

## Realities and Challenges of Record Appraisal, Retention and Preservation Strategies in Public Archival Agencies

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### ABSTRACT

#### **Purpose**

*The paper examines the policy formulation, implementation, appraisal and retention of archives as basic strategies for the management of information resources in public archival agencies. It also investigates the techniques employed for the preservation and conservation of archival records and the impending challenges in the management of public archival agencies.*

#### **Design/methodology/approach**

*Two set of questionnaires are used to collect data from five public archival agencies in Nigeria. The first set used to determine the archival agencies in existence while the second used to collate data from the archivists of the archival agencies.*

#### **Findings**

*The shows the existence of both written and non-written policies used for strategic appraisal and retention of the archival records. Strategies employed in the preservation and conservation of archival records include the use of metal boxes, shelves, special saves, air-conditioning, fumigation, insecticides, security guards among others.*

#### **Originality/value**

*The study recommends the need to review existing archival legislations in the country, improve funding for the agencies, effective and sustainable human resources development strategies, and improve infrastructural development for tackling the prevailing challenges in the public archival agencies.*

### KEY WORDS

*Records, Appraisal, Preservation, Public Archival Agency, Nigeria*

**PAPER TYPE**      *Survey cum research*

### INTRODUCTION

**A**rchival information resources are indispensable sources for socio-economic development and administration. They serve as vital tools for research in many fields of knowledge, such as social sciences; historical studies, public and business administration and in addressing aspects of domestic/ national, and international life. According to **Cunningham & Philips (2005)**, "in addition to being an

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important source of national and cultural memory and places of scholarly research, archives in democracies are meant to help protect the rights and entitlements of the governed. Archives provide a means of democratic accountability, a mean of empowering citizen against potential maladministration, corruption and autocracy". To ensure the attainment of these objectives however certain functional archival management strategies must to be enshrined. Appraisal and retention are important management operations for determining what type of archival information resources are worthy of permanent preservation in an archival agency. In the same vein, preservation and conservation of the archival sources will ensure maximum tapping of the information content of the resources: accessibility to the archival information resources by the users. To provide effective implementation of strategic management practices like appraisal, retention, preservation and conservation in public archival agencies, the need for policy formulations and implementation cannot be overemphasized. This will tantamount to ensuring greater accessibility to and effective management of information the archival information resources.

This study is an attempt to uncover the policy implementation and its nature, as well as to assess the appraisal and retention and preservation strategies using five public archival agencies as sources for data in Nigeria.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A careful examination of the Nigerian National Archives Degree No. 30 of 1992 section 52 (1) (Interpretation and Citation) describe archives as "records which have value for permanent preservation or have been selected for transfer or have been transferred to an archival establishment. The degree further identified retention and disposal as a base upon which records are to be transferred to an archival establishment or disposed off... ". It can be deduced from the provision of the degree that, archival appraisal, retention, and disposal are essential practices for effective and successful management of information from archival resources. Although archivists of the earlier generations paid relatively little attention to systematic appraisal process, it has become an essential part of information management for archival agencies in the twentieth century. This may be a result of the emergence of modern documentation. It should be noted in this regard that, although, much has been written about archival appraisal, yet there is no universal formula for appraisal and retention of archival information resources. **Cunningham and Philips (2005)** also support the view that "there is no standard approach by government agencies for creating, describing and organizing their publications, and each situation is different".

However, to ensure that, repetitive appraisals are avoided, and that archival resources are retained, and used wisely, standards are available for guidance in the management of archival information resources to individuals, institutions, government agencies, or the general public. **Sims (2001)** emphasizes the need for policy formulation and implementation for appraisal and retention processes of archival information resources. Quoting the Public Records Act of 1958 as amended, he submits that, “the guiding principle is that those public records which are over 30 years old and has been selected for permanent preservation should be kept and made publicly available”. Hence, policy is a useful tool for providing public accessibility to archival information records, as well as a guide for effective management of information resources from archives.

