

Original Paper

Records Management Practices in Research Institutes in South-West, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated records management practices in some selected research institutes in Nigeria within the framework of records life-cycle concepts. The primary aim is to explore how research records are managed and find out whether records management as a valuable resource of research institutes receives the desired attention as regards quality practice, level of implementation among others. Using survey research and stratified random sampling techniques, records management practice questionnaire was designed and used to collect data from two hundred and twenty-three respondents that were randomly selected from six out of the fourteen research institute in South-West, Nigeria. The result showed that, research institutes created and managed all types of records predominantly in paper form (68.4%), while the decentralized system of filing was generally practiced in all the research institutes (98%). Although various filing methods, Simple lists were found to be the main tool used for both records control and retrieval. A high level of records insecurity was found (68%), while records generated were managed manually through filing of hard copies in folders and kept in wooden cabinets, metal cabinet and filing shelves. The management of research records were at great variance with the stipulations of the records life-cycle concept and that research records is yet to attain minimal level or records management implementation. This study recommends that records management practice should be adequately funded; recruiting qualified records managers, and embracing the wide range of opportunities offered by ICT for the management of research records.

Keywords

records management practices, records life-cycle, research institutes, record analysis, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Nigeria

1. Introduction

The need for individuals, organizations and institutes to see if their establishments are suited to manage records effectively cannot be overlooked as the importance of proper management and security of records in the success of any organization is paramount and cannot over emphasis. Without adequate records, research institutes cannot do their work efficiently or account for their action. Records are vital for good governance and efficient management of any organization. The guiding principle of records management is to ensure that information is available when and where it is needed in an organized and efficient manner, and in a well maintained environment. The importance of records management is often underestimated by people who do not directly work in the discipline, its impact on the administrative ability of an organization to operate is indisputable. It is only through the operation of a well-run records management life-cycle program such as record creation and control, record appraisal, record management personnel, records schedule, records preservation, records retention and disposal among others that research institutes retain control of its corporate memory which allows their conduct of business. Records management allows an organization to establish and maintain control over information flow and administrative operations.

However, Oyewole (2008) asserts that records are primarily used to provide evidence that an event or transaction occurred, used as reference to support decision-making and document compliance when analyzing risk. To be authentic, reliable and available to users, records must be authorized, accurate and also comply with the laws and regulations governing records keeping. Research records include a wide variety of documentary forms and classes such as reports, maps, photographs, forms, sound recording, motion pictures, correspondence, memoranda, machine-readable records, etc. Abioye (2006) posited that 75% of needed information for the smooth-running of an organization is buried in its internally and externally generated records. Records are the corporate memory of an organization that created them and they are used to supplement the human memory.

Seniwoliba, Maham and Abilla (2017) argued that without records, no assessment can be made of whether individual, private and public organizations have actually carried out the actions and transactions that they need to execute or whether they ensure that their actions and transactions meet the criteria of efficiency, legitimacy of the principles of good governance, and whether they have done things rightly or not. The qualifying element in records over oral information is the evidential value. This is so because, there is always need to prove that something actually happened and this can only be done through evidence found in records. It should be noted that these research institutes under study has different research area such as Medicine, Agriculture, Economy, Technology and Foreign Policy.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The researcher observed that research institutes had no records management policy to guide and protect the use of research records and as such, records are not recognized as valuable, unique resources which need to be exploited like other resource considering the knowledge economy we are. In most cases, various categories of records are lumped and dumped together in the same storage space. The concept

of records retention and disposal has been neglected in their management of records which results in volumes of unwanted mass of records. Consequently, records are difficult to retrieve. There is a loss of man hour input in searching for information especially misfiled records of research findings which cost money. This could only be realized through the establishment and implementation of records management in the selected research institutes in South-West Nigeria which forms the crux of this study.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Ascertain the types of records available the appraisal and retention policy in use;
- ii. Examine the storage and preservation facilities available for research records;
- iii. Determine the usage level of information communication technology in managing research records.
- iv. Find out the challenges hindering effective management of records in the research institutes

2. Literature Review

Records are synonymous with human activities and have existed for centuries, the art of records creation and keeping dates back to the ancient civilization and was not peculiar to literate society. The cave paintings of the pre-historic period were in a way a form of records as they saved useful information about the activities and ways of life of the early man. It was the discovery of writing which later facilitated record creation and retention which was developed from pictures and drawings that were used to convey ideas. However, Akporhonor (2011), posited that records are any recorded information, regardless of forms or medium received and maintained by an agency, institution or organization or individual in pursuance of its legal obligations or in the transaction of business of any kind. Effective records management is a key enabler in achieving business success. Access to records and other documents containing strategic information is the basis of sound decision-making which is a unique and vital ingredient that will assist research institutes in their mission. It is obvious that if the information available for decision-making is either inaccurate or incorrectly interpreted, the diagnostic decision is likely to be in error and the action taken will be inappropriate. Theran (2012) described records as barometers for measuring the performance of an organization. No organization can succeed in present day business environment that is characterized of uncertainty, high risk, and increased crime rate without functional records management. Records after all, can be said to be the life-blood of research institutions and an integral part of business functions to guarantee efficiency, effectiveness and to enable organizations to survive in this accountability era.

