evidence may be obtained and used. Nor is this article the first to seek a more explicit methodological architecture. Kipping, Wadhwani and Bucheli organise the interpretation of historical sources around source criticism, triangulation and hermeneutic contextualisation.² Majeed, Hilal and Ilyas propose a seven-step methodology specifically for historical-legal research.³ Nkansah, approaching interdisciplinarity from legal research, proposes a step-by-step design that begins with doctrinal legal analysis, obtains non-law data through social-science methods and then brings the two sets of findings into a coherent account. These neighbouring frameworks sharpen rather than displace the problem addressed here.⁴ They principally explain how historical sources may be interpreted, how historical-legal research may be conducted, or how legal and non-legal data may be combined. The present article asks a different, though overlapping, question: once a research problem crosses disciplinary boundaries, how can the researcher determine what a source can prove, distinguish evidential quality from disciplinary status and normative authority, recognise when additional disciplinary competence is required, and expose the resulting inference to independent verification? The gap addressed here therefore lies not in the absence of methodological principles or interdisciplinary frameworks, but in the incomplete integration of source selection, source scrutiny, source weight, disciplinary competence and citation within one cross-disciplinary

² Matthias Kipping, R Daniel Wadhwani and Marcelo Bucheli, 'Analyzing and Interpreting Historical Sources: A Basic Methodology' in Marcelo Bucheli and R Daniel Wadhwani (eds), *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods* (OUP 2014) 312-20.

³ Nasir Majeed, Amjad Hilal and Rabia Ilyas, 'On Historical and Historical-Legal Research: Forms, Challenges and Methodologies' (2023) 5(2) *Pakistan Journal of Social Research* 534-36.

⁴ Lydia A Nkansah, 'A Framework for an Interdisciplinary Legal Research Methodology: A Proposed Step by Step Approach' (Centre for Interdisciplinary Legal Studies, University of Hong Kong, 26 September 2024) pt III.

verification landscape. The article claims originality in that synthesis and sequencing rather than in the invention of each constituent practice.

2. METHOD, METHODOLOGY AND THE DISCIPLINE OF INQUIRY

Method and methodology are frequently used interchangeably, yet the distinction matters. A method is a technique or procedure by which evidence is gathered or analysed; methodology concerns the reasoned architecture by which methods are selected, related to a research problem and justified. Legal research scholarship has accordingly distinguished doctrinal analysis from empirical and interdisciplinary approaches.⁵ It has also insisted that research design must respond to the nature of the inquiry.⁶ The point is elementary but often violated in practice. A questionnaire, interview, archive visit, database search or doctrinal case analysis does not become methodologically sound merely because it is recognisable as a research technique. Its fitness depends upon the question it is being asked to answer.

A particularly useful formulation comes from Professor Ehimika A. Ifidon's teaching of historical research methodology at the University of Benin. His classroom formulation emphasises that the nature of the research to be conducted determines the nature of the materials to be sourced, and that the nature of those materials determines the methodology appropriate for analysing them. This article adopts the descriptive expression Ifidon Research Sequence for that formulation and develops its implications across historical and legal research. The sequence may be stated simply: *Research Question* → *Required Materials* → *Methodology of Analysis*. Its memorable form is even shorter: the question determines the materials; the materials determine the method.⁷

⁵ Terry Hutchinson and Nigel Duncan, 'Defining and Describing What We Do: Doctrinal Legal Research' (2012) 17(1) *Deakin Law Review* 83, 85.

⁶ P Ishwara Bhat, *Idea and Methods of Legal Research* (OUP 2020) ch 4.

⁷ Ehimika A Ifidon, Professor of History, Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin. The formulation in the text derives from Professor Ifidon's teaching of historical research methodology, in which he emphasises the

The attribution is deliberately narrow. This article does not claim that the general proposition that research questions influence methodological choice originated with Professor Ifidon. The distinctive feature attributed to his teaching is the intervening evidential stage: the nature of the research determines the materials required, and the nature of those materials in turn determines the methodology appropriate to their analysis. The expression '*Ifidon Research Sequence*' names that three-stage emphasis as developed in this article; it does not convert a classroom formulation into a claim of exclusive priority over the wider methodological proposition that method should fit question.

The familiar statement that method follows question is therefore correct but incomplete. Between question and method stands evidence. The research question identifies what must be known. What must be known determines the materials that must be sought. The character of those materials determines how they should be analysed. In actual research the movement is iterative: a newly discovered archive may refine the question, a witness may reveal an unexpected issue, or a case may expose a doctrinal assumption that requires reconsideration. Yet the intellectual justification still flows in the stated direction. The defective inversion begins with a fashionable technique, gathers convenient material and then manufactures a question capable of accommodating it.

This sequence is equally useful in Law. Doctrinal legal research synthesises facts, legal principles and authoritative materials through a mode of inquiry different from empirical investigation.⁸ If the question concerns the meaning

sequential relationship between the nature of the research undertaken, the materials required for that research and the methodology appropriate for analysing those materials. The expression 'Ifidon Research Sequence' is adopted in this article as a descriptive name for that formulation and for its further development here; it is not intended to suggest that Professor Ifidon has himself published or named the principle under that title.

⁸ Bhat (n 7) ch 5, 143-68.

of a constitutional provision, the researcher ordinarily begins with authoritative legal texts and interpretive materials. If the question concerns the experiences of practitioners applying that provision, interviews or questionnaires may become appropriate. If the question concerns why the provision emerged in its particular form, constitutional history and archival materials become necessary. The subject may remain the same while the evidential need changes; once the evidential need changes, the methodology may change with it.

3. HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SOURCE CRITICISM

Historical research is distinguished not simply by its concern with the past but by the discipline with which traces of the past are converted into historical propositions. Marc Bloch's classic account treated the historian's craft as an inquiry into evidence rather than a passive collection of chronicles.⁹ E. H. Carr foregrounded the historian's role in selecting and interpreting historical facts.¹⁰ G. R. Elton, by contrast, placed greater confidence in disciplined historical research and the critical handling of evidence.¹¹ John Tosh's modern treatment continues the emphasis on the critical use of sources, context and explanation.¹² These debates matter because historical evidence rarely arrives with its meaning attached. Documents are produced by persons and institutions for purposes other than the later researcher's project. They survive unevenly, preserve some voices better than others, and may contain mistakes, reflect self-interest, omit significant information or involve deliberate deception, problems that remain common in contemporary research.

The conventional distinction between primary and secondary sources is useful but relational. A colonial legal textbook may be a secondary authority

⁹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Peter Putnam tr, Manchester University Press 1992) 66-70.