Appraisal and retention in archival perspective are twin processes of determining which records should be considered, selected, or accessioned to an archival repository for permanent preservation. While, retention is considered as the end product of strategic appraisal, it refers to the act of keeping archival information resources rather than destroying them in line with the appraisal strategy or requirements of the archival agency (**Bradsher, 1988, a**). **The American Library Association (1986)** describes appraisal from the value attached to records submitting that, “records should be appraised either because of their scholarly and research value, information value or because they serve as evidence of origin”. Archival appraisal should be based on the value of records for continuity in government and for scholarly and other research purpose, based on the evidence of origin and administration of major governmental activities (evidential value). Other records deserve preservation for substantial purpose, that is, for the information of substantial value they contain.

In addition, archival appraisal and retention can be viewed from the perspective of the life cycle of archival information resources. The life cycle of records reflects the opinion that all archival information resources irrespective of form or purpose, passed through certain stages and hence the need for special techniques in handling, retention and effective control at every stage of life. **Yusuf and Chell (2000)** elaborate more on this: “the life cycle of records begins when records are first organized maintained and actively used by the creators. It continues as records are stored for an additional period of infrequent or dormant use in off-site records centers and ends when their operational use end entirely or when they are selected as archival valuable and transferred to an archive, (retention) or declared non-archival and destroyed”. Further, **Yusuf and Chell (2000)** stress more on the functions of the life cycle of records as the framework for archival management. In their words, “The life cycle means a movement of records in logical steps from the creation

through its use, storage, and retention in active files, to its transfer files, storage and finally disposal". In other words, scholars used the life-cycle concept of records as a framework for the operation of a viable information management of archival resources, programme, with sole assertion that recorded information has a "life" similar to a biological organism: its born lives and dies. The understanding of which assists in the appraisal and retention or otherwise of the archival records, hence, their management. Not only that the life cycle of records should give appraisers in the process of appraising archival records and their subsequent retention but also their primary and secondary values. "All records are created for a purpose; at least some period have value for that purpose, (primary value) which may be administrative, legal, fiscal, or purpose other than those, which they were created while the secondary value relates to research use" (**Bradsher, 1988,b**).

The principal responsibility of an archival agency is to properly and scientifically preserve all the archival information resources entrusted to its care. Preservation and conservation in archival context should be considered as an endless war against the natural and man-made forces of destruction. In attaining this objective, appropriate preservation and conservation measures / programmes ensure the protection of archival information resources to eternity. **Cook, (1986)** noted that, "with good conservation and preservation measures the length of time (life span) of archival information resources can be extended". These measures include; appropriate building structures and equipments; de-identification; regular cleaning; lightening; atmospheric conditions and fire control, as identified by **Wyorkson, (1986)**.

As long as the basic goal of preservation and conservation revolves around the need to prolong the life cycle of the archival information resources, this can be achieved that when these goals and basic principles are understood by both the head of the archival agency, the search room attendants and all staff involved with records maintenance. Indeed, preservation is a vital part of the total archival programmes and there is very tendency that archival information resources will suffer when its preservation techniques or measures are weak. It is on this basis that **Bradsher (1988, c)** emphasized the need for preservation and conservation tasks to be handled by knowledgeable professionals who are aware of the expected uses, conservational requirement.

An analysis of the reference model for archival information system produced by the **CCSDS (2002)** stressed the need for preservation planning which will provides the services and functions for monitoring the archival environment and providing accommodation to ensure that the information stored remains accessible to the designated user community. In addition, preservation planning function according to the

standard should include evaluating the contents of the archives and periodically recommending archival information updates to the current archival holdings, developing recommendations for archival standards and policies and monitoring changes in the technology environment in line with the designated community's service requirements and Knowledge Base.

