

Management of Archival Resources in a Digital Age at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, Taraba State

Melody Gem Moses (CLN)

Department of Library and Information Science,
Taraba State University, Jalingo.
gemmosesmelody@gmail.com

Garbobi Markus (CLN)

Department of Library and Information Science,
Taraba State University, Jalingo.
garbobi@tsuniversity.edu.ng

&

Thomas Blessing Clement

Department of Library and Information Science,
Taraba State Polytechnic, Suntai.
blessed3488@gmail.com

Abstract

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The study explores 21st century management of archival resources at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, Taraba State. Three (3) research objectives and corresponding research questions guided the study. The case study research design was used, with a total population of nine (9) library staff. The questionnaire was the instrument used for collecting data, and the data collected were analysed using simple percentages and frequency counts, and presented in frequency tables. The findings of the study revealed that the Ministry of Justice Library has in its collections legal records, meetings of meetings, personal records, and business records, amongst others; the findings further indicated that the Library is not digitised in line with the 21st-century standard. It was also revealed that archivists and librarians at the Ministry of Justice Library do not possess 21st-century skills. Based on the findings, the study made some recommendations, such as library should be adequately funded, adequate manpower should be employed, and adequate power should be made available in archives centres.

Introduction

An archive is defined as the by-products of the activities of an organisation. Also, Amodu (2019) defined archives as the vital concentration of knowledge that preserves the history of organisations or groups. Ogunsola (2023) noted that archives are documentary by-products of human activity retained for their long-term value. When archivist accepts holdings into their repositories, they are taking responsible custody of these materials. Furthermore, the 21st-century world is an era of rapid scientific and technological developments. It is an era that scholars have tagged as the fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Perhaps, as a result of globalisation, this has made trade, teaching, learning, information accessibility, and dissemination possible without limit (Agidi & Gbamwuan, 2023).

Archives have been evident, right from the period of the Stone Age, when people used materials found around their environment to express their activities. Such activities have served as a source of evidence for societies (Ogba, 2017). The archival resources provide pieces of evidence for generations on past events that influenced the right decisions for the present and future generations. They also provide explanations for applied norms and laws of the societies. To this end, archives have continued, and are well attached to societies, up to the present time, and require proper management. Archive management refers to the systematic and organised approach of collecting, storing, preserving, and providing access to records, documents, and other valuable materials for long-term retention, such is among the practices at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo.

The Ministry of Justice Library is a law library in nature that serves legal practitioners with legal information in carrying out their activities successfully. Such a library, according to Anuoluwa (2019) cited in Yusuf et al. (2022), is a library that is established and attached to them

in its attempt at justice. It serves the information needs of the government in advising other ministries and drafting principal legislators, which are all necessary in the amendments of existing laws, rules, regulations and guidelines. Its collections include legal records, books, journals and research materials. The clientele is the staff of the ministry and other government departments and establishments.

Nonetheless, the Taraba State Ministry of Justice Library, in line with Yusuf et al. (2022), since its establishment in 1991 to date has witnessed significant development, especially in terms of the library collection, which stands at 6,358 and has a seating capacity of 40 users at a time. This library was established to cater for the information needs of the legal practitioners in the ministry. The sole aim is to make available information resources, including archives in various formats, both electronic and printed sources, that will serve the information needs of the ministry. This could also be seen in the national archives of different countries, including private archives of organisations.

Ogba (2017) added that the National Archive of Nigeria was initiated in 1954 as a National Records Office. It consists of stocks, records of Federal, State, and Local Governments, private bodies and individuals who gave voluntary legal deposits. Therefore, the contents of Nigeria's archives contain records of evidential value affecting individuals, organisations and countries. This is also the same thing with the contents of the Council of Legal Education and the Ministry of Justice Library. Furthermore, a clear survey of literature shows that in Nigeria, little or no work has been done on the digitisation of National archives to meet the global best practices for efficient and effective service delivery in the 21st century. Rather, the country has depended on donor-driven digital projects like the Aluka project, which has established approximately 30 digital labs in Eastern, Western, and Southern Africa for the digitisation of content. Mnjama (2017) in Agidi

and Gbamwuan (2023) also added that the country has benefited from the Endangered Archives Programme, funded by Arcadia and managed by the British Library. Such may not be said about the library of the Ministry of Justice, Taraba State. Hence, the essence of the study.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of records management services is not to manage the creation of archives but to exploit the information held in the records efficiently. Nevertheless, while it is essential to manage records well for the benefit of the organisation, it is impossible to administer a fully functional records service unless it has an archival dimension, with safeguards and makes accessible those records to be permanently preserved. Records and archives are research resources, and the archival institution is the specialist facility in which this kind of research is concentrated. It is the function of the archival institution to manage the raw material of history for the benefit of society as a whole.

