Assessment of Records Management Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada, Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

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Abstract

This study investigated records management practices in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Survey design was adopted and data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire administered on the principals of public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages were used for data analysis. A total of thirty-five (35) secondary schools were surveyed across the Area Council and all responded. Findings of the study revealed that all the secondary schools studied generated and received various types of records which included academic, administrative, financial records, etc; majority (37.1%) of the schools organized their records either by subject matter or serially; majority (37.1%) of the secondary schools used storage facilities like cupboards, cabinets and drawers to preserve their records; records like admission register, financial records, log book, store ledger, counterfoils of certificates, staff personal files, etc were kept on closed access by the principals; it was also discovered that majority (85.7%) of the principals used shredding or incineration to dispose of their unwanted records; challenges such as inadequate storage facilities, absence of record keeping policy, improper security of records and lack of support by management and staff of the need for well-controlled records were discovered militating against the effective records management in the secondary schools studied. Based on the findings, recommendations such as establishment of records rooms or centres, provision of adequate and good records storage facilities and provision of records retention/disposition schedule by the Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja among others were suggested.

Keywords: Records Management, Public Secondary Schools, Record Keeping and Storage Facilities.

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Introduction

Education is undoubtedly the greatest instrument which man has devised for his own progress. The role of education in the march towards development for any nation cannot be overemphasized. According to Ochoyi and Danladi (2008), education is generally concerned with the transmission of worthwhile values such as skills, knowledge and planned activities that can develop learner's potentials for national development. Secondary schools are institutions of learning established to provide secondary education after the basic formal education to citizens of a country. A number of components come together to make up the institutions- the physical structure, the students, staff and the curriculum. Certainly the activities of these components must warrant the creation and receipt of records both within and outside the institutions respectively.

Records as defined by Emerson (1989) are those documents in whatever medium received or created by an organization in the course of its business and retained by that organization as evidence of its activities or because of information contained. Records constitute one of the sources of information to the management of educational institutions. Ricks, Swafford and Gow (1992) asserted that records are recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristic, made or received by an organization and used in the operation of the organization. Afolabi (1991) posited that school records are books and files containing essential information on students, school personnel, facilities and programmes. According to Durosaro (2010), school records are being created in the course of day-to-day business of the school to be stored and kept in hard copies as evidence of actions, decisions and processes.

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (2009) defined records management as "the management of information resources in a manner that makes information easily accessible, securely protected, stored and disposed of when no longer required for administrative purpose". *ISO (2001)* defines records management as "the efficient and systematics control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposal of records including the capturing and maintaining evidence of information about business activities and transactions in form of records". The opinion of Karler (1987) is that records

and information management is the scientific and systematic control of receded information, the control of which is over its creation, maintenance, utilization, storage, retrieval and disposition.

Records preservation is essential to good records management. According to Marrelli (1996), preservation of records is the passive protection of record materials in which no physical or chemical treatment to the item occurs. From another perspective, preservation may be viewed as the totality of processes and operations involved in the protection of records against damage or deterioration. Oyedokun (2009) has put it in the right perspective that effective records and information management is a key enabler in achieving business success, as access to records and other documents containing strategic information is the basis of sound decision-making. Secondary school records can be highly prone to theft, fire, mutilation and other intentional acts of vandalism. The safety of records should therefore be of importance to the school principals.

Records are invaluable to secondary school administration. Thus, in order to take advantage of past-experiences, accurate records and good record keeping are the bedrock of planning for the future in the secondary school system. Justifying this assertion, Popoola (2000) stated that information and records management are the bedrock of business activity. If there is no information, the management is crippled in its planning and decision-making processes. It is central in the administration of institutions of learning because it documents the planning and implementation of appropriate course of services. The activities of secondary school management in the areas of generating large volumes of records and preserving them are seen as of paramount significance and worth studying because of their perceived contribution to records management for decision-making among the principals in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja.

