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Records Management Practices in Primary Schools in Support of Good Governance and Organisational Accountability

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate records management practices in selected primary schools in Zimbabwe as factors that contribute to governance, identity, research and memory needs. Independent research addressing records management practices in the context of the developing world is far from extensive. Using the survey approach, this study triangulated a pretested questionnaire, document analysis, an interview schedule and observation techniques to collect data from a sample of 128 primary schools. Data was analysed using SPSS® software and thematic analysis. Records were not managed according to best practices and there was limited compliance with legislation. The situation had a potential to deprive society access to the records with integrity and an impairment of corporate memory. The National Archives did not play an active role in the management of school records in violation of its mandate. Our findings contribute to a better understanding of records management practices in schools and provide guidance for those seeking to learn about and apply proper records management practices in a school environment. Proper records management will promote good governance in primary schools; enable a pathway for compliance administration and organisational accountability. The study may also influence policy review in relation to the management of records in schools.

Keywords: Records Management; School Information Management System; Primary School Records; Bulawayo Province

Introduction and background

There are a variety of reasons why organisations must manage and maintain their records properly irrespective of whether they are private or public. Records management practices hold keys to evidence-based governance, accountability, transparency, protection of rights, fostering social justice and preserving corporate memory. Records have to be created, classified, arranged, described, appraised, protected and made accessible if they are to serve some of these functions.

In this context, records management practices facilitate 'the economical and efficient administrative process for managing information and ensuring access throughout its life cycle, from creation to destruction or preservation' (Library of Virginia, 2012).

When conducting their daily business, organisations create records in various formats, including paper, microfilm, and electronic images, electronic mail messages and databases. Organisational records constitute 75 per cent of the information that is required for rational decision making (Ajiboye et al., 2016). These records must be systematically and efficiently managed in order for them to satisfy their administrative, legal, fiscal, cultural, research and historical memory obligations of these organisations. Well-managed records are likely to contain information that is accurate, complete, authentic, useable and easy to access. Managing records systematically may also help the organisation to reduce the volume of records stored in expensive office space and equipment by disposing records that have reached the end of their life cycle, and protect vital records, efficient, office operations through better retrieval systems, and reduce costs for storage equipment, supplies, space and personnel, among other things. In short, records management assists an organisation to function in an effective, efficient and economical way in the information society. Ultimately, well-managed records are fundamental to service delivery and good governance (Osebe, Maina & Kurgat, 2018).

Like other organisations, schools need to manage their records throughout their life cycle. Inadequate attention is paid to the management of school records in the Bulawayo Province of Zimbabwe. This was borne out when the second authors' niece who had dropped out of school in 1975 in order to join the war of liberating Zimbabwe from British colonial rule tried to apply for a birth certificate from the Home Affairs offices after the war. She was requested to produce her birth record in order to facilitate the process of issuing her with a birth certificate. However, she was not able to produce her birth record because the clinic where she was born at did not keep birth records beyond five years after the birth of an individual. The officials at Home Affairs advised her to go to the primary school that she had attended in order to get a letter from the head of the school indicating that she had been a pupil at the school. The letter was going to be part of the documentation to be submitted in support of her application.

The authorities at the primary school she attended were willing to help her, but they hit a brick wall because the school did not have records to substantiate her claim. The school had not kept any admissions or attendance registers for the previous years, for instance. The information captured in the two documents might have helped the school to decide on her date of birth, for example. These records are preserved for posterity in other countries. For example, in New Zealand, admission registers are kept for 25 years after the date of last entry before they are transferred to the Archives (Archives New Zealand, n. d).

She left the primary school empty-handed because the school did not have records of her having been a pupil at that primary school. In the end, it proved difficult to secure a birth certificate. She could not be issued with a national registration number or a passport without a birth certificate. Her right to claim birthright to a country that she had sacrificed her education and life was compromised by a lack of proper records management practices at her previous school.

