RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR IMPROVED SERVICES AMONG REGISTRY STAFF IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN KANO STATE

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Abstract
This study assessed records management practices for improved service delivery among registry staff in Colleges of Education in Kano State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives: to examine records management practices in terms of appraisal and retention, storage and preservation, accessioning and description, and disposal; and to identify the policy guidelines available for records management. The study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design involving four Heads of Section in the registry departments of four selected Colleges of Education in Kano State. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that electronic records are increasingly used for daily operations, while paper records are largely retained for administrative and accreditation purposes. Records management practices were generally informal, with no institution-specific records management policy guiding appraisal, retention, accessioning, description, preservation, or disposal. Registry staff demonstrated practical, experience-based records management skills but lacked adequate formal training and awareness of relevant legal and regulatory frameworks. Major challenges identified included inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, the absence of formal records management policies, staff workload, and limited institutional commitment to records management. The study concludes that the absence of formal records management policies, standardized procedures, and professional capacity development undermines the efficiency, compliance, and sustainability of records management practices in the selected institutions. The study recommends the development and implementation of comprehensive records management policies, institutionalization of life-cycle records management practices, appointment of dedicated records officers, regular staff training, adequate budgetary provision, and phased digitization of critical institutional records.

Keywords: Records management practices, registry staff, Colleges of Education, Kano State

Introduction

Records management plays a crucial role in ensuring efficient administrative operations, supporting academic activities, promoting accountability, and maintaining compliance with regulatory standards. Effective records Management encompasses the systematic creation, maintenance, use, retrieval, preservation, and disposal of records throughout their life cycle. Because of their

strategic importance, records constitute valuable organizational resources that must be systematically managed to support institutional effectiveness and continuity (Hashim, 2018).

With the increasing volume and diversity of records generated by contemporary organisations, effective records management has become increasingly important (Chorley, Phiri, & Tough, 2017). Records serve as essential administrative instruments without which institutional activities and operational processes cannot be effectively performed. For example, newly appointed officers or successors to administrative positions may depend on institutional records to understand previous decisions, policies, procedures, and operational practices. Such records enable them to determine whether existing practices should be continued or modified to meet emerging institutional needs (Abdulrahman, 2015).

Records management involves the systematic control of records throughout their life cycle, including their creation, maintenance, use, storage, retrieval, preservation, and final disposition. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to effective records management in educational institutions because of growing regulatory requirements, accountability obligations, and the need for timely access to reliable information. The effectiveness of records management is largely dependent on the adoption of appropriate practices, policies, and legislative frameworks. According to Mosweu (2019), records management programmes, policies, and legislation are essential components of effective records management practices. These practices include records creation and capture, classification, storage, preservation, security, and disposal (Alegbeleye & Chilaka, 2019).

However, records maintained in registry departments may be exposed to several management challenges, including arbitrary destruction, inadequate protection against disasters, poor arrangement of files, and the absence of systematic procedures for managing records from creation to final disposition (Abdulrahman, 2015). These challenges may be more pronounced in Colleges of Education, where accurate and reliable records are generated regularly but may not always be managed according to established professional standards.

Registry departments in Colleges of Education serve as custodians of academic records, administrative documents, personnel records, and other institutional information required to support administrative and academic activities. Effective management of these records is therefore essential for efficient service delivery, institutional accountability, and continuity. Consequently, this study investigates records management practices among registry staff in Colleges of Education in Kano State and provides recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of records management practices.

Statement of the Problem

Colleges of Education are expected to maintain accurate, secure, and readily accessible records to support academic administration, regulatory compliance, institutional accountability, and effective service delivery. Effective records management practices, supported by clear institutional policies, competent personnel, and appropriate technological infrastructure, should facilitate the timely processing and retrieval of admissions records, students' academic records, transcripts, certificates, and staff documentation.

When properly managed, institutional records provide a foundation for effective decision-making, accountability, administrative continuity, and service delivery. However, registry operations in many Colleges of

Education in Kano State continue to experience challenges relating to records handling. Records creation, classification, storage, retrieval, preservation, and disposition may be inadequately standardized, resulting in duplication, misfiling, delayed retrieval, and inefficient service delivery.

