Records Management Practices and Information Accessibility in Federal Public Service in Cross River State, Nigeria

Oluwaseun Omowumi Akin-Fakorede
Seun.fakorede@yahoo.com
University of Calabar Library
University of Calabar, Nigeria

Eno Joseph Ottong
Enojoseph200@yahoo.co,
Department of Library and Information Science
University of Calabar, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
This study investigated records management practices and information accessibility in federal public services in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two research questions were formulated with two null hypotheses. Ex-post facto design was used for the study, with a population of five hundred and nineteen records managers/personnel who were identified from one hundred and nine federal public establishments in Cross River State. Census sampling technique was adopted and the sample was 519. Questionnaire was used for data collection, data were analysed using simple regression. The findings revealed that the composite influence of the records management practices on information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State showed that the selected records management practices put together contributed to 63.3% (adjusted R^2 = .633) of what constituted the information accessibility. Again, from the ANOVA table of the regression, the result obtained for F-value = 179.376, p<.05 at df of 6 and 519 indicated that the composite influence of the records management practices was significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis does not stand; hence there was significant influence of the composite effect of the records management practices on the information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State. The filing practice (Beta = .725) has the highest influence followed by the records storage (Beta = .368). The beta weight indicated the height of the impact of the records management practices which means the filing practice is the most critical problem that fuels information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State. Among others, it was recommended that all institutions and establishments should have adequately qualified records managers/personnel; and that training and retraining programmes should regularly be arranged for records managers/personnel, this would solve the seemingly delay of information in federal public establishment in Cross River State.
KEYWORD: Record management, Information Accessibility, public establishment, Cross River State.

t**1.1 Introduction**

Public service is an essential arm and a sine qua non to any properly constituted government. It is an organized body consisting of public servants (civil servants and elected or appointed officials) that provide essential services for the citizens of a country; an arm that is responsible for managing the resources of a nation on behalf of its people who are the owners of the resources (Murtala, 2015). As entrenched in section 318(1) of the constitution of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), officials in the public service include the president, vice president, governors and their deputies, ministers and commissioners, members and staff of legislative house, chairmen, directors of all corporations and companies in which the government has controlling shares. Therefore, the public service, represents the realm where government operates for the benefit of the citizens (Murtala, 2015).

The public service has been the tool available to the governments of Nigeria for implementation of development goals and objectives. It is seen as a pivot for the growth of African economies. According to Ajewoye in Ngwanyi (2006), the role played by public service is multidimensional and includes the following:

1. Helps government to formulate and implement its policies in a complex and ever changing environment.
2. Advices government on the implication of policy options.
3. Actively promotes national unity and integration.
4. Assists government to operate an administrative system that is conscious, performance – oriented, efficient and effective.
5. Protects public interest and services as a custodian of public consciences, and
6. Helps in the operation of personnel management system with high professionalism significant specialization and a satisfying career for civil servant.

From the above, it is obvious that the responsibility of the public service being the only agency responsible for efficient and effective administration of government business, is enormous. To do this effectively, her collection and management of information are considered necessities and this bring about effective records keeping and management.

Records are statements, facts, figures recorded in form of impression and expression, purposely established for remembrance and reference (Ayeni, 2006). They are evidence of events, activities, programmes and facts in any form or medium such as court proceedings, maps, plans, correspondences, notes and memo Records can be created internally or externally in pursuance of legal obligations and preserved as evidence. Records help to ensure and measure government's accountability, by systematically documenting government operations and performance. In all, records are very essential to man.

It is most likely that man discovered his history and existence as a result of information on records that have been preserved. This explains the importance of records and as well buttresses the fact that no nation exists without records. It is obvious that the government of any nation continues to function well as a result of records created and maintained by a previous administration; given that government, governance is continuous. With this, it can be said that records are tools for the conduct of government operations and functions, both as initial stimuli and background information for executive decision making. This demands, of course, that records be properly managed.

Records management refers to a set of activities required for systematic control of the creation, distribution, use, maintenance, and disposition of recorded information maintained as evidences of business activities and transactions. According to the National Archives of Scotland, (2013) records management is the systematic control of an organization's records, throughout its life cycle, in order to meet operational business needs, statutory and fiscal requirements, and community expectation. Proper records management is essential because it helps individual groups or government to:

1. Know what records they have and

locate them easily;
2.   Increase efficiency and effectiveness;
3.   Support decision making;
4.   Accountability;
5.   Meet legislative and regulatory requirement of the organization.