It was this unfortunate incident that partly motivated us to conduct a study to find out how school records managed. We selected the Bulawayo Province in Zimbabwe where the public primary school that she attended is located. At the time of the study, there were 128 primary and 48 secondary schools in the Bulawayo Province, which is situated south-west of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo, 2017). The 128 primary schools which are the subject of this investigation fell under five education districts, namely, Khami, Imbizo, Reigate, Mzilikazi and Bulawayo Central. The schools were characterized as private, public and special. There were six private, six special and 116 public primary schools. Primary schools were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The head teacher provides leadership at the school level. The line managers of head teachers were the District Education Officers who were answerable to the Provincial Education Director. A theory about the management of school records in Zimbabwe may be developed if more studies on the state of managing these records are conducted in other provinces in Zimbabwe. Multiple case studies traditionally associated with theory development (Ngulube 2015). The theory might then be tested in other developing world contexts where the management of school records remains a challenge.

The activities of primary schools in Zimbabwe are mainly regulated by the Education Act which among other things provide for the keeping and maintaining of accounts and records to promote good governance in both public and private schools (Government of Zimbabwe 1996). The Act accentuates the need for schools to create and maintain records for compliance and administrative purposes. The other key pieces of legislation that come into play with regard to the management of school records in Zimbabwe include the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act. Article 20 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of information (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). Access to records by the public is provided for in the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) [Chapter 10:27] of Zimbabwe which partly gives 'members of the public with a right to access to records and information held by public bodies' (Government of Zimbabwe, 2002). The National Archives of Zimbabwe Act [*Chapter 25:06*] mandates the National Archives of Zimbabwe to monitor records management practices in governmental bodies (Government of Zimbabwe, 1986). These laws underscore the need for both private and public schools to manage their records so that they are accessible to the public with an information need. It is evident from the scenario given above that schools are not in compliance with the country's legislation.

School records in action

School records are a source of institutional information that facilitate education planning and administration of schools, and communication with all stakeholders (Tümer & Külcü, 2010). Records provide evidence of communication between the primary schools and stakeholders such as parents, governments and other organisations. Decisions that are made in the running of schools, promoting discipline in the schools, managing resources and resource allocation, planning activities, assessing the progress of the schools, monitoring students achievement and growth, complying with legal requirements, protecting the legal rights and interests of the students, teachers, parents and other interested parties, demonstrating performance and

accountability, and preserving corporate memory are based on properly managed records (Gama, 2010; Information & Records Management Society, 2012; Sunmola, 2008; United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation, 2014).

There are some instances where school programmes have collapsed as a result of a lack of records. For instance, a lack of complete and accurate records contributed to the failure of the Universal Primary Education programme in Nigeria (Aluede, 2006).

School records are also a source of research information. Flannery *et al.* (2013) analysed office discipline referrals (ODRs) records to track school-wide behaviours and the surrounding conditions when behavioural concerns occur (e.g., location, behavioural type, time of day). Such research is nearly impossible where school records are not systematically managed. Despite the important role played by records demonstrated in the foregoing paragraphs, research on the management of school records in Africa is limited. This study is going to add to the existing literature in extending understanding on records management practices in primary schools.
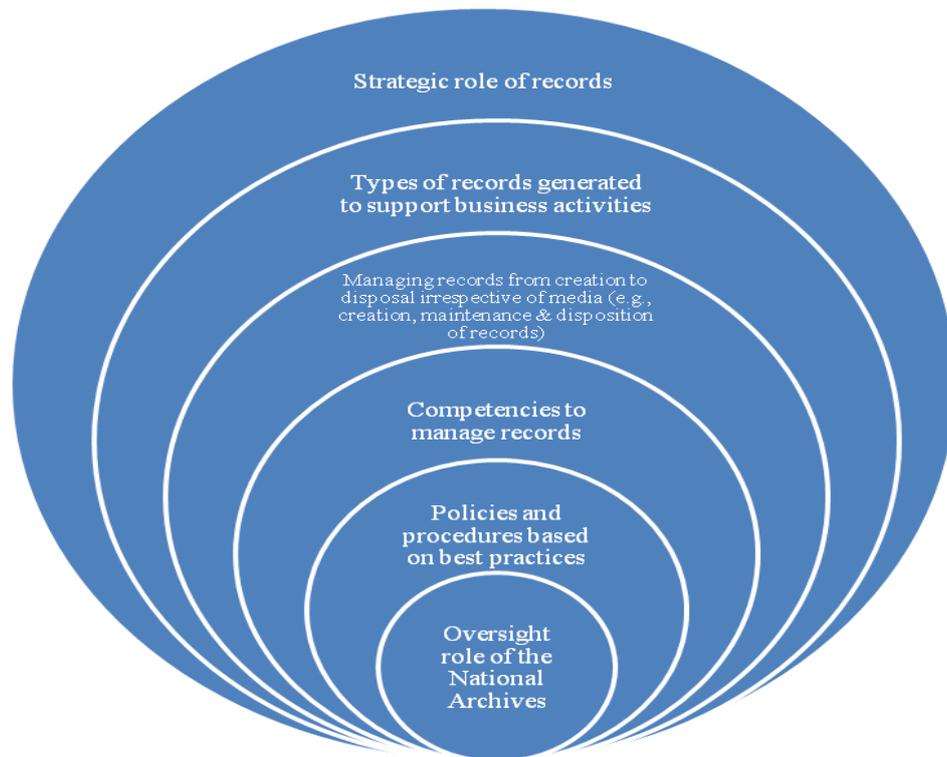
Conceptual framework