Although records management policies and regulatory guidelines exist at national and institutional levels, such policies may be poorly disseminated, inconsistently implemented, or inadequately aligned with the operational realities of individual institutions. These challenges are further compounded by gaps in staff competencies relating to modern records management practices and information and communication technology applications. Other challenges include inadequate funding, poor storage infrastructure, heavy workload, and limited managerial support.

The consequences of ineffective records management may include prolonged processing of academic transcripts and certificates, records discrepancies, loss or deterioration of important documents, and possible non-compliance with accreditation and data protection requirements. These challenges may negatively affect the efficiency, credibility, and accountability of Colleges of Education and may also reduce stakeholder satisfaction.

Despite the strategic role of registry departments in tertiary institutions, empirical studies on records management practices and their implications for service delivery remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of Colleges of Education in Northern Nigeria. There is therefore a need for context-specific research examining the records management practices, policy frameworks, and operational challenges experienced by registry staff in these institutions.

Consequently, this study investigates records management practices among registry staff in Colleges of Education in Kano State, with particular attention to policy guidelines, appraisal and retention, storage and preservation, accessioning and description, and disposal practices.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What records management policies or guidelines exist in the registry departments of Colleges of Education in Kano State?
2. What records management practices are employed in the registry departments of Colleges of Education in Kano State in terms of:
   i. appraisal and retention;
   ii. storage and preservation;
   iii. accessioning and description; and
   iv. disposal?

Review of Related Literature

This review is organized around the records life-cycle model, which conceptualizes records as passing through interrelated stages of creation and maintenance, active use, storage and preservation, and final disposition (ISO 15489-1:2016). Within this framework, effective records management depends on several key practices, including appraisal and retention, storage and preservation, accessioning and description, disposal, and policy guidance.

Appraisal and Retention

Appraisal is the systematic process of evaluating records to determine their administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical value. The outcome of appraisal informs decisions regarding the length of time records should be retained and whether they should ultimately be preserved or destroyed (ISO 15489-1:2016; Millar, 2017).

Appraisal is fundamental to effective records management because it prevents the unnecessary retention of all records, which may consume valuable storage space and institutional resources, while also preventing the premature destruction of records that may be required for legal, administrative, accountability, or historical purposes (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021).

Contemporary appraisal practices have moved beyond the traditional distinction between primary and secondary values towards more functional and risk-based approaches. Functional appraisal evaluates records according to the functions and activities that generated them rather than the intrinsic characteristics of individual records (Cook, 2013; Millar, 2017). This approach is particularly relevant in digital environments where records are numerous and interconnected.

Similarly, macro-appraisal involves analyzing an organization's mandate, functions, and activities to identify records with enduring value rather than assessing records individually or file by file (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021).

Retention scheduling is the principal mechanism through which appraisal decisions are implemented. A retention schedule identifies record series or categories, specifies how long they should be retained, provides the legal or operational justification for retention, and indicates their final disposition, such as destruction, transfer to an archives, or permanent preservation (ISO 15489-1:2016; Penn, Pennix, & Coulson, 2017).

Storage and Preservation

Storage refers to the physical or digital housing of records under conditions that ensure their security, accessibility, and protection from damage or deterioration (ISO 15489-1:2016; Millar, 2017). Preservation refers to the strategies and measures employed to protect records from deterioration, damage, or loss over time. Such measures may include environmental control, proper handling, disaster preparedness, digitization, and the establishment of appropriate storage facilities (National Archives of the United States, 2021; Shepherd & Yeo, 2021).

International standards for physical records storage emphasize the importance of appropriate location, environmental control, secure shelving, restricted access, regular maintenance, and disaster preparedness. Records should be protected from environmental hazards such as floods, fire, pests, excessive humidity, and unauthorized access (International Council on Archives [ICA], 2019).

The increasing adoption of digital recordkeeping has also introduced additional preservation challenges. Digital records require reliable storage systems, regular backups, integrity monitoring, cybersecurity protection, and strategies for preventing technological obsolescence. Digital preservation therefore extends beyond routine backup to include active management of metadata, authentication mechanisms, file formats, and long-term access strategies (Duranti & Franks, 2019; InterPARES Trust, 2021).