### **OBJECTIVES**

It is in line with the above analysis of the researchers' views on archival policy implementation, appraisal and retention and preservation strategies that the researcher conducted this study to provide answers to the following objectives:

- To Identify and describe the policy use in appraisal and retention of archival information resources in the archival agencies.
- To assess the records appraisal and retention strategy use by the archival agencies
- To examine the preservation and conservation strategies use by the archival agencies in the management of their archival information resources.
- To make recommendations for further improvement in line with the findings of the study.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted and used survey research technique which is characterized by selection of random samples from large and small population in order to obtain empirical knowledge. The technique enabled to the researchers to save time and money more so when the wide coverage of the study was taken into consideration. In addition, survey technique was employed to allow generalizations to be made (**Busha, 1980**) about the characteristics, opinions, beliefs and practices of policy implementation, appraisal and retention in all the public archival agencies studied. Using two set of questionnaires as the main data collection instrument, the first survey helped to obtain preliminary information about the number of archival agencies to be used for the study in line with the theoretical suggestions of **Srivastava (1989)**. Data on the availability of the public archival agencies was sought from the Directors of the Ministry of Information Youth, Sport and Culture in five public archival agencies from seven states of the Northwestern zone of Nigeria namely Jigawa; Kaduna; Kano; Katsina; Kebbi; Sokoto; and Zamfara.

The result pilot further guided the researchers in designing and administration of the second set of the questionnaire as the main survey instrument for data collection. It contained a number of questions which

elicited data on the availability of policy and the criteria used for the appraisal and retention of archival information resources. It also sought data on the preservation and conservation strategies of archival information resources employed by the archival agencies. The instruments are administered and collated by the researchers in all the five public archival agencies personally which enabled to achieve a high response rate, establish rapport with the respondents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The five public archival agencies studied reveal that the oldest archive being the National Archives (branch), Kaduna. In terms of availability and patterns of appraisal and retention policy, all the five public archival agencies have records appraisal and retention policy. However, only two of the public archives have a written appraisal and retention policy. These are the National Archives (Branch), Kaduna and the Archives of the Arewa House Kaduna. Further investigation reveals that the policy is a written and or documented piece which stipulates clearly and guide for the appraisal and retention of archival information resources / records for permanent preservation with them. This could be attributed to the fact that, the National Archives (branch) Kaduna was the oldest archival institution in the North-west zone in particular and Nigeria at large. Its existence pre-dated the country independence of 1960. In addition, the fact that it shares proximity in location with the Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna, (located in the same state, same town of Kaduna) may have an influence on the later managerial practices, including policy formulation, and implementation in line with records appraisal and retention.

**Table 1: Availability and Patterns of Records Appraisal and Retention policy**

Name of the Archives	Year founded	Nature of the policy	
		Written	Non-written
National Archives (branch), Kaduna	1957	√	-
Archives of the Arewa House Kaduna	1970	√	-
Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Kano	1987	-	√
National Archives (Branch) Sokoto	1982	-	√
Waziri Junaidu Archive of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto	1972	-	√

*√ Policy availability & patterns of policy*

With regard to the non-written archival policy, findings show that the Archives of the History and Culture Bureaus at Sokoto, Kano and the National Archive (branch), Sokoto have both non-written appraisal and retention policies at the time of this study (Table 1). This is contrary to the submission of **Riggs (1984)** who comment that policies should be in written form to serve as “road maps” for effective management of day-to-day archival records operations. It is also important in order to ensure the maximum possible clarity and to prevent inconsistent interpretations of by staff. In essence, the more definite and documented archival appraisal and retention policies are more helpful for the archival staff to pursue and provide effective appraisal and retention of archival records in the public archival agencies.

