



UNDERSCORING ACCESSION PROCEDURES OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Accession procedures are fundamental to the effective management of archival institutions, serving as the initial step in the lifecycle of records. These procedures encompass a series of structured processes that ensure the systematic transfer of documentation and preservation of records from their creators or donors to archival repositories. As organizations and individuals increasingly recognize the value of preserving historical materials, understanding the intricacies of accessioning becomes essential. This paper not only highlights information management and ethical dimensions involved in record transfer but also emphasizes the significance of adherence to international standards and best practices by exploring the multifaceted nature of accession procedures. The paper's discussion aims to underscore the critical role of maintaining the integrity, accessibility, and authenticity of archival collections and information management procedures in selected private universities in Nigeria. Also, provide a detailed blueprint for the establishment and management of an archive, considering critical challenges such as physical infrastructure, digital transformation, staffing, funding, and public engagement. Accessioning procedures constitute the systematically recording new materials into the archives inventory. Efficient accessioning practices, such as using integrated library systems (ILS) and standard cataloging methods, help ensure that materials are easily searchable and accessible to users. Proper accessioning aids in tracking the lifecycle of materials, making it easier to manage and maintain the collection. By focusing on sustainability and inclusivity, the Nigeria Archive will serve as a critical national resource for researchers, policymakers, and the public.

Keywords: Acquisition, Accessioning, information management, Collection development, Archives.

Introduction

The role of archives in higher education institutions cannot be overstated. University archives preserve critical institutional memory, support academic research, and ensure compliance with administrative, legal, and regulatory requirements. Despite the increasing importance of record-keeping in university governance, the information management and accession procedures for archival materials remain inconsistent across private universities in

Nigeria. As these institutions grow and evolve, so too does the volume and complexity of their institutional records. Poor information management practices and inadequate accession procedures can lead to loss of data, weakened institutional memory, and poor accountability.

Effective information management and accession procedures are essential to ensure materials are organized, preserved, and accessible. Two key functions that underpin this efficiency are information management and accessioning.



These functions ensure that archives maintain collections that are well-organized, accessible, and up-to-date. Tools such as OAIS (Open Archival Information System) are commonly referenced for digital archiving frameworks, while accessioning focuses on the formal documentation and entry of material resources into archives catalog and inventory system. Unfortunately, these were simply taken for granted or ignored by some higher educational institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria, thus there is a need to have to underscore the current practices, challenges, and pave ways for information management and accession procedures in selected private universities in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The preservation of Nigeria's cultural heritage is of paramount importance, the contributions of private universities is apt to the development of effective policies and practices that can ensure long-term conservation and accessibility of diverse forms of invaluable manuscript collections for future generations. Existing studies have largely focused on government or public archival systems, leaving a knowledge gap regarding the archival practices of private universities. Worrying is the lack of compliance with the records management concept, practice, process and activities (Sanders, 2020). This study seeks to bridge this gap by assessment of existing information management and accession procedures of archival materials in selected private universities in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of systematic accession procedures within archival institutions. They highlight that establishing clear ownership and custodial rights during the accessioning phase is essential to protect both institutions and original creators. Current standards such as the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD[G]). A Content Standard (DACS) have been updated to guide archivists in creating uniform descriptions of archival materials (Khan, 2020). These standards enhance interoperability and global access to archival records. Yakel (2021) defines accession in archival work as the legal and administrative act of formally accepting records

into an archive, including documenting their origin, significance, and custodial details. This process is essential for establishing accountability and ensuring that records are properly integrated into the institution's holdings. Caswell (2019) emphasizes that accessioning involves not only the formal acceptance of archival materials but also the ethical documentation of their source, context, and conditions, which helps maintain their authenticity and significance, especially for underrepresented collections. Gilliland (2012) describes accessioning as a foundational step in archival management that includes evaluating records for their organizational and research value, cataloging them, and ensuring they are stored and indexed for easy retrieval. The word accession has now been clearly explained, and the definition of archives will be discussed as well.

