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An Assessment of students' records management system and preservation as a determinant for the effective retrieval and dissemination of information in tertiary institutions in kogi State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to assess students' records management system and preservation as a determinant for the effective retrieval and dissemination of information in tertiary institutions in the state under study. The objective of the study is to determine how students' records are organised, preserved, managed, retrieved, and the challenges encountered. The study sample population comprised of 92 selected records management personnel from some randomly selected tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey method using simple random sampling techniques is used for the study; observation and questionnaire are the instrument used for data collection. The major findings of the study revealed: ineffectiveness in students' record management system, incompetent personnel, inadequate infrastructural facilities, constant power failure, minimal ICT facilities, inadequate space and preservation facilities. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made; effort should be made for provision of standby generator/inverter/Solar energies as an alternative to power supply, training of staff especially on ICTs, digitalisation of their records, provision of adequate funding, enough infrastructural facilities such as storage facilities including electronic storage devices and adequate preservation apparatus.

Keywords: Assessment, students, Record Management, Tertiary Institutions, Kogi State, Nigeria.

- **Introduction**

Tertiary institutions are seen as the factory for producing the high man-power needed in every field of human endeavour in the country. Nigerian tertiary institutions are characterised by multiple goals and objectives which are pursued through their main functions and activities of learning, teaching, research and public service for the advancement of knowledge. Accordingly, the internal functions of tertiary institution system include the task of admitting students, management of students' profile, course administration, welfare services, discipline and certification of studies. These aforementioned tasks are documented as official records containing essential and crucial information of actions and events which are kept and preserved for easy retrieval and utilisation when needed. Records are essential resource of tertiary institutions which are highly needed daily for problems solving and decision making. Students records, whether physical or electronic are very important and should be harnessed through effective records management system. Azim *et al* (2018) defined records as a vital document that are created, received, maintained and used by an organisation or individual in the cause of discharging legal responsibilities or in the pursuance of business activities. The smooth running of any higher institution depends on effective and efficient records management. Suffice to say that the planning, coordinating, organising, controlling and implementing of organisational activities, particularly institutions of higher learning, would be a leap in the dark in the absence of accurate and accessible students records keeping system. Accurate and updated students records protect tertiary institutions from litigation, preserve their corporate memory and foster accountability and good governance.

Tertiary institutions as human organisation, functions mainly through the registry; the custodian of rules, regulations, records and extra-ministerial circular assisted by retinue of officers to carry out the function of the later. Consequently, the role of these officers and their understanding or knowledge of records keeping, management, retrieval, preservation, and information dissemination is a *sin-qua non* to effective students' records management system. Information has been regarded as an indispensable asset of any organisation, whether public or private, it's presently a parameter for classifying the countries of the world into two main classes, namely information poor and information rich countries. Evidently, information availability, accessibility, and utilisation have a strong relationship with the national development of any country. Hence, information is a national resource that can be used to produce value added goods and services. Records and information are inseparable, since they contain information needed for planning, decision making, and control in any tertiary institutions.

It should be noted therefore, that the personal and unpleasant experience of the main author in getting his first-degree academic transcripts from his formal University to another for post-graduate programmes in the same country (Nigeria) took him almost a year. This is partly one of the reasons this research is been carried out.

- **Statement of the Problem**

Observations have shown that there is growing complexity of tertiary institutions administrative system which enhances information generation of students from admission, registration, matriculation, examination, discipline and graduation, among others. The volume of information generated yearly by tertiary institutions are heavy and hence require effective records management system and preservation that are grounded with effective policies and procedures that inform the records management personnel as to the nature of managing students' records from creation to their final disposition. But this is hardly the case in Nigerian tertiary institutions despite extant researches and literatures, cases of misplaced or misfiled documents as well as mutilated, brittle, incomplete students file or loss of records in transit are common occurrences in most tertiary institutions under study. Delayed release and access to vital records and documents creates lapses in students' profile while in school, coupled with non-release of certificates to graduates as when due and delay in producing academic performance through transcripts to graduates for postgraduate programmes both home and abroad, referral, Visa application, litigation, legal or employment purposes, etc.