Different records management practices exist: They include; filing, which is the process of classifying records and putting them in the correct location in the file plan. Storage, be it non-electronic or electronic must store records in a way that makes them both sufficiently accessible and safeguarded against environmental damage.

Alegbeleye (2015) observed the parlous state of records kept in Nigeria, saying no serious attention has been paid to the management of such records of government because in some cases they are very poorly organized. He enjoined government at all levels and as well the private sector, to accord priority to records management. This is because it is an important part of corporate responsibility that allows for the provision of an accurate, timely, and relevant information regime for decision-making which would result in better strategic planning for the country.

Abdulahi (2016) maintains that the reason why organizations practice records management is to control the creation and growth of records, reduce operation costs and improve efficiency and productivity. He added that proper management of records brings about availability, accessibility, accountability, transparency, and good governance which provide continuity in the event of disaster. This made records life circle model important to record management. The life circle model was originated from the thought of T. R. Schellenberg, an American Archivist in 1956. Schellenberg (1956) presented a clear distinction between records management and Archival preservation of record. According to him, preservation is managed by an Archival institution, while record are created and actively used in relation to the purpose for which they are the record life circle model portray the life of a record as that which goes through various stages, much like that of biological organism; the reason being that, it is born (the creation phase), it lives, (the maintenance and use phase) and it dies (a final disposition phase).

Access to information crucial to records management

Access to information in an organization can either be access to records or to any other information sources which could be published or unpublished. Access is not restricted just to internal organizational uses, since citizens, individuals or groups can gain access to it in order to inform themselves about the process that has generated it, and to use it to hold organizations accountable where such need arises. In other words, accessibility means users can identify and use the resources to access the functionality and possible benefit of some system or entity. Qamar (2002) defines accessibility of information sources as the increase and provision of information resources to the clientele in order to increase their knowledge base. Garba (2009) posits that information resources can be made accessible through the use of information and communication technology. They enable access to information and services by minimizing the barriers of distance, costs and as well the usability of interference.

The public service, irrespective of its name, ministry or agency needs adequate access to information for full functioning; given that they are an administrative machinery with which government discharges its functions. Many of such agencies such as these: National Bureau of statistics. The Nigerian Police Force, the Nigerian Air Force, the Nigerian Navy, the Nigeria Army, the Civil Defence Corps, the Immigration Service, the

Judiciary, the Nigeria Prisons and; the National Population Commission. In the process of discharging their responsibilities, records are created, sent, received, stored, searched for and even sometimes misplaced.

The Nigerian government is currently faced with a lot of challenges – security, corruption, unemployment and economics recession. Various reforms are going on in the public service in order to bring about the change that government desires. Government agencies are involved in this change agenda, information is being collated to solve one problem or the other, the citizen need information from government agencies on many of the issues mentioned above. The question, however, is what information is available and how accessible are such pieces of information when needed? It is the thinking of the paper that sometimes such pieces of information are either not available or available, but poorly managed. This has the potential of negatively impacting on government and governance. Given that availability and accessibility of information are what keep the public sector going, how records are managed to ensure their accessibility is very vital. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the influence of records management practices on information accessibility in the federal public service in Cross River State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Delay and denial of access to information among public institutions in Nigeria, irrespective of what the information is meant for, is a common experience. This in recent time has constituted a source of worry among information seekers in Nigeria. Obviously, records are created in and by various agencies of government on a daily basis. This is to make information available to seekers of such thereby bridging the gap between citizens and government. It is, however, sad that the dearth in information

meant to information seekers is increasing on daily basis.

As a way of checking this negative trends, government has been paying salaries, and sponsoring staff to conferences and seminar in order to motivate and equip them with necessary skills for the job. There have been appointment of directors and chairmen of boards of agencies, to see to the smooth running of government via, availability and accessibility of pieces of information.

This has not yielded the desired result on citizens. Information seekers still find it very difficult to access information from these government agencies. Rather than following conventional record management practices that records manager are exposed to, what is observed in most of these agencies is a pile up of files on the floor with some torn and tied in bundles with elastic rubber bands. This questions the prowess of record managers vis-a-vis the tenant of record management practices: proper filing, possession of a storage facilities plan, proper organization of records and so forth to provide needed access to information when needed. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the record management practices that exist in federal establishments in Cross River State and how they translate into accessibility of information to information seekers.