Here are some definitions of an archive by recent scholars: Michelle Caswell (2019) offers an inclusive perspective on archives, arguing that they are not neutral repositories but spaces shaped by power, representation, and societal dynamics. She defines archives as "sites of memory that reflect societal values and power structures, often shaped by dominant narratives, but with the potential to amplify marginalized voices. Gilliland (2012) describes archives as dynamic entities that embody both preservation and transformation. She states that archives "are collections created through appraisal and selection processes that reflect the cultural and societal values of the time, as well as the evolving relationship between past and present.

The importance of accession in the archival process lies in its role as the foundational step in ensuring the preservation, organization, and management of records within an archival institution. Accessioning provides the formal means by which records are transferred into archival custody, establishing legal, administrative, and intellectual control over records. This process allows archivists to document the provenance, content, and condition of records, making them accessible for future use, research, and reference. The purpose of accessioning records in archival institutions is multifaceted, serving as a critical foundation for the effective management, preservation, and accessibility of archival materials. Here are the

primary purposes of accessioning and why it is considered a fundamental archival function: Yun, Audra Eagle. (2023).



Legal Transfer of Ownership: Accessioning formalizes the transfer of records from their creator or donor to the archival institution. This legal transfer is essential to establish clear ownership and custodial rights, protecting both the institution and the rights of the original creators or donors. According to Gilliland (2012), "The archival bond is established through the legal transfer of ownership and custody, solidifying the institution's responsibility to preserve and manage the records."

Establishing Provenance: Accessioning documents the origin and context of the records, ensuring that their provenance their history and the context of their creation is preserved. This is crucial for maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the records. Yaker (2021) notes that "Accessioning is foundational in managing records as archives, providing the necessary control and documentation that uphold their authenticity and their value."

Systematic Organization: Through the accessioning process, records are systematically documented, assigned unique accession numbers, and recorded in accession registers. This organization facilitates efficient management and retrieval of records, ensuring they can be located and accessed easily when needed.

Preservation Planning: Accessioning includes an initial assessment of the condition of the records, allowing archivists to identify preservation needs and develop strategies for long-term care. By understanding the physical state of the records at the time of accession, archivists can implement appropriate preservation measures to protect them from deterioration or damage. Marshall (2019), "Accessioning enables archivists to anticipate preservation needs, setting the stage for proactive care and long-term access to records."

Enhancing Accessibility: Proper accessioning leads to the creation of finding aids and descriptive records that improve the accessibility

of archival materials. By documenting key details about the records, archivists ensure that users can easily find and utilize the materials for research and reference. Caswell (2019) emphasizes, "Accessibility is a core purpose of archival institutions; through detailed accessioning and description, archives provide valuable historical resources to the public."

Information Management

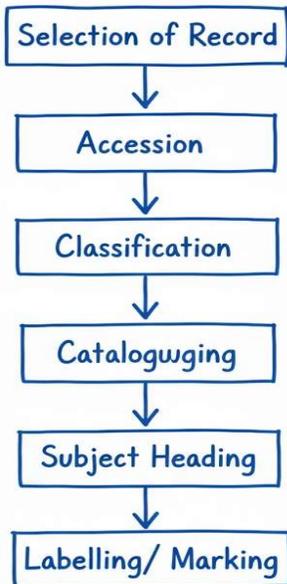
Information management is the application of management principles to the acquisition, organization, control, dissemination and use of information relevant to the effective operation of organizational performances. Information management in archives involves the structured handling of records throughout their lifecycle from acquisition to disposal or permanent preservation. According to Shepherd and Yeo (2018), this includes both physical and intellectual control, grounded in principles such as provenance and original order. It deals with the value, quality, ownership, use and security of information in the context of organizational performances. Information is valuable in terms of cost and quality. There are two aspects of value – commodity aspect and ethical aspect. Ownership implies the owner of a copyrighted material. Ownership deals with the authentic, security, privacy of a material, whereas use means to apply the information in personal work. Unless and until it is used, it will cease to be information. (Samiee & Davallu, 2019).

There are three important factors of Information Management:

1. What information we are capturing?
2. How we are controlling the information?
3. How we are making the information useful for the users?

