

Awareness and Use of the National Archives in Nigeria

Uloma Doris Onuoha

Dept. of Information Resources Management Babcock University, Nigeria

Abstract: *This study sought to ascertain the awareness and use of National Archives of Nigeria. The study adopted the survey design. Study population was made up of artisans, undergraduate students, teachers, accountants and sales persons at Babcock Univeristy, Ilishan – Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. Although the exact population of those within Babcock University could not be ascertained at the time of the study, proportional random sampling technique was, however, used for selecting 100 respondents who took part in the study. A self constructed questionnaire was used for data collection. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was evident from the findings that majority of Nigerians are not aware of the National Archives. Among those who are aware of its' existence, few have actually bothered to visit it and those who have did so mainly for the purpose of school excursion. It was, however, interesting to note that those who have actually visited the National Archives did learn something new from their visit and rated the National Archives as effective in helping Nigerians learn about their national heritage. Based on the findings, recommendations were made.*

Keywords: *Cultural heritage, National Archives, Nigeria, Nigerian culture*

I. Introduction

Nigeria, located on the Atlantic coast in West Africa, is bordered by Benin on the West, Niger and Chad on the North, and Cameroon on the East. Nigeria is the most populous country of Africa with an artistic and cultural heritage unsurpassed in Sub-Saharan Africa (Academic American Encyclopedia, 1994). Nigeria is a land of rich and diverse cultural heritage with more than 250 ethnic groups and a wide array of religious and sophisticated visual arts. The need to preserve cultural heritage materials in Nigeria was recognized by archivists and museum curators as early as the earliest institutions such as libraries, archives and museums established in the early 50's (Zaid and Abioye, 2009). According to Abioye (2009), the National Archives of Nigeria came into being in Ibadan in 1954 as the Nigerian Record Office due to the untiring efforts of Kenneth Onwuka Dike who showed much concern about the state of public records in Nigeria. Presently, Abioye (2009) notes that the National Archives of Nigeria has branch offices in Enugu, Kaduna and other locations in Nigeria. Domiciled in the Information and Communications Ministry, the National Archives is entrusted with the preservation as well as the promotion of cultural heritage in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

With the creation of National Archives of Nigeria, the Nigerian government demonstrated its willingness to preserve and promote its' national heritage. As such Nigerian cultural heritage would not only be preserved but showcased to the whole world (Nigerians and non- Nigerians) through the national archives. While this is laudable, the extent to which Nigerians are aware of, or even utilize the National Archives remains relatively unknown. It is for this reason that the present study investigates the awareness and use of National Archives by staff and students of Babcock University, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to find out the extent of awareness of the National Archives. The specific objectives are to:

- 1 find out the level of awareness of archival institutions in Nigerian within Babcock University
- 2 determine the sources for creating awareness of archives in Nigeria
- 3 find out the extent to which staff and students of Babcock University visit archives
- 4 find out the purpose for which archives are mostly visited
- 5 determine the extent to which archives contribute to knowledge of cultural heritage in Nigeria

Research questions

Based on the objectives, the following research questions are asked:

- 1 To what extent are those within Babcock community aware of archival institutions in Nigeria?
- 2 What are the sources for creating awareness of archival institutions in Nigeria?
- 3 To what extent do those within Babcock University visit the National Archives?
- 4 For what purpose is the National Archives visited?

- 5 To what extent is the National Archive effective in contributing to knowledge of cultural heritage in Nigeria?

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study is restricted to staff and students of Babcock University, Nigeria. Babcock University community was chosen for this study because it has a good mix of both literate and non-literate people to adequately represent what can be found in a typical Nigerian city.

II. Review of Literature

Archives are 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 (Uduigwome 1989). It can, therefore, be deduced that archives are records of an entity that have been selected for preservation because they possess enduring value.

Archives serve as memory cues, because going through the documents of yesterday, the past is restored back to life. Where memory fails and records are not available, evidence of the past are completely erased. While archivists perform the functions of acquiring, organizing and preserving national heritage, it is equally important for them to provide access to their holdings. According to Abioye (2009) access is one of the most important aspects of archival administration.