1.3 Purpose of the Study
1. To find out how records filing practices influence information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.
2. To find out how records storage practices influence information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

1.4 Research Questions
1. How does records filing practices influence information accessibility in

federal public service in Cross River State?

2. How does records storage practices influence information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State?

1.5 Statement Of Hypotheses

1. There is no significance influence of record filing practices on information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

2. There is no significant influence of records storage practices on information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

2.1 Review Of Related Leterature

Filing of records is the process of classifying records and putting them in their correct location in the file plan. Filing and records management are vital parts of any organization. Information is a major element in many organizations' comparative advantage, but it can only be utilized if it is available when needed. At the same time every organization can benefit from cutting down effort wasted at looking for misfiled information and misplaced files. The same principle applies to both computer and paper records.

Filing seems to be the most important aspect of active records management. Benedon (1969) defined filing is the process of orderly arranging and sorting out record to make them quickly found when needed. Patricia (1985) gave a more holistic touch to what filing systems should be about, when she described it as the totality of procedures, tools and equipment which an organization's staff uses to access its records. Robek (1995) even went further to define its content, by stating stated that filing systems comprise documents, file folders and files dispersed all

over the organization. However, in what can be said to be a more comprehensive definition Cook (1999) saw the filing system to be the practical application of a classification scheme on keeping of an organization's record of interest and as well the control of movement of such records round the office.

Filing and file management are indispensable to every organization, it is in this vein that Robek (1995) indentified the three objectives of filing to be:

1. to enable users to be able to retrieve information when needed;
2. to identify and preserve the set order of records; and
3. to enable uniform filing.

The objective of proper files management is ability to find records needed quickly and economically, regardless of their format. Akporhonor (2007) researched into the management of staff records in Delta State University Library, Abraka, Nigeria. He reported that, the filing system was alpha-numerical. The filing aids used were register and index. Two clerical staff received the record/file and another did the filing. The finding revealed that there was a cumbersome filing system; as a result of the lack of a filing procedure manual, and that there were no good cabinets and limited storage facilities; hence, some file were kept on top of either the cabinets or the floor. Using a total population of fifty library staff, personnel records were examined and data were collected through observation and interview. The study recommended that there should be a record/disposal schedule; instead of closing files when they are full and opening another volume irrationally. There should be a filing manual to avoid the cumbersome filing system being used and that records should be computerized. The numerical filing adopted with register and index as aid was good, adequate storage facilities will compliment record disposal schedule if adopted. This will

enhance easy retrieval of information.

Iwhiwhu (2006) researched into management of records in Nigeria universities: problems and prospects. The study reported that records management programmes or policies on records were not available in Nigeria University; as a result of this, administration of records was without recourse to the principle of records management. There was no university record manual, and no records retention and disposal schedule. Personnel handling records were not trained in records management, and inadequate facilities for records preservation, storage, and retrieval were evident. Above all, there was no filing manual to be used in the management of the records. He said inadequate computers used to manage the volume of records generated and the attitude of administrators towards records management constituted the problem of records management in Nigerian university. He recommended that personnel handling records should develop a positive attitude towards records and implement records management programmed. He said records have "life" and should be allowed to live through their life cycle process and that the use of these records in solving problems and taking far-reaching decision would reduce crises in Nigerian university. This study seems to have enumerated all the problems of records management when records are not allowed to run their full circle; the record was as good as deed.

Abdulrahman (2015) assessed the management of records for effective administration of Universities in North Central Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, a total population of 801 and questionnaire as means of data collection, he reported that, alphabetic and subject filing systems were the two major filing systems employed; and that filing was done manually. He recommended that adequate filing systems like alphabetic, numeric and alphanumeric

should be adopted. Identification of vital records and adoption of disaster management plan will enhance effective administration of universities in North Central Nigeria.

Akporhonor (2011), researched into management of records in university libraries in the South South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The study described record management practices for personnel files in Delta State University Library, Abraka, Nigeria. Data were collected through interview and observation. Manual filing systems such as registers were used for staff records and most files were too voluminous. There was a space constraint due to lack of a retention and disposal schedule and the lack of a computer system. It was recommended that staff responsible for files undergo records management training programmes or that a diploma holder in records management with computer skills be employed, and that records should be computerized. Motsaathebe (2009) researched on the management of high court records in Botswana. The purpose of the study was to discuss issues pertaining to the management of court record in Botswana. In the design and methodology approach of the study the paper made the use of questionnaires, structured and structured interviews with the high court administrators and records keeps as well as personal observations on how records are managed, inspection of storage facilities and observations on records retrieval procedure.

