DIGITIZATION AND THE PROSPECTS OF ARCHIVES IN NIGERIA: EXPLORING THE LAGOS STATE RECORDS AND ARCHIVES BUREAU (LASRAB)

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A Conference Presentation at the
University of Education
Winneba, Ghana.
3-7th, Oct 2022

Abstract

Using the Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau (LASRAB) as a case study, this presentation examines:

■ The current state,

■ Prospects and;

■ Challenges in digitizing archival collections in Nigeria.

Presentation Overview

- Brief history of LASRAB
- Statement of problem
- Significance
- Objectives of the study
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusion
- Areas of further research

LASRAB | A Brief History

- The Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau was conceived in 1995 as a Public Sector reform programme for better management of Lagos State records for planning, policy process, enhanced service delivery and heritage preservation.

- In 2002, it was accepted as the Integrated Records and Archives management Programme (IRAMP), a sub-component of the World Bank-assisted State Governance and Capacity Building Programme (SGCBP) which later became the Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project (LMDGP).

- LASRAB formally came into legal existence as a Lagos State Government Agency pursuant to Law 22 of 2007.

- LASRAB House, located in Magodo GRA, Phase 2, Lagos, Nigeria is home to archival facilities like:

- Repositories, Search/Reading Rooms, Reference Library, Gallery, Conservatory, Micrography, Reprography, Mini-museum, Training Room, Audio-Visual Studio, Conference Room, amongst others.

- The Bureau is under the supervision of the Ministry of Information and Strategy.

Statement of problem (1)

- Based on preliminary investigations by the researcher, it was observed that the vision statement of the Institution states that it intends to ensure:

- The maintenance of a modern and credible information warehouse (records and archives institution) that captures full and accurate records on Lagos State that meet the needs and interest of clients.

- And also ensure permanent custody, care and control of the nation's archives using the best modern technology.

- However, some of these records have been badly affected by agents of deterioration such as atmospheric conditions, environmental, biological and human factors.

Statement of problem (2)

- A lot of records are also on the verge of being lost due to the rate at which they are deteriorating, and need to be properly preserved.

- The effect is that if these vital documents (which usually do not have duplicates) are lost, gaps will be created in the collections.

- Digitization is a viable option that can help create back-up documents, enhance preservation by reducing handling of these documents and enhance fast and easy access to the records.

Significance

- This research deals with the contextual and local nature of digitization and brings to the fore the importance of digitizing the collections of LASRAB.

- The findings and recommendations of this study should be useful to policy makers and all stakeholders including the Federal and Lagos State Government of Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

■ The general objective of the study is to examine the challenges in digitizing archival records at LASRAB.

■ The following are the specific objectives of the study:

■ 1. To highlight the types and current state of the records in the archives.

■ 2. To ascertain the level of digitization.

■ 3. To identify the challenges of digitization in the establishment.

■ 4. To identify strategies to overcome the challenges of digitization.

Literature review (1)

- According to a report by Kenney et al. (2005) the processes of digitization may include printed materials or works of art scanned from documents, manuscripts, movies and photographs or digital snapshots of a scene.

- (Radick, 2013; Namande,2012; Asogwa, 2011) admit that Digitization requires the conversion of a material available in analog format into a digital medium by scanning or taking photographs of the materials and transferring it into a digital medium.

- One of the major advantages of having digital archives is the fact that digital files can be accessed or transferred through the use of computer networks (Namande, 2012)

- Millions of users can have access to these files online via the Internet regardless of their locations, and copies can be made several times without degradation of the contents being copied.

- Some institutions around the world have successfully digitized their collections and materials. Examples are the National Gallery in London and the British Library, The American Memory Page of the Library of Congress, The National Archives and Records Administration(NARA), The Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA)is also among some major digitization initiatives in Africa (Saunders, 2005; Biyela, Oyelude and Haumba,2016

Literature review (2)

- The issue of digitization as a means of preserving materials has generated a lot of debate by scholars and researchers.

- Some support the idea while others do not. Matusiak and Johnston (2014: 242) pointed out that at the initial stage, digitization was not considered as a form of preservation in the preservation community.