Accessioning and Description

Accessioning refers to the formal process through which an organization assumes legal and physical custody of records and documents their receipt (Society of American Archivists [SAA], 2018). The process may involve the use of transfer forms or other documentation indicating the source, volume, date range, and conditions associated with transferred records. Effective accessioning establishes a clear chain of custody and provides a foundation for subsequent records management activities (Millar, 2017).

Description involves the development of inventories, indexes, finding aids, or metadata that enable users to identify, locate, understand, and retrieve records. International standards such as the General International Standard Archival Description [ISAD(G)] provide guidelines for describing records using elements such as reference codes, titles, creators, dates, extent, and scope and content (ICA, 2015).

For digital records, metadata standards and structured descriptive systems are particularly important for supporting access, retrieval, authenticity, and long-term preservation.

Records Disposal

Records disposal refers to the systematic and authorized disposition of records that have completed their required retention period and no longer possess administrative, legal, fiscal, or historical value (ISO 15489-1:2016; Shepherd & Yeo, 2021).

Disposal is an important component of the records life cycle because it prevents the unnecessary accumulation of obsolete records while ensuring that records with continuing value are retained or transferred for permanent preservation (Millar, 2017).

Disposal may involve either the destruction of records or their transfer to an archival institution or records centre for permanent preservation. However, disposal should be guided by approved retention schedules and appropriate authorization procedures (National Archives of Australia, 2020; ICA, 2019).

Unauthorized destruction of records may expose institutions to legal and accountability risks, particularly where records are required for audits, litigation, regulatory compliance, or public information requests. Consequently, records disposal must be properly documented and implemented according to approved procedures.

Policy Guidelines for Managing Records in College Registries

A records management policy is a formal written document that establishes principles, assigns responsibilities, defines procedures, and provides institutional authority for managing records throughout their life cycle (ISO 15489-1:2016; Saffady, 2021).

An effective records management policy demonstrates institutional commitment to proper records management, guides staff behaviour, establishes accountability, and provides a framework for related documents such as retention schedules, procedures manuals, and operational guidelines (Penn, Pennix, & Coulson, 2017).

The development of an effective policy generally involves conducting a records inventory, consulting relevant stakeholders, drafting the policy, obtaining legal and administrative review, securing formal approval, disseminating the policy, providing staff training, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring compliance (Saffady, 2021).

However, policy implementation may be affected by inadequate management commitment, insufficient resources, staff resistance, competing institutional priorities, and the absence of accountability mechanisms. Successful implementation therefore requires leadership support, clear communication, adequate resources, staff training, and regular monitoring (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore records management practices and policy guidelines in the registry departments of Colleges of Education in Kano State, Nigeria. Four Colleges of Education

were purposively selected based on their accreditation status, years of operation, and willingness to participate in the study. One Head of Section from the registry department of each institution participated in the study, resulting in a total of four participants.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol developed from the research questions and the records life-cycle model (ISO 15489-1:2016). The interviews were conducted in person, audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants, and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis procedure, which involved familiarization with the data, coding, identification and development of themes, review of themes, and interpretation of the findings.
To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, member checking, peer debriefing, and inter-coder agreement were employed. An inter-coder agreement level of 87% was achieved. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Results and Findings

Policy Guidelines for Managing Records

Participants were asked whether formal policy guidelines existed for managing records within their respective registry departments. The responses indicated that none of the four institutions had developed and implemented an institution-specific records management policy.

One participant stated: “We don't have our own policy, but we follow the Scheme of Service and Conditions of Service issued by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). It tells us how long to keep staff appointment letters, promotion files, and disciplinary records. We treat it as our policy.” — HoS P1 Another participant explained: “NCCE's Conditions of Service is our bible. It says staff files must be kept for seven years after retirement. We don't have a document from our college, but we follow NCCE's rules. We even print out the relevant pages and post them in the registry.” — HoS P2 similarly, another participant stated:
“We use the NCCE Scheme of Service to determine retention periods. For example, admission files are kept for five years, according to the guidelines. We don't have a college policy, but we rely on NCCE.” — HoS P3 the fourth participant reported the use of a state-level framework: “We don't have a records policy developed by our college, but we follow the Kano State Government Records Management Policy. We obtained it from the State Ministry of Education two years ago. We use it to decide what to retain and what to dispose of.” — HoS P4.