¹⁰ E H Carr, *What Is History?* (Macmillan 1961) ch 1, 1-12.

¹¹ G R Elton, *The Practice of History* (Fontana 1967) ch 2 ('Research').

¹² John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (7th edn, Routledge 2021) ch 4.

when the question is what the law was, yet become primary historical evidence when the question is how lawyers of that period understood colonial law. Femi Owolade makes this methodological movement explicit in his study of colonial legal history in Northern Nigeria, observing that legal writings ordinarily treated as secondary in legal research can constitute important primary sources for historians.¹³ The status of a source therefore depends partly upon the proposition it is asked to establish.

Source criticism is commonly discussed through external and internal criticism. External criticism asks whether the source is what it purports to be: who created it, when, through what physical process, and whether its provenance is credible. Internal criticism asks what the source says, what the creator could have known, what interests shaped the account, what contradictions appear and how the claim compares with other evidence. The *Hitler Diaries* demonstrate why the two should operate together. Material testing exposed physical incompatibilities with the claimed period, while textual examination revealed chronological errors and dependence upon Domarus.¹⁴ Two texts do not corroborate one another merely because they contain the same information. If one was copied from the other, similarity may prove dependence rather than independence. The obligation to distrust appearances is captured with unusual economy outside the conventional methodological literature. In *Can't C Me*, Tupac Shakur cautions, 'Don't believe everything you read'.¹⁵ The line is brief, but its methodological implication is substantial. A proposition does not become true because it has been printed, repeated or attractively presented. The researcher must still ask who produced it, in what circumstances, from what knowledge, for what purpose, and whether independent evidence supports it. The *Hitler Diaries* supply an almost literal historical demonstration of that warning: documentary appearance created credibility before source criticism destroyed

¹³ Femi Owolade, 'Writing a Colonial Legal History of Northern Nigeria: An Analysis of Methods and Sources' (2023) 50 *History in Africa* 73, 89.

¹⁴ Bundesarchiv (n 2). The Federal Archives records both material inconsistencies and textual dependence upon Max Domarus's published compilation.

¹⁵ 2Pac, 'Can't C Me' on *All Eyez on Me* (Death Row/Interscope Records 1996).

it. In historical research, therefore, scepticism towards the written word is not irreverence towards sources; it is one of the conditions by which a source becomes usable evidence.

Authenticity is not truth. A genuine diary may lie. A genuine witness may be mistaken. A genuine official report may accurately record an institution's position while omitting competing voices. Historical method therefore does not end when authenticity is established. The accomplished researcher is distinguished less by the number of sources collected than by the quality of the questions put to them.

4. CONTEXT, MEANING AND THE PROBLEM OF ANACHRONISM

The source must also be read within the world that made it intelligible. Quentin Skinner's methodological intervention remains central because he criticised approaches that treated canonical texts as repositories of timeless answers and thereby risked reading an old text 'as though it were written by a contemporary'.¹⁶ Context is not decorative background. Language carries historically situated possibilities; political actors use words to perform acts, justify institutions, attack opponents and respond to problems that may no longer be visible to the modern reader. A historically defensible interpretation therefore asks not only what words can mean now but what they could reasonably have meant and done in the circumstances in which they were used.

The warning is especially important in constitutional research. A constitution is simultaneously an historical text and an operative legal instrument. Historical contextualisation may illuminate why language emerged, what alternatives were rejected, what compromises were struck and what institutional problems occupied the framers. It does not follow that historical

¹⁶ Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas' in *Visions of Politics*, vol 1, *Regarding Method* (CUP 2002) 57, 57. Skinner opens the essay by identifying and criticising the assumption that classic texts should be read 'as though it were written by a contemporary'.

reconstruction exhausts contemporary legal meaning. The historian may ask what constitutional actors understood themselves to be doing; the lawyer must additionally ask what legal instrument ultimately emerged, what authority it possesses, how later institutions interpreted it and what consequences current doctrine attaches to it.

Anachronism can therefore occur in two directions. The historian may impose present categories upon past actors, while the lawyer may select historical fragments because they conveniently resemble a contemporary doctrinal position. Context protects against both errors. Words survive more easily than contexts, and a quotation can be verbally exact while methodologically misleading. This distinction between locational accuracy and representational fairness will become important when citation is examined later.

5. LEGAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AUTHORITY, HIERARCHY AND INTERPRETATION

Legal research shares the historian's concern with authenticity, reliability and interpretation, but adds a feature that is unusually formalised: authority. Doctrinal legal research identifies and synthesises legal principles through constitutions, legislation, judicial decisions and other recognised legal materials.¹⁷ These sources do not possess identical force merely because they are all primary legal materials. Constitutional supremacy, court hierarchy, jurisdiction, commencement, amendment, repeal, precedent and the distinction between *ratio decidendi* and *obiter dicta* may determine what legal work a source can perform. Classification identifies the kind of source; hierarchy helps determine its normative consequence.

The lawyer's concern with authority does not displace the more fundamental research obligation to establish what can responsibly be said to be true. Lord Dinning's formulation in *Jones v National Coal Board* is particularly apt: His object, above all, is to find out the truth, and to do justice according to

¹⁷ Bhat (n 7) ch 5, 143-68.

law.¹⁸ Although Denning was describing the judicial function within an adversarial trial, the methodological significance is wider. Legal research is not exhausted by locating authorities or arranging them according to hierarchy. The researcher must read the authorities closely, distinguish holding from dictum, test factual and historical assumptions, confront contrary materials and resist the temptation to enlist a case merely because a convenient sentence appears to support the desired conclusion. Authority determines the legal weight of a source; disciplined interrogation determines whether the researcher has understood and used that authority honestly. Historical value and legal authority are therefore different attributes. A private letter written by a minister during a constitutional crisis may be historically invaluable while possessing no normative force. A Supreme Court judgment may be legally binding while containing an incidental historical proposition that remains open to ordinary historical criticism. The historian ordinarily asks what evidential weight a source deserves. The doctrinal lawyer must additionally ask what legal authority it possesses. Authority is not a synonym for reliability, and reliability is not a synonym for truth.

Owolade's colonial legal-history analysis illustrates the mobility of source status across disciplines. Legal commentaries that are secondary to a lawyer may become primary evidence to an historian investigating colonial legal thought.¹⁹ A source may therefore be authoritative for one purpose and deficient for another. This is not methodological relativism. It is a demand that the researcher identify the proposition for which the source is being used.

6. *IDUNDUN V OKUMAGBA*: LAND LITIGATION AS A METHODOLOGICAL LABORATORY

If the *Hitler Diaries* operate in this article as a laboratory of historical authentication, *Idundun v Okumagba* operates as its legal counterpart: a

¹⁸ *Jones v National Coal Board* [1957] 2 QB 55 (CA) 63 (Denning LJ).