- It was rather viewed as an approach for creating surrogates for access and reproduction.

- Astle and Muir (2002), supporting digitization, posited that it is important to note that digitization affords archives and libraries the opportunity to place original material in appropriate archival and secure storage areas, to which access can be justifiably restricted by making digital surrogates available.

- This restriction would drastically reduce the risk of damage from unnecessary handling, exposure to light and theft.

- Previous studies supporting digitization pointed out that one of the main reasons for digitizing archival materials is to reduce handling and use of fragile and heavily used originals (Hamooya and Njobvu, 2009;Bayissa, Ketema and Birhanu, 2010; Sigauke and Nengomasha, 2011).

Literature review (3)

- However, other studies, such as those by Smith (1999), Gertz (2007) and Kleifeld (2010), have argued against digitization as a preservation method.

- Smith (1999) emphasized that it provides a lot of access to materials but is not yet a preservation method.

- Some years later, Gertz (2007)expressed a similar opinion, but added that digitization can aid preservation by protecting fragile and valuable analogue materials from additional handling.

- Gertz also acknowledges that a digital copy of material can serve as the only record of an object that deteriorates or is being destroyed, but is still maintaining that it is a form of duplication, not preservation.

- Kleifeld (2010) believes that digitization can never successfully replace conservation. They added that microfilm resources and digitization strategies should be combined for collective achievement of objectives related to the preservation and access of records.

Literature review (4)

- The creation and use of digital materials is capable of reducing the wear and tear which are usually caused in the process of handling old or fragile materials; this is done with the hope of extending the lifespan of the original(Jones, 2001)

- Other advantages of digitization are in the areas of administration, education and research (Asogwa, 2011), improved access (Mutula, 2014; Asogwa,2011; Bashiru, 2010), facilitation of legal and judicial processes (IRMT, 2002), and preservation (Akintundeand Anjo, 2012; Astle and Muir, 2002; Bayissa,Ketema and Birhanu, 2010); British Library, 2012),among others.

- A collaborative digitization project between academic institutions in different parts of the world is capable of increasing the scholarly value of source materials, thereby enhancing education(Asogwa, 2011).

- Despite these advantages offered by digitization, it is important to admit that digitization comes with ahigh financial burden (Astle and Muir, 2002; Granger, 2000)

Literature review (5)

- Also, the reliability of materials may be difficult to establish due to errors which may occur during capturing of the original documents(Le Roux, 2015; Smith, 1999)

- According to Le Roux(2015: 2), "there is always the possibility during large digitisation projects that errors or data loss can happen". The process of reformatting could have a negative effect on the digitized materials, and this could lead to permanent loss of important information(Smith, 1999)

- She added that the authenticity and integrity of images, database or text in digital format may be difficult to verify, which may pose serious ethical implications in certain academic disciplines and professional practices.

- The issue of authenticity and integrity may arise as a result of the infiltration of certain digital technologies which may be used to alter digital information.

- However, Bee (2008),believes that the authenticity and reliability of digitized materials can be maintained if digital preservation processes are diligently followed.

Literature review (6)

- Technological obsolescence is another major disadvantage of digitization (Perry, 2014; Le Roux, 2015). The reformatting process could cause irreversible loss of vital records or information which is irreplaceable (Smith, 1999).

- Digitization as a preservation method has been gradually accepted in libraries and archives round the world. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) endorsed it for preservation in a document published in 2004 (Arthur et al., 2004)

- This was a new development and was considered as a turning point in the debate of digitization as a means of preservation (Arthur et al., 2004).

- The Endangered Archives Program (EAP) in the British Library also supports digitization as "preserved means of copying" of archival materials that are in danger of physical deterioration of possible destruction.

- This recommendation is considered particularly relevant in developing countries where other preservation methods, such as microfilming, may not be readily available.

Literature review (7)

■ It was pointed out that digitization has increased the awareness of preservation and conservation issues and this has made it possible to create copies of endangered archival and library materials worldwide (British Library, 2012).

■ In exploring the Nigerian context, Few works have examined the state of digitization in State archives in Nigeria.

