

Assessment of Records Management Practice by Administrative Assistants for Effective Administration of Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed records management practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The study adopted descriptive survey design with a population of 138 administrative assistants from five public tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. A-40 item structured questionnaire titled "Assessment of Records Management Practices (ARMP)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two from Technology and Vocational Education and one from Educational Foundation, all in Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was done through trial testing and data analysis using Cronbach alpha yielded correlation coefficients of 0.79 and 0.82 for clusters B1 and B2 respectively and an overall coefficient value of 0.80. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed among others that administrative assistants carry out records creation practices while they do not carry out records maintenance/storage practices. Based on the findings, the study concluded that more still need to be done to ensure that administrative assistants practice records maintenance/storage for effectiveness in administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. It was recommended among others that; administrators of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should organize periodical training and re-training programmes such as workshops, seminars and conferences for administrative assistants to help them upgrade their knowledge and skills on records maintenance/storage practices.

KEYWORDS: *Assessment, Record Management Practices, Administrative Assistants, Administration and Tertiary Institutions*

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria are education given in Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. It also includes the Advanced teachers training colleges, monotechnics, research institutes, correspondence colleges and such institution may be allied with them. The major aim of tertiary institutions include the acquisition, development, and inculcation of the proper value orientation for survival of individual and society, and acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013).

The aim of tertiary institutions can be achieved through effective administration. Seniwoliba, Mahama and Abilla (2017) stated that effective school administration is indicated by good use of personnel, money, time, energy and materials to produce desired and expected quality outcome.

Tertiary institutions generate records on daily activities which are vital in meeting administrative needs as well as supporting decision-making process of individuals, institutions, organizations and government. Records provide evidence, information, symbolic affordance, memory, accountability,

How to cite this paper: C. C. Okolocha | Umeokafor, Ndidiamaka "Assessment of Records Management Practice by Administrative Assistants for Effective Administration of Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-5 | Issue-5, August 2021, pp.8-13, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd43752.pdf



IJTSRD43752

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legitimization of power and a sense of personal and social identity and continuity (Akuffo and Adams, 2016). Recorded information provides insight for administrators on issues relevant to institutions and play immeasurable roles in administration because administrators employ them on routine basis for carrying out diverse administrative duties. Alabi (2017) stressed that without appropriate and adequate records management, there cannot be effective and efficient administration of educational institutions.

Records management as conceptualized by the International Standardization Organization (ISO) 15489 (2016) is a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in form of records. The primary function of records management is to facilitate the free flow of records through an organization to ensure that information is rapidly available where and when it is needed. Nmodu (2012) asserted that effective management of corporate information allows fast, accurate and reliable access to records, ensuring timely destruction of redundant information and the identification and protection of vital and historically important records. Furthermore, Nmodu averred that unmanaged records system makes the performance of duties more difficult, costs organizations time, money and resources, and makes them vulnerable to security breaches, prosecution and embarrassment.

In order to implement and achieve effective records management, the ISO 15489 (2016) provided a standard for records management policies and procedures. The aim is to ensure that appropriate attention and protection are applied to all records and that the evidence the information contain can be retrieved effectively and efficiently using standard policies and procedures. When policy is established, good records management practices will be ensured.

Records management practices involve actual carrying out records management functions or tasks in accordance with the established record management standard or procedures (Lawson, 2016). Records management practices according to Bakare, Abioye and Issa (2016) is an act of engaging in record management activities with a view to controlling the creation and growth of records, reduce operating costs, improve efficiency and productivity, assimilate new records management technologies, ensure regulatory compliance, minimize litigation risk, safeguard vital information, and foster professionalism. Regodon (2017) and Sharma (2011)

outlined records management practices as: records creation, records maintenance/records storage and records disposal. Out of outlines records management practices, this study was limited to records creation and records maintenance/storage to ensure comprehensive empirical evidence of records management practices in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

Records creation is the process of creating or receiving records for the conduct of daily business operations of the organization. ISO (2016) averred that the creation of records should involve the creation of content and metadata that document the circumstance of their creation. Records creation, whether paper or electronic should also include a set of rules for referencing, titling, indexing and of appropriate security marking of records (Duller, 2011).

Records maintenance is utmost importance in records management so as to ensure control as well as safety of records. Records are actively used for decision-making and in the process there is a lot of handling and movement of the records involved. Tsabedze (2012) stated that in order to ensure proper maintenance of records, all the information regarding the records storage and retrieval must be gathered and proper strategies implemented before the records are created. Record storage is the systematic process of securing and keeping documents. Adade, Dampsonquashigah and Eshun (2018) noted that it is imperative for a manager to store records in media that ensure their usability, reliability, authenticity and preservation for as long as users need them.

