
AWARENESS AND USE OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES: EVIDENCE FROM THE VOLTA AND EASTERN REGIONAL ARCHIVES, GHANA

Bernard Okoampah Otu (1), Edward Asante (2)

(1) Koforidua Polytechnic, P O Box 981, benoko1979@yahoo.com. (2) eddieasante59@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined the awareness and use of the Volta and Eastern regional archives of Ghana. Archives play a pivotal role in documenting the historical memory of humans. Archives as institution and records as documents are generally seen by academics and other users as a passive resource to be exploited for various historical and cultural purposes. The study employed the survey design with data obtained analysed using descriptive statistics. The population of the study included inhabitants of the defined geographical area who were 18 years and above with some level of education from

secondary to tertiary level. Findings revealed the lack of awareness of the Volta and Eastern regional archives by the inhabitants within that geographical area. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the archives should create more awareness through outreach programmes during festive occasions thus breaking the traditional pattern of waiting for users to come and patronise them to 'marketing' their services to the people to achieve better results

Keywords: Awareness and use; eastern; Ghana; national archives; volta

1. Introduction

In the world over, archives and museum have been the place of custody for documentary heritage of humans. Archives focus on generating and disseminating knowledge. Archives as institutions and records as documents are generally seen by academics and other users as a passive resource to be exploited for various historical and cultural purposes (Schwartz and Cook 2002).

According to Mnjama (2010), the major objective of archival services is to facilitate access to collections in their care, so that the collections are accessible for education and research purposes. The beginning of the National Archives of Ghana dates back to 1946. This was borne out of government effort to rescue its records from damage, confusion and loss (Akita, 1991). The Public Records and Archives Administration Department was formerly known as the National Archives of Ghana which was a successor of the depository established in the Gold Coast Secretariat in 1946. According to Ntewusu (2014) by 1953, the National Archives of Ghana was completely organised and an access and classification system has being established.

The Public Records and Archives Administration Department's establishment law, Act 535 of 1997 provides that it ensures the timely and systematic disposition of all public records in collaboration with public agencies. This law established the Public Records and Archives Administration Department to replace the National Archives of Ghana. Akotia and Balasu (2003) assert that Public Records and Archives Administration Department is the central service agency with statutory responsibilities for the life cycle management of public records in Ghana. The core mandate of the Public Records and Archives Administration is to preserve the cultural and documentary heritage of Ghana.

2. Statement of problem

With the creation of the Public Records and Archives Administration Department of Ghana, which has its holdings as a priceless heritage, the government of Ghana demonstrated the desire to preserve and promote its national heritage. Preserving a nation's heritage not only projects its heritage to the citizenry but to the world at large. Whereas this effort of preserving a nation's heritage is laudable, the extent to which Ghanaians are aware of, or even utilise the archives remains relatively unknown.

It is based on this for which the current study examines the awareness and use of the Eastern and Volta Regional Archives of Ghana.

3. Objectives of the study

Generally the study seeks to examine the extent of awareness and use of the Eastern and Volta Regional archives of Ghana.

The specific objectives are to:

- a) Find out the level of awareness of the archives by citizens within the catchment area of the study
- b) examine the sources of awareness creation in the Volta and Eastern Regional archives of Ghana
- c) Find out the extent to which the people in the catchment area of the study visit the archives
- d) Identify the reasons why archives are mostly visited

4. Research questions

- a) To what extent are the citizens within the catchment area of the study aware of the archives?
- b) What are the sources for creating awareness of the archives in Eastern and Volta Regions of Ghana?
- c) To what extent do the citizens within the study area visit the archives?
- d) For what purpose is the archives visited?

5. Significance of the study

As an academic work, this research is expected to contribute to already existing knowledge in the area of study. It will also serve as a guide to the National Archives of Ghana and other institutions involved in the management of national documentary heritage.

6. Literature Review

The use of the archives in conducting social research is quiet revealing and to put it more succinctly Ntewusu (2014) posited that conducting social history in Ghana's archives is serendipity. This he indicated that the archives provides materials or resources that are academically stimulating and revealing but also cautioned of the enormous challenges confronting the archives which hinders effective research process.

The term archives can be used in three different contexts. It can be used to refer to the materials generated out of an organisational activity. The term may also connote the building in which the materials are stored and lastly it can be used in reference to the institution that manages the archival materials. According to International Records Management Trust (IRMT 1999) archives are those records that are worthy of permanent retention because of their enduring value as evidence or for research.

Shepherd (2009) summaries the importance of archives as ‘‘archives have the potential to change people’s lives. They are a fundamental bulwark of our democracy, our culture, our community and personal identity. They are created in the first instance for the conduct of business and to support accountability, but they also meet the requirement of society for transparency and the protection of rights, they underpin citizen’s rights in a democratic state and are the raw material of our history and memory’’.