¹⁹ Owolade (n 14) 89.

laboratory of proof, authority and the legal consequences attached to evidence.

Few Nigerian decisions provide a more useful bridge between legal proof and historical reconstruction than *Idundun v Okumagba*. The Supreme Court identified five recognised modes of proving ownership of land: traditional evidence; production of duly authenticated documents of title; acts of ownership extending over a sufficient length of time and sufficiently numerous and positive; acts of long possession and enjoyment; and possession of connected or adjacent land in circumstances rendering ownership of the disputed land probable.²⁰ For present purposes, these may be understood as distinct evidential structures. The Court supplied the legal modes; their treatment here as evidential structures is the methodological analysis advanced in this article.

Traditional evidence raises questions of memory, genealogy and transmission. Documentary title raises authenticity, execution, provenance and legal capacity. Acts of ownership and possession require patterns of conduct to be reconstructed across time. Adjacent-land possession invites inferential reasoning from surrounding circumstances. The five modes therefore reveal that legal proof may depend upon precisely the kinds of materials with which historians are familiar, while subjecting them to a distinct legal purpose: establishment of a legally cognisable title under rules of burden and proof.

The judgment contains an even more memorable methodological warning. In considering books relied upon to support traditional history, the Court approved Lionel Brett JSC's statement that courts should not be 'hypnotised by the authority of print'.²¹ The warning reaches far beyond land litigation. Publication is not authentication. Print is not corroboration. The appearance of scholarship does not relieve a researcher of the obligation to ask who

²⁰ *D O Idundun & Ors v Daniel Okumagba & Ors* (1976) 9-10 SC 227, 246.

²¹ *ibid* 246, approving Lionel Brett JSC's warning that courts should not be 'hypnotized by the authority of print'.

produced the information, upon what knowledge, in what circumstances and with what opportunity for verification.

The documentary mode also demonstrates why authenticity is not title. A deed can be physically genuine and correctly executed yet fail to establish the title asserted if the grantor possessed no transferable interest. The historian may be satisfied that a transaction occurred; the lawyer must ask what legal interest, if any, the transaction created. The historian examining generations of occupation may ask when possession began, how boundaries were understood and how family memory developed. The court asks whether the evidence satisfies a recognised mode of proving the title asserted by the party who bears the burden. The same evidence is interrogated through overlapping but non-identical questions.

7. ORAL TRADITION, ORAL HISTORY AND THE HUMAN SOURCE

Jan Vansina's work remains foundational for the disciplined use of oral tradition. He treated oral tradition as both process and product and distinguished transmitted oral messages from the stable written text. Oral history, oral tradition and research interviewing should not be used as synonyms. Oral history ordinarily gathers recollections concerning events or experiences within living memory.²² Oral tradition, in Vansina's specialised sense, involves messages transmitted orally beyond the immediate eyewitness generation. Research interviewing is broader still and may concern present experience, opinion, professional practice or memory.

The difference matters because transmission changes the evidential problem. Vansina emphasised the fluid and mnemonic character of oral messages and the need to move beyond rules developed for stable written sources.²³ The researcher must ask who first witnessed the event, through how many persons the account passed, what circumstances shaped transmission, which

²² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (University of Wisconsin Press 1985) 3.

²³ *ibid* 147.

elements remained stable and which changed, and what familial, political or cultural interests influenced preservation. Collecting testimony is not the same thing as analysing testimony.

Suppose two respected elders give substantially identical accounts of the founding of a community. Agreement may be impressive, but it does not establish independence. Both may derive their account from different eyewitness traditions; equally, both may have learned it from the same elder, school text, radio programme or published local history. Multiplicity is not necessarily independence. The better question is not merely how many sources agree, but how many independent evidential routes lead to the proposition. The same problem appears online when twenty websites reproduce one erroneous source and are mistakenly counted as twenty confirmations.

The connection with *Idundun* is immediate because traditional evidence is one recognised route to proving ownership.²⁴ Yet the disciplines employ the evidence for different institutional purposes. The historian evaluates transmission in order to reconstruct the past; the court evaluates testimony under legal rules of admissibility, burden, credibility and proof. The overlap is substantial, but the consequence of the inference differs.

8. THE LAWYER-CLIENT INTERVIEW AS HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Legal research also begins with human sources. A client enters the lawyer's office and says: My father's land has been taken. The statement is not yet a complete legal claim. The lawyer begins to reconstruct chronology: when did the father acquire the land; from whom; by purchase, inheritance, grant or customary allocation; who witnessed the transaction; what documents exist; who possessed the land; were rents collected; were boundaries marked; was there earlier litigation; which matters did the client personally witness and which were heard from others? The process resembles historical

²⁴ *Idundun v Okumagba* (n 20) 246.

reconstruction because chronology is built, testimony is separated by proximity, documentary evidence is sought and inconsistencies are tested.

Howieson and Rogers' empirical study of lawyer-client interviewing supports the relational character of this process. In a role-play dispute-resolution setting, participants' perceptions of lawyer perspective-taking were associated with trust, self-disclosure and understanding.²⁵ The study should not be universalised into a causal law governing every lawyer-client encounter. It nevertheless demonstrates an important point: the human source is not a database from which facts are downloaded. Evidence emerges through an interaction that itself requires methodological discipline.

The purposes ultimately diverge. The historian may reconstruct possession because the history itself is the object of inquiry. The lawyer reconstructs the past because particular historical facts may generate contemporary rights, liabilities, remedies and litigation strategy. The lawyer then transforms portions of the oral account into attendance notes, affidavits, witness statements, pleadings and correspondence. A future historian encountering that file must remember that those records did not simply record reality; they were institutionally produced for legal purposes through processes of selection and formulation. A record can be authentic, legally important and historically indispensable while still being selective. The human source should therefore be heard before being believed, and understood before being used.

9. QUESTIONNAIRES, INTERVIEWS AND THE FITNESS OF EMPIRICAL METHOD

A questionnaire is a research instrument. It is not, by itself, a methodology and certainly not proof that research is scientific. Lisa Webley's treatment of qualitative empirical legal research emphasises that the selection of a data-collection technique depends upon the research question, objective, access to

²⁵ *ibid* 246.

data and available resources.²⁶ Lee Epstein and Andrew Martin similarly locate quantitative empirical work within research design, data generation, sampling, analysis and documentation rather than treating numbers as self-validating.²⁷ The method does not confer seriousness upon the question; the question justifies the method.