■ While Matusiak and Johnston, 2014; Astle and Muir, 2002; Hamooya and Njobvu, 2009; Bayissa,Ketema and Birhanu, 2010), Lafinhan 2009: 8) Ekoja and Gbaje (2012) explored the state of the National Archives of Nigeria in digitizing sensitive and endangered materials,

■ They argue that despite the fact that digitization of the archives is capable of improving access to and preservation of records, most of the materials currently held by the establishment are not digitized.

■ They also recommend the adoption of modern archival technologies to digitize its collection which is vital to achieving the objectives of the National Archives of Nigeria. Nonetheless, the state of digitization in State Archives is relatively unknown as these scholars focused on the federal archives.

■ Based on this background, this study examined the challenges and prospects of digitizing the collection of LASRAB. Lagos, Nigeria.

Methodology (1)

- This research adopted a qualitative research method anchored on the interpretivist paradigm. The population of this study comprised the staff of Lagos State Ministry of Information and Culture.

- However, the case study was LASRAB. Thus, the archival staff of LASRAB, constituted the sample of the study. The case study was used to develop new knowledge and gain better understanding of the situation in the institution.

- LASRAB was selected because it is one of the first State Archive and remains the most functional and the oldest in Lagos.

- It holds historical records from the 19th century to date. Therefore studying the archives is considered an appropriate case study.

- There are 20 archival staff at LASRAB. Two out of the 20 archival staff are part of the management of the organization while the other 18 are classified as support staff.

Methodology (2)

- The researcher adopted the purposive sampling technique to select participants in the institution.

- This technique was adopted to select the respondents with the anticipation of gaining insight on the challenges of digitization at the institution.

- These individuals were also selected due to their perceived understanding, knowledge and position of the subject matter being researched.

- Data collected was mainly through observation and interviews. All the professionals selected for the study were interviewed.

- Face-to-face interviews were held with six key officers at LASRAB namely, the Principal Archivist, Head of State Repository, Head of Special Archives, Head of Reference Room, Head of ICT and a Senior Archivist.

Methodology (3)

- The interviews were conducted in order to answer the research questions to meet the objectives of the study. Interviews were conducted in English and each interview ranged between 30 minutes and one hour.

- The researcher used a tape recorder to record the interviews which were later transcribed and organized them into topics for the analysis.

- The institution was also observed to find out types of records held by the institution, the current state of digitization and the prospects of digitization in the institution.

- This was done to complement the data collected through the interview and helped the researcher to have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon being studied.

- An observation checklist was used as a guide to collect information from the institution.

Findings

■ Six key staff at the Department of National Archives, Ibadan were interviewed and they are named participant A, B, C, D, E, F in order to hide their true identities.

■ The findings are presented in themes below:

i. Types of records held by LASRAB

ii. Present state of the records

iii. Present state of digitization

iv. Prospects and benefits of digitization

v. Challenges of digitization

vi. Expectation from future digitization

Types of records held by LASRAB (1)

i. LASRAB holds records of enduring value. These records are all over 25 years old, and they include: Official records from the 19th century to date, such as:

ii. Provincial, Divisional and District Office papers (of the former Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the former Western Region, and the former Mid-West State Region). Nigeria Gazette from 1903 to date.

iii. Photographs of pre and post-colonial activities in Nigeria. Newspaper publications from 1859. Company records, individual and family papers.

iv. Missionary societies and bursaries (Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Papers, Roman Catholic Mission Papers of Benin Diocese, Church Missionary Society of both Niger and Yoruba Mission).

v. Maps showings geographical boundaries in Nigeria and old Currencies Collection.

Types of records held by LASRAB (2)

i. Other Records such as the Civil War Bulletin, pamphlets, books and speeches. King's College, United Africa Company papers and National Africa Company and Royal Niger Company.

ii. All these records are classified into four groups and are stored in different repositories for proper management and preservation. These groups of records are Federal Records, State Records, Special Records and Anthropological Records.

iii. Each repository is managed by a Head who oversees its activities and makes sure that records are preserved and secured from threats such as damage and possible stealing of materials by individuals (both within and outside the institution).

iv. The collections of LASRAB are considered very important to the existence of Lagos and Nigeria generally because of their intrinsic and enduring values (such as historical, legal and fiscal values).

