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The Availability, Organization, and Use of Archival Records: A Study of Public Archives Agencies in the Northwestern States of Nigeria

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Introduction

The desire to keep and use records of knowledge and information for reference and permanent preservation can be linked to the earliest time of human history. History has showed how people of the ancient era kept records of their thoughts and experiences on items at their disposal. Clay-tablets, papyrus, cuneiform, palm-trees, bark of trees, animal skins, stones etc, for example, were used for some purposes and historical documentation. With the development of paper and other non-textual documentary forms such as films, photographs, still and motion pictures, videotapes and related machine readable forms, archival records then continue to appear on special physical characteristics.

In the earliest time there was no distinction between record rooms (archives) and libraries, in which sense, archives can be said to have existed for almost as long as records has been kept. Uduigwome (1989) considered archives as the official or organized records of governments, organizations, groups of people and individuals whatever their date, form and material appearance which are no longer needed to conduct current businesses but are preserved either, as evidence of origins, structure, functions and activities or because of the information they contain. Evans (1988) on the other hand described archives as having constituted one of the world's primary sources of information that grew uniquely out of the activities of organizations, institutions, families and individuals. Archives according to him are "records of an entity that have been selected for preservation because they possess enduring value". A record is defined as information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligation or business" (Cunningham and Philips, 2005). In the context of this study therefore, archival records are non current records of an organization, individuals or families created, received and preserved (by public archives agency) because of their administrative, historical, legal, cultural, or other values. Public archival agencies play a vital role to the community because they promote reliable archival records keeping and maintain a visible, accessible and known collection. To this end, the public archives agencies enables and promotes best practice in the management of government records in all formats from the point of creation for as long as they are required to support the needs of government and the people.

Archives served as vital means for the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage and National identity as well as tool for administrative efficiency. More so, archives compliments the human memory thereby allowing the flow of recorded knowledge of the past for future use. The effective preservation and use of such recorded knowledge therefore, can greatly influence societal transformation, politically, culturally, administratively and economically. Cunningham & Philips (2005) who quoted (Derrida, 1996) described the roles of archives in democracy which is an important requirement for societal transformation. According to them, "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by the participation in and the access to the archives, its constitution and its interpretation."

Many studies have pointed to the important roles of archival records in societal transformation. Cunningham & Philips (2005) further submitted that, archives have an important role in ensuring national and cultural memory, scholarly research and ensuring an enshrined democracies entitlements of the governed. The quest for democratic principles in Nigeria can be enhance via effective accessibility and use of archival records. Public archives agencies can serve as a means of empowering citizens against potential maladministration, corruption and autocracy which characterized contemporary democracy of Nigerian society. The archival records can provide all citizens with a kind of check and balance mechanism against a tyrannical government. In this way public archives can serve as a means of healing the deep wounds of democratic accountability and advancement in Nigerian society.

Archives can serve as a tool for performance assessment both by individuals, organization or governance agencies. "Information is the currency of democracy and for individual members of the community to be able to evaluate the success or otherwise of government programs, to be able to assert their rights, to debate the issues of the day, citizens must have access to current and historic (archival records) sources of information generated by government and by other sectors such as academia and private enterprise", Cunningham & Philips (2005). This means that access to information created and distributed by public archives agencies is a necessary requirement for the continued survival and transformation of Nigeria in particular and the world in general. As such, the availability, proper description or organization and use of archival records will no doubt influenced the effective roles of archival records in terms of societal transformation, and this also remained an important aspect of consideration and exploration in archival administration.

Review of Literature

The preservation and accessibility of archives among successive generations constitute the greatest single treasure of the human heritage, UNESCO (1976). Archival records are usually appraised, retained, organized and preserved according to acceptable standard and procedures. Evborokhai (1990) described the nature and coverage of archival resources to include books, paper, maps, photographs, machine readable materials either documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics generated or received by a department or organization in connection with the transaction of its business and preserved as evidence of its functions, policies, decision, operations or activities or because of the information value in them. Archival resources also include letters, reports, dairies, maps, photographs, films, tape recordings and the like. Information contained in archives can be exploited adequately if such resources are properly described and organized, and made available or accessible to the users.