The archival institution also ought to have a distinct character that marks it out from the management of current records and gives it a cultural dimension. The archival institution is staffed by archivists who are specialist professionals who possess and operate a professional ethic that requires that they should not be subservient to the interests or preoccupations of the government of the moment. Although Nigeria is endowed with many cultural heritage destinations and resources, unfortunately, the nation lacks the digital means of archives preservation and management of the 21st century. It is against this background that the present study seeks to examine management of archival resources in the digital age, using the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, Taraba State as a focus.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine the management of archival resources in the digital age at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, Taraba State. The specific objectives include, to;

1. find out the different types of archival records kept at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo;
2. determine if the archival records kept at the Ministry of Justice Library Jalingo are digitised in line with the 21st-century standard; and
3. ascertain if the archivists and librarians managing the archives record possess the 21st-century skills.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered

1. What are the types of archival records kept at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo?
2. Are the archival records kept at the Ministry of Justice Library Jalingo digitised in line with the 21st-century standard?
3. Do the archivists and librarians at the Ministry of Justice Library Jalingo possess 21st-century skills?

Literature Review

Archives are original records that are preserved permanently because of their enduring value. Ogunsola (2023) observed that an archive is a collection of historical records or materials, in any medium, that are preserved for their enduring cultural, historical, or evidentiary value, and can so be referred to as the physical facility where they are located. Also, Ogba (2017) view an archive as an accumulation of historical records or materials, in any medium, or physical facility

in which they are located. More so, Agidi and Gbamwuan (2023) stated that in the course of everyday life, individuals create and keep information about their activities. These records may be personal and unplanned, such as photographs, a letter to a friend or family member, notes to wards, or manuscripts, or they may be official and widely shared. It can also be financial or legal documents, recording of public speeches, medical files and electronic records. These records and the places they are kept are called archives, and archivists are the professionals who assess, collect, organise, preserve and provide access to these records.

There are five types of archives, which include the following: personnel records: these types of records contain information about the employees of an organisation, especially during a disaster, so when there is an incidence of fraud, personnel records could be used to track the employee. Also, it can be used to track an individual's employment history. Ogunsola and Rufia, (2023) added that it is also known as employee records where every information about the employee is recorded, such as date of birth, certificates, position in the organization, number of children if married and soon; Administrative records: these records are used in carrying out enterprise functions and activities. This is where decisions taken in an organisation will be executed and recorded.

Regular meetings are held by the executive arm of the organisation, and its minutes are taken and kept in the administrative records; Fiscal records are also known as financial records. These records can be used to trace how funds are generated and how budgets are made and disbursed (Thegu & Mbenge, 2021). Any document that may be required in a court to prove a case should be jealously kept. Records of any court case won or lost must be kept. Any document that may be required for litigation must be kept intact. Historical records are also referred to as archival records. The history of past activities of an organisation should be safely kept for future purposes.

(Holmes,n.d.) classified archives in terms of their creating agencies which include: public archives or public records: those created by federal, state, and local governing bodies; Institutional and Organizational archives: these may include the records of political parties, patriotic societies, clubs, charitable institutions or organizations, learned societies, foundations, non-profit corporations and the likes.

The nature of archive records in the Ministry of Justice Library in Jalingo reflects the legal, administrative, and historical responsibilities of the ministry. These records are typically maintained to support legal processes, preserve institutional memory, and serve as a reference for research, casework, and policy formulation. Nature includes Legal and Judicial Records, Administrative Records, Historical and Archival Documents and Reference Materials (Ogunsola, 2023).

In the 21st century, the roles of archivists and librarians have evolved beyond traditional tasks such as cataloguing and shelving books or storing paper records. IFLA. (2012) With the rise of digital technology, information overload, and the need for data preservation, professionals in these fields require a new set of skills to remain effective and relevant. They are: digital literacy and technology skills, information management and organisation, Communication and Interpersonal Skills, Skills in classification, indexing, and taxonomy development, Adaptability and Continuous Learning and Project Management

Methodology

The case study survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in the Ministry of Justice Library in Jalingo, Taraba State. The total population of the study was made up of nine (9) library staff. Furthermore, the complete census sampling technique was used in selecting all nine (9) staff as the study's respondents. A structured questionnaire was used

for collecting data. The questionnaire was designed on a 4-point rating scale weighted as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points; Agree (A) 3 points; Disagree(D) 2 points; Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. Nine (9) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents, and all were retrieved, giving a 100% response rate. Data collected was analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages, and presented in frequency tables.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What are the types of archival records kept in the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo?

Table 1: Types of archival records kept in the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo

S/n	Items	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Personal records	5	55.6	2	22.2	1	11.1	1	11.1
2	Administrative records	4	44.4	3	33.3	2	22.2	0	0.0
3	Fiscal records	4	44.4	2	22.2	2	22.2	1	11.1
4	Legal records	6	66.7	2	22.2	1	11.1	0	0.0
5	Business archives	5	55.6	2	22.2	1	11.1	1	11.1
6	Royal archives	3	33.3	3	33.3	2	22.2	1	11.1
7	Family archives	3	33.3	2	22.2	2	22.2	2	22.2
8	Minutes of meetings	6	66.7	2	22.2	1	11.1	0	0.0
9	Sales transaction records	4	44.4	2	22.2	2	22.2	1	11.1
10	Private archives	3	33.3	3	33.3	1	11.1	2	22.2