Information Management in archives

To manage information in archives to cater to the needs of their respective clients, the archivist in the archives usually stores and retrieve information in records deposited for permanent preservation. The process is depicted as follows: (Singh,2001,p34). Lemieux (2016) explores how blockchain technology can be used to enhance data integrity and provenance verification in archival systems.



Example by: The selection procedure of West Bengal State Archive.

Theoretical Framework

The Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model by Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems (CCSDS) (2002)

The OAIS (Open Archival Information System) Reference Model, developed by the Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems (CCSDS), serves as a theoretical framework for digital preservation strategies in university libraries, guaranteeing long-term access to archival records. Since its initial publication as CCSDS 650.0-B-1 in 2002, the OAIS Reference Model has gained

widespread acceptance as a guiding framework for digital preservation in diverse domains, including libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions. This model offers a conceptual foundation for understanding the intricate processes, components, and relationships involved in

preserving and providing access to digital information over extended periods. The OAIS Reference Model comprises several essential components:

Content Information: This component focuses on capturing the intellectual content and contextual information of the records.

Preservation Description Information: This component involves documenting the preservation activities performed on the archival

records. It includes details about migration, emulation, metadata preservation, and other strategies employed to ensure ongoing accessibility and integrity.

Data Management: This component addresses the storage, organization, and management of digital archival records. It encompasses activities such as data ingest, storage, backup, and retrieval. Effective data management ensures efficient and secure handling of records throughout their lifecycle

Administration: This component encompasses the overall governance and management of the digital preservation system. It encompasses policies, procedures, and guidelines for system operation, maintenance, and monitoring.

Access: This component focuses on providing appropriate access to preserved archival records. It involves defining access rights, user authentication, and user interfaces. Access ensures that authorized users can retrieve and utilize records while preserving their long-term integrity.

This model aids in maintaining long-term access to archival records, facilitating research, scholarship, and the preservation of cultural heritage materials.

The relationship between accession and record-keeping

The relationship between accession and record-keeping integrity is a crucial aspect of archival practice. Accessioning plays a fundamental role in establishing and maintaining the integrity of records throughout their lifecycle. Establishing Provenance and Context in accessioning involves documenting the origin, context, and chain of custody of records. This process is vital for maintaining the integrity of records because it ensures that their history is preserved and understood. Provenance is essential for verifying the authenticity of records, which is critical for their use as evidence in research and legal contexts. Gilliland (2012) explains, "The value of records lies not only in their content but also in the context of their creation and preservation, which accessioning helps to safeguard."

Ensuring Authenticity: Through the accessioning process, records are assigned unique identifiers and recorded in an accession register. This



systematic documentation helps prevent the misplacement or alteration of records, preserving their authenticity. Caswell (2020) emphasizes that "Authenticity is a central aspect of archival integrity; proper accessioning provides the initial assurance that records are trustworthy and reliable."

Legal and Administrative Control: Accessioning creates a legal framework that establishes the rights and responsibilities associated with records. This legal control is essential for ensuring that records are managed according to relevant laws and institutional policies, which in turn supports the integrity of record-keeping practices. Yakel (2019) notes that "Accessioning establishes the necessary legal and administrative oversight for records, which not only supports their evidentiary value but also enhances accountability in archival practice."

Facilitating Preservation: The accessioning process includes an assessment of the physical and digital condition of records, allowing archivists to identify preservation needs and implement appropriate measures. Addressing preservation issues at the point of accession helps ensure that records remain intact and accessible over time, supporting the overall integrity of the record-keeping system. Modern preservation techniques, such as digitization, acid-free storage, and climate-controlled environments, are not widely implemented due to resource constraints (Ibrahim, 2019). As a result, many documents are susceptible to rapid deterioration.

Organizational Consistency: Proper accessioning practices contribute to organizational consistency in how records are handled, documented, and preserved. Consistent practices help prevent errors or omissions that could compromise the integrity of records. Training sessions focus on proper document handling, conservation techniques, and the use of digital technologies in archival management (Nwafor, 2018).

Types of Archival Records that are Accessioned

Government Records: These include documents created by local, state, and federal government agencies in the course of their official duties, often encompassing legislative documents, court records, administrative files, and public records. Government records are essential for transparency, accountability, and historical research. As Gilliland (2019) explains, "Government records provide a vital documentary heritage that supports civic engagement, democratic accountability, and social memory."

