

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ARCHIVAL AND TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF HISTORY AND THE NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

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Abstract

History is an evidence-based discipline that seeks objectivity through the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of historical evidence. Inspired by Leopold von Ranke's emphasis on historical objectivity as an ideal, historians continue to pursue rigorous methods that prioritize critical evaluation of sources. Historical evidence is generally divided into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, including archival documents, government records, oral traditions, and artefacts, provide firsthand accounts of past events, while secondary sources such as books, journal articles, newspapers, theses, dissertations, and credible digital materials offer interpretation and analysis. Although Nigerian historical scholarship has traditionally placed greater emphasis on primary sources, this paper argues that secondary sources possess significant value, particularly in contemporary research where primary materials may be unavailable or insufficient. Advances in information technology have expanded access to digital resources, creating new opportunities for historical investigation and scholarship. The study challenges the perception that secondary sources are inferior and emphasizes that meaningful historical analysis often requires a balanced combination of both primary and secondary evidence. Using a qualitative research approach based primarily on secondary sources, this paper examines the evolving relationship between traditional archival methods and modern information resources. It argues that effective historical research in the twenty-first century should integrate diverse sources to produce balanced, comprehensive, and credible interpretations of the past. Such an approach will enhance historical scholarship and enable researchers to address emerging questions with greater depth and accuracy.

Keywords: *Evidence, Historical Analysis, Objectivity, Primary Sources, Secondary Sources.*

Introduction

The study of any discipline begins with the study of the History of that discipline. One reason for this is to give students knowledge of the roots of their discipline and a narrative of how it has evolved from Century to Century. One thing this introductory historical discourse does inadvertently is to give students a sense of belonging and to throw up the Fathers of the Discipline. This in turn leads younger initiates to develop certain habits, lifestyle patterns and choices and to enable them to have a sense of value and honour for their calling and profession. When perhaps as an Accountant you choose to study the impact of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign on the early development of the Profession (early accounting has Babylonian roots), you might not have direct access to Archival sources, Oral sources or Artefacts, but you might have some ancient Papers from Christian Theological Seminaries and from Museums in Iraq and Iran.

The rest of the data and information you might get might be from the shows and TV programmes on the Development of Money on the HISTORY CHANNEL on the Digital Satellite Television Service (DSTV). This indicates that while primary sources and Oral Sources are good, trustworthy, credible and reliable sources of history, access to the root source of evidence is not possible in every instance. In many instances, revised and deduced Secondary sources have proven to be more reliable, easier to access, and more useful to the Historian than primary sources. The Calabar School of History maintains that, researchers should make every reasonable effort to consult valid and credible primary sources. Exceptions are permitted only where insurmountable challenges or constraints exist, as determined by the project or thesis supervisor.¹

To be fair to the Party championing a total or perhaps better put a dominant use of Secondary sources (the Younger generation, Generation X and Generation Z) in the interpretation of History, the complaint has not always been that Primary Sources should be abandoned or discarded totally but that the insistence on their extraction and use should not be rigid. Referring back to the example of a study of the contributions of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign to the

¹ O. E. Uya. *African History: Some Problems in Methodology and Perspectives*. (Calabar: CATS Publishers, Calabar, 2009), 1.

development of accounting as a Profession and discipline, if this was tendered by an Undergraduate student of History or Accounting, it would look burdensome for the Lecturer or Professor to insist that an Undergraduate Student travels to Iraq or Iran. In that instance, it might be interpreted and rightly so, that the Lecturer or Academic is trying to show himself or herself as an exotic, no-nonsense Scholar. Some male and female Scholars in the Nigerian system have often been wrongly described by Students and uninformed outsiders as rigid or as overly stern. Thus, this academic Paper presented also seeks to bring to light something that has come to the knowledge of startled Parents and a distressed public and how it is being interpreted by students and Scholars as an undue insistence by academics in Nigeria on having a stern or notorious reputation. While this is true of a few bad eggs, it cannot be held as the case for all Scholars. In private hushed discussions among the younger, new generation of Academics, many reasons have been touted and put forward for the strange insistence by Nigerian Academics on having what is often wrongly called a stern or notorious reputation.²