**Table 2: Criteria used for Appraisal and Retention of the Resources**

Name of Public Archive	Criteria used						
	Evidentiary Function	Information function	Documentation function	Financial Value	Legal Value	Religious value	Others
National Archives (branch), Kaduna	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna	√	√	√	√	√	√	-
Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
National Archives (Branch), Sokoto	√	√	√	-	√	-	-
Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto	√	√	-	-	√	√	-

*√ acceptance of criteria use*

The finding of the study shows that all the five public archival agencies employed different criterions for the appraisal and retention of the archival information resources. Information resources in the public archival agencies are commonly appraised and retained using evidentiary; informational, legal values of the information resources. Other values considered by the archival agencies for appraisal and retention of the archival information resources focused on the functional, financial and administrative values of the records to their parent organization. All the five public archival agencies considered the evidentiary and information function and legal value of archival records as a criterion for permanent preservation of the archival records. Also all the archival agencies except that of Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History

and Culture Bureau Sokoto, considered the documentary function of archives as a strategy for appraisal and retention of the records. With regard to the religious values of archival records, four of five public archival agencies employed it as a strategy for archival appraisal and retention. The National Archives (Branch), Sokoto is the only single archival agency that does not consider the use of religious value of records for appraisal and retention. The respondents were also requested to provide other appraisal and retention strategies as they deem fit. Two of them indicated others but have not specified on what they could be. These are responses from the National Archives (branch), Kaduna and Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano. The finding of this study is in line with studies reported by **American Library Association (1986)** and **Bradsher, (1988)** and **Sims (2001)** who insist that appraisal, retention and disposal decision of archival information resources should be based on the functions which they performed. “It is accepted that, records of administrative, financial, legal, operational, cultural, social, or scientific value should be retained permanently”.

**Table 3: Strategies for Preservation and Conservation of the Resources**

Public Archive	Strategy for Appraisal and Retention								
	Air-Conditioning	Fumigation	Use of Insecticides	Use of Metal Boxes	Use of Gum	Use of Shelves	Security Personnel	Special Saves	Others
National Archives (branch), Kaduna	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	Microforms computer disc
Archives of the Arewa House, Kaduna	√	-	√	√	√	√	√	√	Dusting
Archives of the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, Kano	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	Dusting and Microforms computer
National Archives (Branch), Sokoto	-	√	√	-	√	√	√		Dusting and Microforms computer
Waziri Junaidu Archives of the History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto	√	√	-	-	√	√	√	√	Dusting

*√ Acceptance of strategy used*



There is a combination of different types of strategies used by the five public archival agencies for the preservation and conservation of the archival resources. The preservation and conservation patterns most common to all the five archival agencies are use of shelves, special saves, and air-conditioning. Other measures employed by archival agencies in the management of archival information resources in relation to preservation and conservation are dusting, use of computers and security personnel. The result of the findings of the study is in consonance with the Nigerian National Archives Decree No. 30 of 1992 (Part II subsection 16) which clearly provides for the preservation of the Nigerian archival information resources. "The National Archives shall preserve under adequate security conditions, all original constitutional instruments, treaties, law, decrees and other legal enactments of the Federal Government". In addition, **(Kalthpalia, 1982)** recommends that, to ensure effective preservation and conservation of archival information resources, it is necessary for them to be housed in an appropriate environment with all the necessary features designed for that purpose.

#### **CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Majority of the respondents identified funding and the lack of state of the art technological facilities as the major challenges in their archival agencies. Other obstacles identified by the archivists have to do with inadequate man power and training opportunity; and poor infrastructural facilities. The use of state of the art technological facilities in the management of archival information resources will go along way for ensuring effective management of public archival agencies and their information resources. It is therefore recommended that, electronic security devices such as the CCTV camera, electronic gates system, fire protection devices should be provided by the relevant authorities. This will no doubt ensure proper preservation and conservation strategy of the archival resources hence, increase their life circle and effective utilization, accessibility and management. Improve funding for public archival agencies will also ensure effective and sustainable human resources infrastructural development for the agencies. In addition the need to review existing archival legislations must be recommended. Such a review should provide for effective and sustainable training and retraining of the public archival agencies professional. This will help greatly in handling and ensuring effective preservation and conservation programmes of archival information resources in line with the contemporary trends of archival practices.

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