The finding indicated that in the past the management of legal records at the high court received little attentions, but now the high court has embarked on measures, including the introduction of an automated court record system to manage its records. The paper shows that the effective management of legal records is of crucial to the administration of justice and that there is a need to pay closer attention to the management of court records. While, Motsaathebe (2009) was concerned

about commitment and closer attention to the management of court records Popoola (2009) researched on organizational commitment of records management personnel in Nigeria private universities. The paper investigated socio-economic factors (such as gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, job tenure, monthly salary): job satisfaction and locus of control as they determine organizational commitment of records management personnel in Nigeria private universities. Ex-post facto type was adopted as research design, while questionnaire was used for data collection from a sample of two hundred and forty records management personnel from a population of 310 in 24 private universities in Nigeria. A total of 220 of these responded and the copies of their questionnaire were found valid for analysis. The data was analysed with correlation. The finding revealed that there was significant multiple correlation between socio-economic factors, job satisfaction and locus of control significantly determined organizational commitment of the respondents. It was therefore recommended that, the administration in private universities in Nigeria should take into consideration the socio-economic variable, job satisfaction and locus of control of records management personnel when planning to improve their organizational commitments.

This recommendation is very important when the socio-economic condition of records management personnel is meant, there is the possibility to be committed to duties and work effectively, even in the area of filing which is considered tasting, a personnel will seat down and work well when there is motivation. Whichever filing system an organization chooses, there are some filing methods that go with them. It is in this light that Terry (1966) identified four basic filing arrangements namely: alphabetic; numeric; geographic and chronological. Ricks (1988) equally identified four methods of filing;

alphabetical, numeric, alphanumeric and chronological. The two authors thus shared different views on the geographical and the alphanumerical methods. On the suitability of the filing method(s) to be adopted by an institution, Popoola (1999) recommended that the alphabetical filing order should be applied for small quantities of paper work while functional headings be used for larger organizations. It is therefore certain that the choice of the system and method of filing should all be geared towards accommodating the operational needs of the office they serve. Filing systems should permit the timely determination of records of enduring value, the periodic destruction of records of transitory values and the constant transfer of inactive records to records centres.

Odu (2009) carried out a research on records management practices in national achieves in Calabar. The study examined the records management practice of the national achieve, Calabar within the framework of the record life cycle and the security device provided. The descriptive survey research method was adopted. A sample of twelve respondents was drawn from a population of fifteen staff. The study revealed gross inadequacies in record management practices to have been caused by inadequate professional staff, non-use of contemporary storage and security devices, non-use of ICT facilities and irregular records appraisal. However, the use of alphabetical and chronological arrangement of records and the use of multiple finding aids by the national archive was commendable. Good felicity aids without good records management practices is effort in futility as aids will not bring out any information from disorganized files. Aids are to compliment good records management.

Kemoni (2009) researched into management of medical records in the Kitendawili National Referral and Teaching Hospital; and reported that, the case study

examined the existing policies and practices for managing medical records in Kitendawili National Referral and Teaching Hospital (KNRTH). To collect data, the researcher used a structured open-ended interview schedule and undertook a physical survey and inspection of the hospital's central medical records unit. The medical records unit staff were co-operative while the researcher was conducting the study.

The study exposed a number of problems that hampered the management of medical records in KNRTH. These included the fact that:

i.   the layout of the central records unit did not cater for effective storage of medical records
ii. there were no storage equipment for medical case files and computer diskettes
iii. some staff involved in medical records management had no formal training
iv. medical records appraisal and disposition were not often carried out
v.   the medical records unit of the hospital had only one computer for compiling statistics, reports and databases, despite the fact that the medical records unit had a compliment of 13 staff
vi. the Kitendawili National Archives (KNA) had no involvement in the management of the hospital's medical records.