These responses indicate that the institutions rely substantially on external frameworks and guidelines in the absence of internally developed records management policies. The NCCE Scheme of Service and Conditions of Service, which are primarily intended to regulate staff appointments, promotions, and conditions of employment, are being used as de facto retention guidelines.

The findings also revealed variations in the adoption of external policy frameworks. While three institutions relied primarily on NCCE documents, one institution reported using the Kano State Government Records Management Policy.
However, even where an external policy was available, its implementation appeared to be informal. One participant explained:

“We have the State Policy, but we never had a meeting to discuss it. No one trained us on how to use it. We simply follow what we understand from it.” — HoS P4

The findings further revealed the absence of formal, institution-specific retention schedules. Nevertheless, all four participants reported relying on external guidelines and practical experience in making retention decisions.

Overall, the findings indicate that none of the four Colleges of Education had developed a formal, institution-specific records management policy. Instead, the institutions relied on external frameworks as informal guides for managing their records.

Records Management Practices in the Registry Departments

Participants were asked to describe the procedures used in managing records within their registry departments, including appraisal, retention, storage, preservation, accessioning, description, and disposal. The findings revealed the existence of a hybrid and evolving records management environment characterized by the continued use of paper records alongside emerging electronic recordkeeping practices.

Although paper records remained important, particularly for administrative, regulatory, and accreditation purposes, three of the four participants indicated that electronic copies of important records were maintained on computers, shared drives, departmental servers, or personal workstations. These electronic records were used primarily to support day-to-day administrative activities.

The findings further showed that appraisal and retention decisions were generally based on practical experience rather than formal retention schedules. Participants reported considering factors such as the age of records and the frequency with which they were accessed.

Similarly, disposal practices were largely informal. Records were sometimes shredded or burned without formal approval procedures, comprehensive documentation, or clear audit trails.

The findings also revealed emerging practices relating to accessioning and description. Some participants had introduced logbooks to monitor the movement of records, while others relied largely on personal memory and informal procedures. One participant explained:

"I started this logbook two years ago after we lost three student clearance files. Now, every time someone takes a file, even for five minutes, they sign it in and out. It is not perfect, but it is better than having no control system." — HoS P3 Another participant stated:

"The logbook is my only audit trail. If NCCE asks for a particular staff promotion file, I can identify who took it, when it was taken, and whether it was returned." — HoS P4

The study also identified the use of informal indexing systems to improve records retrieval. For example, one participant explained:

"I don't simply write 'Staff Appointments' on the folder. I assign a code such as 'SA-2020-003', meaning Staff Appointment, year 2020, third file. This makes it easier to locate the record." — HoS P3 Another participant reported:

"I created a master index containing the code, title, date created, and location of the record. I update it regularly. It is not digital, but it provides a structured way of locating files." — HoS P4

Hybrid Storage and Preservation Practices

The findings revealed that registry departments generally maintained hybrid storage systems. Paper records were retained for official and regulatory purposes, while electronic copies were increasingly used to facilitate operational efficiency.

One participant explained:

"The paper records are mainly for inspectors, while the digital copies are for our daily operations. I keep copies of active files on a hard drive so that the information can still be available if something happens to the physical records." — HoS P4

This finding suggests that electronic records are increasingly being adopted to support administrative operations. However, the absence of formal digital preservation strategies, standardized backup procedures, and institutional digital records policies may expose the institutions to risks relating to data loss, system failure, and unauthorized access.

Informal Appraisal, Retention, and Disposal Practices

The study revealed that all four institutions applied informal procedures for determining the active and inactive status of records. Participants generally reported retaining active records for immediate use and transferring older records to separate storage areas.

