

Record Keeping in Universities: Associated Problems and Management Options in South West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study examined the associated problems and management options of record keeping among universities in the South West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. A total of 2,471 staff (made up of 684 academic and 1,787 non-academic staff representing 20% of the population of each group) was sampled for the study. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data which were subsequently analyzed by the use of mean scores and Z-test statistics to give answers to two research questions and two hypotheses. Findings revealed that negative attitude of staff, improper security of records, inadequate computer terminals, ineffective means of retrieving records, lack of record keeping policy, inadequate resources as well as lack of record retention and disposition schedule among others were identified as the associated problems. On the other hand, the management suggested options pointed at the need for policy formulation/enlightenment for all staff, training needs of staff, full computerization of all records and provision for university records manual. Arising from the above findings, the following recommendations were made: only professionally trained staff in records management be employed over time and/or existing staff be sent for necessary training through in-service programmes. Induction programmes for new staff and refresher courses for old staff were also recommended. Full computerization of all records and provision of university filing manual are encouraged.

INTRODUCTION

Record keeping occupies a strategic position in the efficient and effective management of the university system. In fact, it is central in the administration of institutions of learning because it documents the planning and implementation of appropriate course of services allowing proper monitoring of work. In the conventional paper based organizations such as the universities, paper continues to be viewed as the material for records in administrative documentations (Igweku 2008). The approach is for records created in the course of day-to-day business of the universities to be stored and kept in hard copies as evidence of an action, decision or process. However, the process of record keeping provides a framework for keeping, maintaining and providing for the disposition of records and what is contained in them. They are therefore intended to benefit all members of staff by facilitating continuity and evaluation of services and preserving privacy. This framework is provided for by guidelines designed to educate people on decisions regarding professional record keeping. For instances, American Psychological Association (APA 2007) contains the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" generally required for the maintenance

of appropriate records of psychological services. In Nigeria, just as in America, the nature and extent of the record will vary depending upon the purpose, setting and context of the services. However, whatever the record maybe, it is important that the staff get familiar with the legal and ethical requirements for record keeping in their specific professional contexts and jurisdiction. Generally, record keeping must be guided by some level of confidentiality, proper maintenance, security, preservation of the content and context, etc (Uwaifo 2004; Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu 2007). Unfortunately, the Nigeria situation in the business of record keeping and management especially in the university system has not been too successful because of lack of management components (Omeyi 1997). Writing in support of the above finding, Ibiam (2004) noted that many years of neglect had done great damage to the education sector and record keeping is not an exemption. In his view, Iguodala (1998) believes that personnel (secretaries and filing clerks) who maintain the registry systems with filing cabinets containing the paper evidence of university business are inadequate and in fact ignorant of their responsibilities. This calls to question the reliability and authenticity of records kept in such a system. Giving credence to this, Afolabi (1999) asserted that record management practice in

Nigeria has a number of problems which may include insufficient skilled and experienced record management personnel and possibly, low priority of record management in the scheme of things. Awe (2000) viewed the problems in record keeping from the perspective of these bodies-governments, university management, the staff and the students. He accused these bodies of being responsible for unavailable/inaccurate/incomplete and dishonest records. And according to (Utulu 2001), these adversely affect planning for and provision of structures and facilities, adequate funding, proper formulation and review of policies.

Other associated problems of recording, keeping identified generally in the educational system in Nigeria include lack of record manual and filing guidelines which lead to loss of vital information (Egwunyenga 2005) and inadequate computer terminals (Oketunji 2002). Others are difficulty in record retrieval and lack of appreciation by management and staff of the need for well-controlled records (Egunleti 2001). The result of the foregoing is high profile failures in accountability. The management of these problems would mean the development of efficient and effective options within and between universities, this indeed requires urgent attention. Ogundede (2001) believes there is serious training need for staff. Full introduction and sustenance of computer and internet services as well as records management integration (Baje 1998; Fadokun 2004). Adequate manual classification, security, storage facilities and funds are generally recommended for good record keeping (Tower 2004). It is hoped that if these options are adopted in the university system, perhaps most if not all the problems associated with record keeping would have been addressed.