This is to the extent that poor student records management system inhibits good planning and management of scarce resources. Consequently, records are difficult to retrieve. There is a loss of man hour input in searching for information especially misfiled or misplaced records of students. The essence of records preservation is to allow for effective planning and to prevent records from deteriorating. Records preservation is facing a lot of issues such as technology obsolescence, media fragility and possible physical damage to hardware and storage media. These challenges pose major risks of difficulties in maintaining the persistent integrity, originality, dependency and usability of records. This has been a challenge in tertiary institutions particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria and this is the reason this research is being carried out.

- **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to examine students' records management system and preservation as a determinant for effective retrieval and dissemination of information in tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- identify the types and format of students records created/received, maintained and used in tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria.
- examine the methods of managing students records in terms of organisation, retrieval and preservation.

- identify the problems associated with effective management of students' records in tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria.

- **Literature Review**

A record is either created or received by an organisation in pursuance of or compliance with legal obligations, or in the transaction of business. Records can be either tangible objects, such as paper documents like birth certificates, drivers' licenses, and physical medical x-rays, or digital information, such as electronic office documents, data in application databases, web site content, and electronic mail. Records are the vital resources that an organisation needs to conduct their operations efficiently and effectively. (Bakare, Abioye and Issa, 2016). Without records, no tertiary institution could operate successfully. In other words, records are needed as a proof in any tertiary activities. Records help tertiary institutions to:

- Provide a corporate memory
- Formulate policy
- Make appropriate decisions.
- Achieve greater efficiency, productivity and consistency
- Meet statutory and regulatory requirements
- Protect the tertiary's interests and those of its students, staff and clients.
- Document all the tertiary activities and achievements.

Administrative transparency can only be achieved through the aid of good records keeping. It is through these records that tertiary institution administrators can be held accountable for their actions on decisions they take while in office. Records management aids tertiary institutions in creating students records in order to preserve information for future reference and processing. Therefore, these records that are created help guarantee accountability by the later and thus safeguard evidence of its activities, while allowing timely administrative access to information and the subsequent preservation of the records from their creation until their planned time of destruction (Mukred, Yusof, Asma'Mokhtar & Fauz 2019).

A set of activities required for systematically controlling the creation, distribution, use, maintenance, and disposition of recorded information maintained as evidence of business activities and transactions is regarded as record management (Mosweu and Rakemane 2020). Students' records occupy strategic position in the effective and efficient organisation and administration of tertiary institutions because they document the planning and implementation of appropriate course of actions thereby allowing proper monitoring of activities or tasks. Students' records are important because they serve as major information tools that sustain the school and aid in achieving educational goals and objectives

(Mohamed and Bunawan 2022). Therefore, students' records are universally acknowledged fundamental tools in the business of tertiary institutions and their absence or mismanagement could lead to inefficiencies, failures in operational procedures or jeopardize information retrieval and dissemination processes. Allison and Otuza (2017) posited that lot of students' have suffered in the hands of many tertiary institutions owing to missing records in terms of credentials, exam scripts, results and the like. These phenomena has added extra years to their maximum mandate with the institution and while this ugly menace is not only deterrent to the student but also to the later and parents as it has led them to litigation in some cases.

However, students' records are classified according to their purposes which includes, admission/matriculation records, enrolment/registration records, academic cumulative records-results/transcripts, convocation-degree award and student disciplinary records. These records are important because they serve as major information tools that protect students' rights of degree/certificate with the right class, documented through academic cumulative records (scholastic performance). Organisations and institutions in the world in general and Nigeria particularly for instance, rely on tertiary institutions authentication of certificate and transcript claims. Otherwise, employment or admission for postgraduate study could be denied, delayed or compromised as a result of incorrect or lack of authentic students records or failure to retrieve records (Nwaohma, 2014).

Proper records management could help tertiary institutions to manage their information efficiently, fulfill their mandate, protect them from litigation, preserve their corporate memory, and foster accountability and good governance. Records management as asserted by Oyebo (2016) involves the effective, efficient and systematic control of the processes of creating, receiving, maintaining, and disposing valuable information about the organisation. It is the means of processing information for optimum accessibility and usability, concerned with the origination, collection, organisation, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmission, transformation and use. Records management is all embracing activity which involves form control, correspondence control, reports management, file management, records inventory and appraisal. When students' records are created or received, the user must ensure that they are correctly filed and recorded so that they can be tracked, retrieved and used by the tertiary institution concerned in the future (Azman, 2009).