Figure 1: Onion ring depicting the conceptual framework

Researchers have adopted diverse conceptual, theoretical, and analytic approaches to investigate records management. Two main approaches are dominant in the literature: the records life cycle and the records continuum. These are useful frameworks for analysing records management practices in organisations. The conceptual framework for this study was developed through pulling together components of these two records management theories, aspect of frameworks embedded in the literature such as ARMA International (2009) and ISO 15489 (2001), personal experiences of the researchers as records managers, and knowledge of the context of practice as suggested by Ngulube (2018; 2020) on how conceptual frameworks are formulated. Figure 1

illistrates that an organisation which recognise the startategic role of records will generate records that support the business activities of the organisation, manage records in all media throughout their life cycle based on sound records management pocies and produres and employ competent staff to manage records. The National Archives, being at the centre of the onion ring, should excercise an oversight role as stipulated in the law.

Statement of the problem

Proper records management practices in schools promote evidence-based governance, protect individual rights and foster social memory. However, there are various problems associated with records management practices in schools such as untimely retrieval of records, inadequate or a lack of thorough supervision by the head teacher, and records maintained in unsuitable storage areas (Alabi 2008). While record keeping is an important activity in primary schools in Nigeria (Sunmola, 2008:1), the case seems to be different in Zimbabwe where there is limited literature and research on records management practices in primary schools.

Texts on managing school records have been compiled in Nigeria (Yahaya, Shehu & Oniye, 2008), South Africa (Department of Education 2004a; b), and Zambia (Chifwepa, 1997), for instance. Workshops on records management for school principals have been organised by the State Universal Basic Education Board in Nigeria (Gama, 2010). Scholars have also written on records management in other parts sub Saharan Africa. For instance, Gama (2010) surveyed the management of school records in the Kano State in Nigeria and discovered that they were not properly kept, organised, preserved and appraised. Looking further than the African continent, it is notable that the Information and Records Management Society (IRMS) compiled the *IRMS Schools Information and Records Management Toolkit* booklet, specifically to assist some public sector schools in their compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in the United Kingdom (Information & Records Management Society, 2012).

Such initiatives are conspicuous by their absence in many countries in sub Saharan Africa, including Zimbabwe. It was against this background that this study investigated records management practice at primary schools in the Bulawayo Province of Zimbabwe. Investigating records management practices is pertinent because it facilitates a deeper understanding of how school records are created, maintained and dispose of to meet governance, identity, research and memory needs. This study may significantly change professional practice and policy formulation with regards to managing school records in the Bulawayo Province in particular and Zimbabwe in general.

The following research questions were formulated on the basis of the conceptual framework that informed this study.

- Does management understand why records are critical to the organisation?

- What types of records are generated and managed by primary schools?

- Are school records managed from creation to disposal irrespective of media?

- Do primary schools have records management policies and procedures?

- What are the skills and levels of knowledge of personnel who handle records of primary schools?

- What is the role of the National Archives of Zimbabwe in managing records of primary schools?

Research methodology

Using the survey approach, the study triangulated a pretested questionnaire, document analysis, an interview schedule and observation techniques in order to enhance the validity of the research results. The self-administered questionnaires targeted 128 head teachers of primary schools in the Province. The interviews were conducted with three District Education Officers who were available from the five districts in the Province, the Provincial Education Director, the Director of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) and the Chief Archivist Bulawayo Archives, under whose jurisdiction the province fell. Observations were carried out at two purposively selected public schools in each district, and four sites equally divided between private and specials primary schools. The conditions of records and storage facilities were observed. Documents such as policies, and retention and disposal were analysed. Triangulation of data sources was necessary to corroborate evidence from various sources and gauge the extent to which executive management and NAZ supported the management of records in the studied schools.