Suppose the research question is: what does section X of the Constitution legally mean? Administering questionnaires to five hundred lawyers does not transform their collective opinion into authoritative constitutional meaning. Increasing the sample to one thousand does not cure the mismatch. The defect is not sample size but fitness between question, evidence and method. If the question instead asks what difficulties Nigerian practitioners experience when applying section X, interviews, questionnaires or mixed methods may become appropriate because the evidential need has changed.

The historical analogue is equally clear. A questionnaire administered today to one thousand Nigerians cannot establish what delegates decided at the Nigerian constitutional conference of 1954. The evidential route leads first towards the conference report, contemporary parliamentary proceedings, constitutional instruments and related archival materials. The questionnaire could, however, investigate what Nigerians today know or believe about that constitutional development. The same subject matter generates different questions; different questions require different evidence.

Empirical legal research may be qualitative, quantitative or mixed. Whatever the design, the researcher must confront sampling, representativeness, leading questions, response bias, reliability and validity. Forty commercial lawyers in Lagos may provide extremely valuable evidence about their

²⁶ Lisa Webley, 'Qualitative Approaches to Empirical Legal Research' in Peter Cane and Herbert M Kritzer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research* (OUP 2010) 926, 936.

²⁷ Lee Epstein and Andrew D Martin, 'Quantitative Approaches to Empirical Legal Research' in Peter Cane and Herbert M Kritzer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research* (OUP 2010) 901, 902, 905, 909-10.

experiences. Their answers should not silently become ‘the views of Nigerian lawyers’. The conclusion should not outrun the population and design from which the evidence was obtained.

10. NIGERIAN FEDERALISM: WHEN THE LAWYER NEEDS THE HISTORIAN

Nigerian federalism provides a natural test of reciprocal methodological literacy. A lawyer examining the distribution of governmental powers may properly begin with the Constitution, relevant statutes and judicial decisions. But a different question soon arises: why were governmental powers distributed in this manner in the first place? The operative text cannot by itself reconstruct the political bargains, regional anxieties, institutional experiments and constitutional negotiations that produced it. The question has become historical, and the required materials change accordingly.

The 1953 London Conference and the resumed Lagos Conference of January and February 1954 provide primary institutional materials for that inquiry. The Colonial Office published the London proceedings as Cmd 8934.²⁸ The resumed Lagos Conference was published as Cmd 9059.²⁹ In the House of Commons on 10 February 1954, Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton stated that the Lagos Conference ‘continued and completed the work’ begun in London the preceding summer.³⁰ The proceedings also recorded the continuing federal status of Lagos and the possibility of reopening constitutional questions later. These materials permit constitutional development to be reconstructed from contemporaneous records rather than later summaries alone.

²⁸ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by the Conference on the Nigerian Constitution: Held in London in July and August, 1953*, Cmd 8934 (HMSO 1953).

²⁹ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by the Resumed Conference on the Nigerian Constitution, Held in Lagos in January and February, 1954*, Cmd 9059 (HMSO 1954).

³⁰ HC Deb 10 February 1954, vol 523, cols 1181-84.

Official status, however, strengthens provenance without abolishing perspective. Hansard is excellent evidence that Lyttelton made the statement attributed to him and of the British Government's official presentation of the settlement. It is not automatically conclusive evidence that every Nigerian participant understood the conference identically or that the official account captured every political interest. A primary source provides evidence; it does not eliminate interpretation.

Secondary scholarship therefore remains necessary. Okpanachi and Garba situate Nigerian federalism within a longer trajectory from substantial decentralisation towards increasing centralisation, especially under military government.³¹ Their work performs interpretive labour different from that of Cmd 9059. The conference report preserves an institutional record; historical scholarship relates that record to a larger constitutional trajectory; legal research asks which portions of that trajectory possess present normative significance.

The lawyer reading a 1954 report needs enough historical literacy to ask who produced it, what voices it preserves, what it omits, what other contemporary evidence corroborates it and how later memory may have reshaped the episode. The historian needs enough legal literacy to ask which recommendations became law, what constitutional instrument eventually emerged, how federal and regional competences were structured and how later constitutions altered them. The same document can be read competently by both disciplines while being asked to perform different work.

11. HISTORICAL PRACTICE, LAW-OFFICE HISTORY AND CONSTITUTIONAL MEANING

The methodological difficulty becomes sharper when history is enlisted directly in constitutional interpretation. Curtis Bradley and Trevor Morrison's study of historical gloss in separation-of-powers law examines

³¹ Eyene Okpanachi and Ali Garba, 'Federalism and Constitutional Change in Nigeria' (2010) 7(1) *Federal Governance* 1, 3-5.

circumstances in which longstanding institutional practice may acquire constitutional significance and, importantly, questions how institutional acquiescence should be identified.³² Longevity alone does not settle meaning. Silence by another branch may represent acquiescence, political weakness, strategic avoidance, lack of information or competing priorities. Silence is evidence whose meaning must itself be established.

The danger of selective historical advocacy has long been captured by Alfred H. Kelly's expression law-office history.³³ Kevin Tan's recent analysis revisits the problem, emphasising that constitutional interpretation remains fundamentally a legal enterprise and that even primary historical materials may be incomplete, subjective or inaccurate.³⁴ Advocacy is not improper merely because counsel selects arguments favourable to a client. The methodological problem arises when advocacy is presented as balanced historical reconstruction without acknowledging the difference.

This distinction reveals why citation accuracy is not identical to representational fairness. A lawyer may quote a delegate to a constitutional conference word for word and provide the correct page. The citation is locationally accurate. If materially contrary statements from other delegates are omitted because they weaken the argument, the historical representation may still be misleading. Citation accuracy is locational; representational fairness is interpretive.

History may illuminate why constitutional language emerged, what problems its authors confronted and what practices subsequently developed. None of those historical findings automatically override operative constitutional text or binding interpretation. The proper relationship is neither historical

³² Curtis A Bradley and Trevor W Morrison, 'Historical Gloss and the Separation of Powers' (2012) 126(2) *Harvard Law Review* 411, 417-18, 448-50.

³³ Alfred H Kelly, 'Clio and the Court: An Illicit Love Affair' (1965) *Supreme Court Review* 119, 155-56.

³⁴ Kevin Y L Tan, 'Interpreting the Constitution: The Use and Abuse of History' (2022) 20(5) *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 1958, 1967.

exclusion nor historical domination, but methodological discipline. The lawyer using history must recognise provenance, context, silence, dependence and selective reconstruction. The historian dealing with constitutional law must recognise text, hierarchy, jurisdiction, precedent and normative consequence.

