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Abstract

The doctrinal legal research has been the dominant and most influential research methods in law. The purpose of the present study was twofold; to explore the scope and to analyze the methodologies of doctrinal legal research. After analyzing the systematically selected literature, the present study found that doctrinal research is concerned with methodically finding, examining, explaining and justifying the enacted legal framework. In addition, the doctrinal research was also used to predict the future development in law. Moreover, the study found that doctrinal research methodology was used by legal and non-legal researchers. The study also found that the beginning of the doctrinal legal research is the presence of a legal problem which is followed by finding the relevant legal material including statutory law, constitutional provision pertaining to the problem, by laws, judicial decisions, commentaries of the analysts, encyclopedias and dictionaries. The study further found that after finding the relevant legal material, a researcher is required to analyze the legal material to determine the fitness of the problem or to suggest the solution of legal problem. Further to that, a researcher should also synthesize the legal material to highlight the inconsistencies between enacted legislation and fundamentals legal norms and principles of the legal system. The study also found that a doctrinal research study is concluded by reporting the findings and the recommendations.

Keywords: Research, Legal Research, Doctrinal Research, Scope of Doctrinal Research, Methodology in Legal Research

1. Introduction

The academic research refers to a systematic investigation to resolve particular problems by deploying a scientific methodology which produce generally acceptable knowledge (Grinnell, 1993). The systematic methodology in academic research may be of numerous kinds including theoretical, descriptive empirical, qualitative, quantitative, applied and analytical. The descriptive research is meant to describe a phenomenon by discovering facts whereas the analytical research aims at critically evaluating the information based on collected facts (Khalil, 2010). The applied research, on the other hand, intends to find a solution of any existing problem whereas fundamental research is associated with summaries and the strategy of a research project (Chynoweth, 2008). Similarly, the quantitative research reflects the results of the study in numbers while the qualitative studies produce the findings in words (Isadore & Carolyn, 1998). The theoretical or conceptual research is concerned with a theory or concepts and its purpose is to develop the theory or concept ((MD, 2019). On the other hand, the empirical research is contingent on data and actual observation and its findings may be tested or verified by observing the same facts and in the same manners (Kothari, 2004). The legal research refers to a methodical activity which is based on fact-finding and meant to find the law on particular issue and it results in the expansion of the science of law (Agrawala, 1982). The legal research is carried out for various purposes including finding a solution for a legal problem, confirming or establishing facts, endorsing the existing conclusions or facts, authenticating or producing new theories (Smits, 2009). It is significant to point out that the legal research is a class or type of social science research (Budianto, 2020). The legal research may be of various types including descriptive, analytical, applied, pure, conceptual, empirical, qualitative, quantitative and doctrinal (McConville, 2017). The researchers have produced enormous literature on the various perspectives of doctrinal research. However, these studies do not exactly point out the scope of the doctrinal research. Moreover, these studies do not offer a general framework for doing doctrinal research projects. Besides, the lack of detailed explanation of the doctrinal technique was not an issue because the study was focused internally on the legal community. The intended audience has been immersed in the legal framework and culture, and hence possesses a deep understanding of legal standards. However, in a contemporary interdisciplinary environment, where the research is being guided, examined, and most crucially evaluated by those outside of a limited legal background, the expression of methodology is crucial, particularly if financing is linked to excellence, and excellence relies on clear methodology. The present study intends to fill this gap since its objective is to explore the scope and methodology for the doctrinal research. The present study has the following two research question; what is the scope of doctrinal research? What is an appropriate methodology for doing doctrinal research? The present study, other than introductory section, consists of three sections. The second section discusses the meaning and scope of doctrinal research, the third section analyzes and suggests general framework for doctrinal studies and the last section concludes the study.

2. Doctrinal Research and Its Scope

This section intends to address the first research question of the present study. It has two sub-sections; the first sub-section discusses the meaning of doctrinal research whereas the second sub-section ponders over the scope of doctrinal research.