However, on the other hand, Seniwoliba, Mahama and Abilla (2017) asserted that manual record-keeping is prone to errors and is vulnerable to harm one's business. They further maintained that manual record-keeping is negatively affected by water, fire, and other hazards. It was also reported that the amount of paper kept may be excessive, particularly in Nigeria, where students can request for records of many years. Therefore, Electronic or digital record-keeping has the potential to alleviate the problem of manual record-keeping. Critical examinations of student's records in tertiary institutions under study indicate the needs to ensure that records are well preserved for effective usage as long as possible.

Preservation can be defined as all managerial, technical and financial consideration applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of collection or information materials to ensure their continued availability (Hussain and Yusuf, 2021).

Preventive measures can considerably extend the usefulness of records, and are usually much more cost effective than interventive measures taken to remedy damage after deterioration has taken place. The essence of preservation of students' record is to allow for effective planning and to prevent materials from deteriorating. Balogun and Adjei (2018) maintained that preservation of records faces a lot of issues such as technology obsolescence, media fragility and possible physical damage to hardware and storage media. These challenges pose major risks of difficulties in maintaining the persistent integrity, originality, dependency and usability of records. Preservation of records has been a challenge in tertiary institutions particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Information and data generated from an effective records management system serves as a determinant in aiding the educational institutions to plan and make useful decisions, preserve facts and figures for future references and accessibility thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the organisation and administration of the school.

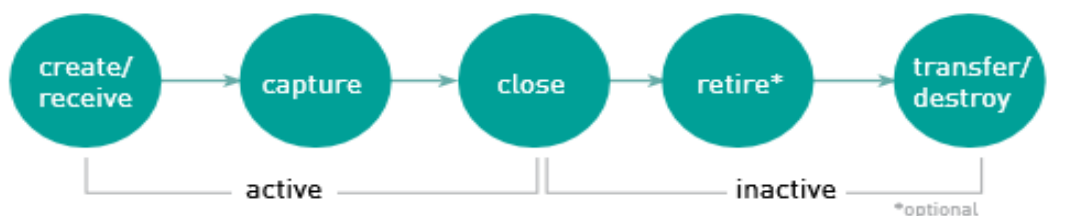
Similarly, Ayanda, Oloniruha and Ogunbade (2014) defines records management as the application of systematic and scientific controls to recorded information required in the operation of an organisation's business. From the above therefore, records management can be defined as "the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records." It states that records management includes activities such as: setting policies and standards; assigning responsibilities and authorities; establishing and promulgating procedures and guidelines; providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records; designing, implementing and administering specialised systems for managing records; and integrating records management into business systems and processes.

However, records management is the systematic control placed over the life cycle of recorded information from creation to its ultimate disposition or permanent storage. The life cycle of a record includes its conception, creation, distribution, usage, maintenance, storage, disposition, and the archival preservation stage. Records management can play an important role in charting the course of policy and determining program priorities. It can also introduce a sense of unity of purpose into the whole administration. Thus, it seeks to create records necessary for the efficient and successful running of tertiary institutions; to produce the records when they are needed; to preserve records relevant to the continued operation of the later; and to create only those records which are necessary. Accurate and up-to-date records are also required to ensure discipline, equity, fair-play and justice in degree award for

graduations. One can imagine a tertiary institution without records or inaccessible records of student enrolment statistics by programme/departments, grades earned by students per semester, etc. Without records, the administrators/government will not be able to make adequate provision of basic services as well as accurate decision taking.

Records management practices in an organisation according to Bake (2015) is to controls, manage and utilise records of organisation for the purpose of the organisation. This is done through the creation to disposition of records, that is, throughout the records life-cycle which includes identifying, classifying, prioritizing, storing, securing, archiving, preserving, retrieving, tracking and destroying of records. The fundamental concept behind records management is the idea that each record has a life cycle. "Life cycle" refers to the stages that every official records must go through. After a record is created, it must be filed according to a defined, logical scheme into an aged repository where it will be available for retrieval by authorised users. When the information contained in records no longer has any immediate value, the record is removed from active accessibility. Depending on the nature of the record, it is either retained, transferred, archived or destroyed. Allison and Otuza (2017) affirmed that students records management practices in tertiary institutions is crucial mostly for all record managers and when their records are well kept, it will help in achieving the institutional goals and objectives.