Problem Statement

Perhaps it would not be an overstatement to say that record keeping problems are common to the different levels of the education sector. It is however becoming clearer that it is more pronounced in the university system because accurate, reliable and trustworthy records that fulfill evidential requirements are being created but not properly managed. This therefore becomes an issue of great concern to government, parents, students, individuals and organizations. In the past, frantic efforts to

improve the situation in many universities through the introduction of computers and internet services as well as development of database management system do not seem to have helped the situation much because the record management system is still conventionally paper-based and manual in operation. Many management staff complains of funds, and material resources. The reality reveals gross inadequacy of qualified personnel, facilities, students' explosion and space problem. This study is therefore a response to the challenge by striving to empirically identify these problems and well defined management options that could improve record keeping processes in universities especially in the study area.

Research Questions

Answers to the following questions were provided in this study.

1. What problems are associated with record keeping in universities?
2. What management option can be employed to improve record keeping processes in universities?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses below were tested in this study.

1. Views of academic staff do not significantly differ from those of non-academic staff on problems associated with record keeping in universities.
2. Views of academic staff do not significantly differ from those of non-academic staff on management options to improve record keeping processes in universities.

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The study population comprised all academic and non-academic staff of federal and state owned universities in the South West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria ie 3,418 academic and 8,937 non-academic staff given a total population of 12,355. From the five federal and five state universities, four universities (two federal and two states) were used for the study and actual sample was 2,471 staff (684 academic and 1,787 non academic) selected through the use of stratified random sampling technique. Structured

questionnaire with scoring order of Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 was used to collect data from the subjects. These were analyzed using mean scores to find answers to the research question and z-test to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Results have been presented in line with the research questions and the hypotheses.

Research Question One

What problems are associated with record keeping in universities?

Table 1 presents the responses of academic and non-academic staff with regard to the associated problems of recording keeping in their various institutions. The table shows that the overall means of the entire 14 items were greater than the agreement level of 2.50. The items considered very high in the respondents' level of acceptance were those with mean rating between 3.18 and 3.02 which included negative attitude in the system (3.18) not well-implemented management system (3.11) improper security for records (3.06) and conventional use of paper for official purposes (3.02). Other problems which were accepted were lack of professionally trained managers, inadequate computer terminals, manual operation, inadequate resources,

ineffective means of retrieving records lack of records retention and disposition schedule, lack of policy, lack of filing manual and acute space problem had mean rating between 2.95 and 2.50. This indicates that respondents did not reject any of the listed record keeping problems. In other words, record keeping problems are generally present in all universities sampled for the study.

Research Question Two

What management options can be employed to improve record keeping processes in universities?

Table 2 shows a summary of the responses on the management options to improve record keeping process in Nigeria universities. The overall means for the 10 items were greater than the acceptance level of 2.50. This implies that the respondents accepted the 10 options. Those options with overall mean scores of between 3.07 and 3.56 considered very high acceptance by the respondents. These include periodical check to ensure proper management (3.56), need for professional training of staff (3.49), Confidentiality (3.48) policy enlightenment (3.44), computerization of all records (3.44), induction for new staff (3.40), record retention manual (3.30), full implementation of internet services (3.26) and adequate provision of fund (3.22). The 10th item and the last is compliance with international standards (2.65) was also considered as an added option.

Table 1: Mean rating of problems associated with record keeping in universities in the South West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria (N = 2,471)

S. No.	Record keeping	SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
1	Negative attitude in the system e.g laziness, mediocrity etc.	914	1142	351	64	3.18	+
2	Record management system not well implemented	882	1122	327	140	3.11	+
3	Improper security for records	691	1301	423	56	3.06	+
4	Conventional use of paper for official purposes	671	1277	419	104	3.02	+
5	Lack of professionally trained record managers	778	1038	403	252	2.95	+
6	Inadequate computer terminals	707	1150	411	203	2.95	+
7	Involvement of manual operations	595	1178	595	103	2.92	+
8	Inadequate resources	659	1054	627	131	2.91	+
9	Ineffective means of retrieving records	589	1261	423	200	2.90	+
10	Lack of records retention and disposition schedule	503	1257	575	136	2.86	+
11	Lack of policy	555	1026	571	319	2.74	+
12	Lack of filing procedure manual	403	082	854	132	2.71	+
13	Acute space problem	423	914	735	399	2.55	+
14	Transfer and retirements of officers	347	810	1046	268	2.50	+

Source: Field Survey

+ = Accepted; - = Rejected

Table 2: Mean rating of management options to be employed to improve record keeping process in universities.