This needs to be done via a records management programme which is the main implementation vehicle for the records management policy whose aims and objectives must be aligned with those of the organization. Popoola (2007) stated that records management involves the effective, efficient and systematic control of the processes of creating, receiving, maintaining, and disposing valuable information about the organization. It is the mean of processing information for optimum accessibility and usability, concern with the origination, collection, organization, storage, retrieval, interpretation,

transmission, transformation and use. Unfortunately, it has become a recurrent issue for records to be irretrievable when required. Nigeria administrators are often concern about the alarming rate of misplacement or loss of vital records and slow speed at which needed records are retrieved from their storage. In most cases, misplaced or loss of records delay necessary actions on urgent matters which leads to irrational decisions that translate to social crisis or an embarrassment to the Nation. Popoola advanced further that records must be actively managed through their life-cycle. Gracia (2011) explained that records life-cycle concept had four phases, namely: creation, distribution, maintenance and use, appraisal and disposition.

To Nwaomah (2013) records management is seen as extending to all aspects of records creation or inscription, use, maintenance and disposal. She posited further that, Records managers need to know and understand the life-cycle of records in order to enhance their ability in the management of research records. She concluded by saying that proper management of research records is an essential requirement for efficient and effective problem solving.

3. Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was survey research design. This is used to seek opinions of individual as regards a problem in which consensus of these respondents will provide the needed solution to the problem at hand. The populations of the study are the staff of research institutes in South-West, Nigeria with the total population of two hundred and twenty-three (223) personnel in several departments/divisions/units as records management is a cross-departmental collective responsibility. In all, nine research institutes were randomly selected from the fourteen research institutes in South-West, Nigeria. The population of the study is stratified as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Sampled Study Population

S/N	Research Institutes	Number of Sampled	Number of responded	Response Rate (%)
1	Centre for Energy Research and Development, Ile-Ife	20	15	75
2	Centre for Management Development, Lagos	26	23	84.5
3	Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria, Ibadan	24	21	84.5
4	Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria Ibadan	25	22	87.5
5	Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Ibadan	31	25	80.7
6	National Centre for Economic Management and Administration, Ibadan	25	15	75
7	National Institute for Horticultural Research Ibadan	25	23	92
8	National Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research, Lagos	20	17	84.5

9	Nigerian Institute of Medical Research , Lagos	27	23	85.19
	Total	223	192	85.4

Source: Researcher's field work survey 2019

The instrument of data collection employed in the research survey is questionnaire which was structured as it provided alternative answer from which they were to select one or more answers. The method of data analysis used was frequency count and percentage for the research questions, while the regression analysis was used for the hypothesis.

4. Result Analysis

Descriptive statistical tools of frequency count and percentages were used for the analysis. The demographic data on the population are analyzed below.

Table 2. The Types of Records Available, the Appraisal and Retention Policy in Use

In what formats are records received?

S/N	Formats	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	Films	40	26.3	26.3
2	Disk	32	21.1	47.4
3	Paper	80	52.6	100.0
	Total	152	100.	

The findings indicated that paper format is the dominant method of receiving records as indicated by 80 (52.6%) respondents above in Table 2.

Table 3. In What Formats Are Records Created?

S/N	Formats	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	Tape	32	21.1	21.1
2	Paper	104	68.4	89.5
3	Film	16	10.5	100.0
	Total	152	100.	

Also, responding to the question on the format for records creation, 104 (68.4%) respondents affirmed that records are created in paper forms. This means that paper format is the most popularly used for receiving and creation of records.

Table 4. Research Records Appraisal and Records Retention Policy

S/N	Records appraisal	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
A	Not appraised	88	57.9	57.9
1.	Appraised	24	15.8	73.7
2.	No Response	40	26.3	100.0
	Total	152	100.0	

Table 4 above shows that majority of the respondents 88 (57.9%) are of the view that their institution does not appraise their records for the purpose of retention/disposal.

Table 5. Research Records Appraisal and Records Retention Policy

S/N	Records disposal options (retention)	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
1.	Administrative value	61	69.4	69.4
2.	Evidential value	9	10.2	79.6
3.	Informational value	9	10.2	89.8
4.	Research value	9	10.2	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	

Administrative value criteria were majorly used in their records retention and disposal which is 61 (69.4%).

Table 6. Do You Use Computer Facilities for Records Operations?

S/No	Computer	Frequency	%	Cumulative Percentage
1.	Available	136	89.5	89.5
2.	Not available	16	10.5	100.0
	Total	152	100.0	

Table 7. Is Your Institution Connected to the Internet?

S/N	Internet	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage
1.	Connected	152	100.0	100.0

Table 8. Does Your Institution Have a Website?