Records Lifecycle



In today's ever-shifting technology landscape, with the proliferation of new technologies including mobile devices, online services and discovery models for research, the ease of access to information relies on a user's familiarity with and access to new technologies. The most common and modern device that emerges in record keeping in recent times is computerisation. This has made information and its management easy and efficient in terms of generation, organisation, storage, utilisation, retrieval and even destruction (when necessary). While advancements in technology provide new ways to access information, undeveloped technology skills may result in unused or overlooked information. In academic environments, the inability to use technology successfully may act as a barrier to accessing vital students records and its management. Knowledge has become a critical determinant of competitiveness in the world economy of today given the prevalent globalisation and rapid technological change.

Otobo and Alegbeleye (2021), posited records as barometers for measuring the performance of an organisation which means that without records, no organisation can function. In addition, records are the by-products of managerial and administrative activities, and they mirror the over-all quality of the organisation's business performance. To be meaningful, it must be accompanied by a detailed set of definitions that identify when a record is created and what type of evidence is required to create reliable and authentic record. Every existing organisation globally is a product of records as they depend on it holistically to execute their plans. The ability of tertiary institutions to create and manage their records successfully will definitely distinguish it from their likes on positive note. Records are information put into a temporary or permanent physical or electronic medium. It could be seen as any instance of a physical medium on which information was put for the purpose of preserving it and making it available for future reference (Oxford Online English Dictionary, 2022). 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 sparsely. At the non-current stage, they are no longer referred to but are sent to the archives after appraising them. One of the concepts of records management is accessibility. Records of students in tertiary institutions can only be useful if they are accessible to the members of the institutions who need to use them. This implies making sure that they are readily retrievable when required. Ensuring that files are constantly retrieved by proper sorting, modification or outright destruction or archiving some before filing and storage. The need for records preservation is, therefore, paramount to the cultural heritage of the past and for future generations obtainable in any organisation (Abdulkareem, Isah, & Issa, 2013). The availability of information for use, retrieval and dissemination by those staff depends on the way records have been physically, digitally and intellectually organised and managed.

- **Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey methods using simple random sampling techniques. Six tertiary institutions were randomly selected from eleven tertiary institutions in the State under study using random sampling techniques. The population of the study comprised 92 staff of registry, faculty officers, Heads of departments officers who are in charge of students' records and level coordinators. Questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection. 92 copies of questionnaire were administered, and 81 copies were successfully filled and returned, making a return rate of 91%. Two research assistants were employed to assist in the distribution of the questionnaire.

Discussion of findings

The types and format of students records created/received, maintained and used in tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria.

Table 1. Classes of student's records and their formats

Names of Tertiary institutions under study	Active records No. %	Vital records No. %	Semi-active records No. %	Inactive records No. %	Total
Federal College of Education Okene	15	18	10	05	48 (100)
Federal Polytechnic Idah	14	14	09	06	43 (100)
Federal University Lokoja	20	22	04	03	49 (100)
Kogi State College of Education Ankpa	13	12	02	01	28 (100)
Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja	16	13	10	03	42 (100)
Kogi State University Ayingba	12	14	07	02	35 (100)
Total	91	93	42	20	246(100)
Records formats					
Names of Tertiary institutions under study	Paper-based records No. %	Electronic records No. %	Film-based records No. %	Tape records No. %	Total
Federal College of Education Okene	13	08	09	02	32 (100)
Federal Polytechnic Idah	13	10	08	05	36 (100)
Federal University Lokoja	16	20	09	-	45 (100)
Kogi State College of Education Ankpa	18	14	03	05	40 (100)
Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja	19	10	04	03	36 (100)
Kogi State University Ayingba	18	22	03	02	45 (100)
Total	97	84	36	17	234 (100)

Researcher fields work, 2022

Data collected regarding the types and format of students' records created and received by tertiary institutions under study indicated that they have very high numbers of active records (91%) and in paper format (97%). While electronic records (84%), filmed-based records (36%) and Tape records (17%).