2.1. what is doctrinal research

The doctrinal research has been and is the most dominant legal research methodology in the past and present (Manderson and Mohr, 2002). There are various definitions of doctrinal research in the literature and the following three definitions represent the definitions of doctrinal research in the literature. Duncan, & Hutchinson (2012) believe that doctrinal research which offers explanation of the legal rules covering a particular area of law or evaluates the connection between various legal rules or explain the difficulty zone and sometimes predicts the development in law which may occur in future (Duncan, & Hutchinson, 2012). To Chynoweth (2011), the doctrinal research is different from empirical research in a sense that it is only concerned with addressing the research question dealing with what is the law and is meant to learn and advance the legal doctrines for the legal community.

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The Australian law dictionary defines doctrinal research as the research which aims at synthesizing the legal norms, rules and principles or which explicates or justifies a particular portion of law which the part of larger legal system (Australian Law Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2010).

These three definitions reveal fundamental features of doctrinal research which may be reduced into the following eight points. First, the legal research in the past and in the present has been mostly influenced by this methodology. Second, this research was used to explain the various legal principles and doctrines. Third, doctrinal research is concerned with discovering new facts by examining the legal material. Fourth, this type of research is used to reach conclusions about the legal system without relying on the empirical methods. Five, doctrinal research is deployed to explain the legal rules, norms, concepts and doctrines. Six, the findings of doctrinal research may also predict the future development in the law. Seven, the doctrinal research does not take into account the social, economic and political factors while studying the law. Lastly, this type of research only relies on the legal material. The data in the doctrinal research may be collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include legislative text (primary and secondary legislation) and the judicial decisions. On the other hand, the secondary sources include dictionaries (legal and English) legal writing in the form of books or research articles and encyclopedias. However, the doctrinal methodology has been criticized by various researchers. For instance, Ali, Yousaf and Ayub (2017) maintain that doctrinal research is uncritical, theoretical and technical. They added that the doctrinal research completely ignores the political, and social significance behind the legal framework.

2.2. Scope

The review of the literature reveals that the traditional doctrinal research has been and is carried out by numerous legal professional and for variety of purposes. For instance, Reitz, (1998) pointed out that this research is carried out by lawyers and scholars for comparative studies to have broader understanding of the legal issues. Similarly, Mark (2011) counts various purposes for which doctrinal research may be carried out by researchers. To him, this type of legal research may be carried out to describe or find the applicable laws on particular situation, to find the solutions of the existing legal problems, to interpret the laws, to comment on the laws, to synthesis the law and for theory building. On the same line of inquiry, Smits (2017) is of the view that this methodology is being used by the students and teachers from the discipline of law from civil as well as common law countries, he also added that this methodology was used to search the relevant laws for a particular legal issue. He further explained that this methodology is not only used to systematically elucidate the various legal concepts and principles but also it is used to examine the connection among principles, rules and concepts to settle the ambiguities and to fill the gap in law. Likewise, Taekema and Klink (2011) and Burg (2019) believe that the methodology may be used to solve the practical legal issues. On the other hand, Myneni (2012) is of the view that the doctrinal research methodology is also used to analyze the legal propositions and concepts. He added that the propositions may be extracted from the appellate court's decisions, traditional legal theories, primary and secondary legislative and judicial reports. Kharel (2018) adds that the doctrinal methodology may be used in comparative and historical research projects having legal relevance, or to highlight the differences between various legal rules and institutions with their psychological, social or philosophical hitches. The comparative research is significant since it enables the countries to learn from other countries or legal systems (Ngwoke, Mbanjo, & Helynn, 2023). Similarly, Shukla (2023) points out that the doctrinal methodology is used to assess the quality of law whether it confirms with the basic norms of the legal systems. Similarly, Vranken (2010) identified another area where the doctrinal methodology may be used and that is the theory testing. He believes that this methodology is concerned with confirming the existing legal knowledge which indicates that this methodology may be and is used by researcher to test the prevailing legal theories. Apart from theory testing, it is also believed that the doctrinal methodology may conveniently be used to build legal theories. Kharel (2018) holds the view that the doctrinal methodology is an appropriate device to build legal theories since the process involves clarifying the law and how different parts of law fit together. Similarly, the doctrinal research is not time bound and it may be used to examine past and future (Hutchinson, 2015). Similarly, the black letter legal research was considered suitable to examine the applicable rules on factual situation, to analyze the link between various rules, exposition or elucidation the zones of strain and even to forecast the potential development which future may have for the law (Pearce, Campbell & Harding, 1987).