Organization of information resources in archives entails description and arrangement of the materials in relation to their creating agency. Jimerson (2002) points out that the essential purpose of archival organization or description is to know what you have so you can find it when you need it. Description of archival records according him is the process of analyzing, organizing, and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate, and explain the holdings of archives repositories and the contexts and records systems from which those holdings were selected.

Information contained in archival materials of contemporary archival agencies cannot be adequately exploited without being described and organized accordingly to provide for easy retrieval by and access to users. The idea of description and arrangement of archival materials in relation to their creating agencies is however, relatively of recent origin. In the olden days, archival materials were subjected to a variety of organization and re-organization, many based on chronological order, subject matter and geographical consideration. With time however, such artificial arrangements were considered ineffective and inefficient. As such, a systematic and effective description and arrangement of records based on their nature and character as well as organ city was developed. The American Library Association (1986) accordingly has commented: the unfortunate consequences of artificial arrangement as well as the development of a fuller understanding of the nature and character of archives led to the formulation of the two basic principles that today are universally recognized as the sole appropriate basis

for the description and arrangement of archives: the principle of provenance and the principle of respect for original order.

Baumann (1986) viewed organization or description of archival resources as the process of establishing intellectual control over holdings through the preparation of finding aids. A finding aid is any description medium card or document, published or unpublished, that is created to establish physical or administrative and intellectual control over records.

This will help for the proper arrangement or putting archival records into their proper final order or 'to place them in order relative to each other' as pointed out by Cook (1977). Prom (2003) also shared this view and made further clarification that, the process stands at the center of archival work and unites the functions of appraisal (deciding what to keep) and reference or providing access to kept records. Based on this analysis of literature, one is left without doubt as to the important roles of archival description and organization in terms of ensuring access and use of archival records.

The concept of access was considered as one of the most important aspect of archival administration by Abioye (2009). He described access in archival context as the availability of records/archives for consultation as a result both of legal authorization and the existence of finding aids. Harold (1977) corroborated this when he viewed access in archival operations as the availability of archival resources to users. This means making available (for use) of archival materials to users through the provision of archival services. It is certainly beyond arguments that, the preservation of archival records whether on paper and the much more modern form of information documentation cannot in any way serves a meaningful purpose without provision of access to the records. The purpose of selecting, acquiring and preserving archives is to make them available for use. Intellectual and physical accessibility are vital components of managing these important information resources, Jimerson (2003). Jimerson (2003) further gave a broad array of public archival clientele to include administrative staff of the institution, scholars, genealogists, local historians, legal researchers, specialists in one or more professional discipline, college or school students, hobbyists, as further adumbrated by Jimerson (2003).

Abioye (2009) identified the historical transformation of archival accessibility. He declared that, "in the past access to archives was restricted to the creators and their legitimate successors. Archives at this time were considered as arsenals of law. The focus has since shifted with the gradual liberalization of access". In the olden days for example, public records were preserved in strict secrecy and under close protection. Such recorded information materials were kept in locked rooms, sacks, boxes, crates, shrines and even the treasury, such that, public access was not practically emphasized. However, shortly before the end of the eighteenth century A.D, the French revolution launched the modern era in the history of archives particularly in the areas of legislation, preservation and public access through the French Archival act of 1794. Momoh (1989) put it succinctly that, it was "the Declaration of Archival Right of Man, 'Archival Act of 1794,' which has become known in professional parlance is a French legacy which made accessibility an essential function of modern archival institution".

UNESCO (1976) declared that: "Information resources in archives should not only be made available and accessible to the public at individual level but also at national and international scope. Archival services can be effective if it is given universal scope and contextualization through access to information and the product of human, creativity without distinction of nationality, language, race, religions or political belief. The memory of mankind belongs equally to all and every one has the right to enjoy its effective participation in the establishment by a variety of techniques and systems of the human conditions required to make possible the unhampered circulation of the media whereby universal thought is recorded". This means that, meeting information needs of archival users is an important factor to reckon with by archivist particularly in public archival agencies. This is because different types of archival agencies and different types of archival resources will attract and be useful to different category of users (Jimerson, 2003). With the growing interest and greater recognition of the possible uses of archival materials for legal, investigative, administrative, and other types of research, archivists and records

managers should recognize that, availability, organization and access to archival records should be given necessary attention particularly in public archival agencies.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study were to:

- Examine the availability of public archives agencies in the north-western states of Nigeria.
- Identify the archival records available in these agencies.
- Determine how those records or archives were organized in the identified agencies.
- Examine how public access is provided to the resources.