Good record management practices are paramount to effective and efficient administration of tertiary institutions because records are one of the tertiary institutions' major assets (Akor & Udensi, 2013). Effective and efficient administration of any organization is dependent upon sound records management practices which ensure that right records are made available when needed (Njeru, Chege & Ngeno, 2017). Okoji (2012) stated that even when information is made available for organization to function, it has to be professionally managed to produce meaningful and result oriented impact desirable for the attainment of organizational goals. Okoji (2012) stated that administrative assistants are seen as the custodian of records management in tertiary institutions as they are professionally trained and equipped to manage records of any institution.

Administrative assistants are individuals who perform routine clerical and administrative duties, organize files, prepare documents, schedule appointments and support other staff (Occupational Outlook Handbook,

2018). Administrative assistants employed in tertiary institutions are responsible for creating, maintaining, storing and disposing records. Incidentally, administrative assistants in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State seem to lack basic knowledge of proper application of records management practices. Major and Omenu (2016) pointed out that a look at way information is generated, used, stored and disposed off in tertiary institutions revealed lack of expertise and efficiency in its handling. It is therefore important for administrative assistants to develop good strategies in records creation, maintenance, storage as well as disposal through established records management procedures and standard for effective administration of tertiary institutions.

The influencing factors on records management practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institution could be years of working. Working experience can be the number of years one spends as an administrative assistant. Administrative assistants with above 10 years of experience may differ in carrying out records management practices than those below 10 years of experience. This could be attributed to exposure to different record management practices as well as long term experience gained over the years. Gude (2012) asserted that as people work continuously for a long time on a particular task, they become more conversant with the best practices and tenets of the work and subsequently develop best attitude towards high performance.

Tertiary institutions are highly decentralized organization in which many autonomous units carry out core functions of the institutions. Without standardized processes, records management practices would differ between departments, faculties within a single institution. Good records management ensure that tertiary institution units employ similar records management practices. Ifedili and Agbaire (2011) lamented that despite the fact that educational records are very vital to the management of educational institutions, it is disheartening to observe that many Nigerian tertiary institutions do not take records-keeping seriously and most of their essential records are badly stored and secured, as a result, cases of lost or misplaced documents as well as butchered or incomplete files become a common occurrence in these institutions. The authors further stated that this is a bane of Nigerian higher educational system as not only does it impair the smooth, effective and efficient running of the schools but also grossly affects staff and students who often need such records for important purpose.

Observations by the researcher revealed that administrative assistants saddled with the responsibility of managing records seem not to possess adequate knowledge of the life cycle of records and probably lack the inertia for managing such records in tertiary educational institutions in Ebonyi State. Situations seem to abound where required records needed to actualize administrative process cannot be traced easily or found at all. These range from students issues through personnel matters to other administrative concerns which create considerable challenges to general institutional effectiveness. It is against this background that this study was carried out to assess records management practices by administrative assistants for effective administration in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain records management practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study ascertained:

1. records creation practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.
2. records maintenance/storage practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are records creation practices by administrative assistants for the effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?
2. What are records maintenance/storage practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State using descriptive survey research design. The state has five public tertiary institutions. The population of the study comprised 138 administrative assistants in public tertiary institutions. The entire population was studied. An instrument titled "Assessment of Records Management Practices" (ARMP) developed by the researchers was used for data collection. The instrument contains items structured on four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) which weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The validation of ARMP was determined using three experts. The data

used for establishing the internal consistency of the instrument were single administration of copies of ARMP administered to 138 respondents made up of administrative assistants in public tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Using data obtained, ARMP was subjected to test for internal consistency using Cronbach alpha. Coefficient values of 0.79, 0.82, 0.76 and 0.84 were obtained for the four clusters respectively. The researchers and 3 research assistants who are administrative assistants in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State collected data for the

study. Direct approach was employed in the data collection in order to ensure that copies of the questionnaire administered were properly filled and successfully retrieved. A total of 138 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and 131 copies were successfully retrieved indicated 95% return. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research question and determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' opinion.

Research Question 1

What are records creation practices by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

Table 1 Respondents' mean rating on records creation practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions.

