

Journalists' Access to and Constraints in Applying the FOI Act in Rivers State

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Abstract

The right to access to information is fundamental to mass media in a democracy and the extent to which this can be achieved will determine, to a large extent, if the media can live up to its role as watchdog of the society, and as the voice of the voiceless. This informed the rationale for this study which examined journalists' access to and constraints in applying the FOI Act in Rivers State. The study employed the survey research design and questionnaire as the instrument for collecting data from a sample of 385 respondents. This study was guided by the libertarian theory of the press. The findings reveal 97.6% awareness of the FOI law among Journalists in Rivers State. The study also found that, though the FOI Act has increased journalists' knowledge of security issues and exposed journalists to secrets about politicians, there still exist some restrictions from the government policy, fear of being killed by politicians and culture of poor record keeping as the Nigerian factor. The researchers, therefore, conclude that the FOI law is just there for the records and public officers see it as a threat hence the use of certain government policies to hinder access to information. In view of the forgoing, the following recommendations are made: that before government promulgates any law, there must be a plan for both implementation and sustainability in the long-run and there is also need to review some aspects of the FOI law that has differing interpretations.

Key Words: Access, Constraints, Press Freedom, Communication and FOI Act

Introduction

The mass media are one of the social institutions that require freedom to effectively function in society. They play a crucial role in society, serving as the watchdog of the society and providing constant stream of information, education and socialization.

Freedom of information is both a concept in journalism and an issue in contemporary media practice. This controversial concept establishes that media practitioners especially journalists reserve the freedom to probe, dig or pry for the purpose of obtaining information, news, and opinion and publish same without hindrance.

It presupposes that the gathering and reporting of news and opinion should be done without any limitation or constraint. In other words, journalists, like every other Nigerian, have the right to hold opinion, receive information and impact ideas without interference. This is a fundamental human right guaranteed every individual by the constitution including journalists.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Act strongly opposes the authoritarian philosophy of the press in which absolute power and control over ownership, content and the use to which the media be put resided with monarch. Since the emergence of modern journalism in Nigeria in 1859 according to (Aliede, 2003), it has been struggling to achieve the needed freedom that would enable it discharge its social responsibilities creditably.

The journalistic task of gathering and disseminating news has not been an easy one largely due to limited freedom occasioned largely by government firm grip and control of the mass media. Thus, Uche (1989) notes that, "relationship between the mass media and the government in Nigeria has been a cat and mouse affair." This implies that, the free flow of information has been trampled upon. Journalists have had no access to vital information let alone the masses. In struggling to get detailed, factual and balanced reportage, journalists have had to continue to nose around for information, exposing themselves to high levels of risk that got them victimized, jailed, tortured and sometimes killed (Ezeah, 2004).

In contribution, Malayo, (2012) asserts that:

Over the years, the agitation for the emergence of a free press society, has been on the front burner of national discuss, especially among journalism practitioners in Nigeria. This owes largely to the fact that the expediency of having a legislation that guarantees a high level of press freedom cannot be ignored. It cannot be ignored apparently against the backdrop of the attendant positive effect it could have on any society.

Even before the passage and subsequent signing of the Freedom of Information Bill into law, there were strong views that the Act was going to facilitate journalism practice in Nigeria. Even though the Act is not a journalism law, journalists were at the fore-front in agitation for its passage; Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Media Rights Agenda (MRA) were among the three civil society organizations that began the campaign of a law of this nature (FOI Coalition, 2003). The bill was presented to the National Assembly two times by journalists: Tony Anyanwu and Nduka Irabor for the first time and Abike Dabiri for the second time (Ojebode, 2011).

Against this backdrop, the need for a Nigerian Freedom of Information (FOI) Act had been emphasized by many media scholars. For instance, Ogbondah (2003, p.128) did note prior to its enactment that: "The National Assembly should enact or guarantee the press and members of the public the right of access to government-held information including computerized records." Similarly, the Media Right Agenda (2004, p.4) at some point, wrote thus about the FOI Bill when passed into law as an Act of Parliament, it will make public record and information in the custody of any government- Federal, State or Local available to every person in Nigeria. Accordingly, the right of access of official information, which the Bill grants will be legally enforceable; with the Freedom of Information Act, it will be possible to find out from Governors, Council Chairmen, Ministers, the President or other public officers, details of any transaction conducted in those offices.