In view of these problems, the study recommended the following measures:

i.   the establishment of a secondary storage area for inactive medical records
ii. the drawing up of a retention and disposition schedule
iii. the introduction of a format conversion programme to be microfilm technology based
iv. active involvement of the Kitendawili National Archives in the management of medical records
v.   upgrading of the hospital's records automation project to cover other medical records functions like creation, use and disposition

3.1 Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was ex-post facto design. The population of the study comprised all 519 records managers/personnel trained/ untrained, skilled/unskilled working in all the 109 identified federal establishments that have their presence in Calabar, Cross River State. The entire population was added and data was gathered from every member of the population.

The sample for this study was five hundred and nineteen (519). This was so because the entire population was added, as a result of variation in the number of records managers/personnel available in the different public services offices in Cross River State. The instrument used for this study was a research questionnaire. The instrument was subjected to face validity. To ensure the face validity of the instrument, it was constructed in sub-scales, with items on each sub-scale measuring a named variable in the study. These sub-scales included demographic data, records management practices: records filing and records storage.

The instrument was trial-tested to ensure that it was reliable for data collection. In doing this it was administered on a sample of 30 civil servants working with records departments of ministries in Cross River State government. The raw scores obtained from the administration of the instrument was subject to Cronbach alpha. The reliability co-efficient of the various sub-scales of the instrument were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cronbanh alpha relia bility estimates of the study variables

S/N	Variable	No of items	$\bar{X}$	SD	α-coefficient
1.	Records filing practice	10	27.99	7.03	0.83
2.	Storage practice	10	28.29	6.73	0.84
3.	Information accessibility	20	38.87	7.44	0.82

Table 2: Coding a nd scoring schedule of the instrument

S/N	Title of variable	Column	Code
1.	Serial number	1-3	001-519
2.	Records filing scale	4-5	Sum of scores in B_1
3.	Storage of records scale	6-7	Sum of scores in B_2
4.	Information accessibility scale	8-9	Sum of scores in Section C

There are two main variables in the study. They are record management practices (independent variable) and information accessibility (dependent variable) in federal public service in Cross River State. The sub-variables of the independent variable include the filing practices, record storage practices. The descriptive analysis of the mean and standard deviation of the variables are provided in Table 3. The interpretation of the descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation can be inferred by comparing the calculated mean with the population mean of the instrument. From a sample of 519, the filing practice has a mean of 21.93. If this value is compared with the average mean of the population of 25, the mean is relatively lower than the population mean. It can be inferred from this result that there is poor filing practice in the federal public service in Cross River state. The result with the respect to record storage also gave a mean of 19.99. This is also a lower value than the population mean; hence the record storage practice is also relatively poor in the State.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation of the variables

S/N	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.	Accessibility information	36.88	3.560	519
2.	Records filing practice	21.93	1.122	519
3.	Record storage practice	19.99	2.255	519

The mean of the dependent variable; information accessibility of 36.88 is relatively low if compared with the population mean of 50.0. This interpreted that the record managers responded that their organizations are not open to public access to information. The standard deviations of the variables are also indications that the responses of the respondents are not too far from one another. This implies that the respondents have a common knowledge of the variables under investigation and that their responses are reliable on the data collected.

4.1 Presentation of Results

The results of the data analyses from which the findings are drawn are presented

according to the stated hypotheses. The mean and the standard deviation of each of the variables are referred to in Table 3. The hypotheses were tested with respect to the data collected on the variables in the study at .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of records filing practice on information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

The variables in null hypothesis 1 are record filing practice (independent variable) and information accessibility (dependent variable). The null hypothesis was tested using data from the 519 record managers from one hundred and nine federal public service institutions in Cross River State. The simple regression analysis was used in the data analysis and the result was given in Table 4.

Table 4: Simple regression result of the influence of records filing practice an information accessibility in federal public service Cross River State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.693[a]	.480	.479	2.569		

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3154.73	1	3154.73	478.14	.000[b]
Residual	3411.11	517	6.60		
Total	6565.83	518			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Records filing practice

b. Dependent Variable: Information accessibility

This table showed the result of the simple regression analysis of the influence of filing practice on the information accessibility from the federal public service in Cross River State. The regression model produced an adjusted R^2 of .479. This indicated that the poor filing practice accounted for 47.9% of the determinants of information accessibility in the federal public service in Cross River State. This finding is a critical indication that the filling practice is relatively poor in the federal public service in Cross River State. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table was F = 478.14 to 2 decimal places and the sig. value of .000 (or p<.05) at the degree of freedom (df) 1 and 517. The implication of this result is that the null hypothesis is rejected and the finding drawn from the result is that there is significant influence of the poor record filing practice on the information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant influence of record storage practice on information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