One reason for the enduring emphasis on primary sources is the influence of Nigeria's pioneering historians, including Kenneth Dike, E.J. Alagoa, Emmanuel Ayandele, Okon Edet Uya, Obaro Ikime, Saburi Biobaku, Akinjide Osuntokun, Adiele Afigbo, Bala Usman, Tekena Tamuno, Waziri Junaidu, Erim O. Erim, Toyin Falola, and Monday Abasiattai. Their scholarship established the methodological foundations of historical research and inspired deep respect among subsequent generations. However, many later scholars adopted their approaches without fully adapting them to changing realities. As society and technology continue to evolve, historical research methods must also embrace innovation while preserving the discipline's commitment to rigorous and credible evidence.³

To illustrate the distinction between primary and secondary sources, the researcher presented a simple analogy during a discussion in Dr. Obar Irom's office. If a student wished to study Dr. Irom's earrings, receiving them by courier would permit only a limited examination of their physical characteristics, such as material, design, and craftsmanship. A more rigorous historical investigation, however, would require visiting the maker, tracing the cultural origins of the design, interviewing relevant individuals, and meeting the owner. This comprehensive

²O. E. Uya. *African History: Some Problems in Methodology and Perspectives*. (Calabar: CATS Publishers, Calabar, 2009), 1.

³ O. E. Uya *African History*... 2.

approach, long advocated by the pioneers of Nigerian historical scholarship and endorsed by the Historical Society of Nigeria, demonstrates the enduring value of primary sources in producing richer, more balanced historical analysis.⁴

Primary sources often provide the richest and most direct evidence, making research grounded in them more authentic, objective, and capable of generating original historical insights. However, the digital age has transformed how information is created, stored, and accessed. Vast quantities of valuable research materials are now preserved in cloud storage and shared through online platforms such as Google, ResearchGate, Academia, YouTube, LinkedIn, Wikipedia, X, Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp. These platforms have become significant repositories of information, reflecting the realities of contemporary scholarship. Consequently, historians must critically evaluate both traditional primary sources and credible digital resources in their research.⁵

Secondary and internet sources present important challenges, particularly regarding authenticity and credibility. Although digital platforms provide rapid access to information and facilitate communication, much online content prioritizes entertainment over scholarly accuracy. The ease with which online information can be edited or removed also increases the risk of misinformation and manipulation, despite growing efforts through cyber law and digital regulation. Furthermore, excessive reliance on internet resources and artificial intelligence may discourage independent research, critical thinking, and analytical writing. As Professor Okon Edet Uya observed, “You learn to write by writing,” underscoring the importance of developing original scholarly skills alongside responsible use of digital technologies.⁶

Primary sources are often preferred in postgraduate research because they generally provide greater stability, authenticity, and long-term reliability. Digital and online sources may be vulnerable to hacking, unauthorized alteration, technical failures, or loss through damaged platforms. Although archives can also face challenges such as fire or theft, such incidents are

⁴S. U. Fwatshak “Granaries of Memories; Stores of Civilisations: Archives and Museums as Sources of Historical Writing” In *Historical Research Method*, edited by S. O. Aghalino, O. O. Okpeh, and D.L. Imbua. (Abuja: Heredotus Publishers Ltd, 2023) 1.

⁵S. U. Fwatshak “Granaries of Memories; Stores of Civilisations: Archives and Museums as Sources of Historical Writing” In *Historical Research Method*, edited by S. O. Aghalino, O. O. Okpeh, and D.L. Imbua. (Abuja: Heredotus Publishers Ltd, 2023) 2.