Some of the research strategies employed by this study have been used successfully elsewhere using a mono-method (Gama, 2010; Adebowale & Osuji 2008). The results from this study are more comprehensive than that of the studies that were cited because data sources were combined to give a relatively broader picture.

Results were analysed using SPSS® software, and thematic analysis. The results from the questionnaire, document analysis, interview schedule and observation techniques are presented in an integrated manner. A total of 96 copies of usable questionnaires were returned, which represents a 75 per cent response rate. Ninety responses were from public schools and the rest were from private ones. Questionnaire data was supplemented and complimented by data from six interviews conducted with the informants mentioned in the preceding paragraphs and observations made at fourteen primary schools.

Findings and discussions

The results and discussions are presented in the following sections. They are organised around the themes of the objectives.

Management understanding of the role played by records

A sustainable records management programme depends on a well-defined strategy, which is supported by management. The data from the questionnaires revealed that the head teachers valued records as a strategic resource. Interviews with the District Education Officers and the Provincial Education Director revealed that some schools did not treat records as a strategic asset. Management in other schools did not support records management activities. Apparently, the head teachers were not alone in neglecting the management of these organisational assets,

their line managers were complicity. The District Education Officers and the Provincial Education Director conceded that they never bothered to monitor all records management activities at the schools under their jurisdiction as their main focus was on pupil and curriculum records. That implies that both the head teachers and their bosses did not treat records management as their primary business. It is surprising that the bosses did not take a keen interest on the management of records in schools given that they heavily relied on school records to make effective decisions about matters pertaining to the management of schools.

The interviewees also confirmed that some schools focused on managing finance and property records at the expense of other records as they were subject to periodic checks by auditors. It was implied by the interviewees that head teachers ensured that these types of records were managed because they did not want to be in trouble with the authorities.

Observation at some selected schools uncovered disparities in the storage conditions and maintenance of various types of records. Financial records were neatly stored in strong rooms and store rooms while other classes of records were neglected. This corroborated the findings from the interviews. There was no dedicated storage space for no-financial records. Some records were stored in the same rooms with stationery, spare parts for plumbing and electrical gadgets. In some case, it was reported that this resulted in poor accessibility of records. A lack of management support and guidance resulted in many primary schools lacking a well-defined strategy for managing their records. There were no standardised storage procedures for school records. A lack of management support resulted in schools managing their records unsystematically without proper storage facilities as depicted in Figure 3.

Types of records generated and managed by primary schools

Primary schools create and keep a variety of records. Figure 2 illustrates that most schools created and used records that were listed as options in the question item in the questionnaire. Schools records do not include books in general as alluded to by Amanchukwu and Ololube (2015), for example. Records such as asset registers maybe created in the use of textbooks, but textbooks are not records in themselves as they are not proof of a business activity or transaction. Unless, if the two authors are referring to the books of accounts, for example.

Data from the questionnaire reveals that all schools kept school governing body records, school management records, school pupil records, school curriculum records, personnel records and finance records. The Department of Education (2004a; b) and the Information and Records Management Society (2012) acknowledged that these are some of the classes of records that schools must keep. The ten most important records that every school must create and maintain as suggested by Rakesh (2012) fall under the broad categories of records captured in Figure 2, which include the school calendar, log book, admission register, pupil's attendance register, teacher's attendance register, cash book, cumulative record cards, stock register of equipment, reports to the parents and service book.

