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RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, YOLA AND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, JALINGO.

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ABSTRACT

Records are information, irrespective of the format on which they appear. Records are important. Without records, an organization simply cannot function. It is in the light of this that this study examined records management practices in the studied institutions to determine their relevance and effectiveness in facilitating the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Colleges. Findings from the study revealed that the studied institutions applied the records life – cycle concept in the management of records but without putting a functional records management practices in place. The study recommended that functional records management should be implemented especially in the areas of recruiting professionally trained personnel in the management of records, improved storage facilities, automation of records and putting in place a disaster management programme as a security measure to guide against natural and man-made disaster among others.

INTRODUCTION

Colleges of Education in Nigeria face a lot of problems in the management of the information which they create or receive from outside their domain. In many of these colleges, the loss of control of records has become a significant factor contributing to administrative inefficiency. This is particularly so when there are no staff trained in archives and records management to effectively manage their records.

Colleges of Education in Nigeria generate a large volume of records. The various types of records created or received consist of letters, forms, reports, correspondence, memos, documents, circulars, minutes, files of mark sheets, finance papers, admissions, etc. These records are increasing everyday without much effort to control their creation, let alone managing them effectively. To conceive the idea of training records staff to manage the increasing information is non-existent in these colleges. Where such records staff are trained, responsibility for records is often ill defined. Even if trained records staff are put in place, storage problems is

another area of concern for the Colleges to contend with. It is one thing to provide storage facilities for these records and it is yet another thing to retrieve such records without difficulty. The cost or effect of depending on incomplete and badly organized records is incalculable.

Since vital records in Colleges of Education are important for the survival of the Colleges, and are referred to most often than not for the smooth running of the Colleges, accurate records should therefore be maintained. This is because the records are the corporate memory of the Colleges especially when one thinks of the inaccuracy of individual recollections of events. Accurate records are also necessary as they provide background information which enables the Colleges to plan for the future.

A well organized records management programme does not only save time to retrieve such records for prompt decision making, but also a lot of money could be saved for the Colleges. To enhance the effective management of records, staff training in Archives and Records Management programme and the provision of storage and retrieval facilities therefore become inevitable for all the Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- i. To ascertain the types of records created, maintained and used as well as their format.
- ii. To determine what storage facilities are provided for these records.
- iii. To increase efficiency and effectiveness in the management of records.
- iv. To find out the status of Records Management personnel and the extent of their training in Records Management practices.
- v. To find out how vital records are protected from possible disasters.
- vi. To find out whether the records are automated or not.
- vii. To put in place a functional Records Management programme where there is none in existence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Records are important. The day-to-day operations of any successful organization depends entirely on its vital records. Many organizations will not survive without keeping, maintaining and using their records.

Emmerson (1989) sees records as those documents in whatever medium, received or created by an organization as evidence of its activities or because of the information contained. Records are products of the activities of which they form a part.

Penn (1983) asserts that the records life cycle consists of creation, maintenance and use, and its disposition. He stresses that if a record is not necessary, do not create it. He furthermore stresses the need for the maintenance of records that are created. Therefore, all the stages involved in the records life-cycle must be considered before any record is created.

Ogunrombi, Abareh and Adamu (1998) are of the opinion that an organization cannot but develop a culture of maintaining a record in whatever form, which will serve as a reference tool in helping the organization fulfill its obligation for effective management of the problems of that organization.

Popoola (2000) posits that records constitute an essential instrument of administration without which operational processes and functions cannot be executed in organizations. To him, records are barometers for measuring the performance of an organization. In addition, records are the by-products of managerial and administrative activities, and they mirror the overall quality of the organization's business performance. If records are barometers for measuring the performance of any organization according to Popoola (2000), it then means that without records, no organization can function.

Studies have indeed shown that many organizations that lost their records through fire disaster or negligence, ceased to operate. It therefore follows that organizations need to keep complete and accurate records for the survival and success of the organizations.

Records contain data from which decisions are made, plans are developed and control is exercised. To be of value, records must contain the correct information in the proper form and be available at the right time, in the right place and in the hands of correct persons. It is the responsibility of records management function to develop and operate systems and procedures for creating, maintaining and disposing of records necessary for the successful operation of an organization.