The Council of Australian Law Deans (2005) also pointed out that the doctrinal methodology may be used for creative fusion of legislative text, to create the link among dissimilar legal doctrines and concepts and to extract abstract principles from developing legal principles and rules. The doctrinal research methodology is used to describe neutrally and consistently the prevailing law or legal doctrines concerning with particular subjects or institutions. The description of laws and legal doctrines in doctrinal research is not limited to theoretical interests only but it also involves the description of practical solutions of scattered or conflicting laws, and legal doctrines in a coherent manner (Smits, 2017). Likewise, the doctrinal research is also of prescriptive nature for the judiciary, legislators and the executive. The researcher use the legal doctrines to provide the normative course i.e. how to behave in a particular situation to the judges, executive and the lawmakers. Similarly, the researchers use legal doctrines in doctrinal research to justify the legal norms, legal system and the existing law (Smits, 2017). Fourie (2015) holds the view that doctrinal analysis empowers the researchers to find the patterns in the data when the textual examination fails to locate the patterns

Similarly, Cownie, (2004) adds that the doctrinal research methodology may be used in socio-legal studies when they need to analyze the law. Cambell and Wiles (1976) added that the traditional doctrinal research methodology should not be at the top list in the work of social scientists when they deploy the doctrinal methodology in their studies. It is significant to discuss that various researchers have acknowledged that the doctrinal methodology may be used in various types of research methods or methodologies of social sciences. Similarly, Hutchinson and Duncon (2012) point out that the doctrinal methodology may be used in qualitative and quantitative research projects. They explained that doctrinal research and quantitative studies involve the positivism and this common feature show that the doctrinal methodology may be used with quantitative studies. They further pointed out that the doctrinal methodology may be combined with qualitative studies since in both the doctrinal and qualitative research studies, a researcher needs to subjectively interpret and apply the law to understand the context of the situation or phenomenon depend upon the context which require subjective interpretation and application. They concluded that doctrinal research is qualitative because the analytical

similarity between two methodologies show that doctrinal research may be qualitative research. Likewise, the doctrinal methodology has the potential to be used with other subjects other than the subjects from the social sciences. For instance, Taekema & Burg (2020) argue that philosophy is imperative in this methodology that may be effectively and usefully combined with the philosophy. They explained that the philosophy is very much relevant in doctrinal studies pertaining to the discussion on the liberty and freedom behind the constitutional rights. They added that the philosophical discussion on the concepts will furnish more depth to the doctrinal studies. Barnett (2011) is also of the view that even the academic lawyers incorporate doctrinal methodology while doing non-doctrinal research. They also pointed out that the researchers use doctrinal methodology while doing research in comparative law. They also empirically demonstrate that the social scientists use doctrinal methodology to give contextual background or to show the discrepancies in academic writings. Similarly, Hutchinson (2015) empirically exhibit after examining the PhD research works focused on reform agenda in Australia that the doctrinal methodology is being used in joint research projects when these are conducted by the people from law and other discipline. He pointed out that the researchers use doctrinal methodology to attain the factual legitimacy, to give the factual background, and to criticize and analyze the law in reform focused research projects. He is also of the view that the constraints in the doctrinal methodology have been loosened over the time.

