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Atulomah, Bola C., "Perceived Records Management Practice and Decision Making Among University Administrators in Nigeria" (2011). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 541.
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Library Philosophy and Practice 2011

Perceived Records Management Practice and Decision Making Among University Administrators in Nigeria

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Introduction

Records management in developing countries, and indeed Nigeria is yet to attain the level of attention and support that it has received in countries of the developed world. All organizations, including the university systems, especially as nearly the entire product of administrative decision-making and service delivery are in the form of information. The records of an organization, such as the university system, constitute her corporate memory which supplement human memory and serve as guides for effective planning and decision making. Records are invaluable to university administration. Thus, in order to take advantage of past experiences, accurate records and good records keeping are the bedrock of planning for the future in the university system. 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. Information is the factor input in achieving rational organizational decision-making and high quality service delivery. It is needed to develop, deliver and assess the effectiveness of organizational policies, make informed choices between alternative courses of action, provide the basis for openness and accountability, protect individual rights and enforce legal obligations

Despite the importance of records management in organizations, there are a lot of problems and constraints of records management in Nigeria. Ajewole (2001) stated that, the problem of records management is not with records and information *per se* but with those having interface and interactions with these two vital resources. The problems of records management can be summarized into inadequate knowledge of the life-cycles of records, inertia in implementing a form of system and information. He identified these problems in every phase of life-cycle of records.

Over the years, universities in Nigeria have consistently faced increasing complex organizational problems in areas such as resources maximization, staffing, procedural problems regarding planning, control and evaluation, information storage and retrieval (Longe, 1988). Nwankwo (1985) stated that modern educational system, like other modern social and economic systems have become

increasingly complex. Educational institutions like the universities are not only facing complex managerial problems, they have become complex in themselves. The complexities of educational systems and their institutions, particularly in Nigeria and other developing countries, tend to be characterized by such phenomena as; student population explosion, diversities in the dimensions of programmes and procedures, inadequacy of funds and other material resources even in the face of inflation, conflicting models and policies adopted for implementation. At the core of the above bewildering list of complex variables is the problem of paucity of information as well as poor capacity for records and information management. The university provides education to the general populace catering for diverse fields of learning, ranging from the humanities, social sciences, arts, science and technology, medicine, law and education at different levels (postgraduate and undergraduate studies). The total enrolment in these universities ranges from 5,000 in the smaller universities to 30,000 in the larger ones and still growing. Various levels of activities are conducted in these universities ranging from ventures to academic and financial transactions. The general disposition of people, and especially office personnel, to have little regard for records has contributed to the poor state of records today in all of the nation's institutions of higher learning.

Popoola and Oluwole (2007) posits that Nigerian university administrators are often concerned about the alarming rate of misplacement or loss of vital records and the slow speed at which needed records are retrieved from their storage. Accurate retrieval and timely availability for use of the required information would reduce common problems of management in institutions, such as:

- difficulties in finding information needed to take decisions or respond to inquiry.
- delays in payment of staff emoluments and fringe benefits
- accumulation of administrative matters which ought to have been discharged, but now causing discontent among staff, students, parents etc.
- improperly registered students in school registers and records.
- inaccurate demographic figures resulting in either lack of places/spaces for students or wastage of spaces/places available.
- inability to forward students' reports/records or release results on schedule (Nwankwo, 1985).

Management of university records is a new development in Nigeria (Ugwunze, 1992). There is a need to create awareness of the importance of records management in the universities. Universities in Nigeria generate an immense quantity and quality variety of records in their day-to-day activities. A lot of files are multiplied in numbers without control over their creation. Problems of storage and retrieval of information on records/ files continue to increase because they are done manually. Most of these records are vital in the sense that they are referred to frequently for the smooth running of every department in the university. He stated further that, records management involves planning, implementing and review of the functions for the administration of the records of an organization. A well organized records management programme saves a lot of money for the administration of the organization. Records management helps to control the quality and quantity of information that is created. The information can be maintained in a manner that effectively serves the need of the organization and any information that are no longer necessary can be efficiently disposed of. In a university with a well organized Records Management Programme, the Records Centre, University Archives and Special Collections Department assist University offices in determining which records to keep and which to discard, and offer advice on ways to file, store, and retrieve records economically and efficiently.

