

Postgraduates' Knowledge, Attitude and Use of Freedom of Information Act in Research

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ABSTRACT

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act aims at giving individuals access to public records and information. It is an Act that could serve as a wealth of tool in the hands of researchers. The study therefore examined the Knowledge, Attitude and Use of FOI Act by postgraduate students in academic research. The study was anchored on the libertarian theory. It adopted the survey research method in gathering data. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 209 postgraduate students from University of Lagos (UNILAG). From the 203 copies of questionnaire analyzed, the study found that while one quarter (24.1%) of the respondents do not know about the FOI, majority of the respondents who know about the Act do not have an in-depth knowledge of its provisions. The study also found that despite the knowledge that postgraduate students have on FOI, about half of the respondents (49.3%) to a large extent do not make use of the Act in research. The study thus recommended that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in conjunction with the media should do an awareness campaign on the existence of the FOI Act and its relevance in academic research

Keywords: *Freedom of Information Act, Postgraduates, Researchers*

1. Introduction

Information is vital for development. It brings about knowledge while knowledge brings about power when it is well applied. Mbachu and Hamilton-Ekeke (2013:3) postulated that “Knowledge is currently recognized as the driver of productivity and economic growth”. The need for easy access to information by the media and the general public gave birth to Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The turbulent journey to the acceptance of FOI Act began in 1999 with Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists as lead advocates for the enactment of the Act. The Act saw the light of day after its first denial in 2007 by President Olusegun Obasanjo as it was finally passed into law on May 28th 2011 by the then President Goodluck Jonathan. Thus, the campaign for the FOI Act lasted for 12 years in Nigeria. This democratic move according to Uche (2011:20) made Nigeria the fourth African country after South Africa, Uganda and Angola to have upheld the FOI Act. The thrust of the Act is to provide public record and information freely for public access while also promoting transparency in government and other public institutions. Therefore the FOI Act requires that public institutions and officers must have proper documentation and record which must be made available and when required as stated in section 3 of the act. The law also laid down stipulated measures to ensure compliance of public institutions to this act; section 9 of the act gave a 7 day ultimatum to either grant or refuse access to information (refusal is only permissible if the information under request is sensitive and can be seen as a threat to national security if disclosed, third party information and exemption of professional and other privileges). Time frame can also be extended to no more than 7 days depending on the type of information that is requested for. When access to information is denied, applicant has the right to take the case to court and if the grievance of the applicant is upheld the liable officer upon conviction will pay a fine of N500, 000. 00.

The FOI Act is thus seen as a useful tool for researchers in the accumulation of facts that will support empirical data which will be used in proffering solutions to solve existing problems. Research is the systematic investigation of phenomenon, Oloyede (2010) defines it as the ability to “search and search until solution is found to advance the course of development”. The FOI Act will enable postgraduate students to have access to otherwise close records and information which will be useful in building and conducting a successful research. The tertiary institutions are the depository of knowledge and training ground for researchers. If proper research is not conducted at the tertiary level, it will affect the national economy of a nation. The Act therefore will allow researchers to receive better treatments from public institutions and thereby facilitate improvement and quality of research that postgraduate students conduct if put into use.

1. Statement of the Problem

The Freedom of Information Act is for the general public to have access to public records. With the emergence of the Act in 2011, some civil societies organized workshops to educate the public on how to make use of the Act. The question however is, aside from media professionals, are the rest of the public aware of this Act and do they have the knowledge of the FOI Act since its enactment 4 years ago? Also, what is their attitude to the Act? Do postgraduate students put into use the FOI Act when seeking information from public records? Preliminary studies and literature supports the fact that a larger percentage of the public are yet to make use of the FOI Act when necessary possibly because they are not aware of the Act or do not have a grasp of what the concept is all about. There is however a superficial knowledge about the FOI Act by a selected few despite the trainings that were organized in the past. The discussion of the law equally gives a general impression that the Act is just a guarantee of media freedom (Ali, 2014: 289). This is so, as a large number of literature has focused on media’s perspective on the FOI Act and a gap in knowledge among

the general public. Also postgraduate students have often made a passing comment that they were often denied access to information by public institutions during the course of their research. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to determine the level of knowledge of postgraduate students to the FOI act, their attitude to the FOI Act and their usage of the FOI Act.

2. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to examine the Knowledge, Attitude and Use of Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act among Postgraduate Students of University of Lagos.

The specific objectives were to:

- 1) Determine the level of knowledge that UNILAG postgraduate students have in the use of the FOI Act in Academic Research
- 2) Examine the attitude of UNILAG postgraduate students to the FOI Act as a useful instrument in information gathering for Academic Research
- 3) Find out the extent to which UNILAG postgraduate students utilize the FOI Act in Research.

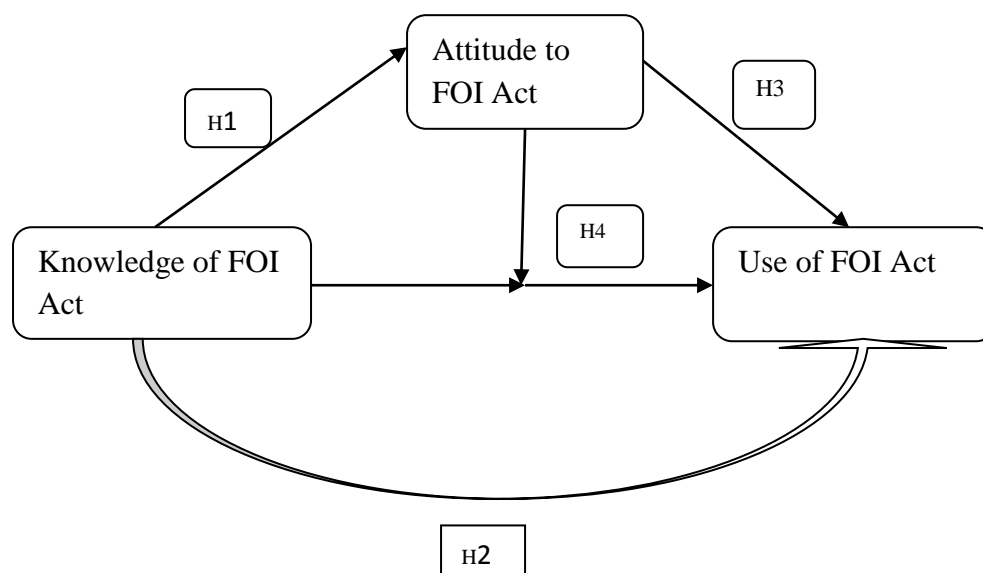
3. Research Questions

- 1) What is the level of knowledge of UNILAG postgraduate students on the use of the FOI Act in Academic Research
- 2) What is the attitude of UNILAG postgraduate students to the FOI Act as an instrument in information gathering for Academic Research?
- 4) To what extent do UNILAG postgraduate students utilize the FOI Act in Research?