Personal Papers: This category includes records of individuals, such as correspondence, diaries, photographs, and manuscripts. Personal papers offer unique insights into individual lives, cultural history, and social movements, and are invaluable to researchers studying specific historical contexts or events. Caswell (2020) notes, "Personal papers are integral to representing diverse voices and preserving perspectives that may otherwise be marginalized in historical narratives."

Institutional Records: Records created by organizations, including non-profits, corporations, and educational institutions, fall into this category. These can include minutes of meetings, reports, promotional materials, and correspondence. Institutional records are crucial for understanding the history and impact of organizations and their societal contributions.

Digital Records: With the growing reliance on digital formats, archival institutions are increasingly accessioning electronic records, including emails, digital photographs, websites, and databases. Digital records present unique challenges related to preservation, access, and long-term usability, necessitating specialized practices for accessioning and management.

Photographic and Audiovisual Records: This category includes photographs, films, audio recordings, and video recordings, which are essential for providing visual and auditory documentation of events, people, and places. Such records offer a richer understanding of historical narratives and societal developments. Caswell (2020) explains, "Photographic and



audiovisual records contribute a unique, multidimensional perspective to archives, capturing moments and memories that text alone cannot convey.”

Criteria for Records to be accessioned

Historical Value: Records must possess historical significance, contributing to the understanding of historical events, trends, or figures. Archivists evaluate records based on their potential to inform future research and align with the institution's collecting policy. According to Jimerson (2009), “Historical value is a core criterion, as it ensures that archives preserve materials that reflect and document society's evolving narratives.”

Legal Requirements: Some records are required by law to be preserved for a specified period or indefinitely, including vital records, tax documents, and other materials subject to public records laws. Legal considerations are critical in ensuring compliance with regulations governing record retention and access. Yakel (2019) states, “Legal mandates play a crucial role in archival decisions, providing a framework for what must be preserved to meet accountability and transparency standards.”

Authenticity and Reliability: For records to be accessioned, they must be authentic and trustworthy. Archivists assess provenance and the integrity of records to ensure they serve as accurate representations of the events or actions they document. Caswell (2020) emphasizes, “Authenticity is paramount in establishing records as reliable sources, safeguarding their role in documenting truth and supporting historical accountability.”

Research and Community Needs: The potential for records to meet the research needs of the community and scholars is a significant consideration. This involves evaluating the demand for certain types of records and their ability to fill gaps in existing collections. Gilliland (2019) notes, “Archives must be responsive to the research and cultural needs of their communities, ensuring that collections serve

as meaningful resources for public and scholarly inquiry.”

Physical Condition: The physical state of records also influences accessioning decisions. Records in poor condition may require immediate conservation efforts before accession, while those in good condition may be prioritized. Marshall (2020) points out, “Assessing the physical condition of records at accessioning allows archivists to allocate resources effectively, balancing preservation needs with access priorities.”

Pre-Accession Activities in Archival Management

Pre-accession activities in archival management are crucial for the proper identification, appraisal, and negotiation of records before they are formally transferred into an archival repository. These activities ensure that records deemed worthy of long-term preservation are carefully selected and that all legal and ethical considerations are met. Below is a detailed exploration of the pre-accession processes:

Identifying Potential Records for Accession

Identifying records for accession involves surveying and appraising materials to determine their long-term value for preservation.

Surveys: Records surveys are a fundamental tool for identifying potential archival materials. Archivists use surveys to assess the types and volume of records held by individuals, organizations, or government bodies. This helps determine which records possess sufficient historical, legal, or cultural significance to warrant preservation. As McKemmish (2005) states, “Records surveys are essential for understanding the documentary landscape and ensuring that significant materials are not overlooked.”

Records Appraisal: Once records have been identified, archivists appraise them to evaluate their archival value. The appraisal process determines which records should be retained based on their informational and evidentiary value. The goal is to avoid over-accumulation and focus on records of enduring significance, ensuring that future users can benefit from these materials.