⁶ S. U. Fwatshak “Granaries of Memories... 14

relatively rare. Consequently, primary sources remain valuable due to their enduring nature and reduced susceptibility to manipulation or disappearance.⁷

For technologically skilled researchers, secondary and digital sources provide significant advantages that were unavailable to earlier generations of scholars. Advances in educational technology have enabled Nigerian universities, including the University of Calabar, to adopt plagiarism detection systems, particularly at the postgraduate level, ensuring originality and academic integrity. Before these innovations, some researchers could misuse existing works with limited chances of detection. The introduction of plagiarism checks, encouraged by academics and supported by regulatory bodies such as the Nigerian Universities Commission, has strengthened research standards nationwide. This development represents a positive contribution of technology and artificial intelligence to modern scholarship.⁸

Globally, there are ongoing efforts to create extensive digital databases capable of storing vast quantities of information and making scholarly materials accessible to researchers, sometimes through subscription services. A researcher studying a specialized topic, such as Minnesota labour law, could access university libraries, digital indexes, and online repositories to obtain relevant dissertations and academic works. The synchronization of global research databases would greatly improve plagiarism detection, encourage originality, and promote collaboration. Such technological advancement would accelerate discoveries and innovations across science, medicine, agriculture, information technology, education, law, and the humanities, ushering in a new era of knowledge development.⁹

Algorithms and the Advancement of Academic Software and Social Media

Algorithms are systematic procedures used by computers to perform calculations, solve problems, and organize information. In the digital age, they play a crucial role in academic analytics and in determining content visibility on social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Amazon, and Netflix. Machine learning systems analyze vast amounts of online data, enabling more accurate searches and personalized results.

⁷ S. U. Fwatshak "Granaries of Memories... 14

⁸ S. U. Fwatshak "Granaries of Memories...14

⁹ C.K. Chan "Is AI changing the rules of Academic Conduct? An In-depth look at students' perception of AI-giarism" University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Education, 2022, 1-17.

Since enormous quantities of information are stored digitally, technology increasingly focuses on improving access and retrieval. In Nigerian academia, online visibility has become essential, encouraging journals and researchers to establish strong digital platforms for global accessibility and recognition.¹⁰

The internet's vast capacity as a repository of information has increased global interest and investment in Mathematics education, particularly in advanced countries. Nigeria is also making progress through initiatives such as the Cowbell Mathematics Competition, which promotes mathematical excellence among primary and secondary school students. Such programmes, supported by industry and government, are valuable investments that encourage analytical skills and prepare young people for a technology-driven future.¹¹

Algorithms have become essential in research platforms, making statistics increasingly valuable to historians for analyzing demographic and social data. Digital tools allow researchers to access specific information with greater accuracy, provided reliable search engines are used to retrieve credible and citable sources. A major trend in information technology is integration, where related platforms merge through partnerships, acquisitions, or takeovers. Such integration, as seen in the acquisition of WhatsApp by Facebook, has improved identity management and enabled users to benefit from interconnected digital services.¹²

Artificial Intelligence and Developing Technical Skills

Parents generally encourage their children to pursue university education to obtain degrees and acquire professional skills valued by employers. This explains the preference for disciplines such as Medicine, Law, Engineering, Computer Science, Information Technology, Accounting, and related fields. During the researcher's period of study in History and International Studies at the University of Calabar (1999–2005), learning was largely manual, class sizes were smaller, and academic training was highly rigorous, producing lasting skills. While Artificial Intelligence offers benefits in detecting plagiarism and improving research,

¹⁰ C.K.Chan "Is AI Changing the rules of Academic Misconduct?" 1-17

¹¹ Chan, "Is AI Changing the rules of Academic Misconduct?"...1-17.