4. Research Hypotheses

1. H_0 Knowledge of Postgraduate students on FOI Act does not significantly influence their attitude to Freedom of Information Act for research

2. **H₀** Knowledge of Postgraduate students on FOI Act will not have a significantly positive influence on the use of Freedom of Information Act for research.
3. **H₀** Use of FOI Act for research is not significantly influenced by attitude of postgraduate students towards the relevance of FOI Act in research
4. **H₀** Knowledge of FOI Act and attitude towards FOI will not have a significant influence on the use of FOI Act by postgraduate students for research



Ojomo, Atakiti, and Alao (2015) Conceptual Model of Postgraduate Students' Knowledge, Attitude and Use of FOI Act

This model suggests that there is the likelihood that knowledge in the absence of attitude can have a direct significant effect on postgraduate students' use of the FOI Act for research while the use of FOI Act for research may not be significantly influenced by their attitude. Also Knowledge of FOI Act and attitude to FOI may have an influence on postgraduates' use of the FOI Act for research.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Libertarian theory which was propounded by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in 1956. The study examined this theory in relation to access of information and freedom to gather information by the public. The theory goes beyond the media to establish that people have natural rights and the deprivation of these rights is immoral. Thus libertarianism basically prescribes that individuals should be free to gather information and publish what they like. Baran and Davis (2009:100) further established that in Libertarian theory, people should be free from arbitrary limits on communication imposed by the state and should be allowed to seek the truth. The theory, according to Folarin (1998:26; Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso, 2008:56) postulated that while individuals have rights to gather and access information, it does not give right to violate individual privacy and national security. Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso, 2008:57) highlighted the assumptions of the theory as:

- 1) Attacks "on government, official party or political party should not be punishable.
- 2) No media organization should be compelled to publish anything.
- 3) No restriction should be placed on any legal means of getting information for publication.
- 4) There should be no restrictions on export (sending) or import (receiving) messages across national frontiers

This theory is relevant to this study as the freedom of information Act seeks to make public record and information accessible to the public without restrictions. The 3rd assumption of the theory supports the thrust of the Freedom of Information Act that compels public officers and administrators to avoid restrictions in getting access to information through legal means for publication purposes which in this context can apply to researchers.

6. Literature Review

Information is central to human existence. The Freedom of Information Act enables the public to gain access to public record in government and private institutions. These information “covers all forms of information or record, irrespective of the format in which they are kept, including, files, letters, databases, loose reports, e-mails, office notebooks, videos, photographs, wall charts and maps” (Federal Ministry of Justice, 2013:5; FOI Act, 2011). The FOI Act has its legal basis drawn from the African Charter on Human and People’s Right, which is part of Nigeria’s domestic law under the African Charter which is also guaranteed by the 1999 constitution of Nigeria.

“Public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good and everyone has a right to access this information, subject only to clearly defined rules established by law”.

Ginsberg (2014:5) also defined FOI as an Act which allows:

“Individual or corporate, citizen or not—to request and obtain, without explanation or justification, existing, identifiable, and unpublished agency records on any topic”.

6.1 Exemptions of Freedom of Information Act

Esimokha (2014:101) highlighted the exemptions of the FOI Act as:

- a. When the disclosure of information may be injurious to international affair and the defense of the federal republic of Nigeria
- b. Information which contain records for administrative enforcement proceedings
- c. Information that will deprive a person of a fair trial
- d. Customer client relationships such as Doctor-patient, journalism confidentiality privileges, legal practitioner-client and so on.

- e. Commercial trade secrets

6.2 Knowledge of Freedom of Information Act

The FOI Act came into being as a way of curbing corruption in the public sector as well as promoting transparency. It is also a means as noted by Larsen (2014:11) of acquiring “formal mechanisms with which members of the public can approach government agencies to release public records”. Over the last 30 years, countries have ensured the implementation of the FOI Act, (Roberts, 2002:9; Esimokha, 2015: 99) and Nigeria came on board in 2011 as a way of promoting a democratic state and right of access of individuals. The Act ensures that every qualified citizen regardless of age, status and educational qualification has the right to access information and the public institutions and officers involved also have the obligation to have proper documentation of records, “activities, operations and businesses in a way and manner that facilitates the public’s right to access information that are in its custody” and to make them available upon request, Federal Ministry of Justice (2013:6). It was further disclosed that for an applicant to access information, the applicant need not put it into writing nor disclose specific interest in the information applied for before the request is granted. However, the applicant should be explicit on the type of document needed. The seven day timeline also begins the day the public institution receives the request while the charging fee is equivalent of the amount needed for photocopy where applicable. In case of a legal proceeding in right to access, the courts for such hearings are High Courts of the States, High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and the Federal High Court; and it must be within 30 days after denial, Caleb (2014:110). Studies have however shown that the public have little knowledge of the freedom of information Act. Ojo (2010:6) reported that as a result of low level of awareness and knowledge among the public, few people make use of the Act. A study by Nnadi (2014:555) reaffirmed this assertion further as majority of the respondents (65.1%) have not read the FOI Act.