Negotiating Donations or Transfers of Records

After records are identified and appraised, archivists must negotiate the transfer of these materials to an archival institution. **Relationship with Donors:** When working with private individuals or organizations, archivists often negotiate donations of records. This involves building relationships with donors and explaining the importance of preserving their records for future generations. As McKemmish (2005) emphasizes, “Establishing strong donor relationships is crucial; it fosters trust and enhances the likelihood that significant materials will be donated.” Archivists also address issues such as ownership, access restrictions, and the potential for long-term control of the materials by the donor. **Government Transfers:** In cases where records are held by governmental bodies, formal agreements and regulations usually guide the transfer process. Archivists operate within legal frameworks, such as public records acts, to ensure that government documents are properly transferred and maintained in archives. Yakel (2019) notes, “Government transfers of records are governed by specific legal obligations that ensure transparency and accountability, making it essential for archivists to navigate these regulations adeptly.”

Legal and Ethical Considerations: Legal and ethical issues are central to the process of transferring records into an archive:

Ownership: Before accepting records, archivists must confirm who holds legal title to the materials. Establishing clear ownership is essential, particularly when records have passed through multiple hands or when the original creator of the documents is no longer alive.

Donor Agreements: Legal agreements with donors formalize the terms under which records are donated. These agreements often specify conditions regarding access, copyright, and whether the donor retains certain rights to the materials. As Theimer (2019) notes, “Well-drafted donor agreements are essential for safeguarding the interests of both the archival institution and the donor, providing a clear framework for the use and management of records.”

Copyright Issues: Archivists must also address copyright concerns, particularly when dealing with unpublished materials or intellectual property. Ensuring that copyright is transferred or that permission is granted for public access and use of the records is a key part of the pre-accession process. As Yakel (2019) highlights, “Navigating copyright complexities is crucial for archivists to facilitate access while respecting the rights of creators and complying with legal obligations.”

Ethical Considerations: Ethical standards guide archivists in their decision-making about which records to acquire and how to handle sensitive materials. Transparency in negotiations, respect for privacy, and adherence to professional standards are all critical elements of ethical archival practice. McKemmish (2018) emphasizes, “Ethics in archiving is not merely about compliance; it involves a commitment to preserving community trust and the integrity of the historical record.”

Accession Procedures in Archival Management

Accessioning is the formal process by which records are transferred into the custody of an archival institution. It includes receiving, evaluating, documenting, and assigning unique identifiers to records, ensuring they are appropriately integrated into the archive. This process is crucial for maintaining accountability, legal integrity, and accessibility of the archival materials. Below is a detailed examination of the steps involved in accessioning, as well as best practices and standards for ensuring a smooth and effective process.

Accession Procedures: Steps in Accessioning Receiving the Records

The first step in the accessioning process is the physical arrival of records at the archival institution. The delivery of records can occur through various means, such as personal delivery by the donor, courier services, or institutional transfer from within the same organization.

Initial Intake: Archivists are responsible for ensuring the safe delivery of the materials and confirming that the received records match what was agreed upon in any prior negotiations or donor agreements.



Initial Assessment

Once the records are received, an initial assessment is conducted to evaluate their physical condition, content, and context. This step involves a preliminary evaluation to determine whether the records are complete, suitable for long-term preservation, and if there are any immediate conservation concerns. **Condition Assessment:** The archivist inspects the physical state of the records, noting any damage, deterioration, or preservation needs. This step is crucial for determining if any conservation work is required before further processing can continue. As Yeo (2018) emphasizes, "Early identification of preservation issues is key to ensuring that archival materials remain viable for future generations."

Content and Context Evaluation: The archivist examines the content of the records to gain a basic understanding of their scope and significance. This evaluation includes reviewing the records' provenance and their relationship to other materials already in the archive (Greene & Meissner, 2017).

Documentation

Proper documentation is essential for ensuring that the provenance, volume, and date range of the materials are accurately recorded. This information serves as a permanent record of the acquisition and can be referenced for future research, legal inquiries, or further appraisal. **Provenance:** Recording the provenance of the records is key to establishing their authenticity and historical context. This includes documenting the creator of the records, their original purpose, and how they came to be in the possession of the archive (Bearman, 2018).