A total of 54 (56.25%) schools did not keep health records while 12 (12.5%) schools did not keep administrative records. It implied child safety was not a priority at these schools. It meant that such schools may not have accident reports, incident reports, risk assessment reports and medical information of learners. Interviews with the District Education Officers and the

Provincial Education Director confirmed that all schools were supposed to have all the types of records stated in Figure 2.
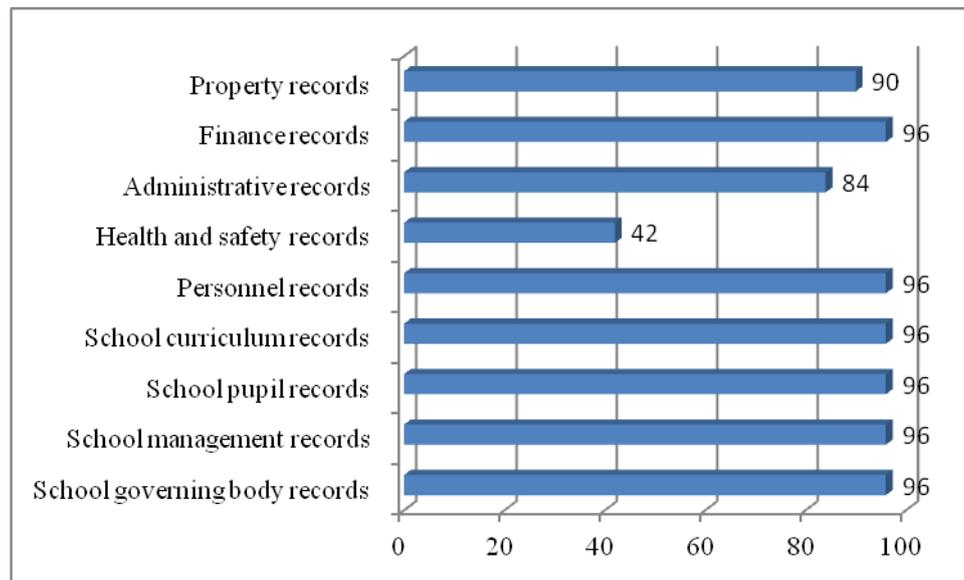

Figure 2: Records generated and managed by schools

Observation techniques revealed that there was no uniformity in the categories of record that were created under each type of record generated by the schools. It was observed that some schools only kept minutes of meetings for school governing bodies. For instance, agendas, policies and regulations, governing body constitutions, elections, minutes of meetings of parents' teachers' association (PTA) and general correspondence were not part of the records of the governing body. Some of these records are important and must be kept.

For instance, in New Zealand, agendas, correspondence and school policies which form part of the records of school governing bodies are kept for 25 years after the date of last entry before they are transferred to the Archives, for instance (Archives New Zealand n. d). The interviewees attributed the absence of a uniform approach to capturing various classes of records to a lack of norms and standards for the management of records in schools. Furthermore, they pointed out that there was a lack of clear guidelines from the Ministry of Education as to what categories of records to keep. In a study in South Africa, Rischmüller and Franzsen (2012) revealed that a lack of guidelines for managing records at schools contributed to the generation of records of a poor quality. Guidelines for managing school records have the potential of creating and managing records that paint a full picture of how business is conducted at the school by covering the full scope of the activities of the school.

Results in Figure 2 demonstrate that some schools did not generate and manage certain classes of records. Gama (2010: 25) discovered that all the schools maintained records, including 'admission register, log book, teachers' records of work, attendance register, visitors' book, teachers' records of work, minutes of staff meeting, school general timetable, minutes of the PTA meetings, hand over and taking over file, cash accounts book, education policy, circulars and syllabi'. These records account for a partial list of the records in the broad categories

outlined in Figure 1. The type of records outlined in Figure 2 have the potential of supporting business and social memory needs if they a managed according to best practices.

Managing primary school records from creation to disposition

Effective and efficient records management practices dictate that records should be managed throughout that life cycle irrespective of format. Record keeping contributes to effective management of schools (Amanchukwu & Ololube, 2015). A comprehensive records management programme encompasses an inventory of records in all formats, implementing filing and indexing systems, records retention and disposal schedules, storing inactive records in a cost effective and secure location, identification and preservation of vital records, identification and preservation of records of enduring value and developing disaster preparedness plans to protect and recover records (Library of Virginia, 2012).

Figure 3 illustrates some of these records management activities in the context of primary schools which were investigated. Active file management has the highest score of 50 (52.1%). Active file management determines how files are arranged, categorised, accessed and stored. Irrespective of record formats being managed, a good school records management system depends on organised classification and filing of records facilitate access, retrieval and use of records (Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2014). All the fifty schools arranged their files by subject. Gama (2010:27) found that the 'majority (38.7%) of the schools organize their records by arranging them in serial order, arrangement by subject closely followed with 36%'.