Table 2. Records Storage and preservation method

Names of Tertiary institutions under study	Computer No. %	Metal Shelves No. %	Wooden Shelves No. %	Steel file cabinet No. %	CD-Rom No.%	Flash drive No.%	Total
Federal College of Education Okene	18	10	18	10	05	02	63 (100)
Federal Polytechnic Idah	16	09	10	09	07	04	55 (100)
Federal University Lokoja	17	08	09	10	06	04	54 (100)
Kogi State College of Education Ankpa	14	10	07	06	03	02	42(100)
Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja	13	12	05	11	04	01	60 (100)
Kogi State University Anyigba	18	12	08	16	03	02	54 (100)
Total	96	61	57	75	28	13	328 (100)
Preservation methods							
Names of Tertiary institutions under study	microfilming No. %	Digitalization No. %	Fire-prove cabinet No. %	Environmental control No. %	Chemical de acidification No %	Security measures in place No.%	Total
Federal College of Education Okene	10	04	11	09	04	10	48 (100)
Federal Polytechnic Idah	14	02	10	08	03	13	50 (100)
Federal University Lokoja	15	13	14	10	07	12	61 (100)
Kogi State College of Education Ankpa	16	09	10	12	02	13	62 (100)
Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja	06	07	09	11	05	11	49 (100)
Kogi State University Anyigba	13	10	07	04	06	10	50 (100)
Total	75	45	64	54	27	69	320(100)

Computer is the major means used in the storage of students' record (96%). Metal shelves (61%), wooden shelves (57%), steel cabinet (75%), CD-ROM (28%) and flash 1(3%) drives are also used minimally. The research also reveals that preservation measures such as microfilming (75%) is the major preservation methods used, digitalisation (45%), fire-proved cabinets (64%) environmental control (54%) and chemical deacidification (27%). While security measures in place to prevent theft is (69%). All these are the preservation method put in place for students records in the tertiary institutions under study,

Table 3. Data collected as regards the problems associated with effective student's records management

Names of Tertiary institutions under study	Inadequate finance No. %	Lack of skilled personnel No. %	Lack of infrastructure No. %	Inadequate storage facilities No. %	Poor maintenance culture	Erratic power supply No. %	Total
Federal College of Education Okene	18	12	11	10	09	10	70 (100)
Federal Polytechnic Idah	15	08	14	07	04	13	61 (100)
Federal University Lokoja	13	06	11	16	04	10	60 (100)
Kogi State College of Education Ankpa	12	04	09	10	08	06	49 (100)
Kogi State College of Education (Technical) Kabba	10	07	11	16	05	09	58 (100)
Kogi State University, Anyigba	11	05	08	06	02	10	42 (100)
Total	79	42	64	65	32	58	340 (100)

From the above table, inadequate finance (79%) is the major challenge coupled with inadequate storage facilities (65%), lack of infrastructure (64%), erratic power supply (58%), lack of skilled personnel and poor maintenance culture are (42%) and (32%) respectively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The finding of the study has discussed a number of challenges confronting the management of student's records, preservation, retrieval and disseminations in tertiary institution studied. The experience generated from the study indicates, among other things, that there are lapses in the generation and management of students records because of lack of skilled or professional record managers, lack of comprehensive and uniform policy has hampered the management, retrieval, utilisation, dissemination as well as inadequate finance, storage and infrastructural facilities, obsolete equipments, poor maintenance culture and erratic power supply. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are therefore put forward for immediate consideration to ameliorate the aforementioned.

The findings indicate that student's records are majorly on paper format. When students' records are saved electronically, there is a high reduction in the use of papers and as such, many trees are saved in the process hence a general minimization of deforestation. Therefore, it is recommended that student's

records should be digitalized to avoid manual system of keeping records and less paper to meet ICT challenges and remedied loss or misplacement of physical records. Besides, it saves time, money, energy in terms of retrieval, dissemination among others. Tertiary institutions should map out strategies for the long term maintenance and preservation of students records according to established retention periods and the creation of backups as part of the disaster preparedness program

Professional records manager should be engaged coupled with regular and special training for management of records and not the normal civil service training with no consideration for records. Its therefore high time tertiary institutions begin to see and treat students' records as an asset. Provision of an alternative source of power supply with legal and regulatory compliance in records management should strictly be adhered to. Adequate provision of finance or proper budgetary allocation of funds should be directed and monitored towards proper and efficient management of students' records such as the purchase of enough and modern storage and preservation facilities in tertiary institutions studied.

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