6.3 The Use of the FOI Act

Larsen (2014:10) stipulated that public records which are of interest to academic researchers are often not made available by the government bodies that control them. This probably is because of the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the public sector or lack of specification of the type of document needed by researchers. Larsen further opined the usefulness of FOI Act to researchers as there are lots of backstage documents which are otherwise not obtainable except following through with the Act. For researchers, information is vital at every stage of the research work. Information aid the gathering of data needed for the phenomenon under investigation while it will ultimately help in proffering solutions to existing problems thus contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic planning, growth and development of the country. In situations where information is denied, it diminishes the quality of decisions in a study which will have a negative effect on development.

The report of Bourke, Worthy, and Hazell (2012:5) showed that the FOI Act has been useful for researchers in a variety of ways:

- It has provided evidence for a core argument
- It has given background information and context
- It has supplied statistics or quantitative data
- It has suggested a pathway of where to go next
- It has helped to dispel myths and misunderstandings

However, Bourke et.al (2012:10, 13; Ginsberg, 2014) opined that while the FOI Act is an important resource for researchers, certain skills for retrieving information have to be developed through training. In using the FOI Act, researchers should ask the right questions to bring out the desired information needed. Researchers should also have cordial relationship with FOI officers and cultivate patience during the waiting period before information is

released regardless of the stipulated 7 day ultimatum. This is due to bureaucracy of paper work most times. This means that for researchers, the request for information should be made earlier as close deadlines will not work except for regular information available on websites of the institutions.

An instance where the FOI Act has been put into use is the case of The Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR) vs. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in August 2011 in Abuja. CDHR compelled EFCC to provide information substantiating an allegation made against it. (Omotayo, 2015:7).

6.4 Knowledge, Attitude and Use of the FOI Act

Review of literature reveals that there is low level of awareness and knowledge of the public about the FOI Act. The study of Nnadi (2014:556-558) found that majority of the respondents (69.1%) have a negative disposition towards the Act as they believed that the Act is not enforceable while 77.7% agreed that they have not put the Act into use. It was also reported that 78.4% which constitutes majority of the respondents who have put the Act into use have been denied access to information.

The study conducted by Dunu and Ugbo (2014:7) also revealed that journalists who are core stakeholders in the FOI Act are aware of the Act. However 66% of the respondents disclosed the FOI Act has not to a great extent improved their access to information while only 15% utilized the freedom of information Act in the discharge of their duty. This finding by Dunu and Ugbo (2014:7) further gives credence to what Daka (2015) citing Dogara (2015) reported that the FOI Act is under utilized by the public. He “decried that the public are not fully engaged to study their laws, calling for advocacy so that people can know and then be able to enforce their rights”. The challenge of implementing the Act as established by Sebina (2005) has affected attitude of the few that know the Act towards the using the Act for academic purposes. Sebina (2005) stated that though public officers have been ordered by the

law to keep appropriate record and avoid destroying records, records are still not available. In the absence of records, retrieving information will be futile. Other laws that still limit the effectiveness of the FOI Act include the Official Secret Acts, which some public institutions still invoke, the swearing in to secrecy of public servants, the criminal code, the Penal code and the Public Complaints Commission Act. This, Omotayo (2015: 9; Esimokha, 2015:109) attributed to “entrenched culture of secrecy”

7. Methodology

This study was carried out using University of Lagos (UNILAG) postgraduate students, as population. The survey research method was adopted. This was used because survey focuses on people and can best be used to get people’s opinions on issues. The simple random sampling technique was further used to select respondents from the postgraduate School, UNILAG. The population of Faculty of Social Sciences in the postgraduate school according to UNILAG registry (2015) is 756. The sample size was derived using Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) formulae. The first stage of the formula was used to obtain the percentage of inclusive respondents of students who probably have heard of FOI.:

$$P\% \times q\% \times \left[\frac{1.96}{5}\right]^2$$

Where p% represents those who might have the characteristics and q% represents those who might not have the characteristics. For this study, it is therefore reasoned that 75% of the population have heard of FOI. Thus:

$$n = 75\% \times 25\% \times \left[\frac{1.96}{5}\right]^2 = 288.$$

To calculate the minimum sample size:

$$n = \frac{n}{1 + \left(\frac{n}{\text{population}}\right)}$$

Where n is 288 and population of study (Faculty of Social Sciences) = 756. The adjusted sample size based on population=209.

To calculate the sample size based on the response rate, n as calculated above is substituted in the formula below where $re\%$ is the expected response rate. The response rate was set to 100% because the respondents were students and there was a high turnout among students in the filling of questionnaire.

$$n^a = \frac{n \times 100}{re\%}$$

$$n^a = \frac{209 \times 100}{100\%}$$

The sample size for this study was **209**

The research instrument used for the questionnaire was the Likert scale of 1-5; 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. 209 copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents in the faculty of Social Sciences, UNILAG. 203 copies were however analyzed as 6 copies of the questionnaire were invalid. The questionnaire was divided into four sections; section A dealt with the demographic characteristics of respondents while the other three sections tested the knowledge, attitude and use of FOI Act by postgraduate students of UNILAG respectively. Parameters used to measure Knowledge of FOI Act were respondents' understanding of the FOI content while 10 questionnaire items were generated to test their knowledge; Attitude towards the FOI Act was measured by testing respondents' disposition and view about the FOI Act. This was tested using 9 questionnaire items. Use of FOI Act was also measured using 8 questionnaire items to determine if respondents have made use of the Act.

To test the reliability of the research instrument, the Cronbach alpha was used. The result was 0.830 which indicates that the research instrument was highly reliable. The Statistical

Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) 21 was used to process the data presented in charts, frequency and tables while linear regression was used to test the research hypotheses.

7. Presentation of Results

In analyzing the data, some items were re-coded. The knowledge of FOI and Attitude to FOI Act was re-coded into Poor (1+2), Fair (3) and Good (4+5) while Respondents' Use of FOI was re-coded into Low (1+2) Moderate (3) and High (4+5)

7.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>	Frequency	Percent
Male	98	48.3
Female	105	51.7
Total	203	100.0

It is indicated from table 1 that more than half of the respondents are females (51.7%)

Table 2: Respondents' Distribution by Age

<i>Variable</i>	Frequency	Percent
21 to 30	89	43.8
31 to 40	78	38.4
41 to 50	24	11.8
51 to 60	12	5.9
Total	203	100.0

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents are within the age of 21 and 30 followed by 31 to 40 (43.8% and 38.4%) respectively.