The International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science (2003) notes that with the establishment of archives, a citizen's right to have access to public archives was recognized, although, some documents contain sensitive information and can not be made available for public inspection. Jimerson (n.d.) summarizes the role of archives by stating that archives protect and preserve records; legitimize and sanctify certain documents while negating and destroying others; and provide access to selected sources while controlling the researchers and conditions under which they may examine the archival record. Archives as a form of records keeping however discourage secrecy in governance. It brings into public view, the life of successive administrations.

In the opinion of Maidabino (2010), public archives 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 have come to play key roles in the preservation of national heritage. Unlike history which records past events, archives keep the relics of the past alive in order to ensure that history will not only be heard but felt. A study carried out by Uduigwome (1989) revealed that public archives are used by scholars particularly students of tertiary institutions. Abioye (2009) in his study also affirmed that archives are used mainly for research purposes (66.6%); informational purpose 33.3%; litigation 11.1% and 5.5% for administrative purposes.

While studying the problems of archival management, Burns, Ferris and Liatsopoulos (n.d.), affirm that some of the problems facing archival management in Africa are related to lack of funds, which is needed not only to house and store records, but also to train staff, streamline technology, and create efficient systems for access, among other records information management needs. Despite the efforts of the National Archives of Nigeria, Alegebeye (1998) listed some challenges facing it as: the existence of a permissive Public Archives Law of 1957 under which the National Archives of Nigeria still operates; inadequacy of modern conservation facilities; inadequate publicity of the importance of the National Archives to national development; limited training opportunities for the staff of the National Archives staff; failure to revive the moribund archives committee and absence of a comprehensive and integrated records management programme.

Theoretical framework

This study hinges on socio-cultural theory propounded by Vygotsky (1978). The theory proposes that learning is a socially-mediated process where learners, both adults and children, are jointly responsible for their learning. The main idea behind this theory is that human activities take place in cultural contexts through social interactions that are mediated by language and other symbol systems and shaped by an individuals' historical development (Ash, 2003). When applied to archives and records management, the experience and knowledge acquired through exposure to archives, coupled with an individual personal experience, can change one's perception of cultural heritage, bringing about change in learning and attitude.

III. Methodology

The descriptive research approach was used for the study. Study population was made up of artisans, undergraduate students, teachers, accountants and sales persons in Ilishan – Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. As at the time of the study the exact number making up the population could not be ascertained; however,

proportional random sampling technique was used for selecting 100 respondents who took part in the study. A self constructed questionnaire was used for data collection while data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Out of the 100 copies of the questionnaire sent out, 68 were retrieved, giving a response rate of 68%.

Table 1: Response Rate by Occupation

Occupation	Undergraduate students	Teachers	Accountants	Sales persons	Artisans
No. of questionnaire sent out	20	20	20	20	20
No. of questionnaire retrieved	20	15	17	11	5

Among the groups that made up the respondents for this study, undergraduates’ were the most cooperative as all twenty copies of questionnaire given to them were filled and returned successfully. Accountants and Teachers also tried in returning the questionnaire, as seen in Table 1. Artisans and sales persons recorded the least return rate. Out of the 20 copies given to sales persons 11 was returned while artisans, returned only 5. This may be attributed to work pressure, lack of interest in participating in the study, or lack of awareness of National Archives. The researcher was asked severally to explain the meaning of National Archives by the two groups.

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	percentage
Male	41	60%
Female	27	40%

N = 68

Among those who successfully filled and returned the questionnaire, 41 (60%) were male, while 27(40%) were female.

Table 3: Awareness of National Archives

Question	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Have you ever heard of the National Archives of Nigeria?	40	59	28	41

N= 68

In order to find out respondents’ awareness of the National Archives of Nigeria, the question “have you ever heard of the National Archives of Nigeria”? was asked. Findings from Table 3 indicate that majority of the respondents 40 (59%) have heard about the National archives of Nigeria.

Table 4: Awareness by occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate students	16	40
Teachers	14	35
Accountants	8	20
Artisans	1	3
Sales persons	1	3

N= 40

Among the various groups, undergraduates (40%) were found to be most aware of National Archives, followed by teachers (35%) and accountants (20%). Sales persons (3%) and artisans (3%) had the least knowledge of National Archives. It can therefore be inferred that the level of education and occupation contributes to the awareness of archival institutions.