Although, the schools claimed to have an active file management programme the evidence in Figure 3 suggests that the programme did not provide for the best physical location for the records and records storage equipment as only one school transferred its records to a kind of records centre. On the other hand, two schools stored their active records in records filing equipment such as filing metal cabinets and shelves. This was corroborated by observations at one of the schools. The use of appropriate storage equipment partially secures the records from unauthorised usage and protection from disasters. Unauthorised access and a security breach 'compromises the security, confidentiality, or integrity' of the information. (Martucci & Oldvader, 2010). For instance, the Information and Records Management Society (2012) recommends that pupil records should be specifically kept in lockable storage areas with restricted access, and records in electronic formats should also have appropriate security.

The fact that a total of 81 (84.38%) schools did not have a records inventory for their paper records implied that they did not know what records they held and did not know their exact location. It was going to be a surprise if they were able to manage what they did not have knowledge of. A records inventory has implications for the management of their records because it is the primary source for information for retention scheduling, vital records protection, indexing systems and records storage (Penn, Pennix & Coulson, 1994). It is impossible to conduct these records management activities without the foundational tool, a records inventory. Figure 3 shows that less than eight per cent of schools had a vital records programme, appropriate storage for records, or records retention and disposal schedules. Gama (2010) found

that there were no formal policies governing the retention and disposition of records as 74.7% of the 75 principals who responded used their discretion to dispose of records.
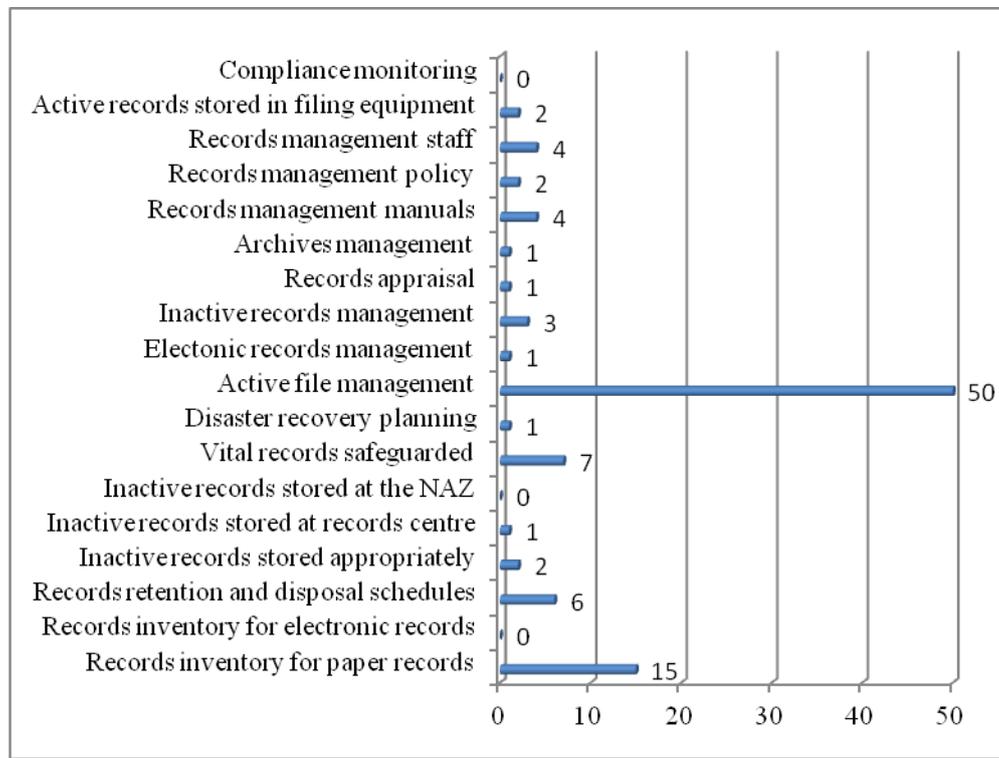

Figure 3: Records management programme for the schools

Only one schools among the six schools that reported as having records retention and disposal schedules appraised its records. Generally, records retention and disposal schedules result from the appraisal of records. It is difficult to understand how the other five schools had records retention and disposal schedules without records appraisal systems. A total of two schools reviewed their retention schedules annually. An absence of a records retention and disposal schedules meant that the surveyed schools were unable to identify records of long-term value to the school. This implies that the schools did not have procedures and authority about how long to keep school records in current, semi-current and non-current records systems.