Present state of the records

i. The present state of records in the repositories of LASRAB is decent when compared to other public archives like the National Archives which are poor.

ii. Records are currently being preserved in boxes which protect them from deterioration from dust and light.

iii. These boxes are kept in air-conditioned rooms to control the temperature-humidity of the storage area.

iv. According to Interviewee C, due to the damages caused by humidity which makes records deteriorate fast, the storage areas are always air-conditioned.

v. He added that although the state of records have improved significantly over the years, more could still be done with regards to insects eating deep into some of these records making them unfit for searchers' use.

vi. The records are also currently being exposed to threats such as mould and discoloration.

Present state of digitization (1)

i. The findings revealed that records are partially digitized. Digitization of the collection was considered to be in its primary or preparatory stage.

ii. Interviewee A and Interviewee E confirmed that limited funding and change of management has been a hindrance in its digitization project.

iii. According to Interviewee F we had a Director who was interested in digitizing the collection of the Bureau's Archives and embarked on the project but due to the appointment of a new Director, the project suffered a setback.

iv. Interviewee C added that before the project was stalled, some documents from the CSO group such as Intelligence Reports, Assessment Reports, Annual and Quarterly Reports were digitized.

v. None of the records in the State Repository are currently digitized; they still remain in the manual format.

Present state of digitization (2)

i. However, there seems to be a plan to fully digitize the collections and it is being captured in the budget of the institution even though, as at the time of interview with respondents, funds had not been released for the project.

ii. According to Interviewee C, "we are currently in the process of arranging manual records in order to put them in a proper state after which we will take the records to the ICT department for scanning and digitization. The institution has made efforts to record the total number of collections with their subject matter."

iii. According to Interviewee E "we have been developing software which would be very useful in the management of the records when fully digitized and they are expected to be made available on the internet so that we can attract more users who can have easy access to them from anywhere in the world."

iv. Even though there was an attempt to digitize the collection of LASRAB in the past, it was obvious that the project had been abandoned and it is being started all over again due to financial constraints and change in management.

Prospects and benefits of digitization (1)

i.   The institution currently has resources such as modern computers, but broken down digitization equipment which needs replacement.

ii. This shows that the institution needs to make good use of these computers and purchase new digitization equipment such as scanners to enable them continue with the project.

iii. It is impossible to embark on a digitization project without making provision for the required tools.

iv. The prospects of digitization of the collections will enable the institution improve and expand its services and also help establish collaboration with other institutions and clients on a global scale through computer networks.

Prospects and benefits of digitization (2)

i. LASRAB has a lot to benefit from digitizing its collections. Some of the potential benefits for the institution include the following:

ii. 1. Easy research 2. Serves as backup to collection 3. Reduced handling of original materials 4. Networking of the Archives 5. Speedy online access to the materials 6. Preservation of the collection.

iii. The findings revealed that all the respondents admitted that digitization of the collection would help the institution perform better in the area of preservation and service delivery.

iv. According to Interviewee B: "one of the major benefits of digitization is enhanced access to our records. The digitization of the collection has the benefit of making research easier."

v. Interviewee D pointed out that "if the search aids are available online, research and consultation will be easier for searchers. They can even have access to the collection from the comfort of their homes or anywhere in the world."

Prospects and benefits of digitization (3)

i.   Interviewee B added that "digitization of our collection will make repository work easier and the access to records will also be faster."

ii. The study also reveals that LASRAB can benefit from creating a network with other archives within and outside Nigeria to facilitate the easy exchange of simple lists or exchange of information and filling of gaps in the collection.

iii. Interviewee F affirms this by declaring that "the online access or enquiry of records can save searchers' time, money and the risk of travelling from various destinations within and outside Nigeria."

