

*Full Length Research*

## **Nigeria Information Policy: A Review**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Information is essential and basic to human existence, national development and global relations. It is as essential as oxygen for human existence. As such there is need for everyone to know how to generate, use and disseminate information for personal, national, global development and peaceful coexistence. Hence, information literacy especially among students, researchers and other literate individual is paramount. Basically, everybody in the society is in need of information literacy skills. Information literate individuals improve the society's quality of life in general and academically. And it helps in day to day life such as buying a house, choosing a school, making an investment, voting for the election, and many more. (Ranaweera, 2008). Information literacy is a person's ability to know when information is needed, locate the information, evaluate the information, and use it

effectively. It goes beyond just being able to search for something on the internet or in a book. It involves being able to determine whether or not the information obtained is true and reliable and the ability to apply the information where needed (Goode 2018).

Adomi, (2008) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) defined Information as some meaningful message transmitted from source to users. In this process information may be stored in information products and services organised for the purpose of providing a memory in numerical, textual, sound and image forms. Information is invaluable at all times and in all circumstances, especially to national development. Information can be communicated through interpersonal channels. Relatedly, information service has a social connotation in that it is responsible for the organizing, storing and dissemination of ideas. It is impossible, that without the transmission of thought or information for the human civilization to have survived and achieved what it has today in terms of

culture, language, speech, science and technology and social organisation. Historically, the use of language which followed logically predated the written word. Graphics were some of the mechanical facet of communication. Today we are very much familiar with 'recording' and the impact of information communication technology (ICT) on information activities. Thus, it could be said that the development of civilization as we know it today is largely due to man's ability to exchange information and ideas.

## A Policy

(Htwe, 2007) as cited in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) opined that a policy is a conscious scheme or plan of action that is intended to guide decision making in order to attain set objectives as well as expected outcomes. A policy is a set of principles which guide decision making. Wikipedia, (2019) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) explained that a policy is deliberate plan of action intended to guide decision and to achieve rational outcome (s). The term may apply to government, private sector organizations, groups and individuals. A policy which is a set of principles and strategies which guide a course of action for the achievement of a given goal may be developed at the organizational or institutional level (Micro policies) or at the national, regional or international level (micro policies). Policies are embedded in the so called policy instrument. These can be the following kinds of legal instruments (constitution, parliamentary acts. Laws, regulations, international treaties etc.), professional instrument (code of conduct, professional ethics, service guidelines, etc.) and cultural instruments (customs, beliefs, traditions, social values, etc.). Olatokun, 2005 in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) explained that policy statement usually, but not always, formalized set forth the goal, a vision, a direction, organizational values and norms or other kind of guiding principles which a group, enterprise or nation intends to follow or adhere to in the pursuit of its everyday endeavours. The goals of any policy may vary widely according to the organisation and in the context in which they are made. Broadly, policies are instituted in order to avoid some negative effect that has been noticed in the organisation, or to seek some positive benefit. Given the above scenario, the concept of policy is defined differently by different people. However a typical policy has the following attributes—a scope, a mechanism; an action. Each rule defines a scope initiating the policies; a framework or structure which embodies the mechanism of the policy implementation and the action which is the effects of the policy on national programmes and events. The policy which comprised set of rules, principles and regulations that guides the development, acquisition, utilization or transfer of information is however regarded

as Information Policy. Information Policy Information policy as any written or unwritten law, regulation, rule or practice that affects the creation, acquisition, organization, dissemination or evaluation of information. According to Montviloff, (1990) cited in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) in Wikipedia, (2019) information policy provide guidance for the design of a strategy and programme for the development and use of information resources, services and systems and that a policy on information or information policy is a set of such policies. An information policy can be formulated at the institutional, national, international or regional level. Information policy, in its broadest sense, is the set of rules, formal or informal, that directly restricts, encourage or otherwise shape flow of information. Information is the basic coin of librarianship, so information policy which is roughly defined as the wide array of miles and policies that govern the handling of information is central to librarian's work. Laws regarding copyright, access to government information, personal privacy, freedom of speech and the like set the information "rules of the road" for our society and thus influence the operating policies, services, and even the fundamental mission of libraries. Libraries are critical information providers and part of their function is to make policies. The policies that they adopt on selection, organization and dissemination of the information they possess, determine to a great extent, their effectiveness.

## Information Society

The concept of information society cannot be played especially in its efforts in which a society can access, share and utilize available information will greatly determine their economic well-being. In the era of information society, it is information that is the most essential factor of production and wealth creation. How well an individual, an organization, an entire society can harness, access, share, and make use of available information will ultimately decide their ability to generate economic growth and to enhance the quality of life for all. Uhegbo, (2004) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) The information society has a great impact on issues bordered on information policies. One way to capture the information environment is to consider how information activities takes place amongst individuals and institutions who are involved in the day-to-day processes of information creation, dissemination and use in the society. Information broadly represented can therefore be said to be any message to be conveyed from one source to another source or destination. Information created is embodied in different forms, which are represented as formats or channels of communication in the forces that are shaping the information society are the information components. These are: information creating activities; information products; information distributors; information

dissemination; and, information users. The importance of information in our society can hardly be overestimated. As we increasingly recognize the critical nature of information, policies that affect information organisation, use, and dissemination become equally critical. There are a variety of stakeholders in the information policy process, stakeholders who are deeply concerned about information from a legal or political perspective. Such stakeholders include:

- Library and information industry—these are very active in influencing policies that will affect the dissemination of information and also are interested in both the discovery of new knowledge and the organisation of current knowledge. The information society generates and consumes great amount of information and at the same time information technological process has made it easier to process, share, and communicate information and knowledge in new ways. Alone, the ever accelerating internets generate innumerable quantities of information supported by a decrease in telecommunication cost as well as in hardware prices. From the foregoing, the concept of information society is however significant in creating a National Policy on information.

### **National Policy on Information**

National Policy on Information is a plan for the development and optimal utilization of information resources and services either at the institutional, national, regional or local level. National policy on information The need to have a 'national policy' that will stimulate a cohesive information generation and dissemination environment has been discussed severally. According to Uhegbo, (2004) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) information policy is one of many different types of public policies that governments make. Nigeria is a very large country, socially and culturally diversified. It is the most populous country in Africa potentially a leading force in the international arena. Nigeria is endowed with an abundance of human and natural resources; it is in a continuum of socio-economic restructuring and adjustment. Civil rule and participatory politics; economic reforms; social reforms; educational reforms; science and technology drives; these are all areas of paramount importance for the future of the nation. In the face of all these social and political uncertainties lies the dynamics of social cohesion. The role of information in the survival of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. An information policy is a plan for the development and optimal utilization of information technology (IT), data resources and services Information policy provides guidance for the design of a strategic programme for the development and use of information resources services and systems. An information policy can be formulated at various levels – institutional, national, regional or international level.

### **Aims and Objectives of National Policy on Information in Nigeria**

A national information policy will help ensure proper packaging of information by determining the nature and format of information resources to meet local needs. Information literacy is not the same as information technology. Information and communication technology skills tend to concentrate on using hardware and software effectively to process and communicate information. Information literacy, on the other hand, is concerned with recognizing when information is needed, and locating, critically evaluating, using and presenting the information to suit a specific purpose (The Open University, 2016).

Librarian plays a critical role in teaching those skills to students so that they are college and career ready (University of South Carolina, 2018). Although information literacy for decades has been championed by librarians through users' education; it has recently drawn the interest of educators, administrators and other role-players in higher education on the need to introduce information literacy related courses.

The objectives of a national information policy according to Montviloff (1990) cited in Uhegbo, (2004) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) are:

- Provision of relevant, reliable and timely information/data at a reasonable cost to all those contributing in various ways to the achievement of the national development goal, e.g. researchers, engineers and technicians, development planners, policy makers, administrators, extension workers, paraprofessional farmers, and entrepreneurs.
- Preparation and implementation of the plan of action for the establishment and operation of a national information system based on the existing infrastructures, the co-ordination of the various systems and services, the identification and correction of deficiencies, the filling of gaps and the productive interaction with regional and international information systems and programmes.
- Ensuring support for the components of the national information systems including information manpower, facilities and technologies through public and other forms of financing and collaborative arrangements.
- Ensuring cohesiveness and sustained growth of the national information systems by formulating and prescribing policies and guidelines for assigning areas of responsibilities, choice of means and method priorities, financial arrangements and coordinating mechanisms in consonance with the country's development objectives and plans and its political, social and cultural specialties and government structures as these evolve with time.
- Ensuring support for research on information related theories, practices, education, training for information generation, transfer and use. National information policy will therefore specify how libraries in Nigeria will go into cooperative resource sharing either among themselves or

with those overseas. Resource sharing is a delicate enterprise and therefore requires carefulness and caution. For instance, what kind of audio-visual accessories, equipment and personnel that should be shared between local libraries and those overseas will be streamlined?

### Contents of National Policy on Information

A National Information Policy will help to strengthen information infrastructure by specifying how resources will be organized and managed. In the view of Montviloff (1999) cited in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019), information policy closely interacts with not only policies in libraries and archive but also with policies in such rapid converging fields as informatics and telecommunication; information policies often respond to specific stimuli at specific period of time and must therefore be flexible.

Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) in Adomi (2008) opined that the contents of most information policies can extend beyond the walls of the library; for instance, telecommunication policies, copyright laws, national information and communication technology policy (ICT), information technology policies (TC), etc. Notwithstanding, the concepts of connectivity, content and competencies are three main areas of concern that can be identified for: national information policy: Connectivity: Ideally it incorporates three areas which are information networks, access and interoperability. For creating the information networks, a policy should set out a strategic approach to the development of the country's information networks. It should provide framework within which public and private investments can be planned. It should specify the preferred approach to regulation ensure that the networks operate efficiently and for the public good. The provision of global access requires that networks are available as widely as possible in institutions and homes. The policy should specify a strategy to ensure access for key organizations and individuals such as schools, libraries and those in isolated rural areas. Pricing strategies should not exclude people from network access. In order to ensure interoperability, one has to focus on the different devices making up the ICT. Giving the rapidly changing technological environment, there will be a variety of technological networks and platforms that can be used to deliver information including computers, telephones and digital television. According to Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) in Adomi (2008), policy should include provision to ensure that there are no barriers to the citizens from absence of interconnectivity between the networks. Content: includes the creation of core content, ensuring delivery of the same, protection of the citizen and provision of free access to core information. In creating core content for the public good, a great amount of public information will be needed in an information