S/N	Records creation practices	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Creation of records using file plan	3.57	0.56	Strongly Agree
2	Receiving document	3.54	0.51	Strongly Agree
3	Systematic referencing of records	2.58	1.13	Agree
4	Systematic titling of records	3.56	0.69	Strongly Agree
5	Dating of documents accurately	3.36	0.48	Agree
6	Regular registrations of outgoing documents	3.30	0.52	Agree
7	Regular registration of incoming document	3.36	0.54	Agree
8	Regular distribution of records	3.11	0.58	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.30		Agree

Data in Table 1 shows that out of 8 records creation practices listed, respondents rated items 1, 2 and 4 strongly agree with mean scores ranged between 3.54 and 3.57. Items 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are rated agree with mean scores ranged between 2.56 and 3.36. The cluster mean score of 3.30 indicates that on the whole, administrative assistants agree that they carry out records creation practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The analysis shows that responses to item 3 has the highest deviation (1.13) among respondents, this suggests that the respondents are quite divided in their opinions on systematic referencing of records for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Other items show homogeneity in the respondents' responses.

Research Question 2

What are records maintenance/storage practices by administrative assistants for the effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

Table 2 Respondents' mean ratings on records maintenance/storage practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions.

S/N	Records maintenance practices	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Maintaining records based on retention schedule	3.47	0.99	Agree
2	Checking of files periodically to ensure their safety	1.70	0.63	Disagree
3	Tracking movement of records systematically	3.45	0.58	Agree
4	Maintenance of file register	2.97	0.94	Agree
5	Maintenance of file plan	1.79	0.59	Disagree
6	Storage of records on clean environment	1.60	0.64	Disagree
7	Storage of enduring or historical records in archive	2.03	0.56	Disagree
8	Updating knowledge on records maintenance	1.76	0.76	Disagree
9	Periodic audition of records maintenance practices Centrally	2.05	0.89	Disagree
10	Storage of records in a protective material/equipment	3.27	0.94	Agree
11	Identification of active, semi-active and inactive records	2.24	0.90	Disagree
12	Storage of records based on classification system	2.52	0.62	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.40		Disagree

Data in Table 2 indicates that out of 12 records maintenance/storage practices listed, respondents rated items 1, 3, 4, 10 and 12 agree with mean scores ranged between 2.97 and 3.47. Items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 are rated disagree with mean scores ranged between 1.60 and 2.32. The cluster mean score of 2.40 indicates that on the whole, respondents disagree that records maintenance/storage practices are being carried out by administrative assistants for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The standard deviations for all the items are within 0.56 to 0.99. This shows that the respondents are not wide apart in their ratings.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative assistants on their records creation practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on their years of working experience.

Table 3 ANOVA summary of respondents' mean ratings on their records creation practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions based on years of working experience

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-ratio	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	6.861	2	3.431	0.563	.03	Significant
Within Groups	590.699	128	6.090			
Total	597.560	130				

Data in Table 5 shows that f-ratio of 0.563 at 2 and 128 degrees of freedom with a *p-value* of 0.03 is less than the criterion value of 0.05 ($.03 < 0.05$). This means that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative assistants on their records creation practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on years of working experience. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative assistants on their records maintenance/storage practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on their years of working experience.

Table 4 ANOVA summary of respondents' mean ratings on their records maintenance practices for effective administration based on years of working experience

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-ratio	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	30.005	2	15.002	0.821	.44	Not significant
Within Groups	1772.745	128	18.276			
Total	1802.750	130				

Data in Table 7 show that f-ratio of 0.821 at 2 and 128 degrees of freedom with a *p-value* of .44 is greater than the criterion value of 0.05 ($.44 > 0.05$). This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative assistants on their records maintenance practices for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State based on their years of working experience. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. Administrative assistants agree that they carry out records practices for effective administration in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Years of working experience did not significantly influence respondents' mean ratings in this regard.
2. Administrative assistants disagree that they carry out records maintenance/storage practices for effective administration in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Years of working experience did not significantly influence respondents' mean ratings in this regard.

Conclusion

Records management practices are important to maintain more efficient and credible students, academic and non-academic records. It is also needed for effective administration of tertiary institutions. Therefore, the planning, coordinating, controlling and implementation of the activities of tertiary institutions would be a leap in the dark without records that should made possible through effective records management practices. Despite the importance of records management practices in administration of tertiary institution, the findings of this study revealed that administrative assistants agree that they carry out records creation practices while they disagree on carrying out record maintenance/storage practices. In

view of these findings, the researcher concludes that more still need to be done to ensure that administrative assistants practice records maintenance/storage for effective administration of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

Recommendation

1. Administrators of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should organize periodical training and re-training programmes such as workshops, seminars and conferences for administrative assistants to help them upgrade their knowledge and skills on records maintenance/ storage. This will enable administrative assistants to carry out these records management practices for effective administration of the institutions.
2. Administrators of tertiary institutions should ensure there is a laid down standard and policy on records maintenance/storage and records practices.

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