Prospects and benefits of digitization (3)

i.   Interviewee D added that "making materials such as Simple Lists and Abstracts of our records available on the web will create make the public aware of our collection and this will most likely increase patronage by the public."

ii. Digitization of the collections will also help preserve and secure certain records which may be in a fragile condition and are being frequently consulted, by reducing the physical handling of such records.

iii. According to interviewee F, "back-up for original collections is possible in case of disaster, loss of records or deterioration."

iv. Interviewee A added that "if we can make digital copies of records available to our patrons, it will help reduce pressure on original copies of some of our materials that are heavily used and this will help prolong the life span of such materials."

Challenges of digitization (1)

i.   Despite the potential benefits that digitization tends to offer LASRAB, the study found some pressing challenges being faced in the attempt to digitize the collections.

ii.   These are similar to the challenges faced in some other African countries (Hamooya and Njobvu, 2010; Sigauke and Nengomasha, 2011; Mudzaki, 2013; Namande, 2012) Some of these challenges are also experienced in some advanced countries (Astle and Muir, 2002; Bu¨ltmann et al, 2006).

iii. **Lack of funding** The findings revealed that the main problem faced by the digitization project embarked upon by the organization was lack of funds. There were inadequate funds to purchase the required equipment for digitization.

iv. Interviewee C said that "the only equipment we have at our disposal is currently out of use and we cannot get it repaired in future. Interviewee A added that they cannot afford to train staff at the moment and they need to be trained in order for them to update their skills and be ready for the new development."

Challenges of digitization (2)

i. Staff need training so as to acquire certain skills to help them utilize the equipment to enhance their various functions in a digitized environment.

ii. **Lack of skilled personnel** On the other hand, another challenge preventing LASRAB was shortage of ICT personnel.

iii. Digitization requires the use of information technology equipment like computers, scanners, databank, servers, etc, which require the expertise of computer experts in the ICT department.

i. The ICT department is currently understaffed with less than five qualified ICT personnel.

ii. **Poor manual record system** It was discovered that in the initial attempt to digitize the collection at the institution, records from the 1800s and those of the colonial administration such as records generated from the Chief Secretary's offices (CSOs), reports (annual, half-yearly, quarterly), intelligence reports, and gazettes were selected first.

Challenges of digitization (3)

i. The institution intends to digitize historical records and other important and fragile records which are frequently consulted by searchers to improve access to these records.

ii. Interviewee D said that "poor manual system currently in place is a problem we are dealing with here. This is because the collection must be well organized for any meaningful digitization process to take place."

iii. **Lack of interest by management** The study revealed that management was also a constraint from full digitization of the collections. Two of the respondents made this clear in the interactions.

iv. Some of the management issues were lack of proper planning and determination to digitize the collection due to lack of understanding of the real concept of digitization.

v. Even though management claimed they had plans to fully digitize, their approach, and lack of will really affected the project.

Challenges of digitization (4)

i. Interviewee B pointed out that "funding is not the major problem, I believe management is also a problem because funds are made available for other projects but when it comes to projects such as digitization they claim there are no funds."

ii. If management can try to take the issues of digitization more seriously, it is possible to make sure that the project is funded.

iii. Some government officials who are mostly politicians do not also understand or know the importance of LASRAB and the collections so funds are not readily made available for the Institution to facilitate projects such as the digitization of the collections.

Challenges of digitization (5)

i. **Lack of proper planning/digitization policy** Interviewee B declared that "there is no digitization policy currently in place to guide us on the type and nature of records to select for digitization and order in which they will be selected but the management is currently planning to come up with a draft on the digitization policy to guide our digitization program.

ii. Initially the Technology Acceptance Model was used as a guide to determine the acceptance level of the digitization initiative by the institution but it was discovered that the issue is not solely about technology acceptance by the staff, but resource allocation by the government

Expectation from future digitization (1)

i. The findings revealed that expectations from future digitization of collections are very high.

ii. Interviewee B believes that "digitization will be very helpful to us in preserving our records and we will be able to provide fast and easy access to records."

iii. Interviewee A also noted that "digitization of the collection will make our work easier because we will be able to perform our functions more effectively and with ease."