The variables in null hypothesis 2 are record storage practice (independent variable) and information accessibility (dependent

variable). The null hypothesis was tested using data from the 519 record managers from one hundred and nine federal public service institutions in Cross River State. The simple regression analysis was used in the data analysis and the result was given in Table 5. This table showed the result of the simple regression analysis of the influence of record storage practice on the information accessibility from the federal public service in Cross River State. The regression model produced an adjusted R^2 of .178. This indicated that the poor storage practice accounted for 17.8% of the determinants of information accessibility in the federal public service in Cross River State.

Table 5: Simple regression result of the influence of record storage practice and information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.424[a]	.180	.178	3.228		

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1180.27	1	1180.27	113.30	.000[b]
Residual	5385.56	517	10.42		
Total	6565.83	518			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Record Storage practice
b. Dependent Variable: Information accessibility

This finding is a critical indication that the record storage practice is relatively poor in the federal public service in Cross River State. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table was F = 133.30 to 2 decimal places and the sig. value of .000 (or p<.05) at the degree of freedom (df) 1 and 517. The result is that the null hypothesis is rejected and the finding drawn from the result is that there is significant influence of the poor record storage practice on the information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State.

In the course of this investigation, some pertinent findings were made. This section of the research report was devoted to discussing such. However, to ensure clarity in the discussion, the presentation was made on a finding-by-finding basis as follows:

Table 6: Coefficient of the Beta weights of the record management practices on information accessibility in federal public service in Cross River State

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-2.790	2.318		-1.20	.229
Records filing practice	2.301	.105	.725	21.90	.000
Record Storage practices	-.581	.050	-.368	-11.51	.000

5.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of the data collected on the first hypothesis of the study showed that records filing practices had a significant influence on information accessibility on information seekers. By understanding the definition of records filing as the process of arranging and sorting records so that they may be found quickly when needed, this finding was expected. To facilitate a wide range of records management activities including identification, capturing and retrieval of records, security and access control as well as disposal, records should be systematically organized according to records classification schemes also called file plans or records filing, which are plans for logical arrangement of records according to one or more of the following: business functions, activities and contents of the records.

In general, a records classification scheme includes a coding system expressed in symbols (e.g. alphabetical, numerical or alpha-numerical) to show the logical relationship amongst the records. A records classification scheme should allow modifications such as addition of new records series/groups to cater for changing circumstances. In view of their important role in records management, records classification schemes should be approved and reviewed by a senior staff in the organization having regard to the following principles: whether business records are separated from administrative records, whether the scheme is systematic, logical, consistent and scalable to facilitate accurate and complete documentation of policies, procedures and decisions for the efficient carrying out of the organization's functions, activities and transactions, whether the scheme can be used easily and the file titles are clear and unique (e.g. avoid the use of "general"/"miscellaneous") to facilitate accurate capturing and ready retrieval of records; and whether the scheme facilities segregation of vital records for protection and establishment of records retention and disposal schedule to satisfy retention requirements stipulated by legislation (e.g. personal data (privacy) ordinance) and to separate records which need to be kept for a long period (e.g. those on policy) from those which need to be kept briefly (e.g. routine correspondence).

The implication of this finding was that timely access to recorded information was contingent to the conventional filing practices adopted on an organization and the file plan in use. In other words, when records were properly filed, they increases information seekers' tendency to access information with ease and vice versa.

This finding was in line with the position of International Record Management Trust (1999), which highlighted the rationale for filing records in any establishment. To them, filing provided an easy ground for identifying individual files and forms of records and also indicated the logical influence of files on records. Thus, if records were filed properly, it implied they would increase the ease of accessing information when needed.

Besides, this finding lends credence to Akporhonor (2007) who noted from a similar study that the hardship encounter by information seekers in having access to records was due to poor or inappropriate filing. According to him, the objective of proper files management was to be able to find the record needed quickly and economically, regardless of its format. Thus, when such records were not appropriately filed, as noted in most establishments today, there was every tendency that information relating to such may be difficult to come by if, not impossible. In a study Akporhonor (2007) conducted in Delta State University Library Abraka, he noted that as a result of the lack of filing procedure manual, good cabinets and good storage facilities. This causes the keeping of

some files and records on top of cabinets or on the floor. The challenge this posed when information contained in them were needed was greater than experienced.