Records management is a field of management responsible for the systematic control of the creation, maintenance, use, reproduction and disposition of records. According to Ette (1984), records management relates to three stages through which records pass, namely: the current, semi-current, and non-current stages. At the current stage, records are created and used frequently. In the semi-current stage, which is the intermediate stage, records are referred to occasionally. At the non-current stage, records are no longer referred to but are sent to the archives after appraising them.

Alegbeleye (1983) defines records and information management as an all

embracing activity which include: form control, correspondence control, reports management and control, active files management, records inventory and appraisal, records retention and disposition, archives management and control, copy reproduction (Reprography).

Unuigbe (1990) posits that records management deals with the full range of paperwork from the creation of a new record to the moment when a decision is made either to destroy it or keep it for all time. It is the application of systematic analysis and scientific control of business records from their creation through processing, maintenance, protection and final disposition.

Ugwunze (1992) asserts that records management involves planning, implementing and review of the functions for the administration of the records of an organization. She further asserts that records management helps to control the quantity and quality of information that is created. The information, she says, can be maintained in a manner that effectively serves the need of the organization.

Be it as it may, it is therefore the responsibility of records management function to develop and operate systems and procedures for creating, maintaining and disposing of records necessary for the successful operation of an organization.

METHODOLOGY

The instrument used in collecting data for this study were a combination of direct observations, interview techniques and questionnaire administration. A combination of these methods was believed to provide an in-depth exploration of the problem under investigation.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of this study, the questionnaire was pre-tested. To do this, ten copies of the questionnaire were administered to ten respondents that were representative of those the questionnaire was meant for.

Indeed, the outcome of the exercise helped the researchers to ask the right questions or clarify the questions and cleared ambiguities about certain statements and determined the difficulties respondents had in completing the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument used was 0.72, using the Cronback Coefficient alpha method of the form.

The target population for this study was the Registry staff of the Federal College of Education, Yola and College of Education, Jalingo who were connected in one way or the other with records creation, use and/or management of records.

Some Principal Officers of the Colleges were interviewed. The researchers personally went to the records storage area, which enabled them to have a full working knowledge of the records management practices in operation.

A total of 63 copies of the questionnaire were administered, out of which 35 copies were given to the Registry staff of the Federal College of Education, Yola and 28 to College of Education, Jalingo. The 63 copies of the questionnaire, which were administered, were equally retrieved. Thus a response rate of 100 percent was achieved.

ANALYSIS OF DATA, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The data collected through the use of the questionnaire were analyzed or processed and presented in figures. Seven tables were drawn in order to adequately discuss the data generated from the questionnaire

**TABLE I:
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY HIGHEST
QUALIFICATION**

QUALIFICATION	RESPONSES		Total	Percent
	FCE, Yola	COE, Jal.		
Colleges				
F.S.L.C.	-	2	2	3.2
WASC/GCE	16	14	30	47.6
ND/NCE	15	10	25	39.7
B.A./B.Sc	-	1	1	1.6
M.A./M.Sc.	4	1	5	7.9
Ph.D	-	-	-	-
TOTAL:	35	28	63	100

The distribution of respondents by highest qualification (Table I) shows that the highest number i.e. 30 or 47.6% of the records staff were holders of WASC /GCE. This is closely followed by holders of ND/NCE with 25 or 39.7% while M.A./M.Sc. constitute 5 or 7.9% and B.A./B.Sc with 1 or 1.6%.

The result indicates that the junior staff formed the bulk of the personnel in the Registry departments and may not likely be involved in the decision making process of the studied Colleges. Perhaps, it might be in place to suggest here that the studied institutions should sponsor their staff for first degrees and doctoral degree programmes.

TABLE II:
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY LENGTH OF SERVICE.

LENGTH OF SERVICE	RESPONSES				
	Colleges	FCE, Yola	COE, Jal.	Total	Percent
1 – 5		-	-	-	-
6 – 10		15	15	30	47.6
11 – 15		14	10	24	38.1
16 – 20		5	2	7	11.1
21 and above		1	1	2	3.2
TOTAL :		35	28	63	100

Table II shows the length of service of the respondents. The table indicates that 30 or 47.6% of the records staff have spent between 6 – 10 years, 24 or 38.1% have spent 11 – 15 years, 7 or 11.1% have spent between 16 – 20 years while 2 or 3.2% spent 21 years and above with a standard error of 0.75. This means that the records staffs in the studied institutions have more active years to spend as the maximum number of years in the public service in Nigeria is 35 years.