**Table 3: Respondents Awareness of Freedom
of Information Act (FOI Act)**

<i>Variable</i>	Frequency	Percent
yes	154	75.9
No	49	24.1
Total	203	100.0

Table 3 shows that 75.9% who are the vast majority of the people know about the FOI Act. This shows that about one quarter of the respondents still do not have knowledge of the existence of the Freedom of Information Act or what the Act is all about. The 49 respondents were thus disqualified from going further in the filling of the questionnaire. This accounted for the 24.1% missing system in subsequent analyses.

Table 4: Time of Knowledge about the Act

<i>Variable</i>	Frequency	Percent
Less than one year	67	33
1-2 years	44	21.7
3-4 years	43	21.2
Total	154	75.9
System	49	24.1
Total	203	100.0

Table 4 shows that out of those that have the knowledge of the FOI Act, more than two third of them have only known about the Act for less than a year (33%)

- 1) **Research Question One** What is the level of knowledge of UNILAG postgraduate students on the use of the FOI Act in Research

Fig. 1: Postgraduate Students' Knowledge on the use of FOI Act in Research

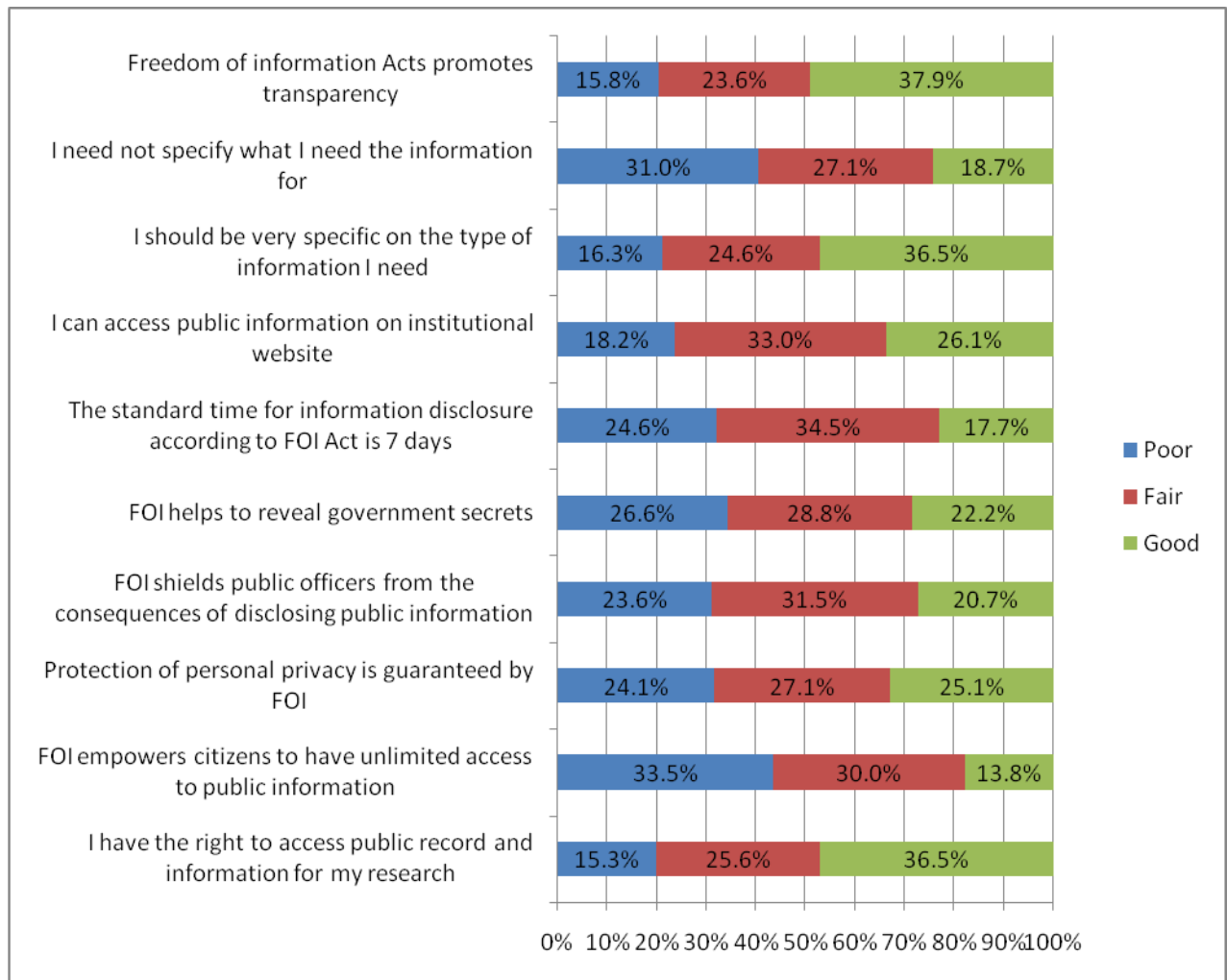


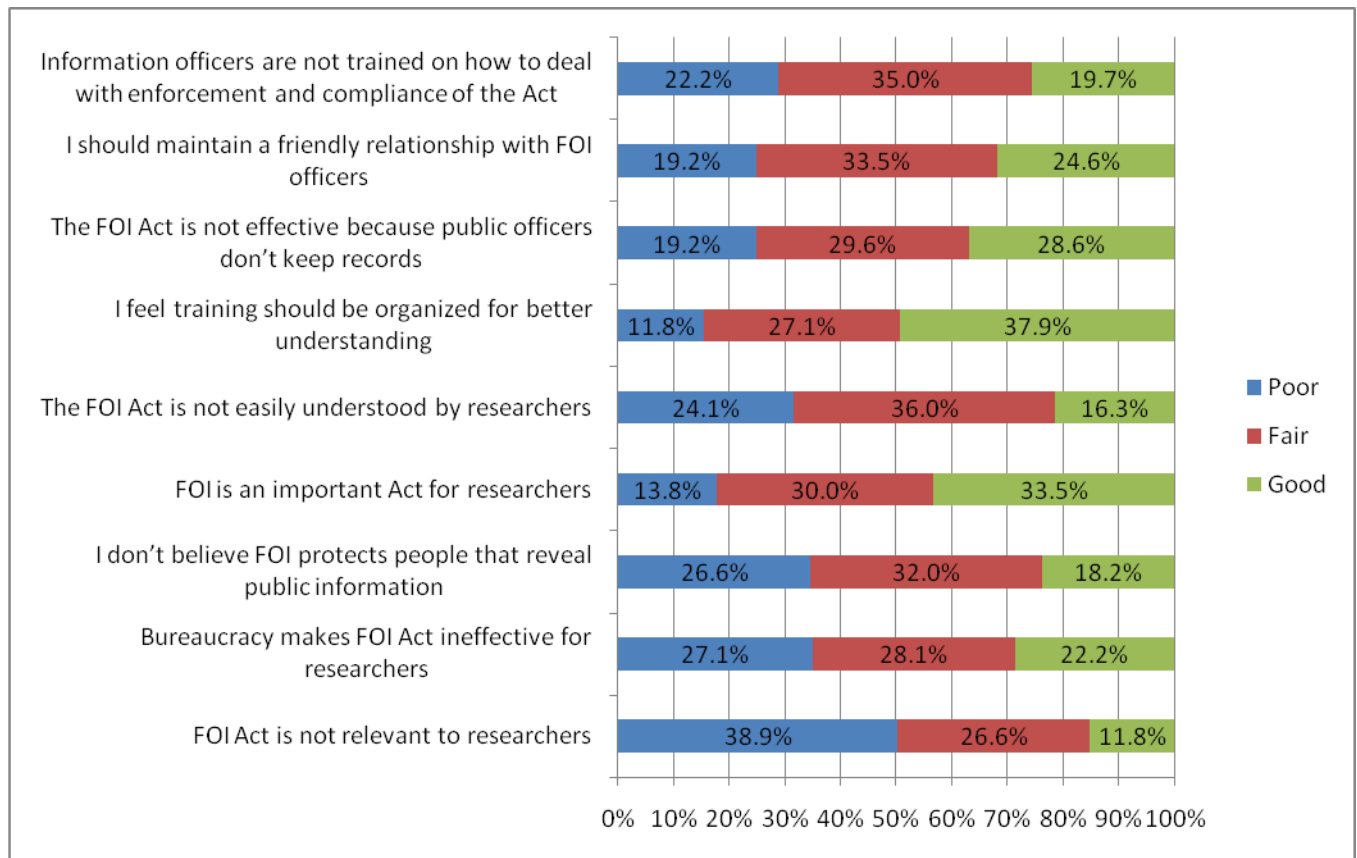
Fig 1 indicates that only about one third of the respondents (36.5%) have a good knowledge that they have the right to access public record for their research while more of the respondents (33.5%) actually have a low knowledge of the exemptions to the FOI Act as they believe there is unlimited access to public information. Also, 27.1% had a fair knowledge that the FOI Act protects personal privacy followed by one fourth (25.1%) who have a good knowledge of the protection of privacy in the FOI Act. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (31.5%) had a fair knowledge that the Act shields public officers from consequences of disclosing public information. The level of knowledge of respondents on what the FOI does is moderately low (26.6%). The knowledge on the standard time of information is poor as only 17.7% of respondents had a good knowledge required for

information disclosure. Further, about one third (33%) and 26.1% of the respondents have a fair and good knowledge that they can access information from institutional websites for research purposes if available. In addition, 36.5% of the respondents have a good knowledge that they need to be specific on the type of information they are requesting for. However, less than one third of the respondents (31%) do not know that they need not specify what they need the information for. The study further found that majority respondents have a good knowledge of the Act being able to promote transparency in the government sector.