The above discussion indicates that the doctrinal research has been and is used by teachers, students, judges, practicing lawyers and even by the researchers who do not belong to legal fraternity. The discussion also shows that the doctrinal research may be used to search the past as well as it may be used to predict the future advancement in the law. In addition to this, the doctrinal research methodology may be used by the researcher to examine the present state of affair in the field of law. Moreover, the discussion also reveals that the doctrinal methodology has been used by legal and non-legal researchers. The legal researchers use this methodology for variety of purposes including describing the law, explaining the law, interpreting the law, and commenting on law. The researchers use this methodology when they have to argue that whether a particular law is in consistent with the fundamental legal principles and norms. Moreover, the legal researchers rely on this methodology to highlight the inconsistencies between different legal rules or norms or to describe the connection between rules, principles, concepts and norms. Similarly, the legal researchers find this methodology as suitable when they have to synthesis the legislative, judicial and academic literature on particular area of law. Correspondingly, the legal researchers build and test various legal theories by deploying the doctrinal research. Equally, the doctrinal research is used to understand the legal status of the factual propositions. Similarly, the legal researchers use doctrinal research when they have to propose solution of legal problems. The discussion also show that the legal researchers use this methodology in every type of legal research like historical and comparative studies. The discussion also reveals that the doctrinal methodology is also used by non-legal researchers when their research inquiry includes the analyses of law. However, they do not give priority to this methodology in such studies. Similarly, the researchers from social science also include doctrinal methods in their qualitative or quantitative research projects. In addition, the social scientists also use this methodology with other disciplines like philosophy, sociology, psychology and political science. Similarly, the researchers from other disciplines use doctrinal methodology to give contextual background in joint research projects conducted by the people from law and other discipline.

3. Methodology for Doctrinal Research

This section intends to address the second research of the present study by examining the various methodologies proposed by different researchers. The section also proposes a general and abstract frame work for the researchers conducting doctrinal research methodology. The discussion in section 2 highlights that the doctrinal research can be used by numerous researchers and for various purposes. In addition, it has also been discussed in the above sections that doctrinal research may be of various types. The variety of the types and doers of doctrinal research necessitates the variation in research methodology. The discussion in the present section is structured in two parts; the first part of the discussion relates to the general methodology proposed by different researchers and the second part of the discussion suggest a general framework for doing doctrinal research.

Before discussing methodologies in doctrinal research, it is better to understand the meaning of methodology in research. Soren (2021) research methodology refers to the practical of any given piece of research where a researcher systematically designs a study to ensure valid and reliable result to address the research aims and objectives (Soren, 2021). As far as the general doctrinal methodology is concerned, Westerman, (2009) is of the view that the researchers' starting pint is usually any new development in law which may be a new law, or new interpretation of any rule or doctrine. After that, the research examines the fitness of this new development in the existing relevant legal framework. This activity may result into the positive or negative conclusions. If the researcher concludes that the new development fits in the existing legal framework, he justifies its fitness in the light of the legal doctrines or concepts. Similarly, if he finds that the new development is not fit in the legal system, he advised the quarter concerned how this new development may be adjusted in the legal framework. Moreover, a researcher also highlights that how this new development may affect the existing legal doctrines and norms or what changes or modification in the legal systems are required to adjust the new development. Similarly, various researchers have also sub-divided the methodology of doctrinal research into two forms; the internal and external research. The internal research methodology refers to the research in which the legal doctrines, norms, concepts and categories are taken as the theoretical or conceptual framework of the research study. On the other hand, the external perspective of doctrinal research refers to research in which the concepts, categories or criterion is derived from other disciplines to study law. Westerman (2009) highlights that the method to study law from internal perspective requires examining the law with the help of logic, reason and argumentation.

As far as the problem based doctrinal research methodology is concerned, it is generally used by practitioners including lawyers, judges and students to solve an existing legal problem. The researchers propose five steps to conclude this type of research in doctrinal studies. These five steps include the collection of relevant facts, categorizing the legal issues, analyzing these issues with the objective to find the relevant laws, reading and locating the primary (legislative text or judicial decisions) and secondary (dictionaries, policy reports, encyclopedias, text books or journal articles) sources of law, synthesizing these sources while keeping