¹² Chan, "Is AI Changing the rules of Academic Misconduct?"...1-17.

excessive dependence on it may weaken students' independent abilities. Therefore, its use should be guided by mature and responsible scholars.¹³

In 2024, numerous Artificial Intelligence platforms continue to evolve to meet users' changing needs. Tools such as Samwell.ai offer valuable support in referencing and plagiarism detection. However, the researcher concludes that, particularly in the African academic environment, such technologies are most effective when used by mature scholars. In the liberal arts, critical thinking, analytical ability, and strong expression develop through reading, research, and intellectual engagement rather than technological dependence.¹⁴

Excessive dependence on Artificial Intelligence can hinder the development of independent analysis among young scholars. Concerns have emerged at the University of Calabar where some students combine multiple AI platforms to generate, refine, and conceal academic work rather than develop their own research skills. Effective scholarship requires balance and academic responsibility. In twenty-first-century historical research, the principle of academic expedience should guide researchers to use appropriate combinations of primary sources, secondary sources, and AI tools where necessary. Such a balanced approach promotes originality, strengthens scholarship, and enables future researchers to build upon existing knowledge while making new contributions.¹⁵

Detecting Plagiarism and Academic Fraud through the Use of Artificial Intelligence

At the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels, students are expected to make original contributions to knowledge through their research projects, theses, and dissertations. Such work requires commitment, diligence, honesty, and intellectual discipline. However, the challenges and demands of rigorous research sometimes lead students to seek shortcuts, including copying existing works, hiring others to produce academic materials, or disguising borrowed ideas through paraphrasing. These practices undermine creativity and scholarly development. Academics therefore encourage students to seek legitimate guidance and support

¹³ S. Mishra "Enhancing Plagiarism Detection: The role of Academic Intelligence in Upholding Academic Integrity" *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 2023, 1-14.

¹⁴ S. Mishra "Enhancing Plagiarism Detection ... 1-14.

¹⁵ S. Mishra "Enhancing Plagiarism Detection... 1-14

from their supervisors and university resources rather than adopting methods that compromise research integrity and personal growth.¹⁶

Academic shortcuts are frequently exposed during internal and external defence examinations, raising important questions about why some Nigerian students continue to pursue dishonest alternatives despite their risks. Possible explanations include societal challenges such as corruption, declining educational standards, and inadequate preparation at earlier levels of learning. Strengthening education is therefore essential to develop students' knowledge, confidence, and problem-solving abilities. When properly equipped, students are more likely to seek legitimate solutions rather than engage in academic misconduct. Universities, particularly at the postgraduate level, must also strengthen monitoring systems to ensure that attempts at academic fraud are effectively detected and discouraged.¹⁷

Educational training should include psychology and effective teaching methods to help educators nurture students positively despite challenges. Nigeria's education system must focus on developing the complete individual by emphasizing knowledge, character, confidence, and self-worth from the earliest stages. Teachers should inspire students to recognize their uniqueness and potential, equipping them to resist negative peer influence and maintain integrity when facing academic or social pressures.¹⁸

The Future of the Archives in Nigeria

An archive is a repository for preserving historical records and documents, including letters, reports, maps, photographs, films, digital files, and sound recordings. Archives may be governmental, organizational, religious, or personal. Government archives preserve official records, while organizational archives maintain institutional documents. Archiving involves storing physical or electronic information for long-term preservation and future reference.¹⁹ The term archive originates from the Greek word "archeia," meaning public records. Despite advances in electronic storage, the traditional National Archives in Nigeria remains highly relevant and has a promising future.

¹⁶ T. H. Cormen *et. al.* *Introduction to Algorithms*. (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2022), 1-113

¹⁷ T.H.Cormen et al "Introduction to Algorithms" 1-113.

¹⁸ T.H. Cormen "Introduction to algorithms" 1-113.

¹⁹ S. U. Fwatshak "Granaries of Memories; Stores of Civilisations: Archives and Museums as Sources of Historical Writing" In *Historical Research Method*, edited by S. O. Aghalino, O. O. Okpeh, and D.L. Imbua. (Abuja: Heredotus Publishers Ltd, 2023) 14.