One participant explained:
"We keep active files in the main cabinet because they are used regularly. When a file becomes old and is no longer frequently needed, we move the paper copy to a historical archive area." — HoS P1

Another participant stated:
"If a file has not been accessed for about three years, we consider it inactive and move it to another storage area because we do not have enough space to keep everything in the main office." — HoS P4

A third participant explained:
"We do not have a written policy, but we have developed a pattern. If a file is more than seven years old and has not been requested, we may consider it no longer necessary." — HoS P3

These responses indicate the existence of a de facto retention and disposal system based largely on practical experience rather than formally approved institutional procedures.

Participants also reported that disposal practices were conducted without comprehensive formal authorization. One participant stated:
"We have no written rule for disposal, but when a record has not been used for several years, we may decide that it is no longer required. A disposal note may be prepared and the files destroyed." — HoS P4

The findings demonstrate that although registry staffs have developed practical approaches to records management, these practices remain largely informal and may expose the institutions to legal, administrative, and accountability risks.

Overall, the results indicate that the registry departments have developed practical and experience-based records management practices. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of these practices are constrained by the absence of formal institutional policies, approved retention schedules, standardized procedures, adequate infrastructure, and professional training.

Summary of Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. None of the four Colleges of Education had developed an institution-specific records management policy. Three institutions relied primarily on the NCCE Scheme of Service and Conditions of Service, while one institution relied on the Kano State Government Records Management Policy.

2. Records management practices in the registry departments included appraisal, retention, storage, description, and disposal. However, most of these practices were informal and were not guided by approved institutional policies or standardized procedures.
3. Electronic records were increasingly used to support daily administrative operations, while paper records remained important for official, regulatory, and accreditation purposes.
4. Some registry staff had developed informal control mechanisms, such as logbooks, indexing systems, and alphanumeric coding, to improve the organization and retrieval of records.
5. Retention and disposal decisions were largely based on practical experience rather than formally approved retention schedules.
6. Major challenges affecting records management included inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, the absence of institutional records management policies, inadequate professional training, staff workload, and limited institutional priority.

Conclusion

The study concludes that records management practices across the four selected Colleges of Education are characterized largely by informality, pragmatism, and the absence of comprehensive institutional policy frameworks. Registry staff demonstrates practical and experience-based records management skills; however, they operate within institutional environments that provide limited policy guidance, professional training, financial support, and technological infrastructure.

The findings further indicate that the hybrid use of paper and electronic records represents an adaptation to operational and regulatory demands rather than a fully developed commitment to systematic digital transformation. Informal practices such as logbooks, indexing systems, alphanumeric coding, and de facto retention procedures demonstrate the initiative and practical capacity of registry staff. However, these practices remain vulnerable because they are not formally documented, standardized, or institutionalized.

The absence of formal records management policies and approved retention schedules constitutes a major weakness in the management of institutional records. Informal appraisal, retention, and disposal practices may expose the institutions to legal, administrative, financial, and accountability risks.

Therefore, the current state of records management in the selected Colleges of Education requires systematic improvement. Effective records management can only be achieved through the development of institutional policies, standardized procedures, adequate funding, professional capacity development, improved infrastructure, and the gradual integration of appropriate digital technologies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Colleges of Education should adopt and implement systematic procedures covering records creation, appraisal, retention, storage, preservation, accessioning, description, retrieval, and disposal.

2. Each College of Education should formulate, approve, disseminate, and regularly review a comprehensive records management policy aligned with relevant national standards, regulatory requirements, and institutional needs.
3. The institutions should establish clear retention schedules specifying how long different categories of records should be retained and the authorized procedures for their disposal or permanent preservation.
4. Registry personnel should receive continuous training in modern records management practices, digital Record keeping, preservation, information security, and relevant legal and regulatory frameworks.
5. Institutional management should provide adequate storage facilities, appropriate shelving, secure digital
6. storage systems, backup facilities, and other infrastructure required for effective records preservation and retrieval.
7. Colleges of Education should consider appointing dedicated records officers or assigning professionally trained personnel to coordinate and supervise records management activities.
8. The institutions should gradually digitize high-value and frequently used records while ensuring that appropriate procedures are established for electronic storage, backup, security, access, and long-term preservation.
9. Management should establish mechanisms for monitoring compliance with records management policies and procedures through periodic audits, records inventories, staff supervision, and regular policy reviews.

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