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Organization and Accessibility of Information Resources in Federal High Court Libraries in North-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Information organization and accessibility are part of the core functions of any special library. The need for organization is necessary to accomplish a planned library's goals. Effective organization provides effective retrieval and use of the resources and also saves time for both the user and the information professional. This study highlights and describes the method of information organization and access in the Federal High Courts libraries in North-eastern geo-political zone of Nigeria. It also discusses the various ways the federal high court libraries organize information resources, the means for information access and the challenges associated with the organization and accessibility of the information resources in the libraries. Qualitative research method, using narrative-based research design was adopted for the study while interview guide was the instrument used for data collection. Five heads of the libraries were purposely selected to serve as the study participants from five (5) Federal High Courts in the zone. The data collected was analyzed thematically using coding system. The findings revealed that the resources in the libraries were organized serially in accordance with the broad subject of each item in open shelves without the provision of any class mark on the books, it also identified some of the challenges to be lack of comprehensive and uniform information organization policy and shortage of manpower. The conclusion emphasizes on the need for a comprehensive and uniform information organization policy, continuous evaluation of the methods of information access for effective and efficient library services. The ultimate goal of this study is to enable special librarians, and others interested in information services to understand the concepts, principles, and processes behind information organization and retrieval in special libraries.

Keywords: Information resources, Special libraries, Information organization, information retrieval.



Introduction

Libraries are repositories of information, information that is stored in books, and other medias are organized in a logical manner that will facilitate users finding it repeatedly. Libraries have the longest tradition of organizing information for the purpose of retrieval. When materials are organized into collections, their physical entities have to be arranged. They may be placed on shelves in some more meaningful order or in an arranged format; most resources are however, arranged by classification. The value of information resources in any given library depends on the degree of order in which it is organized and taken care of. Unlike the google and other online information providers, libraries are guaranteed, the information that you saw today will still be there next week, and there is guarantee that the material will be organized in a logical manner that will facilitate your finding it again (Alderman,2014).

When knowledge is not in order, the more it is, the greater the confusion. Therefore, library services cannot be achieved without proper organization of information in an orderly manner. Also, according to Oke (2008), “putting information resources in proper manner will assist to achieve the purpose they are meant for”. Information organization and accessibility are part of the core functions of information professionals. The value of information organization cannot be overemphasized. The volume of information created, generated and stored is of such immense proportions that without adequate organization, retrieval process for an information user would be cumbersome and frustrating. Today’s information professionals should be conversant with the information organization and retrieval system, emphasize the need for a continuous evaluation of the information access and retrieval methods to make for an effective and efficient information retrieval system (Onwuchekwa, 2011).

Organizing information saves time for both the user and the information professional. Recorded information goes beyond written text. Video and audio recordings, images, cartographic representations and web pages are also included (Taylor and Daniel 2009). One of the functions of any special library should be the cataloguing and classification of their information resources and accepting organizing principles and methods. Processing information resources involves doing anything possible to ensure their easy identification, access and use. Hill (2012) reported that information resources should be organized in accordance with the accepted principles of their respective libraries. The term “knowledge organization system” encompass all types of schemes for organizing information. It includes classification schemes that organize materials at a general level and subject heading that provide more detailed access and authority files that control variant version of key information. Because knowledge organization systems are mechanism for organizing information, they are at the heart of every library and information centers Knowledge organization systems are used to organize information materials for the purpose of easy retrieval management of collections (Govindbhai, 2015)

The concept of information access means that there are some information resources that have been organized in an orderly manner suitable for easy retrieval. The organization of library resources is basically for the easy access. It makes accessibility to library resources not just easy but timely. The library user or researcher must be assumed to be a busy person and his time must be saved (Olise 2021). One of the Ranganathan’s laws “save the time of the user” is also applicable here. The arrangement of books according to the degree of mutual relationship of subjects would lead to save the time of the time of the user (Library & Information Science Network, 2018). Organization of library resources, broadly speaking, refers to the process of getting library materials including books and non-book into an



arranged form so as to aid easy access of such materials and for posterity (Olise 2021). Accessibility is the degree of the ease with which it is possible to reach a certain location from other locations. Access can also be viewed as the ability to access the functionality and possible benefit of some system or entity.