The law, it is believed, will give protection to public officers who discover the perpetration of a fraudulent act and reveal is thereby discouraging corruption among public office holders.

Taking a cue from the functional aspect of the freedom of Information Act, Yalaju (2001, p.205) avers that: "the right of access to information is aimed at strengthening the media by securing and protecting freedom of expression and the press particularly." It is against the above grounds that the enacted FOI Act seeks to make information more freely available to journalists in the same way it would be available to every other person who might request any information. It is also expected that, with the law in effect, the media would have access to more accurate information, which would improve the quality of media practice.

There is no gain saying the fact that the Nigeria Freedom of Information Act was proposed in the context of international affirmation of the rights of citizens to access information held by public bodies as fundamental human right.

Statement of the Problem

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act in Nigeria has been perceived by many proponents of the law as a step in the right direction. Before the signing of Freedom of Information (FOI) bill into law by President Goodluck Jonathan on the 28th May 2011, the press went through a lot of criticism in the hands of people/government, especially the military government which as a result many journalists were imprisoned, assassinated and assaulted.

The recent enactment of the FOI law in Nigeria has been greeted by many proponents of the law as a step in the right direction. Media practitioners believe that the Freedom of Information, as a communication phenomenon will play an essential role in placing Nigeria on the right track of development. It will also increase the people's participation in government programmes and policies as well as translate to the enthronement of accountability and good governance.

Having said this, the problem is the level of preparedness on the part of the core agitators of the FOI Act, being the journalists as it relates to their maximizing the provisions of the Act towards effective journalism practice. It is therefore instructive to note that the FOI Act is one of the criteria for gauging a truly democratic state. There is no gain-saying the fact that democracy is at its best when the people have all the information that the constitution of the nation permits. The question now is that, are journalists aware of the provisions of the law with their strengths and weaknesses? Are journalists optimistic or pessimistic that the Act would facilitate journalism practice? These questions constitute the problems this study investigates.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act among journalists in Rivers State?
2. To what extent do the journalists in Rivers State have access to information of public interest based on the provisions of the FOI Act?
3. What are the constraints to access to information among journalists in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Freedom of information (press freedom) could be traced to the age of enlightenment and development of Democracy in America. It is a product of libertarianism which derived unarguably from the libertarian theory of the press. It is one of the ingredients of libertarian approach to the theory of media.

Freedom of information shortly opposes the authoritarian philosophy of the press in which absolute power and control over ownership, content and the use to which the media could be put is in the hands of the monarch. The authoritarian system pre-supposes that: truth was conceived not to be the product of the great mass of people but of a few men who were in a position to guide and direct their fellow. Thus, truth was thought to be centered near the center of power. The rulers of the time used the press to inform the people of what the rulers thought they should know and the policies the rulers also support.

The rule of the press then therefore was chiefly to support and advance the policies and thinking of the government in a society where criticism of the political machinery and officials in power through the media is forbidden. This contradicts the belief of the libertarian that man is a rational being capable of choosing between truth and falsehood, deciding between bad and good and when faced with alternative choices, capable of choosing the truth and the good.

The press therefore, must be free to feed the people with information and allow them to judge because they are rational beings. According to Siebert et al (1956), the libertarians assume that in a democratic society, there would be a multiplicity of voices available to if not actually reaching the public, let every man who has something to say on public issues express himself regardless of whether what he has to say is true or false and let the public ultimately decide. In other words as far as libertarians are concerned, the press should be; given freedom to express opinion by multiplicity of voices on any public issues, a partner in the search for truth where every individual reserves the natural right to search for truth.

The Press Freedom

Press freedom in Nigeria has been lamented by many personalities. Amadi (2003:4) writes that: "there is a suspicion in Africa that a free press could lionize the ordinary citizen to the extent of causing a shift in the power base, this assumption is not groundless considering the contribution which journalism made towards the political decolonization of the Africa continent." It is on record that most of the so-called nationalists: Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana etc. started their career as editors and publishers, the suspicion is traceable to the mistaken imagination that since a fettered pre-independence press was able to remove the powerful colonial masters, that an unfettered post-independence press would be too hot for the new less powerful African masters to contend with." Although, there is no absolute freedom anywhere in the world

especially that of the press, but then Nigerian constitution should promulgate a special right of the press and not generalized as stated by Yalaju (2001, p.91) that section 39(1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria right of freedom of expression and the press states: "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinion and receive and impart ideas and information without interference."