This finding also supported that of Abdulrahman (2015) who assessed the management of records for effective administration of universities in North Central Nigeria. He reported that only two filing systems (alphabetical and subject) were practiced and inappropriately done so, and that filing was done manually. To him, this influenced negatively access to information. On the basis of such finding, he recommended the adoption of an adequate and appropriate filing system such as alphabetic, numeric and alphanumeric.

It can be seen from the foregoing that the finding from the test of this first hypothesis was expected, and not a deviation from standard. From the mean of 21.93 of records filing practices experienced in the federal public service in Cross River State indicated poor filing practices. As a result of wrong and non filing of record which was occasioned by lack of trained personnel, lack of master file plans, poor storage facilities. These were evidence by piled up files on the floor with some torn and tired in bundles with elastic rubber, while some were kept under and on top of tables. Hence the congested and disorganized files as reported by the respondents that files were not properly kept. However, this may change in the future if trained staff are employed and are regularly sent on conference and embark on knowledge sharing with in-house training.

From the analysis of data collected on the second hypothesis of the study, it was gathered that record storage practice has significantly influence on information accessibility to information seekers in federal establishment in Cross River State. Details of the finding is that when records were stored in a proper cabinet, with filing racks and under a tidy environment with control temperature of relative humidity and adequate space, then the access to such information when retrieval was needed and vice versa, was going to be easier. Records should be stored in such a manner so as to facilitate user access and ensure that they are protected from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, removal, deterioration, loss or destruction. An organization should lay down guidelines on the storage of records including sensitive or classified records. for records in paper form, organizations should note that paper deteriorates rapidly in an environment of high temperature and humidity. Furthermore, mould growth on paper can be a health hazard to staff. Paper records should be stored in a clean and dry environment (e.g. not near unblocked window, under/near water/sewage pipe, water drain, manhole, water permeable wall or ceiling, water tank), and in proper facilities (e.g. filing cabinets and filing racks) instead of stacking them on the floor. An organization should also arrange inspection regularly and after events such as rainstorm. For paper records which have long-term (e.g. 30 years of over) value, they are recommended to be stored in a clean environment with round-the-clock control of temperature and relative humidity to ensure their preservation over time.

The implication of this second finding of the study was that most hindrances in accessing of information in some establishments and institutions could be traced to improper records storage practices. Put differently, if records were properly stored, there was bound to be no problem in accessing information to such records.

This finding was similar to that of Odu (2009) who researched into records management practices in national achieves, Calabar and observed gross inadequacies. These were attributed to inadequate professional staff, non-use of contemporary storage and security devices, non-use of ICT facilities and irregular records appraisal.

According to him, these inadequacies in records storage had significant influence on retrieval and subsequent use of such information.

Freda (2014) observed as noted in this finding, that there were a lot of inadequacies among records managers in respect to storage of records in organizations. This he noted had significant effect on information accessibility to information seekers. He, thus, recommended, in agreement with international standards that records should be stored in such a way that they were accessible and safeguarded from environmental damage. This finding was therefore in support of earlier literature and as well as justified general thinking and reasoning. Surprisingly, access was denied during this research, the researcher was not allowed access into their storage area, citing security reasons despite the fact they have been told that the investigation was purely for academic purpose. Through observation, the researcher observed pile-up files in bags and on the floor in most of the establishment investigated. This confirms the unduly delay in accessing information sometime or non availability of such information. When records are not stored in a manner to facilitate user access, how then would that record be a tool for the conduct of government operation and an evidence for assessment of government activities by citizens?

Findings from the study revealed that there were variations in the standardized coefficient beta values of records management practices in federal establishments in Cross River State. However, the extent to which most of those practices were observed were relatively poor. Similarly, it was found that the extent of observing records management practices by records managers/personnel had significant influence on information accessibility in public service in Cross River State.

Composite influence and information accessibility

From the combination of all the variables the analysis indicated high percentage of the factors that influence the information accessibility. Although the weight differ but the composite influence of the records management practices was significant. Indication from all the empirical and literature review showed a lot of work done on all the variables, but no research work has been done that examine the composite effect of all the variables. From the analysis, there were variation in the standard coefficient beta value, and filing practices has the highest influence. Filing which is the process of classifying record and putting them into the correct location in the file plan, when this was not properly done what would happen to the record is better imagine. This research is very unique, in that it was able to combine all the variables and discovered that the composite influence on records management practices was significant which is the gap this research work filled in the body of knowledge.