Gwagwalada Area Council is one of the six Area Councils in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Put together, there are 35 public secondary schools there. The secondary schools in the Area Council are more populated than most schools in other Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Statement of the Problem

Records management is the supervision and administration of digital or paper records, regardless of format. It is a set of activities required for systematically controlling the creation, distribution, use, maintenance and disposition of recorded information maintained as evidence of business activities and transactions. Records management in whatever format, according to Eluhiwhu (2005) is regarded as one of the pillars of good public management because activities of any organization are based on access to information contained in records. Coetzer and Lerox (2012) remarked that records management is the process by which physical or electronic records are managed whether internally or externally generated from their inception, receipt, storage all the way through to their disposal.

The type of educational institution and its activities determines the types of records it generates and receives from other sources (Gama, 2010). Secondary schools by the nature of their functions generate a lot of records; some of which are academic, administration and financial records. Some of these records have less value that may warrant their being disposed of immediately after use while some may warrant preservation for a period of time depending on their value while others have to be preserved permanently. Depending on the value of records created or received, secondary school administrators to some extent determine those to be preserved or disposed of as the case may be especially in the absence of a policy that guides their appraisal, retention and disposal. Research has revealed that even in institution of higher learning, records management (creation, organization, preservation, accessibility, retention and disposition) seem to be rather difficult.

From the researcher's preliminary investigation in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja, there appeared to be delay in retrieving records and in some occasions information regarding a transaction was duplicated because previous records could not be readily substantiated possibly because of loss or misplacement of records resulting from improper storage as some were kept on the top of cabinets and others dropped on the floor. The researcher, also observed that in the absence of records and its management, public secondary schools in Nigeria would likely be incapacitated in their

decision-making process. It is against this background that the study is designed to assess how records are managed in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Research Objectives

The study was carried out to:

1. Find out the types of records generated or received by public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council (GAC) Abuja;
2. Identify various methods used in arranging records for accessibility;
3. Find out the strategies employed in preserving records;
4. Identify the procedures used in retaining records in secondary schools studied,
5. Find out the various strategies used in disposing of the unwanted records, and
6. Identify the challenges of effective records management in the schools covered.

Methodology

Survey research was employed. As Babbie (1986) put it, survey research is used for descriptive, exploratory and explanatory purposes. Bhattacherjee (2012) also asserted that survey research involves the use of self-designed questionnaire or interview to systematically collect data on people's preferences, thinking and behaviour. The survey method was adjusted suitable for this study to enable the researcher cover the targeted public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. Since the study was concerned with assessment of records management in public secondary schools, this method was appropriate.

The population of the study was 35 public secondary schools located in Gwagwalada Area Council. All the schools were covered in the study. Self-developed questionnaire was the major instrument used in collecting data from the secondary school principals. The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements designed to elicit relevant data from the respondents. Face validity of the questionnaire was used to determine its quality. It was carried out by giving the

draft copies to experts (senior colleagues) who had conducted extensive research in records management practices to review and their comments were taken into account in designing the final questionnaire. Reliability co-efficient of the questionnaire was carried out through a split-half test conducted at the Government Day Secondary School, Gwagwalada. The test was split into two sub-tests. The scores of the two tests were obtained placing all odd numbered items in one sub-test and all even numbered items in another sub-test. The scores of the two tests were then completed and two sets of scores were correlated and reliability co-efficient of 0.86 was obtained which rendered the instrument reliable for this study.

Copies of the questionnaire were administered with the help of research assistants. In addition follow up visits to the schools studied were made to ascertain some of their claims on the questionnaire. The exercise gave an opportunity for the researcher to see some of their records, preservation facilities and how records were organized. The Education Inspectorate Department of the Gwagwalada Area Council was equally visited to ascertain the existence of any policy guiding records management in secondary schools. Descriptive statistical analysis was used in analyzing data generated.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

A total of 35 copies of questionnaire were administered to principals in public secondary schools in the Area Council. All the copies were retrieved and found usable. The 100 percent response rate was not unconnected to the fact that the researcher enjoyed maximum cooperation from the principals of the schools studied.

Types of Records Generated or Received by Public Secondary Schools

List of various types of records that could be generated or received by secondary schools was provided to principals to indicate those they generate or received in their schools.