12. THE SEVEN QUESTIONS OF SOURCE SCRUTINY

The examples considered so far reveal the limits of simple labels. A source may be primary and false, official and incomplete, authentic and misleading, secondary and indispensable, or legally authoritative while historically contestable. Classification is useful, but classification does not determine reliability. Before a source is permitted to carry a scholarly proposition, this article proposes seven questions: Is it authentic? What is its provenance? Is it reliable for this proposition? What does it mean in context? What authority does it possess? What independent evidence corroborates or contradicts it? Can another researcher retrace my use of it? The individual questions belong to familiar traditions of historical and legal method; the contribution here lies in bringing them together as a portable sequence across both disciplines.

Authenticity asks whether the source is what it purports to be. Provenance asks where it came from and through what route it reached the researcher. Reliability must always be completed by the words for what proposition? Context asks what the source meant within the circumstances in which it was produced. Authority asks what institutional or normative force it possesses. Corroboration seeks genuinely independent confirmation and contrary evidence. Traceability asks whether another researcher can retrace the evidential journey. The source is interrogated before it is enlisted.

Provenance is particularly important in the digital environment. Twenty websites repeating the same constitutional claim may appear numerically impressive. If all twenty copied one erroneous post, the researcher possesses one evidential lineage reproduced twenty times. This article describes that error as the multiplication illusion. Repetition is not corroboration unless the

evidential routes are sufficiently independent. The same principle applies to oral traditions, copied footnotes and AI-generated bibliographies.

Context prevents verbal accuracy from masquerading as interpretive fairness. Skinner's warning against reading old texts as though written by contemporaries illustrates the historical dimension.³⁵ In Law, a passage from a judgment may be quoted exactly but detached from the issue, facts or later authorities that limited it. Verbatim accuracy is not identical to representational accuracy.

13. THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SOURCE EVALUATION

The Seven Questions interrogate the individual source. The Three Dimensions of Source Evaluation answer a related but different question: once scrutinised, what kind of weight can the source legitimately bear? The dimensions are Evidential Quality, Disciplinary Status and Normative Authority. They should not be treated as three synonyms for a 'good source'. A source can perform strongly on one dimension and weakly on another.

Evidential Quality concerns authenticity, proximity, reliability, completeness, consistency, provenance and corroboration. Disciplinary Status concerns the function a source performs within the particular inquiry. Owolade's observation that legal writings may be secondary to the doctrinal lawyer and primary to the legal historian demonstrates why 'primary' and 'secondary' are relational classifications rather than permanent labels.³⁶ Normative Authority concerns institutional force. A constitution, statute and Supreme Court judgment can have legal consequences that a private letter or scholarly article does not, even where the latter is historically more revealing.

³⁵ Skinner (n 17) 57.

³⁶ Owolade (n 14) 89.

Source	Evidential Quality	Disciplinary Status	Normative Authority
Private contemporary letter	Potentially high, depending on provenance and knowledge	Primary historical evidence	Ordinarily none
1954 constitutional conference report	High for official record, subject to perspective and completeness	Primary historical/constitutional material	Not automatically present constitutional law
Supreme Court judgment	High for what the Court decided and said	Primary legal authority; may also be historical evidence	High within applicable hierarchy
Contemporary textbook	Variable	Usually, secondary scholarship	Persuasive only
Oral tradition	Depends on transmission, memory and corroboration	Primary evidence for appropriate historical questions	May acquire legal relevance under applicable law
AI-generated citation	No independent evidential value until verified	Research lead only	None

Source: Generated by author, 2026

The framework challenges the boast ‘I used primary sources. Primary for what? Authentic? Reliable? Representative? Authoritative? Corroborated? Correctly interpreted? The real question is what this particular source can

legitimately prove in this particular inquiry. The Three Dimensions therefore resist source fetishism and force the researcher to match the weight of the conclusion to the actual capacity of the evidence.

14. CITATION, REFERENCING AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF SCHOLARLY VERIFICATION

Knowing a citation style is not the same thing as knowing how to reference research. Referencing styles are disciplinary conventions for identifying sources, permitting verification and distinguishing an author's contribution from borrowed ideas. The principal systems used in the Arts, Humanities and Law include the Modern Language Association style, the American Psychological Association style, Harvard author-date referencing, the Oxford University Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities (OSCOLA), the Chicago Manual of Style, and Nigeria's National Association of Law Teachers Uniform Format and Citation Guide (NALT). Although their conventions differ, Chicago, OSCOLA and the other systems regulate the presentation of authorities. Chicago distinguishes Notes and Bibliography from Author-Date and uses numbered notes corresponding to superscript markers;³⁷ OSCOLA is designed for accurate and consistent citation of legal authorities.³⁸

Chicago deserves particular prominence in historical, legal and interdisciplinary research because its Notes and Bibliography system combine accurate source attribution with considerable intellectual flexibility. Unlike systems that principally confine citations to brief bibliographical information, Chicago expressly accommodates substantive or discursive notes which may amplify an argument, explain a technical expression, introduce a qualification, identify a contrary opinion, or supply useful background that would interrupt the movement of the main text.³⁹ It also

³⁷ *The Chicago Manual of Style* (18th edn, University of Chicago Press 2024) chs 13-14.

³⁸ University of Oxford Faculty of Law, *Oxford University Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities* (5th edn, 2026).

³⁹ *The Chicago Manual of Style* (17th edn, University of Chicago Press 2017) s 14.39.

provides coherent rules for books, archival materials, interviews, newspapers, cases, statutes and electronic sources, while its shortened-note system prevents needless repetition.

OSCOLA performs a comparable function in legal scholarship and remains admirable for its precision, economy and internal consistency. NALT's attempt to adapt legal citation to Nigerian authorities is therefore commendable. Its execution, however, has attracted criticism for contradictions, gaps, unclear illustrations and rules whose wording or presentation sometimes appears insufficiently edited.⁴⁰ Prescriptions concerning typography and other matters of presentation occasionally seem arbitrary beside the carefully developed systems of Oxford and Chicago. This raises an uncomfortable question: why could Nigerian law teachers not produce, through sustained consultation, testing and revision, a more polished and internally consistent national guide? NALT should not be abandoned, but comprehensively revised. A Nigerian citation system ought to retain local relevance while attaining the clarity, stability, accessibility and editorial discipline demonstrated by OSCOLA and Chicago.⁴¹

These systems matter, but they principally answer how a source should be cited. Methodology asks the prior questions: should this source be cited for this proposition at all; has it been verified; does it support what is claimed; has it been represented fairly; and can the reader locate the relevant passage? No citation system can rescue defective source selection. Citation performs attribution, verification, disclosure of authority and intellectual accountability. It reveals the route by which an assertion entered the argument and enables the reader to inspect that route. The pinpoint is therefore not decorative. Samuel Fox Kraus's study of thousands of pin cites

⁴⁰ Timothy F Yerima, 'OSCOLA/NALT Citation and Referencing Styles: Simplifications and Clarifications of Lingering Fogs' (2022) 1-2.