However, digitization is essential to improve accessibility, allowing researchers to obtain historical materials remotely through secure online platforms. With adequate funding and competent management, the digitization of national records would encourage wider historical research and provide answers to important national questions. Making archival materials accessible would also enable renewed examination of the works of pioneering Nigerian historians, thereby strengthening the growth and development of History as a discipline.²⁰ Nigeria would benefit from establishing several geographically distributed National Archives linked through digital networks. Such interconnectivity would improve accessibility, reduce research costs, and encourage historians to pursue broader and more ambitious studies.²¹

Bridging the Gap Between Archival Sources and Modern Information Technology Software and Websites

In this study, “bridging the gap” refers to encouraging younger historians to recognize that both primary and secondary sources are valuable and complementary in modern research. Their combined use in assignments, seminars, projects, and postgraduate studies promotes a more balanced and comprehensive approach to historical inquiry. To address contemporary challenges, academics require continuous training on detecting plagiarism and misuse of Artificial Intelligence tools. This is particularly important because younger generations, especially Generation X and Z, are deeply connected to digital technology and online platforms. Often described as the “sight and sound generation,” they engage more with visual and audio content than traditional reading methods. The popularity of videos, documentaries, social media, and online platforms demonstrates this shift. Consequently, scholars must adapt by integrating technological awareness with established research principles to maintain academic integrity.²²

Mobile phone manufacturers have contributed significantly to the growth of online visual content through continuous improvements in camera and video technology. Companies

²⁰ S. U. Fwatshak “Granaries of Memories; Stores of Civilisations: Archives and Museums as Sources of Historical Writing” In *Historical Research Method*, edited by S. O. Aghalino, O. O. Okpeh, and D.L. Imbua. (Abuja: Heredotus Publishers Ltd, 2023) 14.

²¹ S. U. Fwatshak “Granaries of Memories... 15.

²² S. Mishra “Enhancing Plagiarism Detection: The role of Academic Intelligence in Upholding Academic Integrity” 1-14.

such as Apple, Samsung, Tecno, Huawei, Infinix, Nokia, and others continue to enhance digital capabilities, resulting in a rapid increase in the quantity and quality of online audiovisual materials. Historians must therefore adapt by developing skills to evaluate and utilize these emerging sources of evidence. This paper advocates the careful integration of audiovisual learning into history education through documentaries, historical clips, and interdisciplinary productions. Dedicated audiovisual learning spaces within History departments would further enhance teaching, research, memory, and student engagement.²³

To bridge the gap between archival research and modern information technology, accessibility to archival materials must be improved without compromising security. Ease of access should not mean unrestricted access. Similar to visa systems in countries such as the United States and Canada, researchers should undergo proper verification before accessing national archival resources remotely. Applicants should provide relevant details, including identity, occupation, research objectives, and legal commitments regarding responsible use of information. A structured registration system, supported by official identification records, would promote accountability while allowing genuine scholars easier access to valuable primary documents. In the documentation forms, they should be required to surrender their National Identity Number (NIN) as currently issued by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) and their Bank Verification Number (BVN) as currently issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).²⁴

Researchers should be encouraged to submit completed works to archives, institutions, agencies, or departments for preservation and future reference. These repositories would expand available resources, acknowledge institutional contributions to scholarship, and support subsequent researchers. Such a practice would ensure the continuous growth of academic materials, improve access to evidence, and promote increasingly innovative and advanced research.²⁵

²³ S. Mishra "Enhancing Plagiarism Detection: The role of Academic Intelligence in Upholding Academic Integrity" 1-14.

²⁴ T.Schmitz "Legal Writing/Legal writing and Language" Contribution to the Course, Methodology of Legal Research and Legal Writing, 2022, 1-2.

²⁵ T. Schmitz "Legal Writing/Legal writing and Language" 1-2.