The seeming freedom of the press is guaranteed by statements of general principle as commonly expressed in the constitution of democratic countries. In Nigeria, the freedom has not been free as the word implies – able to act at will, not under compulsion or restraint, independent, not restricted. In spite of the constitutional guarantee the press has not been free in Nigeria. This has made (democracy) life difficult, specifically during military governments.

Unlike Nigeria, the United States of America is the freest press in the world, the independence of their press is guaranteed by the first amendment which is very and reliable to enable the journalists win, during litigation. This fact did not deny the citizen their other rights when a journalist goes contrary in terms of libel invasion of privacy, trespass etc. although libel vary from State to State, none inhibit the press from reporting the truth. If Nigeria wants to emulate democratic system of government from America why not the full Freedom of the Press and Information Act which are evidence of a democratic set up, why overlook the most important aspect of the democracy?

Ogbondah (2003, pp.100-101) states that the law of independence, courage, objectivity and ethical principles on the part of Nigerian journalist can constitute a greater threat to Press Freedom even more than the enactment of obnoxious Press Laws by the State. The Ethical Code of Conduct of the Nigeria Press Organization enumerates eight ethical principles that the Nigerian journalists must adhere to among other things the code says that "it is the duty of the journalist to refuse any reward for publishing or suppressing news or comments, other than salary and allowances legitimately earned in the discharge of this professional duties."

Deutschland Magazine of February and March (2000, pp.39-40) reported that one hundred and eighty-five countries signed the general declaration on human rights, yet in many of these countries, Article 19 of this declaration, which refers to the right of Freedom of the Press and of opinion is still not completely observed. The worse is the fact that at the current time, over 700 journalists, writers and publishers around the world are in prison for insisting on their right to put their opinion into writing. Freedom of the Press is prerequisite for good and just governance and for effective social development, the right to knowledge is reliant on the free flow of information and ethical aspirations. Press freedom is an integral part of that basic right to which all men and women are entitled. Udoakah (2001, p.102) emphasized:

More often than not, African is castigated by the West as a continent without Press Freedom. The issue of Press Freedom is a twin question of how a society should be governed. Patterns of press control are considerably influenced by the political belief of the societies concerned, these are commonly identified as the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and the Soviet theories.

It is imperative to note that Freedom of the Press as mentioned above has never been absolute but Nigeria still has to proffer solution to a specific provision for the Nigerian press to enable them discharge their duties creditably and objectively without let or hindrance

Theoretical Framework

In keeping with the global tradition, scholars often use theories and models in an attempt to explain social phenomenon.

A theory serves as a background for the empirical adventure into any research study. However, research cannot be successful without theory to guard in the understanding of the topic under study. The key theory for this study is the libertarian theory.

Libertarian Press Theory

The Libertarian Press Theory provides the theoretical bedrock for this work. According to its proponents, (John Milton, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Jefferson), libertarianism hinges on the 'self-rightening' principle. It advocates for a 'free market place of ideas' with the hope that good ideas will naturally 'sell' at the expense of the bad ones (Bitner 1989, Sambe 2008, Nwabueze 2014). To this end, all forms of restrictions or limitations to freedom of expression are criticized.

The theory which emerged in Europe in the 17th Century opposes the authoritarian press theory which subjected the press to strict government regulations and restrictions. During the authoritarian era, the press was viewed as an agency of the state which was expected to protect its interest, hence the need to act in accordance with the dictates of the state. However, with the libertarian press theory, the press operates with unlimited freedom, devoid of all forms of censorships.

This theory is relevant to discussions in this study. Although the Nigerian constitution addresses the issue of freedom of expression in section 39, the FOIA expands the scope of press freedom in the country, as it provides for freedom of access to information of whatever kind. The implication here is that, though freedom of expression has been guaranteed by the 1999 constitution as amended, official records and information that are vital in the fight against corruption were shielded in bureaucratic secrecy and tagged 'classified information'; hence the advent of the FOIA provides a new dimension to the concept of press freedom in the country

Methodology

Survey Research design was adopted in this study. According to Nwodu (2006), survey is a research method which focuses on a prehensive sample derived from the entire population of the study. The survey method was chosen in preference to other methods like content analysis because of its capacity to measure human attitudes and opinions.