⁴¹ University of Oxford Faculty of Law, *Oxford University Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities* (4th edn, Hart Publishing 2012) 1-2; National Association of Law Teachers, *Uniform Format and Citation Guide* (NALT 2022) 80-81.

in legal scholarship demonstrates the centrality of precise citation practice.⁴² The methodological proposition developed here is that the more precise the proposition, the more precise the citation should ordinarily be. A reference to a four-hundred-page book may establish that the book exists; it does not show where the author made the specific statement attributed to him.

Source → Verification → Proposition → Pinpoint → Citation Style

The order matters. Putting style first produces beautifully formatted uncertainty. This article uses Citation Fitness to describe the degree to which the authority cited is methodologically appropriate to the proposition it is asked to support. A newspaper may appropriately establish that a politician made a reported statement but be a poor authority for controlling constitutional doctrine where the judgment itself is available. A textbook may summarise *Idundun* accurately; the case itself is the fitter citation when stating what the Supreme Court held. Citation Fitness is about fit, not prestige.

Secondary citation creates another problem: evidential distance. If Researcher A quotes an inaccessible archival document through Author B, honest scholarship discloses the intermediary. To cite the archive directly without having consulted it creates the impression that the evidential distance is shorter than it actually is. Every additional link creates another opportunity for transcription error, contextual distortion or mistaken attribution. Sometimes the chain cannot reasonably be eliminated. Sometimes the researcher's task is to stop the chain by returning to the accessible original.

Citation can also be technically accurate while methodologically misleading. A quotation may be reproduced word for word and accompanied by the correct pinpoint while an immediately surrounding qualification is omitted. Citation accuracy is locational. Representational fairness is interpretive. The

⁴² Samuel Fox Krauss, 'Pin Cites' (2023) 98(3) *New York University Law Review* 897-903.

text carries the argument; the footnote strengthens its evidential transparency. A citation is not merely the address of a source; it is an invitation to verify the researcher's claim.

Referencing is the visible architecture of an invisible research process. The footnote shows the reader where the researcher claims to have been. Methodological integrity determines whether he actually went there.

15. RESEARCH ETHICS AND THE HUMAN SOURCE

Research ethics is not external to methodology. It affects what evidence may be gathered, how it may be gathered, how it may be preserved and how it may legitimately be used. The Oral History Association's Principles and Best Practices treats ethical responsibility as extending across interviewing, consent, preservation, access and the relationship between interviewer and narrator.⁴³ A human source is not an inert object. The source has dignity, interests and potentially something to lose from the researcher's decisions.

Consent is therefore more than the existence of a signed form. Ethical guidance emphasises informed participation, communication of project goals and risks, and appropriate arrangements for review, preservation and access.⁴⁴ Yet ethical permission to receive evidence is not methodological justification to believe it. A participant may validly consent and still be mistaken. A witness may willingly provide an allegation that cannot be corroborated. Ethical admissibility and evidential reliability are separate questions.

Politically charged research makes the connection especially visible. Erin Jesse's work on oral history in highly politicised settings shows how the circumstances in which participants speak can affect both the risks they face

⁴³ Oral History Association, *OHA Principles and Best Practices: Principles and Best Practices for Oral History* (Oral History Association 2025) Core Principles 6-10.

⁴⁴ Oral History Association, 'Statement on Ethics' in *OHA Principles and Best Practices: Principles and Best Practices for Oral History* (Oral History Association 2025) points 1-4.

and the evidence received.⁴⁵ Valerie Janesick similarly treats oral-history interviewing as a qualitative practice that should be situated alongside other forms of evidence rather than treated as self-sufficient testimony.⁴⁶ Human-source research therefore adds an ethical question to provenance: not merely where did this evidence come from, but how was it obtained?

The same issue arises in legal practice. Confidential client material may be highly useful for analysis yet subject to professional obligations that restrict disclosure. In AI-assisted research, the first question should not be whether a system can summarise a confidential interview transcript or client communication efficiently. It should be whether the researcher is entitled to place that material into the system at all. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI expressly identifies data privacy, human agency and ethical validation as central concerns.⁴⁷ The nature of the material determines not only how it should be analysed but also the conditions under which it should be collected, stored and processed. A source may consequently be evidentially valuable yet ethically unusable in the form in which it was obtained.

16. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE NEW CRISIS OF VERIFICATION

Generative artificial intelligence intensifies an old methodological problem: plausible information can now be produced much faster than it can be verified. *UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* advocates a human-centred approach concerned with privacy, human capacity and ethical design.⁴⁸ For research methodology, the central danger is not simply that AI can be wrong. Human researchers have always been

⁴⁵ Erin Jessee, 'The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology amid Highly Politicized Research Settings' (2011) 38(2) *Oral History Review* 287-307.

⁴⁶ Valerie J Janesick, 'Oral History Interviewing with Purpose and Critical Awareness' in Patricia Leavy (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edn, OUP 2020) 457-79.

⁴⁷ Fengchun Miao and Wayne Holmes, *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* (UNESCO 2023) ss 3.3.1-3.3.4 and 4.2-4.3.

⁴⁸ *ibid* ss 3.1 and 4.2-4.3.

wrong. The distinctive problem is that error can be expressed fluently, instantly and in the external forms of scholarship.

The *Hitler Diaries* created physical documentary plausibility. Generative AI can create bibliographical plausibility. A fabricated reference may contain an author, title, journal, volume, year, pages and DOI. Its polish does not establish existence. Plausibility arrives before verification. AI may identify a source for investigation; it cannot complete the act of verification on the researcher's behalf.

A recent retraction provides a useful illustration. In December 2025, Springer Nature retracted *Forty Years of Fertility Transition in Hong Kong* after the publisher stated that it could not verify the source of at least twenty-four references and that the authors admitted undeclared use of AI tools.⁴⁹ Methodological restraint is important here: the notice establishes unverifiable references and admitted undeclared AI use; it does not establish that every unverifiable reference was necessarily generated by AI. The example is powerful precisely because the evidence should not be made to say more than it says.

The problem can be understood as a form of citation laundering: an unsupported or unverified proposition acquires the appearance of scholarship as it passes into conventional bibliographical form. Recent literature has independently used the expression in discussing the onward circulation of hallucinated citations.⁵⁰ Perfect punctuation around a fabricated source remains perfect punctuation around a fabrication.