Table I Types of Records Generated or Received

Records Generated or Received	Generated in the school	Received from other places
Admission Register	✓	x
Attendance Register	✓	x
School Cash Register	✓	x
School Time Table	✓	x
Log Book	✓	x
Visitor's Book	✓	x
Syllabi	✓	x
Scheme of Work	✓	x
Continuous assessment records of students	✓	x
Teachers' Records of Work	✓	x
Past Question Papers	✓	x
Students' academic reports	✓	x
Staff Records	✓	x
Examination Time Table	✓	x
Minutes of PTA Meetings	✓	x
Minutes of Staff Meetings	✓	x
Complaints Received from Parents	✓	x
Donation Received	✓	x
Circulars	✓	x
Copy of Education Policy	✓	x
Staff Attendance Register	✓	x
Annual Reports	✓	x
Inspection Report Record	✓	x
ANNUAL REPORT	✓	x
Handover File	✓	x
Records of Construction and Renovation	✓	x
Records of Excursion/Field Trips	✓	x

Records Generated or Received	Generated in the school	Received from other places
Pictures and Videos of Occasions Organized by the School	✓	x
Guidance and Counselling File	✓	x
School Diary	✓	x
Posting and Transfer of Teachers' file	✓	x
Transfer of Students File	✓	x
Old students Association File	✓	x
Library File	✓	x
Lesson Note	✓	x
Financial Records of Development Levies Collected	✓	x
Teaching practice file	✓	x
Duty Master and Duty Prefect Report Book	✓	x
Correspondence File	✓	x
Health Related Records	✓	x
Games/Sports Report Records	✓	x
Staff Movement Book	✓	x

✓ = Applicable   x = not applicable

Table 1 showed the records that were either generated or received by all the secondary schools. All the schools indicated generating or receiving such records. The common ones maintained by virtually all the schools included admission register, attendance register, log book, teachers' scheme of work, minutes of staff meetings, students academic reports, cash account book and minutes of Parent-Teacher Association. The study further revealed that education policy, circulars and syllabi were only records or documents received from outside (Education Directorate of the Federal Capital Territory). Examination question papers and examination time-tables were generated as well as received from outside. This is because examinations are organized both internally and externally. The study revealed that majority of the public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja did not maintain properly these records listed. Some of these records are vital for the general administration of schools. Akporhonor (2011) asserted that records serve as important source of information that enable individuals and organizations to carry out their legal obligations. Maintenance of these records will to a great extent facilitate decision making as well as enhance the smooth general administration of the school system.

Organization of School Records

School records occupy strategic position in the effective and efficient organization and administration of the school. In order to establish how records generated or received were organized in the schools, options were provided for the principals to indicate the types of methods adopted in arranging records. Table 2 presented their responses.

Table 2: Methods of Organizing Records

Methods of Organizing Records	Frequency	Percentage %
Alphabetical arrangement	8	22.9
By subject matter	13	37.1
Chronological arrangement	4	11.4
Serialization	9	25.7
Randomly	1	2.9
Total	**35**	**100**

The organization of records is usually considered from the viewpoint of information systems (libraries, archives or records centres) whose aim is to acquire, organize and store records to facilitate the retrieval of specific records when needed (Tiamiyu, 2000). Different methods are used in organizing records depending on many factors such as the policy statement, technical skills of the managers, etc. The study revealed that public secondary schools used one method or the other. Majority (37.1%) of the secondary schools studied organized their records by subject matter, arrangement by serial order closely followed with 25.7%. The arrangement of records by subject matter does not require much technical skill on the part of the records officer. Probably that explains why most of the secondary schools employed the method. Random organization of records was found in one school (2.9%). This situation might have occurred probably because of non-realization of the importance of logical arrangement of records for easy accessibility. Personal observation of the records in the schools by the researcher indicated that many of them were locked up in cupboards or cabinets while others were in book forms such as visitor's book, log book, attendance register, scheme of work, etc. It was also found that tool like index register that could be used to facilitate easy retrieval of records was not maintained by many of the secondary schools.

Method of Preserving Records

The study found out various strategies the schools employed in preserving their records for posterity especially vital records that are to be kept permanently. Table 3 presented responses from the secondary schools principals.