Conclusion

Findings from the study revealed that there were variations in the standardized coefficient beta values of records management practices in federal establishments in Cross River State. However, the extent to which most of those practices observed were relatively poor. Similarly, it was found that the extent of observing records management practices by records managers/personnel had significant influence on information accessibility in public service in Cross River State.

The record life circle model was of important to this study, record lives on, in that when records are created it is born, while in usage it lives and it dies in the final disposition phase. It can be affirmed that T.R. Schellenberg (1956) was essential tools in the

management of records in our public institutions and our records managers/personnel will be better off if all these are put into good use.

Besides the assertion that the management practices were in one way or the other related to information accessibility, it was also known from this study that the measure to which such practices were observed was a determining factor in the accessibility of information. Thus, it could be concluded that lack of access to information by information seekers was due to the fact that there was a lack of some inadequacies in records management by establishment's records managers or personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All establishments and institutions should have adequately qualified records managers. This will definitely curb the situation whereby records are inappropriate kept.

2. Training and re-training programs by way of seminars, conferences and workshops should be organized for records managers and coordinators in our institutions and establishments. This will keep them abreast with current practices in records management, which will also on the whole reduce the difficulty involved in accessing information when the needs arises.

3. Records supervisors or senior records managers in the universities or research institutes should pay regular visits to establishments with the view of supervising them. By so doing, corrections will be made when errors are first identified in record management.

REFERENCES

Abdullahi, A. B., Abiola, A. A. & Abdulwahab, O. I. (2016). An assessment of records management practice in selected local government council in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Journal of International Science Theory and Practice, 4* (1), 49-64.

Abdulrahman, A. B. (2015). Management of university records for effective administration of universities in North Central Nigeria. *Academic Journals*, 7 (3), 47-54.

Akporhonor, B. A. (2007). The management of staff records at Delta state University library, Abraka, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice, 3* (6). Available at: http://digitalcommons. unl.edu/libphilprac/106.

Alegbeleye, G. O. (2015). How proper record keeping can help stem corruption. *University of Ilorin Bulletin: A weekly publication of the office of the vice chancellor* 7(7); 13-14.

Ayeni, J. (2000). Focus, concept and scope of information and records management in information and records management in Nigeria. Problems and prospect. *The proceedings of the first national workshop on information and management held in Lagos, Nigeria.*

Benedon, W. (1969). *Records management practice.* Michigan: Hall

Freda, A. (2004). Assessment of records management practices among the administrative staff of University of Education, Winneba – Kumasi (UEW – K) and Mampong (UEW – M)

campuses. *Postgraduate thesis/dissertations submitted to the College of Arts and Social Sciences*.

Garba, S. K. & Bitagi, A. M. (2014). Evaluative study of information researches and services utilization for research in academic libraries in Niger State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Business Management. 2*, 121-128.

International Records Management Trust (1999). *Managing public sector records: A study programme*. London: International Records Management Trust.

Iwhiwhu, E. B. (2006). Management of records in Nigeria University: Problem and prospects. *The Electronic Library, 23*(3), 345-355.

Motsaathebe, L. & Mnjama, N. (2009). The management of high court record in Botswana. *Records Management Journal*. 19(3): 173-189.

National Archive of Scotland (2013). Record management. Retrieved from: http:/www,nas.gov.uk/recordkeeping/recordsmanagement.asp.

Ngwayi, N. M. (2006). Record management practices in the Cameroonian civil service. *Unpublished doctorial thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*.

Popoola, S. O. (2009). Organizational commitment of record management personnel in Nigerian private universities. *Records Management Journal*. 19(3), 204-217.

Qamar, K. (2002). Global trends in agricultural extension: Challenges facing Asia and the pacific region. *Keynote paper presented at the FAO regional expert consultation on agricultural extension, research extension – farmer interface and technology transfer, held in Bangkok*.

Robek M. F. Brown G. F. Stephen D. O. (1995). *Information and record management: document-based information systems*. New York: GLENCOE McGraw-Hill

Schellenberg, T. R. (1956). The appraisal of modern public records, bulletins of the national archives. *Indiana Magazine of History. 53*, 243-247.