Dada (2011) emphasized the importance and indispensability of law information sources to legal practice by terming the law library as the laboratory for the legal profession. With the stiff competitiveness which characterizes the legal practice of the 21st century, legal practitioners in Nigeria and their contemporaries in every other jurisdiction are professionally impelled to have access relevant and well organize information sources for chamber services and advocacy. For effective client counselling timely response to file briefing, judges and lawyers need to have access to appropriate statutory and judicial authorities in order to achieve overall success while representing their client's interest within and outside the law courts

The Federal High Court Libraries are required to provide an avenue through which law sources (legal texts, indexes of law reports, case law and old files of similar cases in the past precedent) are accessed to validate the case presented and for adoption of the new legal position or to reverse the previous court decisions. This paper explores the Organization and Accessibility of information resources in Federal High Court Libraries of North eastern Nigeria. However, because of the nature of the population of this study, qualitative research methodology was adopted, because it was assumed to be the best suited methodology for the study. Also, narrative research design was adopted in which interview was used for collecting data from participants.

Statement of the Problem

Information is the critical input to every aspect of the legal process, is central to all activities of any organization, in every environment and for any endeavor to national development. For any organization to function properly, it must have the appropriate and well-organized information resources provided by its library in order to achievement the organizational aim and objectives.

Taking into consideration the significance of information organization and access to the existence of any special library, the state of information organization and accessibility in the federal high court libraries are critical which is an evident that there are problems that libraries are immersed in and the consequence of this can negatively affect the organization as a whole. Therefore, the libraries are still faced with a number of challenges of poor facilities, lack of professional staff as well as poor service delivery as they seek to continue organizing information as expected to satisfy their parent organizations, they are supposed to make information resources easily accessible to users. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed in order for these information providers to be seen as effective and efficient contributors to their parent organizations.

However, in spite the problem of poor organization of information resources as stated in the preliminary literature search, studies have shown that Federal High Court libraries are faced with the dilemma of Lack of highly trained professionals, lack of training and retraining of staff, inadequate funding which drastically affected all aspects of library and information services in the libraries. Therefore, considering the role played by the special libraries and the issues raised above, there is need for this study to find out the methods of information organization and access in the federal high court libraries in north Eastern Nigeria with the hope that the findings of this study would serve as a framework and a guiding principle on



how to organize information resources for the Federal high court libraries under study and improving the library's systems and services.

Objectives of the study

The major objective of the study is to find out the method of information resources organization and retrieval in federal high court libraries of North-Eastern Nigeria. And the specific objectives are to:

1. Find out how federal high court libraries Organize information resources in their respective libraries.
2. Determine the means for accessing information resources in the Federal High Court Libraries.
3. Identify the challenges associated with the organization and accessing information resources in the libraries under study.

Review of related literature:

Studies have shown that there is a wide range of articles and views on the subject of Organization and Retrieval of Information Resources in special libraries. The Ranganathan first Law "every book its user" is a motivating direction but which cannot be achieved except through bibliographical and physical organization of information resources (Patil and Pranita, 2014). Olise, (2021) Define organization of library resources as the cataloguing and classification of library information materials for easy retrieval. Book and other information materials in a library are organized into different collections, periodical collection, reference collection and books are arranged according to classified order.

According to Alderman, (2014) Organization of information entails indexing, abstracting, classification and cataloging. He also stated that finding information deliberately rather than serendipitously relies on many people organizing information in a systematic manner that can be consistently retrieved in an organized system. Libraries have continued to provide reliable information resources and sources that can never be accessed freely on the Internet. Information and organizing information are what libraries are all about.