The population for this study comprises the entirety of journalists in Rivers State. According to the Nigeria Union of Journalists Database, the total population of Registered Journalists in Rivers State is 385 (source: NUJ, Rivers State).

Sample size is a smaller but precise representation of a larger group of people, objects or items that are used for measurement. The sample should be representative of the population to ensure that we can generalize the findings from the research sample to the population as a whole. The sample size for this study is 385 using census sampling technique.

In order to obtain defined response from the respondents, appropriate instrument for data collection will be used. For this study, structured questionnaire was the instrument employed to collect data for the study.

The data collected in this study was coded in numerical values and analysed using SPSS version 20.0 software for statistical analysis. Descriptive analysis was carried out for the study. The result for the descriptive analysis was presented in tables showing frequencies and percentages as well as mean scores and standard deviation scores based on the objectives of the study concerned.

Results

Three hundred and eighty five (385) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to journalists in Rivers State using accidental sampling technique (i.e. strict intercept). However, out of this number, two hundred and ninety-four (294) copies of the questionnaire were successfully retrieved. This therefore represents a success rate of 76% of the total copies of questionnaire distributed. And this was adequate to represent the sample size.

Table 1: Distribution of responses showing the demographic details of respondents

S/N	Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
1.	Age	18-22years	21	7.1
		23-27years	58	19.7
		28-32years	78	26.5
		33-37 years	42	14.3
		38 years and above	95	32.3
2.	Sex:	Male	147	50
		Female	147	50
3.	Educational Qualifications:	BSc./B.A	137	46.6
		MSc./M.A	125	42.5
		Ph.D	32	10.9
Total			294	100

Source: Survey Field Study, 2019

The result in Table 1 reveals that majority of the respondents (95 representing 32.3%) fall within the age bracket of 38 years and above. This is followed by respondents between 28 – 32 years as affirmed by 78 (26.5%) respondents. At the bottom of that section of the table are respondents between 18 – 22 years as affirmed by 21 (7.1%) respondents. The implication of this result is that most Journalists in Rivers State have long been in the profession.

There is equal representation in sex distribution of respondents with each recording 147 (50%) indicating equal number of male and female Journalists found among sampled respondents in Rivers State.

On the educational qualifications of respondents, there is a preponderance of respondents with Bachelor's degree (137 representing 46.6%). This is followed by respondents with Masters' degree (MSc/MA) as affirmed by 125 respondents (representing 42.5%). At the bottom of that section of the table are respondents with Ph.D (32 representing 10.9%). The implication of this result is that Journalists in Rivers State are widely read.

Table 2: Distribution of responses showing the employers of respondents

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Government	156	53.1
2	Private	138	46.9
Total		294	100

Source: Survey Field Study, 2019

The result in Table 2 shows the employers of the respondents in the study (i.e. the affiliation to which each Journalist belong). From the result, it is obvious that majority of respondents 156 (53.1%) work in government-owned media outfit while the remaining 138 (46.9%) said they work in Private-owned media outfits.

Table 3: Distribution of responses showing years of experience of respondents

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Less than 1 year	14	4.8
2	1 - 5 years	21	7.1
3	6 - 10 years	102	34.7
4	11 years and above	157	53.4
Total		294	100.0

Source: Survey Field Study, 2019

The result on years of experience (i.e. as shown in Table 3) of respondents shows that there is a preponderance of respondents with 11 years of experience and above. This is affirmed by 157 respondents (representing 53.4%). This is followed by respondents with 6 – 10 years of experience (102 representing 34.7%) and those with 1 – 5

years of experience (21 representing 7.1%). At the bottom of the table are respondents below one year experience (14 representing 4.8%). The implication of this result is that most respondents in Rivers State have more than 6 years of experience which suggests that they have been equipped with various Journalistic skills while in the profession.

Table 4: Distribution of responses showing respondents level of awareness of the FOI Act in Rivers State

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Yes	287	97.6
2	No	7	2.4
	Total	294	100.0

Source: Survey Field Study, 2019

There is an increased level of awareness among Journalists in Rivers State as shown in the results in Table 4. From the result a total of 287 respondents are aware of the FOI Act in Rivers State. This represents 97.6% level of awareness found among the respondents. What this means is that only a negligible few (7 representing 2.4%) Journalists claim not be aware of the FOI Act in Nigeria. This can be traced to the few number of respondents that have less than one year of experience as Journalists since the FOI bill was signed into law in 2011 by President Jonathan.