The *Ifidon Research Sequence* supplies a practical safeguard. The sound order is *Research Question* → *Required Materials* → *Appropriate Methodology*. The pathological inversion is *Available AI Tool* → *Generated*

⁴⁹ Yiming Bai and others, 'Retraction Note: Forty Years of Fertility Transition in Hong Kong' (2025) 9 *China Population and Development Studies* 516-17.

⁵⁰ Dirk H R Spennemann, 'How Unique Are Hallucinated Citations Offered by Generative Artificial Intelligence Models?' (2026) 14(3) *Publications* art 38.

Material → *Retrofitted Research Question*. AI can assist within a research design; it should not become the design. The Seven Questions apply with particular force: is the suggested source authentic; what is its provenance; is it reliable for this proposition; what context has been omitted; what authority does it possess; what independent evidence confirms it; and can the researcher retrieve and inspect it independently?

Current empirical evidence also counsels against simple claims that AI either destroys or improves thinking. A 2026 systematic review by Changyue Li, Hang Cui and Linda Serra Hagedorn synthesised sixty-seven empirical studies and found that cognitive outcomes varied importantly with instructional structure and scaffolding: structured and inquiry-oriented use could support higher-order thinking, while less structured use presented greater risks of cognitive offloading and weaker critical engagement.⁵¹ Zhu and colleagues distinguish dependent cognitive offloading, in which AI substitutes for core thinking, from autonomous offloading, in which AI operates as a scaffold while the user retains agency.⁵² These studies justify conditional concern, not a universal causal claim.

The methodological distinction developed here is between assistance and cognitive outsourcing. The relevant question is not simply how much work is delegated, but which intellectual functions are delegated and whether the researcher retains the competence necessary to evaluate the result. The risks may be especially serious where AI is introduced before the researcher has developed independent habits of source discovery, criticism, comparison and argument, because the user may lack the very competence needed to recognise error. *AI is most valuable when it amplifies intellectual capacities*

⁵¹ Changyue Li, Hang Cui and Linda Serra Hagedorn, 'The Cognitive Impact of ChatGPT in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Critical and Creative Thinking Outcomes' (2026) 10 *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence* art 100571.

⁵² Qiuhan Zhu and others, 'Not All Cognitive Offloading Is Equal: Distinguishing Dependent and Autonomous Offloading to Generative AI' (2026) 17 *Frontiers in Psychology* art 1878629.

that the researcher is simultaneously developing; it becomes dangerous when it substitutes for the development of those capacities.

Transparency is necessary but insufficient. Disclosure answers whether AI was used. Verification answers whether the authority exists and supports the proposition. Transparency does not cure unverifiability. The required intellectual disposition is a habit of doubt: neither reflexive disbelief nor technological hostility, but disciplined refusal to allow plausibility to substitute for verification. Fluency is not evidence. Confidence is not corroboration. Speed is not verification. Technology changes the instruments of research; it does not abolish the researcher's responsibility for truth.

17. METHODOLOGICAL PATHOLOGIES: HOW RESEARCH GOES WRONG

The recurring failures examined throughout this article share a common structure: an indicator of scholarship substitutes for scholarship itself. A questionnaire substitutes for research design; an old document substitutes for authentication; a famous judgment substitutes for analysis; a quotation substitutes for interpretation; twenty repetitions substitute for corroboration; a perfect citation substitutes for verification; AI fluency substitutes for judgment. The appearance of method has displaced method.

The principal pathologies may be described as methodological inversion, source accumulation without criticism, primary-source fetishism, authority-reliability confusion, presentism and anachronism, confirmation bias or law-office history, multiplication illusion, questionnaire ritualism, citation laundering, quotation decontextualisation, cognitive outsourcing and overclaiming. These categories overlap, but each identifies a point at which the evidential chain can fail.

Overclaiming deserves particular attention because it can corrupt otherwise competent research. The 2026 AI literature illustrates the problem. Conditional findings concerning scaffolding and cognitive offloading cannot responsibly be converted into the universal proposition that AI makes

students intellectually weaker. Evidence of conditional risks does not justify a universal causal claim.⁵³ The same restraint applies across disciplines: a witness's account should not establish more than the witness could know; a sample should not represent a population beyond its design; an archival document should not speak for actors it did not represent; a judgment should not be extended beyond its ratio and jurisdiction.

The corrective is a return to sequence. The research question determines what must be known. What must be known determines the materials to be sought. The nature of those materials determines how they should be analysed. Each source is interrogated before enlistment. Its evidential quality, disciplinary status and normative authority are distinguished. Contrary evidence is sought. The conclusion remains confined to what the evidence permits. Citation enables another researcher to retrace the route. There is no single research technique capable of compensating for a defect in that chain. The accomplished researcher is distinguished less by the number of sources collected than by the quality of the questions put to them.

18. RECIPROCAL METHODOLOGICAL LITERACY

Interdisciplinarity is not automatically superior research. Irma Kroeze warns that genuine interdisciplinary legal research is unusually difficult and that much work described as interdisciplinary is more accurately multidisciplinary.⁵⁴ That caution is useful because the argument advanced here is not a demand that every historian become a lawyer or every lawyer a historian. Reciprocal Methodological Literacy is narrower and more practical: enough familiarity with the methods of a neighbouring discipline to recognise when the materials generated by one's research question cannot responsibly be interpreted through one's principal disciplinary training alone.

That caution also marks the boundary between Reciprocal Methodological Literacy and stronger claims of disciplinary fusion. The concept does not

⁵³ Li, Cui and Hagedorn (n 52).

⁵⁴ Irma J Kroeze, 'Legal Research Methodology and the Dream of Interdisciplinarity' (2013) 16(3) *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 35, 51-55.

assume that exposure to another discipline makes a researcher fully interdisciplinary. It imposes a more modest threshold obligation: recognise the methodological character of unfamiliar material, know when one's training is insufficient, and respond through further study, collaboration, consultation or a narrower claim. In that sense, the concept is designed partly as a safeguard against the amateurism that critics of interdisciplinary legal research identify.

The constitutional lawyer need not possess an historian's complete professional formation before recognising that a 1954 conference report requires provenance, contextualisation and comparison with other contemporary materials. The historian need not qualify as a lawyer before recognising that a Supreme Court judgment has an institutional status different from a political memoir. What neither researcher should do is treat unfamiliar disciplinary material as though its methodological character were self-evident. The central question is: what proposition is this source being asked to prove?

The concept therefore operates through a sequence: *Research Question* → *Required Materials* → *Disciplinary Character of Materials* → *Necessary Methodological Competence*. Where the required competence exceeds the researcher's training, the proper response may be additional methodological study, collaboration, consultation or a narrower claim. Intellectual maturity includes knowing what one does not yet know.