Research Methodology

The survey research technique was used for the purpose of this study. Survey research according to Busha (1980) is characterized by selection of random samples from large and small population in order to obtain empirical knowledge which allows generalization to be made about characteristics, opinions, beliefs and attitudes of the entire population being studied. The survey research method reportedly saves time, money and was considered capable of enabling the researcher to examine the accessibility and use of Public archival Records in the North western States of Nigeria.

Firstly, the researcher conducted a pilot study to obtain information about the public archives agencies in existence in the seven states that made up the North western part of Nigeria. The researcher visited all the seven states of Jigawa; Kaduna; Kano; Katsina; Kebbi; Sokoto; and Zamfara respectively. A questionnaire (Appendix 1) was used to obtain data on the existence or availability of public archives in the states. The data was collected from the Directors of information in the Ministries of Information, Youth, Sport and Culture of each state. The result of the pilot study revealed the existence of five public archival agencies available in all the seven states that made up the North-Western Zone of Nigeria. (Reported in the data presentation part of this study). The use of pilot study was found useful against the theoretical knowledge that, pilot study can be used by to obtain preliminary information about the population as reported by Srivastava (1989)

For the purpose of collecting data relevant for this study, the researcher designed a separate questionnaire (appendix 2) which was administered to the archivists and the directors of all the five public archival agencies. The choice of these subjects was because they were considered as directly responsible for the daily professional and administrative affairs of their respective archival agencies. The questionnaire was administered to the archivists of the five agencies. The questionnaire elicits data on the types of archival resources available in the five public archives agencies. It also sought data on how these archival resources are described and organized as well as how access to them were provided. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher in all the five public archives involved in the study. This approach was meant to explore the advantages of personal administration of research instrument as indicated by Best and Khan (1989), who stated that: "Questionnaires administered personally to groups of individual have a number of advantages. The person administering the instrument had the opportunity to establish rapport, and explain the meaning of items that may not be clear. "

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Profile of the Public Archives Agencies in Northwestern states of Nigeria

Name of state	Name of the public archives	Year founded
KADUNA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The National Archives, Kaduna• Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna	1957 1970
KANO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano	1987
SOKOTO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau.• National Archives (Branch), Sokoto	1982 1982

There are a total of five public archives agencies founded in different period in the North-western states of Nigeria. The data collected reveals that there are more public archives agencies in existence in Kaduna and Sokoto states respectively. Each of the two states has two public archival agencies. Two of the five public archival agencies are branches of the National Archives of Nigerian. The other two were founded by state governments of Kano and Sokoto states respectively. While, the Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna holds the historical collections of the former Premier of the defunct northern region, late Sir, Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto. It can also be deduced that, majority of the public archives in this part of the country were post colonial creation, except the National Archives (branch), Kaduna which was the oldest of all the public archives agencies in this part of the country, founded during the colonial administration.

Table 2: Categories of Archival Records Available in the Public Archives.

		NATURE OF THE RECORDS							
	Name of the Public Archives	Administrative Records	Historical Records	Judicial Records	Financial Records	Legislative Records	Minutes of Meeting	Security or Internal Records	Others
1	National Archives (branch), Kaduna	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
2	Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
3	Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
4	National Archives (Branch), Sokoto	A	A	A	NA	A	NA	A	NA
5	Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

Key: A=Available; NA=Not Available

Category of Archival records Availability in the public archival agencies

All the five public archives retained a number of archival records which includes administrative records; historical and judicial or legal records. Others include financial records, minutes of meetings and security or internal records. The study however, reveals that the National Archive (branch), Sokoto does not have financial and minutes of meeting records in its custody. (Indicate how this finding is in line with the findings of other studies).