Decision Making in the University System

Decision making in the university system is an administrative function and

invariably requires information in the form of records. Administration is ordinarily discussed as the art of "getting things done." Emphasis is placed upon processes and methods for insuring incisive action. Principles are set forth for securing concerted action from groups of people. Decisions are made at different levels in the university. However, it is fairly obvious that the lower one goes down the organization the lower the level of decision that must be made and in reverse, the higher one goes the higher the level of decision; irrespective of the level, however, information will be required one way or another. In all spheres of activity decisions are being made about the allocation of budgetary resources, the prioritization of programmes, the granting of social benefits, the commissioning of new projects, the closure of unproductive ventures, the information to release to the public or the level of classification that certain information requires. Records and archives provide the information that is required by those who make the decisions. The question only is whether these records are available to these decision makers and whether the decision makers are aware of their existence and thus make use of them when making decisions. Thomassen, (2002) opined that trustworthy records contain reliable evidence of decisions taken, rights acquired and commitments made. Without records, no assessment can be made of whether individuals and public organizations have actually carried out the actions and transactions that they had to execute, whether they have performed these actions and whether they have done the things which they were not supposed to do.

Decision Making in University System is always by committee system. Each university has between twenty and sixty committees and each of this committee is expected to specialize with regards to the terms of and focus of activities. In practice, however, there are disturbing overlaps and duplication of efforts. Nevertheless, the thrust of committee activities is decision making. This entails the analysis of available options and the choice of one of several possible alternative options. Such decisions of committees may have to do with providing solutions to specific problems (e.g., course unit system and the problem of re-sit examinations; top heavy structure of staff in some departments etc.). The decisions may also have to do with broad and recurrent issues like financial allocation (e.g. finance sub-committees of the development committee or the finance and general purposes committees of council) or recruitment and reward sub-committee as in appointment and promotion committees, or with disciplinary sub-committee as in the joint committees of Senate and Council. What is most instructive and common to all the committees is decision making and choice of one out of several options or alternative viewpoints. The degree to which such activities reflect or result from superior administrative capacity is conditioned by several factors. These include:

1. The membership or composition of the committee
2. The leadership, chairmanship, or conveyance
3. The frequency or regularity of committee meetings
4. The time taken for a particular decision to be reached (one month, one year etc.)
5. The records or minutes of proceedings (accuracy of documentation)
6. The availability or non-availability of administrative supports (e.g. competent secretary, information bank, or precedent regulations etc.)
7. Consistency or inconsistency of application of rules and regulations or other bases of reaching decisions
8. The timeliness of frequency or follow up actions and documentation of decision, decision extract, communication of decision etc.

The study investigated perceived record management practices and administrative decision-making among University administrators in Nigeria and made appropriate recommendations to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness in the university

sector. It was also hypothesized in the study that perceived records management practices of university administrators will be contingent in administrative decision-making process. The study would also be useful in providing some information that could be used in improving the existing management information systems for the tertiary institutions.

Method

The study was ex-post-facto design in which a validated semi-structured questionnaire was developed using results about institutional policies and types of records obtained from key-informant interviews, and utilized to gather information about perceived records management and administrative decision making processes from 795 senate members enrolled by stratified random sampling of 13 universities within Nigeria out of a total of 92 universities. Valid empirical studies are usually guided and rooted by sound theoretical framework such as employed in this study where the development of the instrument for measuring perceived records management and administrative decision-making process were operationalized by considering questionnaire items that required 4–response Likert-type scales for these domains; *'awareness of record management programme'*, *'perceived support for records management'* and *'perceived benefits of records management'*. Similarly, measures for decision-making processes was carried out using the 4-response Likert-type inventory scales for the decision-making domain; *'process of decision-making'*, *'method of decision-making used'* and *'presentation and implementation of decision made'*. For validity of the study, theories and models were considered very important tools for conceptualizing domains and variables because they provided the basis for understanding the dynamics of the theme of the study and the behaviour of senate members enrolled and those factors that influence such behaviour and phenomena (Van Ryan and Heaney 1992; Statistical analysis of the data involved aggregating the scales of the domains and subjecting the variables to analysis of variance (ANOVA) where differences in measures between categories were suspected and regression analysis were conducted to test hypothesis with a cut-off set at $p = 0.05$ level of significance.