Schools were at the risky of keeping records longer than necessary and destroying records in violation of the National Archives Act if they do not have records retention and disposal schedules. That has cost implications as systematic disposal of records frees space and equipment of unnecessary records and facilitates the fast retrieval of records. It was observed that records were kept longer than necessary in many schools because of a lack of clear guidelines on the retention and disposal of records. Space for storing records was quickly running out. A shortage of storage facilities for school records was identified as a problem by researchers such as Adebowale and Osuji (2008) and Gama (2010).

Figure 3 shows that seven schools protected their vital records. Vital records programmes identify records that are important for business continuity in the event of a disaster and ensure

their protection and preservation. Data suggests that business continuity was an important factor for all school heads, but their failure to identify and safeguard vital records meant that it remained a pipe dream. Business continuity plans are closely linked with disaster preparedness. According to Asamoah, Akussah and Musah (2018) and Maude (2013) disaster plans are a form of insurance for organisational assets such as records. One school reported the existence of a written records management disaster plan. However, the plan did not cover electronic records. The results imply that many schools are at the risk of failing to operate effectively if they were struck by a disaster. They will not be able to have access to their key administrative and teaching records.

Increasingly, records are created in electronic formats as result of the use of information and communication technologies and the diffusion of the internet (Asogwa, 2012). For instance, electronic mails are gradually replacing telephone calls and memos in many working environments, including schools. Electronic records pose a unique challenge when compared to traditional paper-based records. Electronic records are subject to technological obsolescence because they depend upon specific hardware and software to be created, maintained, accessed and used. Electronic media is fragile, and it has a limited life span. E-mail and websites pose an additional challenge. Only one school had an electronic records management programme out of 86 schools that reported that they created and used electronic records. A total of 85 (99%) of the schools neglected managing their electronic records. Continued access to these school records and the ability to retrieve them was diminishing. Preservation of both electronic and paper records of any organisation is necessary to avoid corporate amnesia. Failure to manage records in all formats by the school is likely to have a negative influence on their governance, productivity, level of compliance with business needs, community expectations and regulations, and their ability to systematically maintain records that are comprehensive. The fact that Figure 3 shows that there was no compliance monitoring means that schools did not have a means of measuring if their records management systems were compliant and effective.

Records management policies and procedures in schools

The success of a records management programme hinges upon developing records management policies and procedures (Information and Records Management Society 2012; Library of Virginia 2012). Data from the questionnaires, interviews and observations revealed that eighty schools did not have formal policies and procedures. The sixteen schools that claimed to have policies and procedures to manage their records referred us to circulars and memos from the parent ministry. It was a relief to find out that four of the sixteen schools had a records management manual. According to Ricks *et al.* (1992: 528) records management manuals facilitate the standardization of procedures, establishment of responsibility, assistance with employee training and provision of updates on policies and procedures. They all claimed that the manuals served that purpose.

During the interviews, the District Education Officers concurred with the sentiments of the sixteen schools that referred to circulars as their policies and expressed surprise at those schools that reported that they did not have policies and procedures for managing records. Surprisingly, the Director of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) and the Chief Archivist Bulawayo Archives were not familiar with the contents of the circulars, yet they were the overseers of the management of all government records.

The legislation and government circulars provide a general framework for the management of school records. However, these government instruments neither define the role that records management play in fulfilling the mission of the school nor assign roles and responsibilities of individuals in managing the schools' records in compliance with policies, and other standards and procedures. A document that performs that function effectively is a written records management policy. All schools that were surveyed did not have a written records management policy. The existence of such a policy demonstrates the school's commitment to manage records throughout their life cycle to support its business functions and provide information about its activities. A study by Gama (2010) discovered an absence of records management policies and concluded that all the records management problems experienced by the schools stemmed from a lack of a written records management policy.