Moran, (2013) identified that Traditionally, in libraries, information was contained in books, periodicals, newspapers, and other types of recorded media. It was accessible through a library's catalog and with the assistance of indexes, in the case of periodical and newspaper articles. Library organization consists of two major steps, which are cataloguing and classification. Before any material should be available for use, it has to go through the process of cataloguing and classification. Sometimes the two are grouped together as technical services. It is in line with this that in Govindbhai (2015) defined library classification as the structure of coding and organizing documents or library materials according to their subject and allocating to a call number to information resources for easy access. Library classification is a part of the information organization system and a form of bibliographic classification. It goes hand in hand with library cataloguing under the rubric of cataloguing and classification.

Library cataloguing is also part of the library organization systems, it provides the physical description of a book which helps in identifying the location of a classified book on the storage system, "shelves or database". A library catalogue is defined by Wijoyo (2009) as a list of books, maps, sound recordings or materials in other medium that represents a



collection arranged alphabetically by authors, titles, number or subjects. Cataloguing is how a library maintains its list of materials. However, when the collection becomes a bit large, an informal arrangement for grouping the books by subject categories may provide access to them. In a library, each entry in the catalogue is the representation of a bibliographic record at a particular point in the catalogue. The Federal High Court Libraries should ensure that all their information resources are well organized and are kept under sufficient administrative and intellectual control. Organization of information resources is an important step involved in information resources management.

Accessibility is very important specifically as it focuses on special libraries and their access to entities, often through the use of assertive devices of printed and electronic devices or through technological format. It is one thing for the resources to be available and it is another thing to be accessible. Whatsoever is available but not accessible is equally useless, only what is accessible is usable. Ndagana (2000) in his opinion noted that the term “access” is used by different people in relation to quite bits and pieces of the whole as in subject open access and knowledge access system. However, each refers to one or more aspects of providing the means of access to information in a fuller sense to knowledge.

The accessibility of information resources is an important recurring theme in the library. According to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), resources may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one’s subject of interest, but the user may not be able to lay hands on them. The more accessible information sources are the more likely to be used. Readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access. They also noted that the availability of an information resource does not necessarily imply its accessibility, because the source may be available but access to it prevented for one reason or the other. Garba (2009) posited that information resources can be accessible through the use of telecommunication and information technology. It enables access to information and services by minimizing the barriers of distance and cost as well as the usability of interference.

Agyen-Gyasi, Lamptey and Frempong (2012) observed that the library’s effectiveness was traditionally measured in relation to completeness and balance of collection, the adequacy of acquisitions, cataloguing, etc. Accessibility is very important specifically as it focuses on special libraries and their access to entities, often through the use of assertive devices of printed and electronic devices or through technological format. It is one thing for the resources to be available and it is another thing to be accessible. Whatsoever is available but not accessible is equally useless, only what is accessible.

The Legal information resources of a court can only be useful to the court if they are accessible to the Judiciary who need to use them. This implies making sure that they are readily retrievable when required. Chinyemba and Ngulube, (2005) states that records could be maintained for easy retrieval by:

- Ensuring that files are constantly retrieved.
- Ensuring proper sorting, modification or outright destruction or archiving some before filing and storage. Abdulsalami (2013) stated that the intellectual access to available information has since properly been a major pre-occupation of libraries. Importance has been reflected in the efforts devoted to the design and creation of bibliographies, catalogue and classification schemes and other devices that help to establish the access to individual documents and their relevance to specific inquiries.



Access to legal records is governed by the policy of the court and the access policy may differ from one court to another. Bayraktaroglu and Ozgen (2008) define access as the way, means or methods used to locate the acquired legal information in the library. These include the telephone, e-mails, faxes, visiting the library personally and reading public notice-boards, etc. The means of accessibility to information is a powerful procedural measure that needs to be instituted in an information system for quality control. Practicing judiciary need access to statutes, acts and decrees that are legislation passed by the government. According to Logan (2008), many of the rules that govern everyday life are contained in instruments made under powers granted by statutes. Legislation includes statutory instruments, orders in council and local-bylaws. Tuhumwire and Okello-Obura (2010) studied the sources and means of access to legal information by lawyers in Uganda. In their study, they found that the growth in legal information had inevitably led to the change in the legal profession and also led to change in legal information needs. Calling the attention of government and legal information providers for the legal information needs of lawyers to be met the right sources should be available to them and the proper means of access dovetailed in the legal information provision strategies.