TABLE III:
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY SEX

SEX	RESPONSES				
	Colleges	FCE, Yola	COE, Jal.	Total	Percent
Male		19	12	31	49.2
Female		16	16	32	50.8
TOTAL		35	28	63	100

The distribution of respondents by sex is displayed in Table III. Out of 63 respondents, 32 or 50.8% were females while 31 or 49.2% were males. This implies that there is a balance in the number of sexes in the studied institutions.

TABLE IV:
**DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY TYPES OF RECORDS
 CREATED**

TYPES OF RECORDS	RESPONSES		Total	Percent
	FCE, Yola	COE, Jal.		
Colleges				
Papers	30	27	57	90.5
Disks	3	1	4	6.3
Tapes	1	-	1	1.6
Films	1	-	1	1.6
TOTAL	35	28	63	100

The result from Table 4 shows that the commonest format of records creation in the studied institutions is paper with 57 or 90.5% while there is a wide margin of disks, which followed with 4 or 6.3%, tapes and films with 1 or 1.6% each. From the result, it is clearly seen that paper still remains the main medium for recording information in the studied institutions.

Penn (1983) in support of the use of paper explains how modern technologies make it easy for records to be created. In other words, you take an existing record created on paper, put it on a copy machine, press a button and in a matter of seconds, you have two records instead of one. He therefore cautioned that thought should be given to the necessity for the existence of a record before creating it.

PERSONNEL TRAINING

From the data made available from the records staff, there was no form of records management training programme received by them at the studied institutions. Most of them found it difficult to understand the concept of records management at the time of filling the questionnaire. All the records staff have not had any form of training in records management or archives administration, let alone engaging the services of a Records Manager/Archivist to maintain records in the studied institutions. This has affected the management of the institutions' records in no small measure.

Ugwunze (1992) observes that it is very essential to have well-trained personnel in records management. Seminars/workshops, lectures and in-service training for records staff are very essential in improving records management skills. Such facilities, she said, could provide opportunity for acquiring new techniques in records management and this enhances their rate of productivity.

Alegbeleye (1982) points out that the importance of trained personnel in records management cannot be over-emphasized. He stresses that records management has no prospect of success unless the services of trained personnel are employed. He emphasized that there is an urgent need for professional personnel in the registry to coordinate all the activities involved in records management. He lamented that at present, the number of trained personnel in records management is inadequate. There is therefore a clarion call on the studied institutions to train personnel in Records Management in order to put a functional records management practice in place.

**TABLE V;
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY TYPES OF
STORAGE FACILITIES USED IN KEEPING RECORDS.**

STORAGE FACILITIES	FCE, YOLA	COE, JAL-INGO	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Wooden shelves	1	2	3	4.8
Metal shelves	8	7	15	23.8
Steel cabinets	25	19	44	69.8
Others	1	-	1	1.6
TOTAL	35	28	63	100

Table 5 shows distribution of respondents by types of storage facilities used in keeping records. The result indicates that the most common device used as storage facility are steel cabinets with 44 or 69.8%, metal shelves ranked second with 15 or 23.8%, wooden shelves with 3 or 4.8% while others with 1 or 1.6%.

The researchers discovered that all the steel cabinets were obsolete with no keys to provide security for the records. Further investigation revealed that the obsolete cabinets were grossly inadequate. As a result, some files were seen either placed on top of the cabinets or kept on the floor which constitute security risks for the records.

The study also revealed that restrictions were placed on the use of records. A closed access system was maintained to prevent unauthorized staff from getting access to the records.

Hopler (1976) notes that records are the life blood of any organization and to treat the matter of storage and protection of these records lightly would be foolhardy. He further argues that records which are not properly stored

will be at the mercy of agents of records destruction such as rats, termites, fungi, mould, heat, humidity and even human destructive agents like theft and vandalism. He concludes that if a record is worth keeping, then such record must be adequately stored and protected.