The relevance of archives in society has been captured more succinctly by the National Archives of Canada (2003) as

- Archives ensure that historically significant records are systematically described and; wherever possible available for the variety of research uses, including teaching purposes, building plans, publications, television and radio programs, plays and legal proceedings.
- Archives serves as society’s collective memory; they provide evidence of the past and promote accountability and transparency of past actions
- Archives help people to understand their history and the role of particular organisations, individuals and movements in shaping the past. Knowledge of the past creates a better future
- Archives help to foster and promote a sense of community and identity.

While acquiring, organising, and preserving national heritage, it is important for archivists to provide access to their collections in the archival repositories. Abiola (2009) posits that access is one of the most important aspects of archival administration. By access, he is referring to both the physical access and the intellectual access. Physical access is ensuring that the documentary materials are physically intact and in good state whereas intellectual access involves facili-

tating the exploitation or use of its content. Citizen's rights to have access to public archives are acknowledged with the establishment of archives, in spite, of the fact that some documents contain sensitive information and cannot be made available for public inspection.

According to Akotia (2003) national archival institutions are charge with the task of ensuring the proper management of public records, promoting the preservation and accessibility of archival heritage, and overseeing the national archival system. Archives provide a reliable and authentic knowledge base, enabling the past to be reconstructed and understood. Without archives, the past would remain largely unknown.

Uduigwome (1989) in a research conducted in the Nigerian national archives observed that public archives are used by scholars and particularly by students of tertiary institutions. Abioye (2009) affirms the above by stating that archives are used mainly for research, information, litigation and for administrative purposes. Kemoni (2002) in studying the utilisation of archival information by researchers in the University of Nariobi, Kenya found that researchers utilised maps, atlases, gazettes, thesis and dissertations, newspapers, statistical records, video films, political record books, journals and conference papers.

As valuable as the archives are, they were not without limitations. Nteuwusu (2014) outlined a few of these limitations to include the physical conditions of the files, classification, accessibility and terminology. The physical conditions of most of the files in the archives of Ghana are in a deplorable state. This is as a result of inadequate storage space and the poor environmental conditions in which these national documentary heritages are kept.

In collaborating the limitation or challenges facing archival management in developing countries, Yusuf (2013) postulated that a major challenge facing archival management in Africa is the lack of funds, which is needed not only to store records, but also for the efficient training of staff, streamlining technology in archival institutions, and creating efficient systems for access, among other records information management needs.

7. Methodology

A survey research design largely guided the study and employing descriptive statistics in the analysis of the data obtained. The population of the study was made up of inhabitants of the defined geographical area who are 18years and above and has had some level of education from secondary to tertiary level. A proportional random sampling technique was used to elicit information from 200 respondents who participated in the study from the two geographical areas.

8. Presentation of Findings and Discussions

A total of 200 questionnaires were sent out to the study area, out of which 148 were retrieved representing 74%.

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	86	58.1
Female	62	41.9
Total	148	100

Table 1 gives a summary of gender respondents. 86 (58.1%) of respondents were males and 62 (41.9%) of the respondents were females.

Table 2: Age of respondents

Ages	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 24 years	10	6.8
25 – 31 years	24	16.2
32 – 38 years	47	31.8
39 – 45 years	31	20.9
46 and above	36	24.3
Total	148	100

Table 2 depicts the age distribution of respondents. 10 (6.8%) of the respondents were between the ages 18 – 24 years, 24 (16.2%) were in the age brackets of between 25 – 31 years. 47 (31.8%) were age between 32 – 38 years. 31 (20.9%) of respondents were in the ages 39 – 45 years and finally 36 (24.3%) were made up of respondents in the ages 46 and above.

Table 3: Level of education of respondents

Education level	Frequency	Percentages
Secondary	25	16.9
Post secondary	40	27.0
Tertiary	66	44.6
Others	17	11.5
Total	148	100

On assessing the level of education of respondents, it was revealed that 66 (44.6%) forming majority of respondents have tertiary education, 25 (16.9%) have secondary education, 40 (27.0%) have post secondary education and the remaining 17 (11.5%) indicated others or unspecified levels of education as shown in Table 3.

To elicit information from respondents on their level of knowledge or awareness of the archives in the Eastern and Volta Regional archives of Ghana, respondents were asked the question; Are you aware of the archives in your area? Findings revealed that majority of the respondents were not aware of the existence of an archives in their catchment area with 96 (64.9%) responding “ No” and the remaining 52 (35.1%) responding “Yes”. This confirms the findings of Onuoha (2013) who assert that majority of the people in the Bedrock University area of Nigeria were not aware of the existence of the Nigerian National Archives.

Table 4: sources of information about the archives

Sources of Information	Frequency	Percentage
School	12	23.1
Television/ radio	18	34.6
Exhibition	10	19.2
Posters and flyers	12	23.1
Total	52	100

To ascertain the level of awareness of the archives by respondents, it was incumbent to find out their source of information or knowledge about the archives in the Volta and Eastern Regions of Ghana. Table 4 indicates that 12 (23.1%) had information about the archives through their schools, posters and flyers, 18 (34.6%) of the respondents indicated that they became aware of the archives through the media (television and radio), whereas knowledge about the archives through exhibition constituted 10 (19.2%).