Table 3: Factors of consideration in the Description and Organizations of Archival Records in the Public Archives

		FACTORS CONSIDERED				
	Name of Public Archive	Creating Agency	Date of records creation	Date of records Transfer	Receiving Agency	Provenance
1	National Archives (branch), Kaduna	C	C	NC	C	C
2	Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna	C	C	NC	C	C
3	Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano	C	C	NC	NC	C
4	National Archives (Branch), Sokoto	C	C	NC	NC	C
5	Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto	C	C	C	C	C

Key: C=Considered; NC=Not Considered

Organization of Resources

All the five archives considered a number of factors in organizing their records. The use of records' creating agency, date of creation and the provenance factors are common to all the five public archives in establishing the intellectual control of their records. The date of records transfer is not a factor of consideration in the description and organization of the records by the majority of the archives except the Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto. The finding of this study is in line with the findings of other studies conducted by Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu (2007); Baumann (1986); Jimerson (2007) and Prom (2003) who emphasized the need for archival records to be properly described and organized following patterns established during their original use and creation. Prom (2003) posited that, to retain a proper context for interpreting the actions of an individual or organization, archival files must be properly arranged and described. A good archival practice mandates that the records of an organization, the personal paper of an individual or the aggregation of a documentary collection be described and arranged following patterns established during original use and creation. Jimerson (2002) also justified the used of provenance principles as an important factor of consideration in describing archival records. "The fundamental archival principles of provenance and original order dictate that, archival records should be organized by office of origin or records creator and that the original filing order should be maintained whenever possible". Also, Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu (2007) further indicated that, description and arrangements in archival context not only ensure proper organization of the records but also facilitate quick and easy access to the records when required.

Table 4: Accessibility and or use patterns of Archival Resources in the Public Archives Agencies

		NATURE OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED							
	Name of Public Archive	Search Room Services	Lending Services	Information services	Exhibition services	Public Relation and Publicity Services	Reprographic Services	Media Services	Others
1	National Archives (branch), Kaduna	P	NP	P	P	NP	P	NP	P
2	Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna	P	NP	P	P	NP	P	NP	NP
3	Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano	P	NP	P	NP	NP	P	NP	NP
4	National Archives (Branch), Sokoto	P	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P
5	Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto	P	P	P	P	NP	P	NP	NP

Key: P=Provided; NP=Not Provided

Accessibility and Use of Archival Resources

The finding of this study reveals that all the five public archives provide access to their archival resources. Accessibility to the information resources is provided through a number of archival services which include search room services, & information and reprographic services. These are very common to

all the archives agencies except the National Archives (Branch), Sokoto which does not provide reprographic service due to lack of facilities. This has really concretized the rule of use and access as enshrined in the literature. Abioye (2009) declared that; search room and references services has been in existence at the National Archives of Nigeria for decades with comprehensive search regulations published to guide the searchers and to regulates their conduct in the search room. Search room and reference services are provided in not only Nigerian archival agencies but other archival institutions worldwide as further noted by Abioye (2009). Search room and reference services are geared towards both intellectual and physical access respectively. Intellectual access is made possible through reference use of archives and search room service ensure and enshrined physical access through the use of appropriate facilities to allow users to examine archives in a secure and convenient atmosphere as opined by Jimerson (2003). The study further reveals that none of the five public archives provide lending, media and public relation and publicity services except Waziri Junaidu Archive of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto. This is indeed contrary to what the literature have indicated on the need for archives to create an active outreach program to overcome misunderstanding of users about archives and to inform potential users about the potential benefits of using archives as indicated by (Cook, 1977; Bauman 1986; Pugh, 1994; Jimerson; 2003 & Abioye, 2009). Jimerson (2003) for example clearly stated that, archivists and records managers should identify their user clientele, develop outreach methods for informing users, provides intellectual and physical access, establish and administer access policies and provide on-site or remote outreach-services. The lack of adequate funding may have been responsible for the non provision of media and public relation and publicity services by the archives. As these set of services requires extra budgetary allocation which many of the archival agencies cannot afford.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that government has traditionally been the most complex institution in most organization, societies and a leader in terms of producing records, its archives has always been the source of information about any national community. Government or public archives constitute the recorded collective experiences and memory of the national community and are therefore the basic components of its communities. Access and use of such records can have a significant value to individuals, institutions and society in general. The accessibility and use of records of human knowledge, their preservation and passages or communication among successive generations no doubt constitute the greatest single treasure of the human heritage. This is because they provide opportunities for maintaining the legal integrity of the individual, organization, and families including entitlements as well as the use of the archival information for administrative actions. All governments therefore should establish, maintain and use the public records of its jurisdiction. Public archival institution should have adequate and effective program of archival description, accessibility and use. This is very imperative because of their importance in the provision of information to interested individuals, families, organizations, state administrators and the wider society at large.

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