Findings from figure one therefore suggests that postgraduate students' knowledge of the FOI Act is minimal. This is so as respondents to a large extent have a fair knowledge of what the FOI Act is all about. For instance, while 36.5% and 25.6% of the respondents have a good and fair knowledge that they have the right to access public record, about one 5th of the respondents (15.3%) do not know that they have the right to access public record. The figure at a glance thus suggests that while 75.9% of the respondents know about the FOI Act, some of them probably have not seen the need to read the content of the Act. The findings of this study align with that of Nnadi (2014:555) who reported that majority of the journalists in Akwa Ibom (65.1%) have not read the FOI Act. It also supports the claim of the Libertarian media theory which postulates that as a free market place, the public can decide what to read and what not to read. It also supports the assertion of Daka (2015) in Dogara (2015) when he opined that Nigerians are not studying their laws.

Research Question Two: What is the attitude of UNILAG postgraduate students to the FOI Act as an instrument in information gathering for Academic Research?

Fig. 2: Attitude of Postgraduate students to the use FOI Act for Research



From figure 2, it can be deduced that more than one third of the respondents (38.9%) have a good disposition towards the FOI being relevant to researchers while more than one quarter of the respondents (27.1%, 28.1%) have fair and poor disposition towards the fact that bureaucracy makes the FOI Act as ineffective for researchers. In addition, only a minority of the respondents (18.2%) do not believe the FOI Act protects public officers who disclose public information. However, more than one third of the respondents (33.5%) have good perception that the FOI Act is of importance to researchers while 13.8% have a low perception of FOI Act being important to researchers. Likewise, more than one third of the respondents (36%) have a fair perception that the Act is not easily understood by researchers while a good proportion of them (37.9%) believe that training should be organized for better comprehension and understanding of the Act. Also, 29.6% of the study participants have a moderate attitude that the FOI Act is not effective because public officers do not keep record

and lower proportion of the respondents (19.2%) have a poor perception towards maintaining a cordial relationship with public officers. Also, more than one third of the study participants (35%) further have a fair perception that public officers are not trained on how to deal with compliance and enforcement of the FOI Act.