**TABLE VI:
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY ADOPTION OF SECURITY
MEASURES ON RECORDS**

SECURITY MEASURES	RESPONSES				
	Colleges	FCE, Yola	COE, Jal.	Total	Percent
Burglary proof		29	26	55	87.3
Fire detection		6	1	7	11.1
Smoke detec-		-	-	-	-
Heat detection		-	1	1	1.6
Others		-	-	-	-
TOTAL		35	28	63	100

From the result in Table VI, it is seen that burglary proof system is the most common security system in use in the studied Colleges with 55 or 87.3%. This is widely followed by fire detection system with 7 or 11.1% and heat detection system with 1 or 1.6%.

The study revealed that the studied Colleges maintained 24 hours surveillance in the records areas. The study also revealed that there was no provision for fire extinguishers in the records areas. This situation is alarming. Place (1966) recommends that records storage areas should be equipped with fire extinguishers and good water sprinkler system.

It is generally known that fire constitutes the greatest enemy of records. This is due to common occurrence of fire disaster, which could either be accidental or deliberate. Since disaster is an event which could occur at any time, the provision of fire extinguishers in records areas can help to prevent or minimize the extent of damage when disaster occurs.

**TABLE VII:
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AWARENESS OF
DISASTER MANAGEMNT PRACTICES**

DISASTER AWARENESS	RESPONSES				
	Colleges	FCE, Yola	COE, Jal.	Total	Percent
Yes		25	25	50	79.4
No		10	3	13	20.6
TOTAL		35	28	63	100

Table VII shows the distribution of respondents as to their awareness of disaster management programmes as a measure guiding against natural and man – made disasters. It is obvious from the table that 50 or 79.4, out of 63 respondents reported that they are aware of the existence of the programme while 13 or 20.6% claimed ignorance of it.

The study revealed that the studied institutions did not have any disaster management programme in place. It is quite clear here that the Colleges were fully aware of the existence of the programme but made no efforts to practice it.

McIntyre (1996) asserts that many incidents, which can be described as disasters, had destroyed or seriously damaged part of libraries or archives. Alegbeleye (1983) emphasizes that it is important to establish protective measures for records by the establishment of a vital records management programme. The protection of organizational goals, he said, may be achieved in two ways:

- i. By establishing disaster control measures through conducting a hazard survey on all aspects of the building both inside and outside which need to be thorough and comprehensive.
- ii. By establishing a vital records management programme, which could be by dispersal, duplication or vaulting methods.

The studied institutions are therefore expected, as a matter of urgency, to embark on disaster planning, which is an organized programme of preparedness against man-made, natural, or accidental disasters. Such preparedness requires attention to be paid to the protection of manpower, resources, and records.

AUTOMATION OF RECORDS

Data made available indicated that the studied Colleges had not automated their records. The study however revealed that plans had reached advance stages to automate their records. This is commendable.

Ugwunze (1992) opines that the importance of automated equipment cannot be over-emphasized. This is because they extend workers potentials, relieve tedium and quicken the pace of producing and disseminating information. The use of the computer should be introduced as this will enhance storage and retrieval of information without much difficulty.

Risks (1971) posits that the use of computers and other information technologies will assist in records creation and control, storage and retrieval as well as quicken dissemination of information to users at the least cost.

The studied Colleges should therefore note that the use of automated systems in their records offices is highly recommended. With the use of information technology in records offices, it is possible to reduce clerical work and provide information for better control.

CONCLUSION

Records are information, irrespective of the format on which they appear. Records are important. Records are synonymous with information without which an organization cannot function. They are vital to the continued survival of an organization.

The majority of the records staff involved in the management of records in the studied Colleges were in the junior and intermediate cadre who had no form of training in records management or archives administration, let alone had a say in the decision making processes relating to their work. The few staff in the senior cadre were equally affected as they were not trained in records management or archives administration.

This calls for a change of attitude on the part of the studied institutions to put in place, as a matter of urgency, functional records management practices by recruiting professionally trained Records Managers/Archivists in the management of the institutions' records. The benefits to be derived from the implementation of this policy cannot be quantified in monetary terms.

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