society. Much of this needed to be provided by public sector institution working when necessary in collaboration with the private sector. The policy should therefore set out a strategy that will ensure that public support is available for the development of needed information content. In order to ensure effective delivery of content, the creation of digital content alone will not be sufficient. Effective delivery over the network requires the development of appropriate information retrieval aids and navigation tools. Government department and agencies must seek Innovative ways of presenting information to the citizens cutting across institutional boundaries to ensure target markets are reached efficiently; training and awareness programmes will be required. The Policy should indicate how these issues are to be addressed. Ethical issues like protecting the citizens require regulatory Mechanisms. The information policy should address a range of legal and regulatory issues including privacy and data protection, Intellectual property rights, censorship and fraudulent use of the networks and to legal deposit of intellectual property. The rapid development of e-commerce will generate further requirements for regulation in the consumer interest. To ensure the rapid take-up that the government seeks, the e-envoy will need to make issues of consumer confidence a priority. To have free access to core information, a policy will need to cover rights of access to information. Competencies include the development of universal information literacy, the supply of information specialists and the creation of information strategies for organizations. Instruction in Information Literacy (IL) is provided by librarians to all students at Hedmark University of Applied Sciences (HUAS). In addition to searching instruction, all first-year undergraduate students are required to attend the 90-minute course *Evaluating and Citing Sources*, which is the background of the study. The study was conducted in an effort to evaluate the effect of this course on student learning, to improve both course content and librarians' teaching. This course focuses on how to critically evaluate information sources, cite them correctly in academic writing, and avoid plagiarism. A previous study documented students' proficiency in these three topics *prior* to library instruction, while the current study compares those results with a follow-up survey, conducted after both library instruction and the submission of written work in which citations were required. Due to low response rates from some student groups in the follow-up survey, it was difficult to draw meaningful conclusions for the original sample. A selection of respondents from two disciplines was therefore focused upon, namely nursing and teacher education. This study is the first of its kind in comparing these two student groups and can provide useful information about the IL skills and needs of future teachers and nurses—two of the largest and most central professions in society today (Nierenberg,2017). This

study excludes searching, however, and encompasses only the aspects of IL related to evaluating and using information. Librarians at multiple campuses collaborate on everything from the acquisition of resources to IL-teaching. Information literacy is rooted in the concepts of library instruction and bibliographic instruction (Abdulwahab, Amusan, and Umma n.d).

### Information Literacy Assessment

To develop universal information literacy, effort is needed to develop a base level of information literacy for everyone. The policy should set out a strategy for the achievement of this. It should encompass a wide range of skills including numeracy, literacy, computer and information retrieval skills. The Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture, for example, has several parastatals and departments which are responsible for administering and implementing information policies. For examples, the Department of Culture is responsible for the formulation and execution of the national cultural policies for the promotion of all national cultural activities through the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Council for Arts and Culture. This body is responsible for the policies guiding national museums. The National Library of Nigeria is a parastatal under the Ministry of Education. In its crusade for an information policy in Nigeria, the Nigerian Library association has organized several seminars, workshops, conferences with a view to coming out with a blue-print to enable the government formulate an information policy. For example, "Draft of the National Policy on Information Resources and Services" was produced at an NLA conferences held at ASCON, Topo, Badagry. Under the National Library, a National Information and Documentation Centre (NIDOC) was established as a bibliographic and numerical databank of information for the social and economic development of the country. And, as a focal point for the exchange of information, NIDOC intends to coordinate a network of participating centres in Nigeria. Information policies can be identified in the various bodies responsible for information services both in the private and public sector. Even though in Nigeria, a single paper on National Information policy does not exist, there are still traceable documented information policies on copyright, collection development, information technology among others. Copyright policy Copy right could be classified in terms of items, rights and term. The items

cover the areas of original literary, musical, dramatic and artistic work; cinematographic films, sound records and protection of the form but not the ideas. White and Crawford, (1997) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) asserted that the use of collection development statements has, in all types of libraries, been a standard practice.

### CONCLUSION

Information literacy policy is not the same as information technology. Information and communication technology skills tend to concentrate on using hardware and software effectively to process and communicate information. Information literacy policy, on the other hand, is concerned with recognizing when information is needed, and locating, critically evaluating, using and presenting the information to suit a specific purpose (The Open University, 2016). UNESCAP, (2007) in Yahaya, Ejigbo and Oladokun (2019) concluded that the mere establishment of written national ICT policy, however, has value in itself. At a minimum, it conveys the message that the government is forward looking and intends to pursue the utilization of ICT in the society. Government should aspire, of course, to do more by putting the policy content into actual practice and becoming a role model in applying ICT in their administration and services.

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