The findings from figure two revealed that postgraduate students of UNILAG have a fairly good perception of the FOI Act as about two third of the respondents have a good and fair knowledge of the relevance of the FOI Act to researchers. This is probably so because their level of knowledge of the FOI Act informed the manner through which the FOI Act is to be perceived. Their minimal perception of the FOI Act as moderate may also be as a result of the fact that a larger percent of the respondents are of the opinion that the FOI Act is not easily understood and therefore believe training need to be organized for better knowledge and attitude towards the Act as a necessary tool of information gathering in research. Their minimal attitude of the Act may also have been informed by their high perception of the difficulties posed by public officers in making public record readily available to the public. They are also of the opinion that while researchers are trained on how to use the Act, public officers also needs to be trained on how to ensure compliance and implementation of the Act. The findings give credence to the study of Nnadi (2014:556-558) whose findings revealed that majority of the respondents (69.1%) have a negative disposition towards the Act as they believed that the Act is not enforceable.

Research Question Three: To what extent do UNILAG postgraduate students utilize the FOI Act in Research?

Fig. 3: Respondents Utilization of the FOI Act in Research

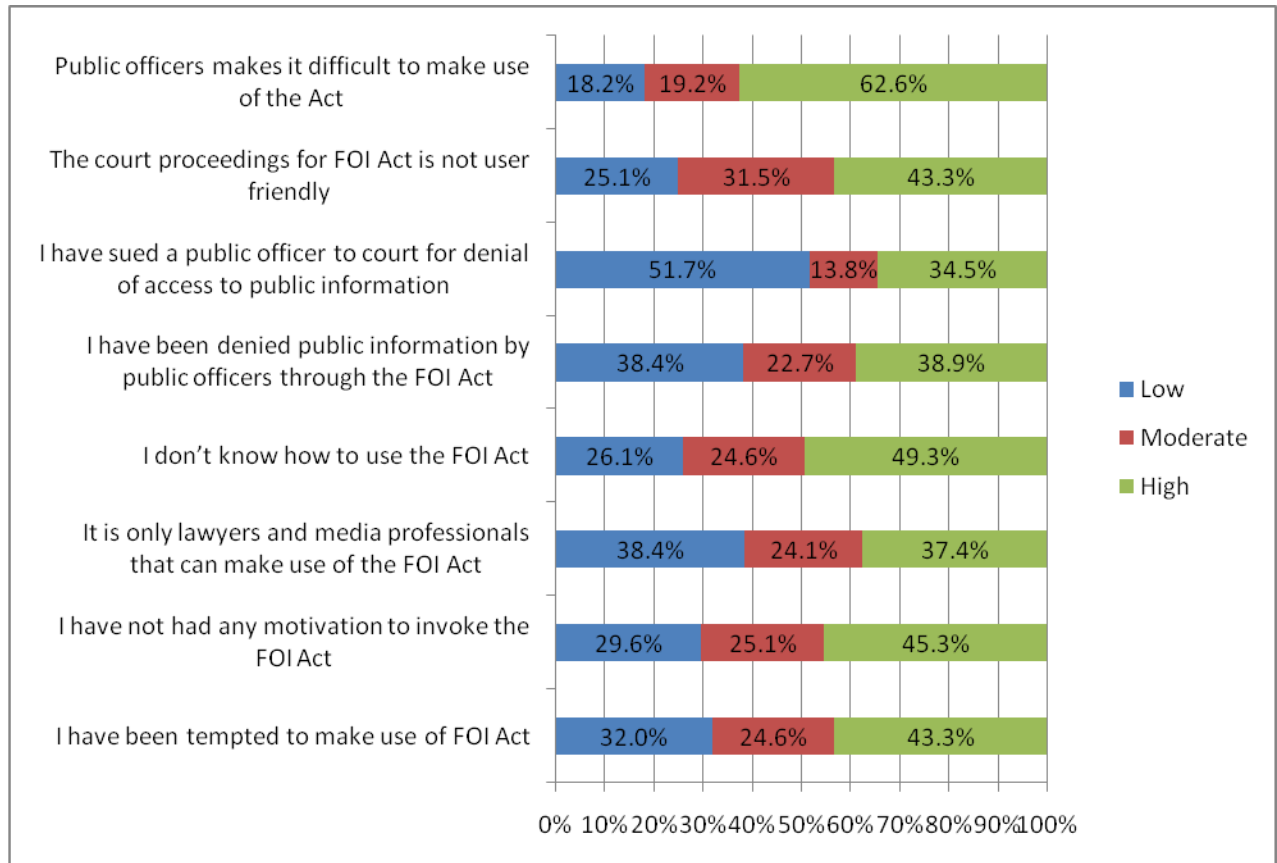


Figure 3 indicates that close to half of the respondents (43.3%) have attempted to a large extent to make use of the Act while less than half of the respondents (45.3%) to a high extent have not seen the need to utilize the FOI Act in research. Further, more than one third of the respondents to a large extent (37.4%) do not make use of the Act because they believe it is only meant for lawyers and media professionals while almost half of the respondents to a high extent (49.3%) accented to the fact that they do not know how to make use of the Act in research. In addition, about one quarter of the respondents (26.1%) make use of the Act to a low extent. Moreover, more than one third of the respondents to a high extent (38.9%) agreed that they have been denied access to public record by public officers during the course of

research. The study found further that more than half of the respondents (51.7%) have not sued a public officer before for denial of access to public information. The figure further depicts that less than half of the respondents (43.3%) to a high extent do not make use of the FOI Act in research because it is not user friendly while almost two third of the respondents to a high extent said public officers make the use of the FOI Act difficult (62.6%).

From figure 3, it can be deduced that the extent to which respondents make use of the Act in research is moderately low. The findings of Nnadi (2014:556-558) also showed that 77.7% agreed they have not put the Act to use while 78.4% who constitute majority of the respondents who have put the Act to use have been denied access to information. Also, the finding of Daka (2015) citing Dogara (2015) give credence to this finding when he lamented that the FOI Act is under utilized by the public. A lot of factors accounted for this findings. Firstly, this is because respondents have not felt the need to make use of the Act, they have not actually invoke the Act probably because they do not see the usefulness of the Act in research. Respondents' high and fair perception (37.4%, 24.1%) that the FOI Act is meant for lawyers and media professionals alone might also have accounted for their indifference in the use of the Act or it could be the fact that about two third of the respondents (62.6%) felt to a high extent that public officers are stumbling blocks to their inadequate use of the Act. This aligns with the position of Sebina (2005) who reported that the challenge of implementing the Act has affected attitude of the few that know about the Act towards utilizing the Act in research. Sebina (2005) further stated that though public officers have been ordered by the law to keep appropriate record and avoid destroying records, records are still not available. It however opposes the assumption of the libertarian theory which stipulates that **“No restriction should be placed on any legal means of getting information for publication”**.