Table 5: Method of awareness

Method	Frequency	percentage
School	7	18
Media	20	50
Personal visit	4	10
Through a friend	9	22

N= 40

For those who have heard about the National Archives of Nigeria, it was necessary to find out how they heard about it. Findings from Table 5 reveal that most of the respondents did so through the media as indicated by 20 (50%) of the respondents. Friends constitute the next to best method of creating awareness as indicated by 9 (22%) of the respondents. Knowledge of the National Archives through personal visit is rare as indicated by 4 (10%) of the respondents.

Table 6: Visit to National Archives

Question	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Have you ever visited any branch of National Archives of Nigeria?	16	24	52	76

N=68

The findings as revealed in Table 6 show that out of the 68 respondents only 16 (27%) of the respondents have actually visited a branch of the National Archives of Nigeria, even though 40 (59%) of the respondents have heard about it.

Table 7: Visit by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Teachers	8	50
Undergraduate students	3	19
Artisans	3	19
Accountants	2	12
Sales persons	0	0

N=16

Among the 16 respondents who have actually visited the National Archives at one time or the other, teachers constitute 8 (50%), undergraduates constitute 3 (19%), while artisans constitute 3(19%), and accountants constitute only 2 (12%). Salespersons were yet to visit any branch of the National Archives of Nigeria. Although undergraduates’ are more aware of the National Archives of Nigeria, as indicated in table 4, teachers, rather than undergraduates had the highest frequency of visits.

Table 8: Purpose of visit

Purpose	Frequency	percentage
School excursion	7	44
For entertainment	5	31
Research	3	19
To learn about Nigeria	1	6

N= 16

Table 8 shows the purpose for visiting archives. The most popular reason for visiting archives is for school excursions as indicated by 7 (44%) of the respondents. Entertainment followed as affirmed by 5(31%) of the respondents. Those who visited for the purpose of research constitute 3 (19%) while only one respondent visited for the purpose of learning about Nigeria. This possibly explains why more teachers and undergraduate students are more aware of the National Archives of Nigeria.

Table 9: Learning about Nigeria

Question	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Did you learn anything new about Nigeria during your trip?	15	94	1	6

N=16

A major objective of this study was to find out if people (Nigerians) do learn about Nigeria from the National Archives of Nigeria. The question “did you learn anything new about Nigeria during your trip”? was asked. Among the 16 respondents who have actually visited the National Archives of Nigeria, 15(94%) did learn something new about Nigeria during their visit as against 1 (6%) who affirmed not learning anything new.

Table 10: Effectiveness of National Archives of Nigeria

Question	Very effective		Effective		Ineffective	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
How would you rate the effectiveness of the National Archives in helping Nigerians learn about their national heritage?	10	27	20	54	7	19

N=37

Out of 37 respondents who responded to this section of the questionnaire, 10 (27%) rated the National Archives of Nigeria as very effective in helping Nigerians learn about their culture. 20 (54%), rated them as effective, while only 7 (17%) rated them as ineffective. 3 respondents who had visited did not respond to the question.

IV. Discussion of findings

Based on the findings of the study, it is obvious that awareness of National Archives as an institution is low among those within Babcock University as 23(41%) of the respondents affirmed that they have never heard of the National Archives of Nigeria. The low awareness was equally confirmed during the distribution of the questionnaire as the researcher was repeatedly asked by some of the respondents to tell them about National Archives. Artisans and sales people were the least aware of National Archives as most of the respondents from

the two groups refused to fill the questionnaire stating that they have no knowledge of it. Undergraduate students and teachers were the most aware of National Archives thereby indicating a relationship between level of education and awareness of National Archives of Nigeria. For those aware of the institution, awareness was created mostly through the media and friends which was rather surprising, considering that visit to National Archives of Nigeria should have been a priority for student excursions thereby making schools a major source for creating awareness.