Results

The results showed that respondents in this study were federal universities 521 (65.5%), State 224 (28.2%) and Private 50(6.3%). The median age of respondents was 41-50years and there were 543(68.3%) males and 226(28.4%) females enrolled for the study that consented. Most of the respondents 401 (50%) had administrative experiences of 6 years and above and majority 658(82.8%) of them possessed a doctorate degrees. The results further showed that Senate members 133(16.7%) indicated that they were not aware of organized system of records management programme; 587(73.8%) also reported that the records are kept with various principal officers while 460(57.9%) indicated that there is abridged protocol for handling records in their various institutions. A sizable proportion of Senate members 673(84.7%) indicated that they were not sure of the full ramifications of records management in their various institutions while 475(59.7%) indicated that they are aware of government policy on records management. Respondents 499(62.8%) further indicated that every principal officer should have some understanding of what records management is all about; while 533(67.1%) of the respondents reported that they were not aware of any budgetary allocation for records management in their institution for records management in the institution.

From all these, it could be inferred that the senate members were aware of organized system of records management and that there is no abridged protocol for handling records management in their institutions. Majority of Senate member surveyed were not aware of any government policy on records management. The Senate members are also aware of the full ramifications of records management.

These imply that there were some forms of records management practices in place for all types of records. Regarding awareness of Record management practice, 133(16.7%) respondents reported not being aware of any organized system of records management programme. Further, respondents' perceived records management practice and their decision-making process showed a significant relationship with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.840 ($p < 0.0001$). Testing for variations in records management ($F = 147.3$; $p < 0.0001$), and administrative decision-making process ($F = 142.91$; $p < 0.0001$) among respondents in the categories of universities surveyed revealed that a significant difference thus exist suggesting that they perceive and processed their records differently for decision-making.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic Variables	Senate members who responded in this study N=795	
	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender:	543	68.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males • Females 	226	28.4
Age: (Years)	6	0.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <25 • 25 to 35 • 36 to 40 • 41 to 50 • >50 	30	3.8
	55	6.9
	394	49.6
	293	36.9
Admin Experience:	40	5.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • < 2 • 2 to 5 • 6 to 9 • 10 > 	163	20.0
	201	25.0
	200	25.0
Educational Qualification	60	7.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates • Masters • PhD 	40	5.3
	658	82.8

Table 2, Summaries of ANOVA for differences in records management between the federal, State and Private universities surveyed in the study

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Variable	Source of variation	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Records Management	Btw. Group	47375.8	2	23687.9	147.30	.000
	-	-	-	-	-	-
State Federal Private	Within Group	127363.4	792	160.812		
TOTAL:-	TOTAL	174739.2	794			

Table 3, Summaries of ANOVA for differences in administrative decision-making process between the federal, State and Private universities surveyed in the study

Variable	Source	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Administrative Decision Making	Btw. Group	87672.7	2	43836.4	142.91	.000
	-	-	792	306.73		
State Federal Private	Within Group	242935.8				
TOTAL:	TOTAL	330608.6	794			

Discussion

In this study 795 participants who occupied management positions in the university academics were surveyed to identify their perceived records management practices along with administrative decision-making process. As the university generates massive information concerning its diverse fields of learning and other activities there should be in place records management programmes that enables the appropriate sorting of these huge information from the citadel of learning which are relevant to national development. The university as an institution needs well-managed records to uphold the rule of law, to be accountable for their actions and to ensure that the interest of the university community is protected; The university governing council needs records to enable them to formulate policy and make decisions on the basis of well-organized, accurate and comprehensive information; Administrators need well-structured, complete and accessible records so that they have the information available to them to implement policy, deliver services to staff and students, manage resources and carry out their work and auditors and other regulators need access to the information in records to ensure that resources have

been used fairly and honestly, that programme and procedures have been carried out and that standards have been met. Obviously there implications for national development when records are not properly managed or used in the process of making decisions that contribute to the development of the country. Decision making in the university system is an administrative function and invariably requires information in the form of records. Records are the product of administrative and business activity. The findings in this study suggest that respondents sampled from the three categories of universities demonstrated perceived records management practice to be contingent in administrative decision-making process. The following recommendations are made to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness in the university sector:

- Establishment of a comprehensive functional Records Management Programme in all Nigerian universities.
- The Establishment of a University Archive
- The National University Commission (NUC) should make as a matter of policy the establishment of a functional Records Management Programme and University Archives as a benchmark for accreditation
- More Professional Training Schools should be established to update skills of records management personnel.
- There is a dearth of information regarding current issues evolving from research in the area of records management and decision-making process appearing in peer review papers suggests that there is need to conduct more studies in this area.

Improving records management in educational institutions in particular, will help to eliminate various observed administrative/managerial problems and weaknesses that cause inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the institutions.

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