In addition, almost half of the respondents (49.3%) to a very high extent do not know how to make use of the FOI Act while about one quarter can make use of the Act to a fair extent in

research. This finding thus suggests that training is required for postgraduate students and the general public to comprehend the Act. This further corroborates the report of Bourke et.al (2012:10, 13; Ginsberg, 2014) who opined that as the FOI Act is an important resource for researchers, certain skills of retrieving information has to be developed through training on how to use the act. It was deduced further that while there is a low usage of the FOI Act by respondents, few of them are seen to be making good use of the Act. These are probably those who have the good knowledge of the Act and a good perception of the FOI Act. The analysis further found that about one third of the respondents (38.9%) who to a high extent have been denied access to public record and information have actually invoked the Act by suing public officers. This is evident as 34.5% among those who have been denied access to a high extent indicated they have sued public officers. The finding of Larsen (2014:10) supports this data as it was observed that academic researchers are often denied access to public records.

Test of Hypotheses

Decision Rule

The pre-set level of significance for this study is 0.05. The Null hypothesis assumes that no relationship or effect exists between the variables under consideration. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis assumes that a significant relationship or effect exists between the variables under consideration. On the whole, if the P-value (that is, the significance or the probability value) exceeds the pre-set level of significance (which is 0.05), the null hypothesis will not be rejected and the alternative hypothesis will be rejected; but if the P-value is less than or equal to 0.05, this means that the null hypothesis will be rejected and the alternative hypothesis will not be rejected.

Null Hypothesis One

Knowledge of Postgraduate students on FOI Act does not significantly influence their attitude to Freedom of Information Act for research

Table 5: Regression Analysis showing influence of postgraduate's knowledge of FOI on Attitude towards FOI

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	15.222	1.601		9.509	0.000
	Knowledge of FOI	0.326	0.056	0.434	5.859	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Attitude towards FOI						
b. R Squared= 0.188						

From table 5, Postgraduate knowledge of FOI significantly influence their attitude towards FOI ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore the analysis shows a moderately positive significant influence on attitude of postgraduate students towards the FOI Act ($\beta = 0.434$); this signifies that an increase in postgraduate knowledge of FOI will lead to an increase in their attitude towards FOI. Postgraduates' knowledge of FOI can predict 18.8% of variation of influence on their attitude towards FOI. This implies that for postgraduates' knowledge of FOI to increase, they must have a positive attitude towards the Act and an increased knowledge of FOI will help to have a positive inclination towards the FOI Act. This is so because a positive attitude towards FOI will bring about the desire to know more about the FOI Act. It was thus deduced that the minimal knowledge that respondents have on the FOI Act had a significant influence on the fair perception of the Act. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Null Hypothesis Two

Knowledge of Postgraduate students on FOI Act will not have a significantly positive influence on the use of Freedom of Information Act for research

Table 6: Regression Analysis of the Influence of Postgraduate students Knowledge on Use of FOI Act in Research

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.669	2.377		6.172	0.000
	Knowledge of FOI	0.151	0.083	0.150	1.816	0.071
a. Dependent Variable: Use of FOI						
b. R Squared= 0.023						

Table 6 shows that knowledge of postgraduate students does not have a significantly positive influence on the use of FOI Act ($p=0.071$). The implication of this is that knowledge of FOI Act does not necessarily lead to the use of FOI Act. This is so because many may not have the need to invoke the Act or they do not know how to use it. This shows that despite the knowledge that postgraduate students have on the FOI Act, researchers to a large extent do not make use of the Act. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Null Hypothesis Three

Use of FOI Act for research is not significantly influenced by attitude of postgraduate students towards the relevance of FOI Act in research

Table 7: Regression Analysis of the Influence of Postgraduate students Attitude on the Use of FOI Act

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.633	2.601		5.626	.000
	Attitude towards FOI	.169	.105	0.133	1.618	0.108
a. Dependent Variable: Use of FOI						
b. R Squared =0.018						

Table 7 shows that the use of FOI Act is not significantly influenced by attitude of postgraduate students ($p>0.05$). This suggests that attitude of postgraduate students does not predict their use of the FOI Act for research purposes. This shows that there is significant positive attitude towards FOI Act and the reason it will not lead to use. The implication is therefore that postgraduate students' perception and attitude towards the FOI Act will not determine their use of the Act. That is, attitude has no place in respondents' decision to make use of the Act. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Null Hypothesis Four

Knowledge of FOI Act and attitude towards FOI will not have a significant influence on the use of FOI Act by postgraduate students for research