Table 5: Distribution of responses showing the extent to which Journalists have access to information

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	U	Mean	St.D
1	It has increased access to information and has helped journalists gain knowledge of issue about security	118	138	8	23	7	4.146	0.9683
2	It has exposed secret information to journalists	62	179	38	8	7	3.956	0.8146
3	It has made public officers have a sense of responsibility		197	67	16	14	3.520	0.8040
4	It provides opportunity for investigative journalism	48	193	30	8	15	3.854	0.9026
5	Journalists need to apply to have certain information	48	61	64	93	28	3.027	1.2499
6	Certain information are still classified and as such journalists do not have access to such information	22	22	150	93	7	2.861	0.8769

The result in Table 5 was analysed using Limit of Real Numbers for a 5-point Likert scale. The Limit of Real Numbers is given as follows:

-) For “Strongly Agree decisions = (5.00 – 4.45) = 5 point
-) For “Agree decision” = (4.44 – 3.45) = 4 point
-) For “Disagree” decision = (3.44 – 2.45) = 3 point
-) For “strongly Disagree” decision = (2.44 – 1.45) = 2 point
-) For “undecided” decision = (1.44 – 0.45) = 1 point

From the result, 4 out the 6 responses had mean scores that fall within the Limit of Real Numbers for “Agree” decision (i.e. 4.44 – 3.45) (i.e. approximately 4.00). The responses include:

- “It has increased access to information and has helped Journalists gain knowledge of issue about security” (mean = 4.1463) (St.D = 0.9683)

- "It has exposed secret information to Journalists" (mean = 3.9558) (St.D = 0.8146)
- "It has made public officers have a sense of responsibility" (mean = 3.5204) (St.D = 0.8039)
- "It provides opportunity for investigative journalism" (mean = 3.8537) (St.D = 0.9026)

Conversely, the remaining two responses had mean scores that fall within the Limit of Real Numbers for "Disagree" decision (i.e. 3.44 – 2.45) (i.e. approximately = 3.00). The responses include:

-) "Journalists need to apply to have access to certain information" (mean = 3.0272) (St.D = 1.2499)
-) "Certain information are still classified and as such Journalists do not have access to such information" (mean = 2.8605) (St.D = 0.8769)

The implication of the above results is that the bureaucracy involved in accessing "classified information" as claimed by the respondents can undermine the publication or reportage of the truth in the interest of the public. This can also discourage Journalists especially as it concerns investigative Journalism.

Table 6: Distribution of responses showing the factors that hinder access to information

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	U	Mean	St.D
1	Government policies still hinder access to information	185	79	7	16	7	4.425	0.9525
2	Fear of being killed by politicians whose secrets are leaked through journalists reports	99	172		8	8	4.184	0.8096
3	The policy of the media house	114	165		8	7	4.262	0.8028
4	Poor culture of record keeping in Nigeria	92	171	24		7	4.160	0.7650
5	The FOI law is too weak because of lack viable machinery for implementation	7	186	16	7	78	3.126	1.3428
6	The procedure in getting access to information is too cumbersome	86	92	24	15	77	3.323	1.5766

Source: Survey Field Study, 2019

The result in the above table (i.e Table 6) was analysed using the same Limit of Real Numbers for the 5-point Likert scale. From the result, 4 out of the 6 responses had means cores that fall within the Limit of Real Numbers for "Agree" decision (i.e. 4.44 – 3.45) (approximately = 4.00). These are the responses that respondents affirmed as factors that hinder access to information. They include:

-) "Government policies still hinder access to information" (mean = 4.4252) (St.D = 0.9526)
-) "Fear of being killed by politicians whose secrets are leaked through Journalists reports" (mean = 4.1837) (St.D = 0.8097)
-) "The policy of the media house" (mean = 4.2619) (St.D = 0.8028)
-) "Poor culture of record keeping in Nigeria" (mean = 4.1599) (St.D = 0.7650)

Conversely, the remaining 2 responses were not perceived as factors that can hinder access to information since the mean scores for each of them fall within the Limit of Real Numbers for "Disagree" decision (i.e. 3.44 – 2.45) (approximately = 3.00). The responses include:

- "The FOI Law is too weak because it lacked viable machinery for implementation" (mean = 3.1259) (St.D = 1.3428)
- "The procedure in getting access to information is too cumbersome" (mean = 3.3231) (St.D = 1.5766)

The implication of the above result is that the FOI Act, which was intended to make public information more freely available and accessible to Journalists, could best be described as a legacy in antiquity.