The Future of the Private and Commercial Archive

In Nigeria, the banking and finance sector remains one of the leading institutions in information management, record-keeping, and archival practices, maintaining both physical and digital records. This is largely driven by the need for accountability, legal protection, and accurate documentation of customer transactions. The civil service, particularly digitally advanced Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, also maintains valuable historical records. Similarly, private organizations require effective archives to verify staff credentials, employment histories, and business transactions. Given the prevalence of inaccurate claims and fraudulent documentation, reliable record systems are essential for accountability, legal protection, and institutional continuity. Therefore, every significant organization should maintain comprehensive records of its daily, monthly, quarterly, and annual activities to support future reference and informed decision-making.²⁶

The Nigerian business environment is increasingly experiencing legal disputes involving contracts, claims, and customer grievances, similar to trends observed in Western countries. This development encourages organizations to improve accountability, service delivery, and record management. Consequently, private and commercial archives have a significant future role. Business, employment, and academic archives must combine traditional paper records with modern digital systems to ensure information is preserved and easily accessible. The banking sector, in particular, provides researchers in Business Management, Accounting, Marketing, and Finance with valuable primary and secondary data. Reliable record-keeping enhances statistical analysis, reduces errors, and contributes to more comprehensive and balanced research outcomes.²⁷

Effective documentation and record management help organizations verify employee backgrounds and reduce risks. Many institutions, especially banks, maintain detailed records of staff and prospective employees through employment referencing systems that confirm credentials and previous work history. These records support sound hiring decisions and can assist investigative agencies such as the DSS, EFCC, ICPC, and Interpol when investigating

²⁶ E. J. Alagoa "Interdisciplinary Approach to African History in Nigeria". *Présence Africaine* No 94, 1975, 1-13.

²⁷ E. S. Abd-Elaal, S. H. P. W. Gamage, and J. E. Mills. "Assisting academics to identify computer generated writing". *European Journal of Engineering Education*. 47). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2022.2046709>, 2002, 725-745.

crimes. Proper documentation therefore strengthens accountability, security, and institutional integrity.²⁸ The preservation and continuous development of commercial and private archives serve the broader interests of society by safeguarding valuable historical records. The life of Professor Okon Edet Uya illustrates this importance. For his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin, Professor Okon Edet Uya researched the life of Robert Smalls, a former slave who became a distinguished public servant in the United States. His study, made possible by well-preserved archival records and rigorous scholarship, was later published by Oxford University Press as *Robert Smalls: From Slavery to Public Service*, demonstrating the enduring value of comprehensive historical documentation.²⁹

Preserving Nigeria's collective history requires sustained investment in comprehensive archives and well-maintained museums. Such efforts enable future generations to understand their past, address contemporary challenges, and strengthen their sense of identity. As demonstrated by Professor Okon Edet Uya's scholarship, reliable historical records support meaningful reconstruction, enrich historical interpretation, and safeguard the nation's cultural heritage for posterity.

Conclusion

A balanced historical study is best achieved through the careful integration of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, including archival records, oral testimonies, and archaeological evidence, provide direct and authentic accounts that strengthen the objectivity of historical inquiry. Secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, newspapers, and credible digital resources, complement these materials by offering interpretation, analysis, and broader scholarly perspectives. In the twenty-first century, historians must bridge the gap between traditional archival materials and emerging digital sources to ensure that historical research remains relevant and accessible.

The study further emphasizes the growing influence of artificial intelligence in academic research. While AI tools can enhance efficiency, excessive dependence on them may weaken students' analytical abilities, critical thinking, and originality. Consequently, AI should

²⁸ E. S. Abd-Elaal, S.H.P.W Gamage, J. E. Mills, "Assisting academics to identify computer generated writing" 725-745.

²⁹E. S. Abd-Elaal, S. H. P. W. Gamage, J. E. Mills, "Assisting academics ...725-745

serve as a supplementary research aid rather than a substitute for independent scholarship. Lecturers and researchers should also become proficient in AI technologies to harness their benefits while detecting plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. Finally, the study highlights the enduring value of public, private, and commercial archives through the example of Professor Okon Edet Uya's research on Robert Smalls, which was made possible by well-preserved historical records. Strengthening archival institutions, improving access to verified researchers, and preserving documentary heritage will ensure that Nigeria's historical legacy remains available for future generations and continues to enrich historical scholarship.

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