Table 3: Methods of Preserving Records

Preservation Method	Frequency	Percentage %
Storing records in Cupboards, Cabinets, Drawers, etc.	13	37.1
Lamination	3	8.6
Dedicating a special room (record store)	1	2.9
Dusting of records regularly	2	5.7
Open access to records by a few staff to avoid mutilation	10	28.6
Computerization/Digitalization of records	5	14.2
Total	**35**	**100**

Records preservation is essential to good records management. Preservation can be viewed as the totality of processes and operations involved in the protection of records against damage and deterioration. Records are preserved using different methods depending on the skills and initiatives of the records officer/manager. Table 3 presented the secondary school principals' responses on the methods used in preserving their records. It was observed that some of the schools employed multiple methods. The idea is a welcome development because the more methods one applies the more likelihood the records would be preserved effectively. The table gave picture of a lot of the schools storing records in cupboards, cabinets, drawers, etc. This discovery was not surprising because storage facilities such as cupboards, and drawers are commonly found in every school. It was also observed that a lot of secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council have computers mostly dedicated for training purpose, only 5 were found using such facilities as part of the preservation methods of their records. It may be surprising that fumigation was not popular among the schools because it requires some financial commitments on the part of the principals. Insufficient office accommodation might be the reason for not dedicating a special room for records as it was only one school that indicated such facility.

As part of the strategies employed in preserving the records as well as for confidentiality, the following records were found to be on close access by majority of the schools studied- cash book, admission register, log book, counterfoils of certificates, punishment book, store ledger, staff movement book, donation book, personal files of teachers, annual report and syllabi. Although records are for use, access to some of them should be restricted only with permission. This would enable the Principals track the records as to who uses what, when and for what purpose. Some of these records like counterfoils of school certificates, store ledgers and cash books if tampered with may put the school as well as the principal in trouble and some are vital records that cannot be replaced when lost. However, records such as annual reports, syllabi should be on open access as teachers are supposed to be conversant with the trends of the subjects they teach as well as the developments of their schools in terms of their successes and challenges and the future plans as may be contained in the annual reports.

Policy/Procedure on Retention of Records

Respondents were requested to indicate if their schools had policies or procedures on retention of school records. Table 4 presented their responses policy.

Table 4: Policy/Procedure on Retention and Disposal of Records in the Schools

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Period for which record should be regarded as active	20	57.1
Period record is retained	10	28.6
Mode of retention of records	15	42.9
Types of records to retain	6	17.1

Table 4 apparently showed that 20(57.1%) of the respondents claimed that they had retention policy on the periods records were active; 10(28.6%) agreed that the policy was on period records was retained 15(42.9%) were of the opinion that the policy covered mode of retention of records and 6(17.1%) agreed that the policy was on the types of records to retain.

Method of Records Disposal

In order to verify how records were disposed of or destroyed, a number of methods were listed in the questionnaire for the respondents (principals) to tick as applied to them. Their responses are indicated on table 5.

Table 5: Methods of Records Disposition

Method of Disposition	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Incinerating (Burning	18	51.4
Shredding	6	17.1
Dumping in the dust bin	8	22.9
Paper pulverizing	3	8.6
Total	**35**	**100**

Table 5 revealed that the most common way employed by the schools studied was incineration (51.4%). When records are burnt, they are destroyed forever unless their duplicates exist. Records to be burnt therefore must be carefully appraised to actually adjudge them as unwanted. 8 (22.9%) of the schools surveyed disposed of records by dumping them in dustbin. This act could be

dangerous they may attract the attention of some students who may take them home to sell to those who use papers to rap some items (fried yams, roasted meat, etc) or use item for other purposes that could expose them to the general public. Other methods of records disposal indicated were shredding (17.1%) and paper pulverizing (8.6%).

Challenges of Records Management in the Schools

The study was interested in finding out the challenges of records management as indicated by respondents. Tables 6 presented their responses

Table 6: Challenges of Records Management in the Schools   N=35

Records management challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of record keeping policy	21	60
Lack of storage facilities	18	51.4
Inadequate computer terminals	22.	62.9
Improper security of records	17	48.6
Lack of support by management and staff of the need for well-controlled records	23	65.7
Difficulty in records retrieval	15	42.9
Lack of filing guidelines	16	45.7

Table 6 revealed that majority of the respondents indicated that the major challenges of records management in their schools were lack of support by the management and staff on the need for well controlled records (65.7%); inadequate computer terminals (62.7%); lack of record keeping policy (60%) and lack of storage facilities (51.4%). Others were improper security of records (48.6%); lack of filing guidelines (45.7%) and difficulty in records retrieval (42.9%).