Many studies have been conducted to determine the challenges confronting information resources organization and accessibility in special libraries in Nigeria. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) reveal that efforts are being made worldwide to promote access to information in all formats. They identified the attendant features of challenges, such as power failure, machine breakdowns and lack of spare parts and technicians, which intermittently stall the performance of the modern gadgets of information storage and transfer in developing countries. Another study on challenges of accessibility of information resources by the judiciary by Dorsch (2000) identified lack of time, inadequate access to information sources, lack of skills, cost of information and geographical isolation as the major barriers to effective use of information. Moreover, poor quality of instruments used and difficult technical language limit the usefulness of audio-visual information services. The literacy levels of information seekers also limit the usage of information. Adeoye and Popoola (2011) highlighted the accessibility of library and information resources in their study, they explained that, learners must have access to the necessary information materials and resources. These resources might be in tangible (i.e., printed resources) and intangible (i.e., electronic resources) format. User may encounter five possible types of inaccessibility problems i.e. the conceptual, the linguistic, the critical, the bibliographic, and the physical.

Methodology

The qualitative research method and narrative-based design was applied for this study. The population comprises all the staff of the five Federal High Court Libraries of North-eastern Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was adopted, as it was considered appropriate because the respondents were selected based on their experiences and understanding of the issue on ground and to be able to arriving at a clear conclusion. A structured interview guide was the data collection instrument. The interview guides were personally administered to the heads of the libraries and All the five (5) copies of the interview guides administered were collected and recorded systematically giving a 100 percent response rate. Thematic data analysis approach was adopted for analyzing the collected data. It focuses on assigning of themes and codes to the participants within the data and this can assist in arriving at clear conclusions.



Results

In order to examine and investigate the organization and retrieval of information resources in the Federal High Court Libraries in North Eastern Zone of Nigeria, data was collected from five (5) heads of libraries from various libraries of the Federal High Court of North-eastern Nigeria, for qualitative research analysis to address the objectives of these study. The researcher coded the participants as: R1, R2, R3, R4 and R5, respectively. Using the structured interview guide the response rate was 100%. The interview data were transcribed and presented based on the responses obtained from the interviews. Not all the librarians were professional librarians, but they are all hardworking and dedicated to their responsibilities.

Research question 1: How does the federal high court libraries organizes information resources in their respective libraries.

To determine the organization of information resources the participants responded to several questions. All the participants indicated that none of the libraries used any kind of classification system for information organization in their libraries. R1, R2 and R3 explained that the libraries serially described and arranged their information resources based on their subject area without provision of any class mark on the books. R1 and R2 narrated that information description and arrangements were done in accordance with the broad subject area of each item. Also, they arranged their resources on open shelf. R2 indicated that no rule or guide was used for information organization, proper shelving and re-shelving to ensure proper organization. R4 and R5 narrated that information resources are organized by the librarians, and those generated by the libraries are organized and shelved for further utilization.

Research question 2: What are the means of accessing information resources in the Federal High Court Libraries

On the issue of the methods in which the respective libraries provide access to information resource to their targeted users. R1 discussed that they provide table of contents to judges. R1 and R2 narrated that the libraries did not have catalogue cards to ease accessibility; rather they provided access through the use indexes which is a little bit difficult for users to use them without the help of the librarian. R1 indicated that users were allowed to crosscheck the shelves in case of journals, magazines, textbooks or reference resources. R3 indicated that for easy access to information resources they provided direct services through the provision of table of contents to judges. R2 and R3 also narrated that they gave personal assistance to the users in search of information for whatever purpose for easy access. They assisted the users to locate the materials and answered their queries. R4 and R5 stress that there is no any policy guiding the access to information, because policy guiding access to information may differ from one court to another.