Expectation from future digitization (2)

i. Digitization of the collection is also expected to save space and elongate the lifespan of records by reducing handling.

ii. The respondents seemed to be theoretically familiar with the potentials of digitization to the organization.

iii. According to Interviewee F: "I have read about modern technologies that can help us improve our operations in this institution, and digitization is one of such major technologies."

Expectation from future digitization (3)

i. They believed that digitization of the collection is capable of replacing certain manual operations to avoid repetitive tasks and difficult procedures can be simplified by digitizing the collections.

ii. They believed that digitization can increase patronage of services rendered in the Search Room and enhance income generation for the institution.

Expectation from future digitization (4)

i. The Search Room is also expected to expand beyond the physical boundaries of LASRAB and be placed on the Internet where digitized collections will be made available to a larger group of researchers.

ii. This will not only gain high local and international recognition for the institution but will also serve as a source of financial benefit for the institution.

iii. Interviewee D noted that "the digitization of all our collection will definitely serve as a backup for our manual or paper based records."

Conclusion (1)

- This paper has established that lack of funding and shortage of competent staff are the major issues confronting LASRAB.

- Lack of a digitization strategy as revealed in the study and previous studies could also poses a major challenge regardless of the funds invested in the digitization project.

- Legislations and policies on the digitization of archives seem to be non-existent.

- Technophobia by long serving staff/ professionals is also perceived as a challenge due to the fact that a professional used to handling manual records might be unwilling to adopt the new technology because of the fear of being a novice in digitized archival technologies.

Conclusion (2)

- This puts the digitization efforts at risk as certain professionals might not encourage the initiative and perceive it as a threat to their jobs or even their egos, which can frustrate any digitization initiative in a developing country like Nigeria.

- However, despite the challenges, the project has a lot of potential benefits for the institution and this was unanimously admitted to by the professionals interviewed.

- Digitization will help the institution solve some of the problems concerning loss and damage of records, preservation and enhance access to the collections in the Archives.

- It also makes it possible to keep surrogate copies in case of disasters, loss or inevitable deterioration of records in the collection and most importantly it makes access to records faster, easier and more efficiently.

Recommendations (1)

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

Funding Funding is a major challenge facing the digitization project at the institution. Apart from internal funding, the institution can find alternative means of generating income which will help the digitization project such as international funding and bursaries.

Digitization policy LASRAB, Lagos should develop a digitization policy and guideline which will serve as a blueprint for the digitization project.

The policy must be addressed urgently and provisions must be made for fast deteriorating collections such as historical records which are consulted frequently in order to save the records from deteriorating conditions of archival storage.

Recommendations (2)

The issue of copyright must be considered and carefully addressed in order to avoid copyright problems in the long-run.

The copyrights of software which are needed to access digital files, and the right to copy for preservation have to be adequately articulated in the policy.

Staff education, training and employment It is important to employ new generation and experienced archivists who have IT skills.

The current staff should be trained inhouse and encouraged to participate in seminars, conferences and workshops within and outside the country in order to update their knowledge in current trends in digital archives and management.

Recommendations (3)

Step-by-step digitization approach A step-by-step approach can be adopted to make it possible for the project to be completed in phases to reduce the financial burden on the institution.

Commitment of management Management should be more committed to the project as this will be the driving force for achieving all that have been mentioned above.

Preparing for future challenges LASRAB should take note of future challenges such as the issue of copyright while planning on its digitization project.

It is important to learn from the challenges faced in other countries (Britz and Lor, 2004, Ryan, 2010; Pickover, 2010) in preparation for the digitization project.

Areas of further research

❑ This study covered the challenges of digitization of the collection of the Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau, Nigeria.

❑ However, further studies should be carried out in other state dependent public archives in Nigeria.

❑ Further studies should focus on developing a feasible framework for digitization projects in public archives. The issue of digital preservation of digitized materials should be included in further research due to the challenges of digitization.

❑ Most importantly, these studies should be carried out in the context of developing countries in order to deal with peculiar challenges that might be associated with developing countries.

❑ The adoption of qualitative research in further studies to understand the phenomenon being studied in their natural settings is recommended.

Thank You