Key: SA – Strongly Agreed; A – Agreed; D – Disagreed; SD – Strongly Disagreed

Table 1 revealed the respondents' responses on the types of archival records kept at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo. Result shows that out of the nine (9) respondents, 5(55.56%) of the respondents responded to strongly agree; 2(22.22%) of the respondents responded to Agree; 1(11.11%) of the respondents to Disagree and 1(11.11%) of the respondents responded to Strongly Disagree on the keeping of personal records. The findings indicate that the Ministry of Justice Library has in its records, legal records, meeting minutes, personal records, and business records, amongst others. These agree with the views of Solomon and Christopher (2023) on exploring artificial intelligence for records and archival management systems (AI-RAMS) for

Nigerian public organisations. Ogunsola (2023) added that these records are typically maintained to support legal processes, preserve institutional memory, and serve as a reference for research, casework, and policy formulation.

Research Question 2: Are the archives records kept in the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, digitised in line with the 21st-century standard?

Table 2: State of digitisation of archives records

S/n	Item Statements	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
11	The archives records in the Ministry of Justice library, Jalingo, are highly digitised	1	11.1	2	22.2	3	33.3	3	33.3
12	The archives records in the Ministry of Justice library are digitised.	-	0.0	1	11.1	2	22.2	6	66.7
13	The archives records in the Ministry of Justice library, Jalingo, are partially digitised	1	11.1	2	22.2	2	22.2	4	44.4
14	The archives records in the Ministry of Justice library, Jalingo not digitised	2	22.2	1	11.1	3	33.3	3	33.3

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree

From Table 2 above, the result shows that out of Nine (9) respondents, 1(11.11%) of the respondents responded to Strongly Agree; 2(22.22%) of the respondents responded to Agree; 3(33.33%) of the respondents responded to Disagree and 3(33.33%) of the respondents responded to Strongly Disagree. The findings indicate that the Ministry of Justice library in Jalingo is not digitised in line with the 21st-century standard. These agree with the findings of Netshakhuma (2016) on the exploration of the digitisation strategies of the liberation archives of the African National Congress in South Africa.

Research Question 3: Do the archivists and librarians at the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, possess 21st-century skills?

Table 3: 21st-century skills possessed by archivists and librarians

S/N	Items	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
15	Metadata development skills	1	11.1	2	22.2	2	22.2	4	44.4
16	Word processing skills	2	22.2	1	11.1	3	33.3	3	33.3
17	Online cataloguing and classification skills	1	11.1	2	22.2	3	33.3	3	33.3
18	Digital referencing skills	-	0.0	1	11.1	2	22.2	6	66.7
19	Skills to upload documents to online plate forms	1	11.1	2	22.2	3	33.3	3	33.3
20	Sending and receiving e-mails	1	11.1	1	11.1	2	22.2	6	66.7
21	Ability to create different file formats	2	22.2	1	11.1	3	33.3	3	33.3
22	Skills in using different social media platforms	2	22.2	2	22.2	2	22.2	5	55.6
22	Circulation of books and archives records online	1	11.1	-	0.0	2	22.2	3	33.3
24	Web design	2	22.2	1	11.1	2	22.2	6	66.7

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree

The result captured in Table 3 indicate that out of Nine (9) respondents 1(11.11%) often respondents responded to Strongly Agree; 2(22.22%) of the respondents responded to Agree; while 2(22.22%) of the respondents responded to Disagree and 4(44.44%) of the respondents responded to Strongly Disagree. The findings indicate that archivists and librarians in the Ministry of Justice library do not possess 21st-century skills. This agrees with the study by Thegu, Oyieke and Mbenge (2021) on the management of students' academic records for best practice at KCA University, Kenya. The findings further supported the position of IFLA (2012) with the rise of digital technology, information overload, and the need for data preservation. Professionals in these fields require a new set of skills to remain effective and relevant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study clearly shows that the Ministry of Justice Library, Jalingo, has different types of archival records ranging from legal records, personal records, minutes of meetings, fiscal records, among others. It also indicates that the archives in the Ministry of Justice library, Jalingo, are not digitised in line with the 21st-century standard. It also revealed that the librarians/archivists in the Ministry of Justice library lack basic digital skills to digitise their records. The records management process in the 21st century is quite different from what was obtainable centuries ago,

computer and digital technology have taken over the paper and other forms of preserving and keeping records. It is therefore a necessity that archival records be digitised in line with the 21st-century standards to be able to prolong their lifespan and access to these records.

Furthermore, the study concludes that archives are vital records and deserve considerable attention. Digitising these archives has become a very big challenge for both librarians and archivists of the 21st century because of so many factors, such as lack of adequate funding, lack of digital literacy skills, lack of policy, amongst others. The following recommendations will help archivists and librarians overcome some of these challenges:

1. The library should be adequately funded.
2. Librarians/archivists should be trained and re-trained on the acquisition of digital skills.
3. Adequate/trained manpower should be employed.
4. Record management policy should be made available for libraries and archives centres.

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