Volume and Date Range: Archivists document the physical extent of the records and their chronological coverage. This information is vital for future cataloging and for providing users with a basic understanding of the scope of the records (Schellenberg, 1996). **Assigning Accession Numbers:** Each accession is assigned a unique identifier, known as an accession number. This number is crucial for tracking the records throughout their life cycle within the archive.

Unique Identifier: The accession number provides a link between the physical or digital records and the documentation created during the accessioning process. It ensures that the records can be easily located and referenced within the archival system (Cook, 2017). As suggested by McKemmish (2018), "A well-organized numbering system enhances the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the archival management process, contributing to long-term accessibility."

Registration and Record-Keeping in Accession

Maintaining Accession Registers and Databases: Once records have been accessioned, archival institutions maintain detailed registers or databases to track and manage the records. **Accession Registers:** Traditionally, accession registers were maintained as physical logs where each accession was recorded, including details such as the accession number, donor information, and a brief description of the records. However, there is a growing emphasis on digital solutions that improve efficiency and accessibility. **Databases:** Today, most archives utilize digital databases to manage accession records. These databases allow archivists to efficiently search, update, and cross-reference records, ensuring that materials are easily accessible and trackable over time. According to Lee (2022), "The adoption of advanced archival management software has revolutionized the way institutions handle their collections, enabling real-time updates and better data integrity."

Metadata Creation and Cataloging of Newly Accessioned Materials: Cataloging is an integral part of the accessioning process, involving the creation of metadata to describe the records in detail. Archivists create metadata that includes descriptive information about the records, such as subject matter, format, and key terms. This metadata is essential for making the records discoverable to researchers and for integrating them into the larger archival collection. This move toward standardized metadata practices supports better long-term access and usability of archival materials.

Using Accession Records for Future Reference and Accountability: Accession records serve as



essential tools for accountability and transparency. They provide a detailed history of when and how records were acquired, allowing archivists to track the provenance and handling of materials over time.

Accountability: Accession records are often used to resolve disputes, confirm ownership, and demonstrate legal compliance in handling records. These records are invaluable for auditing purposes and for providing a clear chain of custody. Furthermore, as the archival field faces increasing scrutiny regarding privacy and ethical considerations, thorough documentation provided by accession records has become crucial for compliance with contemporary legal and ethical standards (Duranti, 2017).

Best Practices for Ensuring a Smooth Accession Process: Following best practices can help ensure that the accessioning process is efficient, transparent, and legally compliant:

Comprehensive Documentation: Detailed documentation of the records' provenance, condition, and content should be created at the time of accessioning. This not only facilitates future research but also serves as a legal record of the acquisition. Recent literature stresses the importance of thorough documentation practices as critical for institutional accountability and transparency (Hamer, 2018).

Legal Considerations: Legal issues such as ownership, copyright, and donor agreements must be addressed before accessioning. Ensuring that all necessary legal documents are in place, such as donor agreements and transfer deeds, helps prevent future disputes.

Appraisal Techniques: Accessioning should involve careful appraisal to ensure that only records of enduring value are preserved. Records that are duplicative, incomplete, or irrelevant to the institution's mission should not be accessioned, as this helps maintain a manageable and focused collection. The shift towards data-driven appraisal techniques has gained traction, allowing archivists to better assess the long-term value of records in an increasingly digital world (Gonzalez, 2023).

Conclusion

This study therefore, concludes that accession procedures are essential to archival management, ensuring the systematic transfer of records into archival institutions. This process includes identifying potential records, negotiating transfers, and addressing legal and ethical considerations, all of which are vital for maintaining the integrity and accessibility of archival materials. Adherence to international and national standards, such as ISAD(G) and DACS, promotes consistency and enhances user access. Best practices, including comprehensive documentation, legal compliance, and effective appraisal techniques, ensure that only records of lasting value are preserved, supporting accountability and transparency. As digital records become increasingly prevalent, adapting accessioning practices to new technologies and evolving legal frameworks is crucial. Ultimately, thorough and ethically sound accession procedures are fundamental for preserving our collective memory and facilitating future research in the archival landscape.

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