Skills and knowledge of personnel who handle records of primary schools

People are the most critical component of implementing a records management programme (Cisco & Trombley, 2012). The staff is key to planning, implementing and supporting records management systems and users. Effective records management programmes depend on 'the right people, with the right knowledge and skills' (Duffus, 2017: 206). Professional records managers can use their skills and knowledge to carry out records policies and procedures, help an organization to comply with various mandates (Buchanan *et al.*, 2017). Figure 3 shows that four schools out of a total of 96 had employed professional records staff. It turned out that these schools were being run privately. Interviews with the District Education Officers and the Provincial Education Director confirmed that public schools did not have a post of records manager in their establishment. This made it difficult for them to create and fund such a post.

As in the study by Gama (2010), the results from the questionnaire revealed that many school head teachers (92) lacked sufficient knowledge on how to manage records effectively due to a lack of training. The problem was aggravated by the fact that there were no records managers in these schools. The Provincial Education Director suggested that it might be wise to train head teachers in the management of records through in-service programmes, conferences and seminars where it was not possible to employ records managers. It is apparent from the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act that NAZ should play that role. The deficiency of records management skills and knowledge in schools uncovered by this study seems to suggest that the training of teachers in higher education institutions should also include modules on records management so that they may value the importance of records from the onset and manage them effectively when they get employed in various schools.

The role of the National Archives of Zimbabwe managing records of primary schools

Section 6 subsection 1, paragraphs (a) to (c) of the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act [Chapter 25:06] mandates the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) to inspect and examine the records of any government department and to give advice or instructions 'concerning the filing, maintenance and preservation and, when necessary, the transfer to the National Archives of the records' of that that department; and to 'give instructions with regard to the retention or destruction of the records' of that department (Government of Zimbabwe 1986). Interviews with the Director of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) and the Chief Archivist

Bulawayo Archives confirmed that government primary schools fell under the jurisdiction of NAZ. Data from the questionnaires revealed that many public schools (90) did not get guidance from NAZ and destroyed or disposed of their records without the authorisation of NAZ. This was due to the fact that many head teachers were not aware of the existence of the NAZ, and the roles that it played in helping them manage their records for current and future use.

Interviews with staff from NAZ confirmed that NAZ was not playing a significant role in the management of school records because of resource-constraints. Data revealed that NAZ did not conduct any records surveys in schools as mandated by the law.

NAZ was in violation of its own Act by failing to play a role in guiding schools in managing their records. Memory institutions such as archives in sub Saharan Africa have neglected to manage records emanating from the community including schools (Ngulube 2012). Managing school records is considered essential in other parts of the world. For instance, Archives New Zealand (n. d) gives guidance on how to dispose of school records in New Zealand. On the other hand, the Australian Society of Archivists (2017) has a school archives special interest group. NAZ should partner with teachers' training colleges and influence the inclusion of some records management modules curriculum. This may assist NAZ in fulfilling its by ensuring that schools records are managed in compliance with the regulatory environment and community needs. NAZ may also organise workshops for school heads and other stakeholders to underscore the importance of managing school records.

Conclusion and recommendations

This research investigated records management practices at primary schools in the Bulawayo Province in Bulawayo. The findings reveal that schools lacked a robust records management system to systematically manage their records and support the schools in conducting their business. There was no compliance monitoring and auditing to establish if their records management systems were effectively supporting business requirements. Managing records according to best practices and relevant legal frameworks may enable schools in the Bulawayo Province to increase their efficiency, effectiveness and productivity, comply with the law, foster accountability and transparency, and support memory and research needs of the community. That may also facilitate the creation of 'a stable archival record of the 21st century' (Recordkeeping Roundtable, 2013). It is apparent that managing school records properly has the potential of making the establishment of a nationwide information management system for primary schools in Zimbabwe possible. This study may be used as a baseline for establishing proper records management in Zimbabwe and other developing world contexts. More research should be conducted in other contexts so that the development of a theory on records management in primary schools in developing world contexts may be possible.

Based on the findings it is recommended that primary schools should:

- give appropriate attention to records management practices dealing with records in all media;

- develop policies and procedures for creating, classifying, indexing, filing, storing, retaining and disposing of school records as it is the case with Australia and New Zealand, for example;

- establish norms and standards for managing records in primary schools;

- design and implement an integrated recordkeeping and archival infrastructure for primary school records;

- recruit people with expertise in records management to facilitate the management of primary school records;

- advocate the integration of records management into the curriculum of teachers' training colleges as a matter of priority; and

- liaise with the National Archives of Zimbabwe to get assistance on the management of primary school records.

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