Table 5: visit to Volta and Eastern Regional archives in Ghana

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	46	31.1
No	102	68.9
Total	148	100

Table 5 shows that out of the total number of 148 respondents who participated in the study only 46 (31.1%) of the respondents have actually visited a branch of an archives in the Volta and Eastern Regions of Ghana even though 52 (35.1%) had indicated earlier that they were aware of the archives. 102 (68.9%) responded that they have not visited any branch of the archives located in the Eastern and Volta regions of Ghana.

Table 6: reason of visit to the archives

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Research	18	39.1
School visit	12	26.1

Personal visit	10	21.7
Sight seeing	6	13.0
Total	46	100

The essence of Table 6 is to elicit from respondents the purpose for which they visited the archives. It is obvious from the table that majority of the respondents representing 18 (39.1%) visited the archives to undertake research, 12 (26.0%) indicated that they visited the archives through excursion organised by their school, 10 (21.7%) of respondents went to the archives on a personal visit while a small minority representing 6 (13.0%) indicated they visited the archives basically for sightseeing. This finding in relation to the purpose of visit to the archives support the findings of Abioye (2009) who affirmed that archives are used mainly for research purposes. Uduigwome (1989) in his findings assert that the archives is used mainly by scholars particularly students and teachers of tertiary institutions.

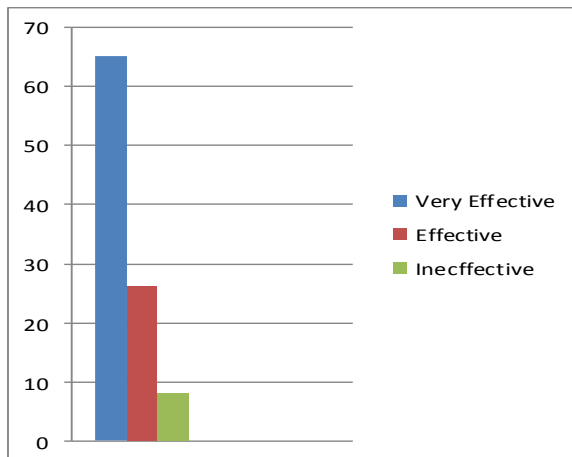


Figure 2: A bar chart showing the effectiveness of the use of archives. Source: Field work, February 2015

Figure 2 shows that majority of the respondents who have actually visited the archives representing 30 (65.2%) indicated that the archives in the Eastern and Volta Regions of Ghana is very effective, 12 (26.1%) stated that the archives in terms of their organisation and collections in relation to the national heritage of the country is effective but only 4 (8.7%) pointed out that the archives is ineffective in relation to their collections and organisation. The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Onuoha (2013) who assert that the National Archives of Nigeria in terms of both its organisation and its holdings is very effective. This is indicative of the fact that the archives contributed to the knowledge of cultural heritage among its users as Vygotsky (1978) succinctly described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as one interacts with people, objects and events in the environment.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

An increase in the prestige of archives can only be possible when people are aware of and utilise them. Once users become aware of archives they will tend to use it. The implication of this is that archives which users are not aware of would be underutilized thus, what is fundamental to archival information provision is to create user awareness. It is obvious that archives play an important role in education. Cook (1997) as cited by Senturk (2013) points the advantages of using archives in facilitating education as extending access to archives to the school community has a number of distinct advantages for an archive. For a profession saddled with an exceedingly low and, some would say, doddering profile, educational use permits an archives to create a positive 'image' at the same time as awareness and appreciation of its services are promoted. Users and the general public can be educated about the value and potential use of its holdings, allowing the archival unit to claim some measure of financial support in return.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following as a way of increasing awareness and use of the Volta and Eastern Regional archives in Ghana;

- The Eastern and the Volta Regional archives should create awareness of their collections through outreach programmes such as exhibitions during festive occasions. Since festivals are locally organised, it brings together people of diverse background and an exhibition can help educate the locals and visitors alike of the importance of the archives in documenting the national heritage of Ghana. Archives as a social agency according to Yusuf (2013) should therefore move from the old pattern of waiting for users to come patronize them to 'market' their services to the people in order to achieve better results.

- The collaboration between academia and an archive is one of the surest ways of increasing awareness and use of the archival repository. Since most of the people who visit the archives are researchers, there is the need for the archives to collaborate with the educational institutions within their respective jurisdictions to create awareness among the student body and their teachers. This will afford the students and their teachers an opportunity to appreciate not only their culture but that of others as well.
- Considering the proliferation of the media landscape in Ghana today, it will be appropriate for the regional archives to run programme on the radio and newspapers to educate or propagate the holdings of their archives to the local inhabitants of the area. This can be done in both the local and English languages to cover a wider spectrum of the population.
- The Volta and Eastern Regional archives should digitise their collections to ensure easy access. Digitisation ensures that one is able to irrespective of location access the collections or holdings of a specific archive.

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