S. No.	Record keeping	SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
1	Periodical check to ensure proper management	1437	990	32	12	3.56	+
2	Need for professional training of staff	1309	1186	52	24	3.49	+
3	Maintenance of confidentiality	1357	954	160	-	3.48	+
4	Policy enlightenment were available	1226	1130	88	27	3.44	+
5	Computerization of all universities' records	1237	1086	140	08	3.44	+
6	Induction/orientation for new staff	1054	1373	24	20	3.40	+
7	Record retention policy/record manual are encouraged	902	1429	128	12	3.30	+
8	Full implementation of internet services	942	1277	212	40	3.26	+
9	Adequate provision of funds	782	1453	224	12	3.22	+
10	Compliance with international standards	503	814	950	204	2.65	+

Source: Field Survey

+ = Accepted; - = Rejected

Hypothesis I

Views of academic staff do not significantly differ from those of non-academic staff on the problems associated with record keeping in universities.

Table 3 shows the result of a test of difference of the views of academic and non-academic staff on the associated problems of record keeping in universities. The decision is that their views are not significantly different as the calculated z value is 0.13 which is less than 1.96, the critical value of Z. The hypothesis of no difference in their views is hereby upheld.

Hypothesis 2

Views of academic staff do not significantly differ from those of non-academic staff on management options to improve record keeping processes in universities.

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in the views of academic and non-academic staff with regards to management

options to improve record keeping in universities. This is because the calculate Z value of 0.20 is less than the critical Z-value of 1.96. Arising from the above result, the hypothesis is therefore upheld.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study point to the fact that there are a number of problems associated with record keeping in the universities ranging from negative attitude of staff, badly implemented record management system, insecurity of records, use of paper convention, lack of training, manual operation, inadequate computer terminal and resources to ineffective retrieving, retention and disposition schedule, as well as lack of policy and filing procedure manual. These agree with the views of Omeyi (1977), Daya (1996), Iguodala (1998), Egwunyenga (2002), and Iwhiwhu (2005) who have in their various studies pointed out at different times that records kept by Nigerian universities, their acquisition policy, methods of preserving and disseminating them are faulty. This

Table 3: Summary of Z-Test analysis showing the views of academic and non-academic staff on associated problems of record keeping in universities.

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	Z Cal	Z critical	Level of sign	Decision
Academic Staff	684	3.06	251.81	0.13	1.96	0.05	Not Significant
Non Academic Staff	1,787	3.08	411.75				

Table 4: Summary of Z-test analysis showing the views of academic and non-academic staff on management options to improve record keeping processes in universities.

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	Z Cal	Z critical	Level of sign	Decision
Academic Staff	684	3.25	337.71	0.20	1.96	0.05	Not Significant
Non Academic Staff	1,787	3.27	553.14				

finding could explain why it is very difficult to gather information from many universities archives especially students' records such as transcripts, sometimes examinations scores which may be declared missing and many other general administrative documents. Even when they are available, these problems may create doubt as to the authenticity and accuracy of such records. The ultimate consequence is embarrassment to such institution.

On management options, the study came up with some useful measures to include periodical checking of records, professional training, and full computerization of the system, policy enlightenment, provision of records manual, introduction of internet services, and adequate provision of funds, security and storage facilities. These confirm the approaches put forward by Ogundele (2001) who believes that employee training and staff development are continuous life processes and are imperative because they add quality to management processes. Furthermore, the findings equally agree with Baje (1998), Fadokun (2004) and Tower (2004) who share the idea of adequate security, storage facilities and funds as necessities for good record keeping. The researcher believes that if these options are well-adopted, the problems so far identified will gradually become a thing of the past.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have led the researcher to conclude that there exist acute record keeping problems in universities in the South West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria because there are evident components and these could be curbed effectively by the adoption of the right management options as have been made available by the findings of the study.

RECOMMENDATION

It is hereby recommended that professionally trained staff be employed over time and existing staff be sent for necessary training through in-service training programmes. In addition, induction programmes for fresh staff, full computerization of universities records and provision of universities' filing manual are encouraged.

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