Research question 3: What are the challenges associated with the organization and accessibility of information resources in the libraries under study?

The findings as regards to the challenges associated with the organization and accessibility of information resources in the federal high court libraries of the North-eastern Nigeria, as narrated by the participants, R1, R3 and R3 stated that shortage of manpower, lack of training and retraining of librarians, lack of professional librarians and lack of basic working facilities are their major challenges. R2 and R3 indicated that inadequate space and storage facilities were also part of the challenges faced by the libraries. R4 stress that there is lack of



borrowing facilities for users, improper display of the information resources in the library, R5 also narrated challenges associated with the access and organization to their information resources were problems of internet connectivity, inadequate infrastructure for accessing resources electronically, lack of local area network connection, insufficient computers, and interrupted power supply,

These challenges identified with regards to the organization and accessibility to information resources may hinder them from obtaining quality output in the course of their service provision.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings on information resources organization have shown that none of the libraries used any kind of classification system for organization of their information resources, rather they use name and subject index. Information description and arrangements are done in accordance with the broad subject area of each item. It also indicated that no general rule or guide was used for information organization within the federal high court libraries. These findings supported by Hill (2012) who reported that information resources should be organized in accordance with the accepted principles of their respective libraries. The other criteria should reflect the capturing, collecting, analyzing and disseminating information that serves to identify information material and to explain the context and information system that provided it.

The findings on the accessibility of information shows that the libraries did not have catalogue cards to ease accessibility, for easy access to information resources they provided direct services through the provision of table of contents to judges and they also provide name and subject index. It also shows that there is no any policy governing the method of accessibility in the federal high court libraries. Virtually every field of endeavor is affected by the impact of rapid technological advancement but the federal high court libraries are left behind. These findings are also supported by Huffine (2014) who stated that the problem of inadequacy and current legal information resource, especially those in digital formats, is the first and the major challenge facing the federal high court libraries in Nigeria. Their models of subscription were mostly the traditional method and they didn't participate in consortium-based subscription for the provision of access to relevant legal information resources.

On the challenges, the study finds out that there is shortage of manpower, lack of training and retraining of librarians, lack of professional librarians and lack of basic working facilities. Also, inadequate space and storage facilities were also part of the challenges faced by the libraries. It further revealed the problems of internet connectivity, inadequate infrastructure for accessing resources electronically, lack of local area network connection, insufficient computers, and interrupted power supply. The challenges identified with regards to the organization and accessibility to information resources may hinder them from obtaining quality output in the course of their service provision. This is in line with the findings of Tuhumwire and Okello-Obura (2010) in their study the sources and means of access to legal information by lawyers in Uganda. In their study, they found that the problem faced in legal information access were insufficient provision of proper resources and services, incompetent library staff, they also indicated that there were limited law librarians and delay in returning vital information materials, lastly, they find out that there was inadequate time to search for information



Conclusion

The finding of the study has discussed a number of challenges confronting the organization and retrieval of information resources in the Federal High Court Libraries in North-Eastern Zone of Nigeria. The findings generated from the study indicates, among other things, that none of the libraries used any kind of classification system for organization of their information resources, rather they use name and subject index. Information description and arrangements are done in accordance with the broad subject area of each item. The study concludes that Virtually every field of endeavor is affected by the impact of rapid technological advancement but the federal high court libraries are left behind.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Information be repackaged in order to take care of challenges of proximity to access and organization in the federal high court libraries. There is need for a general policy guide for governing the method of information organization and accessibility libraries under study
2. Courts librarians' job productivity should be improved by their attending training, conferences, seminars and workshops, both local and international, as at when due. this will contribute immensely to the desired services in the library operations.
3. In order to alleviate the problems of low basic working facilities, interrupted power supply and provision of I.C.T. facilities, Government should allocate sufficient funds to federal high court libraries to enable them acquire adequate facilities for effective services.

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