From the findings, it was also revealed that although more than half of the respondents 40 (59%) have heard about the National Archives of Nigeria, only 16 (27%) have actually taken time to visit. Teachers were found to have the highest frequency of visitation followed by undergraduate students. The finding is in partial agreement with Uduigwome (1989) whose study revealed that archives are mainly used by scholars particularly students of tertiary institutions. School excursions were found to be the major purpose of visitation to the National Archives, followed by entertainment and research. The finding is in partial agreement with the findings of Abioye (2009) whose study affirmed archives are used mainly for research purposes. The reason for the partial disparity may be associated with the fact that majority of the respondents who have visited the National Archives in this study are teachers and may have undertaken their visit to the National Archives as a result of school excursions at a stage in their educational pursuit.

It was also affirmed by this study that the National Archives of Nigeria, contributes to the knowledge of cultural heritage among Nigerians as majority of the respondents who have actually visited the institution 15 (94%) affirmed that they did learn something new about Nigeria during their trip. Majority of the respondents did also agree that the National Archives is effective in helping Nigerians learn about their national heritage. The findings support the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) which assumes that learning can take place through social interaction.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

It was evident from the findings that majority of Nigerians are not aware of the National Archives. Among those who are aware of its existence, few have actually bothered to visit it and those who have did so mainly for the purpose of school excursion. It was, however, interesting to note that those who have actually visited the National Archives did learn something new from their visit and they rated the National Archives as being effective in helping Nigerians learn about their national heritage. Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- 1 The National Archives of Nigeria should endeavour to create more awareness at the grassroots level, this can be during local festivals where they are likely to get more of the locals and educating them of the importance of national heritage.
- 2 Considering the fact that most people who have heard of the National Archives did so through the media, it would be appropriate for the National Archives of Nigeria to run programmes in Nigerian languages to reach out to the local populace.
- 3 Most Nigerians seem to visit the National Archives mostly for the purpose of school excursions. Based on this, the Federal Government can use schools as a way of ensuring public knowledge of archives by making it compulsory at some level of education, from the primary to the university level for students to take a trip to National Archives, so that they learn not only to appreciate their own culture, but the culture of others as well. This would, no doubt, help to foster the much needed tolerance between the diverse groups in Nigeria, thereby helping them to understand and appreciate one another.

References

- [1]. Abioye, A. (2009). Searchers' perceptions of access regulations in Nigerian national archives. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. Available @ <http://unllib.unl.edu/LPP/abioye.htm>
- [2]. Alegbeleye, G. B. O. (1998). Archives administration and records management in Nigeria: Up the decades from amalgamation. *ARMA Records Management Quarterly*. Available @ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3691/is_199807/ai_n8799970/
- [3]. Ash, D. (2003). Dialogic Inquiry and Biological Themes and Principles. *Journal of Museum Education*, 28(2): 8-12.
- [4]. Burns, S., Ferris, J & Liatsopoulos, D. (nd) The Problems and Barriers of Records and Information Management in Africa. Available @ acamegill.pbworks.com/f/Ferris+et+al.pdf
- [5]. Feather, J. & Sturges, (2003). *International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 440-441
- [6]. Jimerson, R. C. (n.d.) Archives for All: The Importance of Archives in Society. Available @ <http://www.aag.org.br/anaisxvcb/contendo/resumos/plenaria1/randalljimerson.pdf>
- [7]. Maidabino, A. A. (2010) The Availability, Organization, and Use of Archival Records: A Study of Public Archives Agencies in the Northwestern States of Nigeria. Available @ <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/maidabino2.htm>
- [8]. Mazikana, P. (1990). *Archives and Records Management for Decision Makers: a RAMP study*. Paris: Unesco
- [9]. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2001). 6th ed. Sally Wehmeier ed Oxford; Oxford University press
- [10]. Uduigwome, C. (1989). The use of archival resources in the National Archives. *The Nigerian Archives* 1 (1): 28-32.
- [11]. Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [12]. Zaid, Y & Abioye, A. (2009). Museums, libraries and archives: collaborating for the preservation of heritage materials in Nigeria. Paper presented at the World Library and Information Congress: 75th IFLA General Conference and Council 23-27 August 2009, Milan, Italy. Available @ <http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/index.htm>