C	Website	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage
1.	Available	113	53.3	53.3
2.	Not available	39	5.3	58.6
	Total	152	100.0	

Table 9. Which Records Management Function of Your Institution Are Automated?

S/N	Automated	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1.	Records filing, storage, and distribution	8	5.3	5.3
2.	Records retrieval	39	25.7	30.9
3	Records creation	73	48.0	78.9
4.	Records scheduling	8	5.3	84.2

Table 10. Does Your Institution Have Electronic Recording System?

S/N	Electronic recording	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
1.	Available	60	37.4	37.4
2.	Not available	92	82.6	100.0
	Total	152	100.0	

Table 11. Is It Functional?

S/N	Electronic recording	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	Not functional	49	68.1	68.1
2	Functional	23	31.9	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	

Majority of the respondents in Table 6, 8, 136 (89.5%) use computer facilities for records operation. All the respondents in Table 7, 10, 152 (100%) stated that their institution is connected to the internet, in Table 8, 113 (53.3%) of the respondents indicated that their institution has a website.

The study revealed that creation of records in Table 9, 73 (48.0%) is the record management function that is automated in their institution, in Table 10, 92 (82.6%) indicated they do not have. Hence, most of the respondents affirmed that their institution does not have electronic records system. Where they

have electronic recording system, research revealed that, 23 (31.9%) is functioning while 49 (68.1%) disagreed.

Table 12. The Storage and Preservation Facilities Available for Research Records

What records storage equipment does your institution use?				
S/N	Equipment	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	Metal cabinets	43	28.3	28.3
2	Open metal shelves	18	11.8	40.1
3	Open wooden shelves	83	54.6	94.7
4	Others	8	5.3	100.0
	Total	152	100.0	

In Table 12, as for the arrangement of records, the study reveals that research institutes relied heavily on wooden shelves for records storage 83 (54.6%). Observation showed that some of the wooden shelves were already collapsing under the heavy weight of the records they were bearing.

Table 13. The Challenges Hindering Effective Management of Records in the Research Institutes?

Item Description	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate funding	70	46
Poor records storage facilities	65	42.8
Lack of space	52	34.3
Inadequate training and motivation	69	45.
Lack of material and equipment	56	36.8

Majority of the respondents complained bitterly and identified certain challenges hindering effective management of research records which is majorly inadequate funding 70 (46%).

5. Conclusion

Management of records in the research institutes is essential for its internal efficiency. However, the study confirmed that management of records was at the rudimentary stage. The holistic approach that is managing records through its life-cycle phases and total quality records management programme was not applied in the management of research records. Research records are in deplorable condition. The main goal of management of records in an organization is to provide much needed information on

demand, in the right format and at the right time. In the selected research institutes, there were also cases of misplacement or loss of records, a situation that does not augur well for their administration. Equally important is a records schedule that determines the life expectancy of records. Absence of a schedule in the institutions meant a haphazard disposal of their records and this is a fundamental defect in the management of research records.

6. Recommendations

- 1) Adequate and good records storage facilities should be provided. There should be proper space planning with enough space allocated for records storage. Standard shelving equipment preferably steel should be procured while wooden shelves and racks particularly those that were already collapsing under heavy weight of records should be eliminated. Records storage should be centralized. The present practice of having huge records piled up on the floor in staff personnel offices is not ideal for proper tracking of records and retrieval.
- 2) Research institutions should adopt and implement an integrated record management programme based on life-cycle concept. A records center should exist not just in name but also in full professional operation.
- 3) Records appraisal and scheduling must be undertaken to determine the life expectancy of records in the research institutes. Although research records are special types of records, it is orthodox to assume that they are all records of permanent value that should end up in the archives. A records schedule is essential to stipulate the disposal action to be taken in respect of research records of the institutions. A well-developed records schedule to meet the peculiar needs of the institutions must, therefore be formulated.
- 4) Qualified records managers/archivists should be recruited, adequate manpower development programme be put in place. They should be motivated, encouraged and supported to make a career in records management. A career path should be developed for them in the scheme of service.
- 5) A formal training for records management staff is a sine qua non for effective management of records. While some of them might have attended one workshop or the other in the past, majority of trainings they attended were normal general civil service routine that were not specifically geared towards inculcating the nitty-gritty of records management. There was, therefore, a yawning gap between the ideal and the reality on ground in the management of records in the research institutes that were surveyed.
- 6) The records management programme of the institutions should be well funded. Adequate budgetary provisions should be put in place for record offices, management of records especially in the area of storage, equipment and materials. A periodic evaluation of the programme will guarantee improvement and sustain timely availability of research records for efficient problem solving.

- 7) Research institutes should avail themselves of the wide range of opportunities offered by Information Communication Technology (ICT) such as electronic records management to reduce the large volumes of paper and store space for records which will guarantee easy retrieval and eliminate misplacement and loss of records.

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