Table 8: Regression Analysis Depicting Knowledge of FOI Act and Attitude towards

FOI on the Use of the Act by Postgraduate students

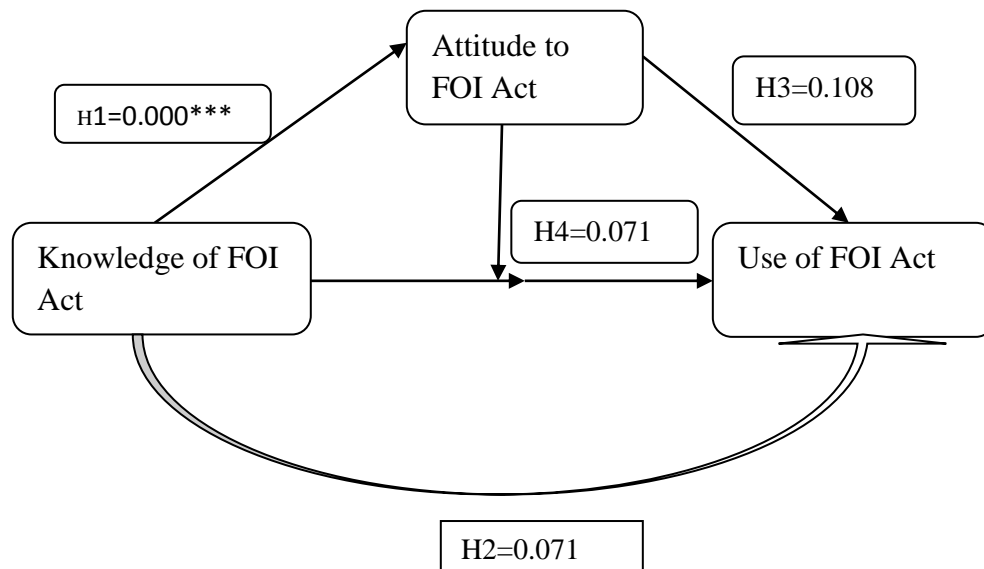
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	12.031	3.008		4.000	0.000
	Knowledge of FOI	0.094	0.092	0.094	1.025	0.307
	Attitude towards FOI	0.176	0.120	0.134	1.465	0.145
a. Dependent Variable: Use of FOI b. R Squared= 0.037 c. ANOVA=0.071						

From table 8, the model shows that both knowledge of FOI Act and Attitude towards FOI Act do not jointly have a significant influence on the use of the Act by postgraduate students. Knowledge of FOI and attitude towards FOI do not individually have a significant influence on use of FOI ($p > 0.05$). The null hypothesis was therefore accepted

This raises the question of why there is a disconnection of knowledge and Attitude towards the FOI Act because it would have been expected that the informed knowledge of the FOI Act and attitude will jointly influence their use of the Act. What are the endogenous and exogenous factors leading to the disconnection between knowledge, attitude and use? Could there be a contamination in their knowledge such as what the Act is actually about or they do not have the right knowledge of the FOI Act? This thus serves as a recommendation for

further study to find out what are the internal factors that can lead to a continuum in the knowledge, attitude and use of the FOI Act.

Resultant Model



Note: Significant at 0.05 (***)

Ojomo, Atakiti and Alao (2015) Conceptual Model of Postgraduate Students' Knowledge, Attitude and Use of FOI Act

7.2 Summary of Findings

1. The study showed that about one quarter of the respondents are not aware of the FOI Act.
2. From research question one, the data showed that postgraduate students' knowledge of the FOI Act is minimal. Though they know about the Act, there is however lack of in-depth knowledge on the content of the Act.
3. The study further found that while about two third of the respondents have a fairly good perception of the relevance of the Act to researchers, there is still a poor disposition towards the implementation process of the Act and how they can utilize the Act in research.

4. It was also deduced from the study that the extent to which respondents make use of the Act for research purposes is moderately low while the few who make use of the Act are still denied access to public record and information.

Summary of Hypotheses

1. The minimal knowledge that respondents have on the FOI Act had a significant influence on their attitude towards the Act as useful in research. Hence, null hypothesis one was accepted
2. The null hypothesis two: *Knowledge of Postgraduate students will not have a positive influence on the use of Freedom of Information Act for research* was rejected. This is because despite the knowledge that postgraduate students have on FOI, such knowledge did not have a positive influence on their use of the Act for research
3. The null hypothesis three: *Use of FOI Act is not significantly influenced by attitude of postgraduate students towards the FOI Act in research* was also accepted as the attitude of respondents did not predict their use of the Act.
4. Null hypothesis four: *Knowledge of FOI and attitude towards FOI will not have a significant influence on the use of FOI Act by postgraduate students* was accepted as knowledge of FOI Act and attitude towards the FOI Act did not jointly and individually influence respondents' use of the FOI Act for research.

8. Conclusion

There is a general perception by the public that the FOI Act is meant for media practitioners and a selected few. However, the law grants individuals the right to access public record and for public officers to make such record or information available to whomever has made the request as far as the information or record is not classified under exemptions and where there are exemptions; there must be appropriate justification and reasons for denial. It was in this light that this study sought to investigate Postgraduate Students' Knowledge, Attitude and

Use of Freedom of Information Act (FOI) in Research. That is, since the law was enacted in May 2011, what has been the level of knowledge of postgraduate students to this Act, their Attitude and Use of the Act? In view of the findings, the study concludes that while knowledge of FOI Act by postgraduate students can actually predict their attitude towards the FOI Act, there is still a disconnection in the knowledge, attitude and use of FOI by postgraduate students.

The FOI Act is a useful tool of accessing information and enhances good quality research. Hence, appropriate measures should be taken in implementing the Act effectively such as record keeping, appointment of a Public Information Commissioner to ensure the full implementation of the Act.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- 1) The National Orientation Agency (NOA) in conjunction with the media should begin an awareness campaign on the existence of the FOI Act and its relevance in academic research. Research is needed to facilitate the development of a nation and access to information will enrich research findings upon which decisions will be made for sustainable development. It is therefore imperative for an awareness campaign to be organized to sensitize the general public.
- 2) The media as part of their social responsibility to the public should also develop media content that will deal in educating the public on the content of the media for better understanding and use of the Act. This will help to eradicate elements of contamination that the public might have about the FOI Act
- 3) Trainings- more workshops and seminars should equally be organized for the general public and public officers for proper utilization and implementation of the Act and

public institutional websites should also be functional and up to date on information that will be of interest to the general public

- 4) The legal proceedings for the FOI Act can also be reviewed. The Magistrate court should be given a legal right to attend to FOI Act cases as against only the High Courts in the Federal capital and the states who have the legal jurisdiction to preside on FOI cases.
- 5) The Act should also be inculcated into the tertiary institutions curriculum. Postgraduate schools should make it a policy to organize workshops to enable them have in-depth understanding of the Act
- 6) The violation of the Act should amount to criminal offence. The fine of N5000 as stipulated in the Act is not sufficient enough to enforce implementation of the Act. There should be stringent stipulated measures that will ensure compliancy on the part of public officers such as relief of duty when found negligent.

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