Some of these problems, especially lack of records keeping policy, lack of storage facilities, inadequate computer terminals and lack of support by management and staff on the need for well –controlled records were identified by other scholars such as Owo (2014) and Alabi (2017) as factors militating against effective records management in secondary schools.

Solutions to the Identified Challenges

Respondents were required to suggest solution to the identified challenges of records management in their schools. Their responses were presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Proffered Solution to the Identified Challenges		N=35
Solutions to identified challenges	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
In-service training and retraining (conferences, seminars and workshops)	23	65.7
Provision of Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities	24	68.6
Provision of storage facilities	22	62.9
Recruitment of records officers	20	57.1

Table 7 revealed that majority of the respondents suggested that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities should be provided (68.6%); in-service training and retraining through seminars and workshops should be organized (65.7%); provision of storage facilities (62.9%) and recruitment of records officers in the schools (57.1%).

Conclusion

Records are the corporate memory of the organization that owns them. To make appropriate decisions, secondary school principals must have reliable, complete, sufficient, efficient, accurate and timely information. Decisions are as good as the information on which they are based. Most of the information necessary in decision making are derived from records.

The researcher observed the following issues. Firstly, public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja create and receive records on daily basis resulting in a lot of records that need to be filed, appraised, preserved and probably put in the archives accordingly.

Secondly, the secondary schools applied different methods in organizing their records. Those mostly used were subject based and alphabetical arrangements. The preservative strategies applied to keep records were the use of cupboards, cabinets, drawers, and lockers. None of the schools, however, had records room

where semi-active records that are not used regularly are stored. The storage facilities and equipment were still inadequate as there were cases of records dumped on the floor.

Thirdly, some secondary schools applied restricted access to some vital records such as financial records personnel files and school certificates. Period of which records should be regarded as active and shredding or incineration were mainly used for retention and disposal of records. There was no written records keeping policy that could guide the practice. Challenges such as lack of written record keeping policy, lack of storage facilities, inadequate computer terminals and lack of support by management and staff on the need for well-controlled records affected effective records management in the secondary schools.

Research Implications

The results of this study revealed some implications for putting in place effective records management practices in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, and by extension Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. One basic implication is that, from the results of the data obtained from the respondents, public secondary schools required well-controlled records for decision making. Unfortunately, such records were not generally available in the schools.

The point to note is that a secondary school system that is desirable in terms of conducting its business in an orderly, efficient and accountable manner; delivers services consistently and equitably, needs a successful records management that include a clear mandate and policies communicated and explained to all concerned. It also needs clear definition of responsibilities and central control over scheduling/disposal function to ensure that information is retained as long as needed.

The results of the study also revealed that there was no serious effort on the part of organs of the secondary school scheme in the Area Council to establish records rooms where semi-active records that are not used regularly could be stored. It is clear from the study that records rooms are desirably needed in public secondary schools. Government should provide adequate funds for the establishment of records rooms and other storage facilities which are required for effective and efficient records management practices in schools

Recommendations

From the responses, positive changes are needed for the improvement of records management in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. The importance of records management cannot be over-emphasized in the successful administration of any school. Therefore, the following are recommended for the improvement of records management in the schools.

Establishment of records room or centre. There should be records rooms or centres in the schools for the purpose of collating and keeping all the records that are of permanent value whether administrative or academic. This is to ensure easy reference. Such records room should be where inactive records will be retained for a certain period of time for administrative purposes, after which they could be transferred to the archives for keeps. In order to achieve the purpose for which this room will be created, it is important to appoint a records officer or manager who will coordinate the records management of the school.

Adequate and good records storage facilities should be provided for the public secondary schools. There should be proper space planning with standard shelving equipment preferably steel shelves.

Standardized method of organizing the records should be adopted by all the secondary schools. This will enable the principals to be familiar with the system wherever they may be transferred to within the Gwagwalada Area Council.

The Area Council should endeavour to provide the schools with records retention/disposal schedule through a constituted committee of action officers and records managers. This will guide the school principals on what to dispose of, when and how they should be disposed of. On a long term basis, the records in the secondary schools should be computerized.

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