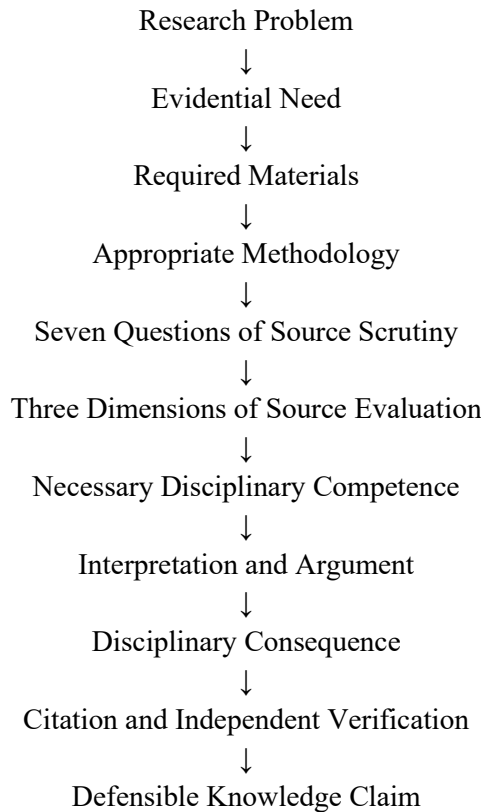
The curricular implication follows. History programmes dealing with constitutional, institutional, diplomatic or legal history should expose students to elementary legal-source literacy: authority, hierarchy, jurisdiction, precedent and statutory interpretation. Law programmes should expose students more seriously to provenance, archives, chronology, oral transmission, contextualisation and corroboration. Both should teach citation as research method, empirical design, research ethics and digital verification. The purpose is not shallow hybridity but disciplined recognition of evidential demands.

The lawyer need not become a historian, nor the historian a lawyer. Each, however, becomes a better researcher by learning how the other interrogates evidence.

19. FROM RESEARCH PROBLEM TO DEFENSIBLE KNOWLEDGE: THE INTEGRATED RESEARCH VERIFICATION FRAMEWORK

The analytical propositions developed in this article can now be brought together in an Integrated Research Verification Framework. The framework does not claim to invent source criticism, legal hierarchy, contextual interpretation, corroboration or citation. Its contribution lies in their sequencing and cross-disciplinary integration. The *Ifidon Research Sequence* determines the evidential route; the Seven Questions interrogate the source; the Three Dimensions determine what weight the source can bear; Reciprocal Methodological Literacy asks whether additional disciplinary competence is necessary; interpretation converts evidence into argument; citation exposes the route to independent checking.

The five formulations developed in the article perform different tasks and should not be treated as interchangeable labels. The *Ifidon Research Sequence* addresses selection: what materials and methods follow from the research problem. The Seven Questions of Source Scrutiny address interrogation: what must be asked of an individual source before it is enlisted. The Three Dimensions of Source Evaluation address weight: what evidential, disciplinary and normative burden the source can legitimately bear. Reciprocal Methodological Literacy addresses competence: whether the researcher possesses, or must obtain, additional disciplinary capacity to interpret the material responsibly. The Integrated Research Verification Framework addresses architecture: how those distinct operations are ordered from research problem to independently verifiable claim. The contribution of the framework is therefore cumulative integration, not the multiplication of synonymous concepts.



The addition of disciplinary consequence is important. A well-established historical fact may carry no direct normative legal consequence. A legally binding conclusion may settle a dispute while remaining only one kind of evidence for an historian reconstructing the wider past. The same inference can therefore occupy different intellectual positions according to the discipline in which it is deployed. The framework may also be reduced to six propositions: the question determines the materials; the materials determine the method; the method interrogates the sources; the sources constrain the permissible inference; the discipline affects the consequence of the inference; the citation permits the inference to be checked. This is the movement from information to scholarship. Information can be accumulated, copied, generated or retrieved. Scholarship must be justified.

The analytical formulations introduced here draw upon established traditions of source criticism, legal authority, contextual interpretation, empirical method and scholarly verification. Their contribution lies in the particular synthesis developed in this article. The expressions *Ifidon Research Sequence*, Seven Questions of Source Scrutiny, Three Dimensions of Source Evaluation, Reciprocal Methodological Literacy and Integrated Research Verification Framework organise that synthesis. The individual methodological practices incorporated within them are not claimed as newly discovered.

20. CONCLUSION: FROM INFORMATION TO KNOWLEDGE

The forged Hitler Diaries, the disputed land deed and the hallucinated citation belong to different eras and disciplines, yet each returns the researcher to the same question: how do I know what I claim to know? History teaches the researcher to distrust the apparently self-authenticating document. Law teaches the researcher to distrust the apparently authoritative proposition until its institutional status is known. Oral evidence teaches that memory and transmission require interrogation. Empirical method teaches that instruments acquire legitimacy from the questions they are designed to answer. Citation teaches that scholarly claims should be traceable. Artificial intelligence has made all of these lessons more urgent because plausibility can now be manufactured at extraordinary speed.

The central research problem of the digital age may increasingly be less the scarcity of information than the discrimination of reliable knowledge from plausible information. Search engines, digitised archives, legal databases and generative AI have reduced many costs of retrieval. They have not abolished provenance, context, dependence, bias, hierarchy, corroboration or interpretation. The ease with which information can be found should therefore increase rather than diminish the discipline with which it is evaluated.

The *Ifidon Research Sequence* places evidential need between question and method. The Seven Questions insist that the source be interrogated before enlistment. The Three Dimensions distinguish evidential quality, disciplinary status and normative authority. Reciprocal Methodological Literacy recognises that some sources demand competence from beyond the researcher's principal discipline. The Integrated Research Verification Framework connects these ideas to interpretation, disciplinary consequence and independent verification. Together they offer a simple discipline: do not permit the appearance of knowledge to outrun the evidence that justifies it.

Research training should accordingly cultivate source criticism before technological dependence while teaching researchers to use new tools intelligently. Students should learn to locate sources independently, recognise authority, test provenance, identify evidential dependence, verify quotations, distinguish research questions from research instruments and understand the ethical conditions under which human evidence may be used. That habit of doubt is not cynicism. It is disciplined intellectual responsibility. *Find the source. Interrogate the source. Contextualise the source. Corroborate the source. Understand its authority. Cite it precisely.*

The accomplished researcher is distinguished less by the number of sources collected than by the quality of the questions put to them. Technology will change. Databases will change. Research instruments will change. Artificial intelligence will become more capable. The researcher's responsibility will remain. Technology changes the instruments of research; it does not abolish the researcher's responsibility for truth.