in view the background of identified legal issues and putting forward tentative conclusions. It is thought that such research methodology may invite skepticism from the research and academic community since such research may be viewed as the outcome of pragmatic solutions. Similarly, Hutchinson (2006) views doctrinal research methodology as a two-steps process. According to him, the first step in the doctrinal studies should be to search the objective reality. He adds that the searching the objective reality in doctrinal research involves locating the law from primary and secondary sources. He also suggests that a researcher at this step should access, and consult the relevant historical legislation on the subject comprehensively. The in-depth search of the sources of law will show and determine the depth of the research inquiry. Similarly, he proposes that a researcher at the second step should interpret and analyze the law. He is of the view that the second step is vague which necessitates that the legal researcher must carefully go through this step while interpreting and analyzing the located laws. He suggests that a researcher must complete this step intelligibly so that his findings may be understandable for an outsider. Likewise, Kharel (2018) also proposed seven steps methodology to carry out doctrinal research studies. His proposed seven steps include collecting relevant facts, ordering the legal issue, probing the problem to search the relevant law, considering the background material including primary and secondary sources of law, finding the relevant judicial decisions, forming the context of all the issues, and drawing tentative conclusions. Sealy (2005) suggested seven steps methodology including analyzing the problem, getting an overview of the problem, locating the relevant laws, checking other sources, apprising search and citing the cases.

The various methodologies suggested by various authors in the above paragraph reveal some common features of these methodologies which may be summarized in the following five points. First, the proposed methodologies indicate that the beginning of the doctrinal legal research is the existing of a legal problem or issue. It simply means that a researcher must have or find a legal problem for conducting an acceptable and good doctrinal research. Second, these methodologies reveal that a researcher must find the relevant legal material on the given legal problem. This legal material may include statutory law, constitutional provision pertaining to the problem, by laws, judicial decisions, commentaries of the analysts, encyclopedias and dictionaries. Third, a researcher should systematically and carefully go through the legal material to determine the fitness of the solution of a legal problem or issue. A researcher must study the legal sources in depth since it will determine the depth of his research project. Most important, the outcome of studying the numerous sources of law should result in systematic synthesis of the relevant legal literature. Fourth, a researcher should analyze the legal issue dialectically and should support his conclusions or arguments in light of the legal doctrines, principles, norms or concepts. A researcher should also highlight that how the legal problem may affect the legal system in general and a specific area of law in particular. Fifth, a researcher should give his findings or conclusions regarding the legal issue under inquiry.

Keeping in view the discussion in this section, the researchers of the present study suggest the seven steps doctrinal research methodology. It is suggested that a researcher must identify a legal problem and determine the objective of his study. After that, he should coin research questions while keeping in view the objective of his study. At the third step, a researcher should find the relevant and applicable primary and secondary legal material regarding the research questions. A researcher should, at the fourth step, carry out the analysis of the legal issues in light of the collected legal material in the form of statutory laws, by laws, legal doctrines, concepts and norms. He should carefully synthesis the relevant legislation and commentary with the sole aim that how the legal issue may be resolved without compromising the fundamentals of the legal system. At the last step, a researcher should report his findings in an acceptable way coupled with his recommendations.

4. Conclusions

Doctrinal analysis is the overriding and defining characteristics of academic legal research. The scope of the traditional doctrinal research has been widened over the years. The legal fraternity deploy this methodology to find the law, to explain the law, to develop or test legal theories, to highlight the inconsistencies between enacted laws and legal norms, and to suggest the solutions of legal problems. In addition, the legal researchers also include the doctrinal research method even when they do non-legal research studies. On the other hand, the researcher from outside the discipline of law use doctrinal research methodology in all types of research to give the contextual background to their research studies. Though the procedure and the productivity of the doctrinal research is different, yet, the basic research methodology is alike. As far as the methodology for doctrinal research is concerned, the present study concludes that the starting point of the doctrinal study is the presence of legal problem or issue. After that, the researchers find the relevant laws from primary and secondary sources of law, analyze the problem dialectically in the light of the available legal framework, systematically synthesis the legal literature, reports his findings or conclusions and put forward the recommendations.

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