This is because other government policies seem to be hindering the "free" access to public information due to certain restrictions placed on what could be described as "classified information".

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed as they provide answers to the proposed research questions in the study. They are also discussed in relation to findings in other related studies establishing areas of corroboration or disagreement within the context of the study.

Research Question One: What is the level of awareness of the provisions of the FOI Act among Journalists in Rivers State?

From the results, the researchers found that all the respondents are quite educated as all had either of Bachelors' degree, Masters' degree or Doctor of Philosophy degree (i.e. 46.6%, 42.5% and 10.9% respectively).

This informed the high level of awareness witnessed from the other result on level of awareness of Journalists in Rivers State on the FOI Act in Nigeria. There the researcher also found that majority (97.6%) of the respondents are aware of the FOI Act that was signed into law in 2011.

This finding agrees with the findings from a study conducted by Dunu and Ugbo (2014) where 100% of Journalists in Enugu, Anambra, Imo and Ebonyi States were found to be aware of the FOI Act in Nigeria.

Further studies carried out by Abone and Kur (2014) corroborated the findings in this study as 83.8% of Journalists were also found to be aware of the FOI Act in Nigeria.

The implication of these findings is that the signing of the FOI Act received a boost within the media landscape and among Journalists who are the custodians of the news emanating from the act of legislation.

Research Question Two: To what extent do the Journalists in Rivers State have access to information of public interest based on the provisions of the FOI Act?

From the result, the researcher found that the FOI Act has helped Journalists in Rivers State gain knowledge about security issues; it has also exposed Journalists to secrets about politicians and it has provided opportunities for investigative journalism.

Dunu and Ugbo (2014) in their findings negates this finding as findings in their study revealed that 85% of Journalists in some selected states in south east Nigeria have not been using the FOI Act. What this means is that they have not explored the opportunities inherent in the FOI Act.

Similarly, Nnadi and Obot (2014) found that 22.3% of Journalists have not also had access to information using the provisions of the FOI Act but an overwhelming 72.7% said they explored and used the opportunities provided in the FOI Act to access information of public interest.

The implication of these findings is that Journalists explore opportunities in a legislation based on their perception of such legislation as well as the enabling environment that aids such opportunity to be harnessed.

Research Question Three: What are the constraints to access to information among Journalists in Rivers State?

In this study, the researchers found that government policies ranked highest among the factors that hinder access to information of public interest. Also, further findings reveal that "fear of being killed", "policy of the media" and "poor culture of record keeping in Nigeria" were found to be among the factors that hinder access to information of public interest among Journalists in Rivers State.

Dunu and Ugbo (2014) also found that government and public institutions failed to comply with the principles of the FOI Act and that the few that complied did so after much delay or via litigations.

Guyson, *et. al.* (2017) further corroborated these findings from what they found in their study. From their findings, most Journalists (58.2%) see the provisions of the FOI Act as a challenge to Journalism practice in Nigeria based on the aforementioned constraints.

The implication of these findings is that the FOI Act, notwithstanding its provisions to make public information more freely available and accessible, could best end as a legacy in antiquity based on the weaknesses that have been observed.

Conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, the researchers conclude as follows:

1. There is a strong correlation between awareness of the FOI Act and the educational qualification of the Journalists in Rivers State.
2. Awareness could not translate into practice or use of the FOI Act due to fear of being killed (as expressed by journalists in Rivers State) and poor culture of record keeping as well as government policy.
3. Government policy will not always be favourable to aspects of Journalism practice that reveal top classified secrets of politicians or the government in power.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers made these recommendations:

1. There is a need to review some aspects of the FOI Act which appear to be open to differing interpretations.
2. Journalists should also harness the opportunities provided by the FOI law by engaging in investigative journalism and not depend on press releases and sources.
3. There is a need for monitoring and evaluation plan for the FOI ACT to ensure its effectiveness.

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