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MANAGING RECORDS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

H.A. Yusuf and T.O. Ibraheem

Abstract

School record is an indispensable tool for effective administration of schools. The recognition of this great importance of school records has made schools to keep up to date genuine information for its growth and development. This paper, therefore, focuses on the concept, importance and problems of record keeping in schools. The fact that many schools still keep records only in files that are prone to destruction necessitates the need for basic computer knowledge by educational administrators to be able to access and apply necessary information. Part of the challenges revealed are that many schools cannot afford to get a computer because of the cost implication and some with computer lacks qualified personnel to operate them. Finally, the paper concludes that record keeping in this century has modified the old ways of keeping records and also recommends the upgrading of existing records, installation of computers in schools and capacity building programmes for education administrators to meet the modern record keeping.

Introduction

School is an institution where instructions are given in a several discipline, as part of its responsibilities is answerable to several authorities in account of its effective functioning. It has to show that the aims and objectives of education are attained, children receive fruitful education, monitor students' progress in studies by appraising their attainments and capabilities. Records are used for planning regular, weekly, termly and annually the course of activities of the school, and in order to afford the schools the opportunity to obtain information and furnish it to all the concerned or interested parties, it is necessary that complete, factual and systematic records are maintained. School administration touches modern life in several ways and, therefore, record keeping should have an important place in the school system. However, efficiency of the school head depends on record keeping and management.

In recent time, the world is becoming increasingly characterized by technologically facilitated phenomenon. The increase in the number of human, material and financial resources disbursed to educational institutions and capturing greater data into files/books are relatively difficult,

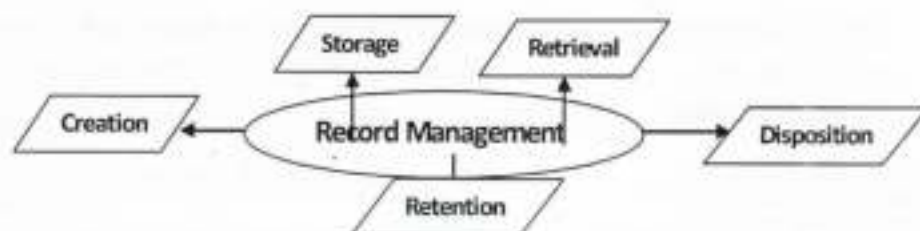
thus, the need to implore technology in the operation of our school system becomes essential. This will enable administrators to have a thorough grasp of activities of the entire school system and help in proper management of the school. It, therefore, becomes cumbersome to capture greater data into files or books which are more flexible format for record keeping. It is important that information be captured, managed and preserved in an organized system that maintains its integrity and authenticity. Abiodun (2003) explained that, management of any organization involves planning, organizing, controlling and making decision in order to ensure its smooth running as well as to realize the purpose for which it is set up. Accurate, up-to-date and timely information are needed in order to carry out these functions. It is, therefore, imperative to understand that information and records are assets of the school, and as such need to be managed actively and properly.

Concept of Record Management

Record keeping is vital to an education system because of the fundamental role it plays. Although, it enables a school to have a clear picture of what is available and what is required, it also provides justification of certain needs. Furthermore, it serves to extend the memory by which persons or organization can pass their cultures and achievements to future generations (Chifewaga, 2014). Meanwhile, Durosaro (2002) viewed school records as official transcripts or copies of proceedings of actions, events or other matters kept by the school manager. It is an authentic register or document of official account of transactions or occurrence which are preserved in school's office. Fayeye (2009) was on the view that records are documents preserving a piece of evidence or information constituting an account of something that has occurred. While, Suleiman (2009) explained that records are collection of information on events, actions, situations and transcripts that are kept for current use and for reference purposes. Record keeping is the responsibility of the school administrator because of the indispensable role it plays in the day-to-day operations. Record management is the planning, controlling, directing, organizing, training, promoting and other managerial activities to the life cycle of records, which are conducted to achieve adequate and proper documentation of policies and transaction, and effective management of school operations. It involves the storage, retrieval and use of information as well as the application of systematic and scientific control to all the recorded information of a school for its operation.

The National Archives of Scotland (2013) described record management as the systematic control of an organization's records throughout their life cycle, in order to meet operational needs, statutory and fiscal requirements and community expectations. Effective management of information allows fast, accurate and reliable access to records, ensuring the timely destruction of redundant information, identification and protection of vital and historically important records. Atulomah (2001) posited that records of an organization such as the school system constitutes her corporate memory which supplements human memory and serves as a guide for effective planning and decision making. Records are valuable to school administration, thus, in order to take advantage of past experiences, accurate records

and good records keeping are the bedrock of planning for the future in the school system. Records Management entails creation, storage (which include protecting all vital records), retrieval (for use as needed), retention and disposition (Peretemode, 1995).



(Self Designed)

Figure 1: Record Management Cycle

Olagboye (2004), classified school records into two. These are;

Statutory records which are specified to be kept by various regulatory provisions of the education law. These include: Teachers' weekly diaries and lesson note, individual cumulative record card, academic record of students, a stock book showing items of equipment, health record book, staff confidential report forms, duty master and duty prefect record book, announcement book, minutes books, staff attendance register, report file, and log book; and

Non statutory records which though not specifically prescribed by law, are kept by the schools because they provide a significant source of information to both the school and the community. This can also be classified as: academic records, administrative records, stores and financial records.

Importance of School Records

The importance of record keeping management in school administration cannot be over emphasized. Peretemode and Okpetu (1995) highlighted the importance of record keeping to include the following:

- It provides useful information to an employee of labour who may want to recruit pupils for jobs. Enquiries may be made about the authenticity of the student's certificate and sometimes about the students' behaviour. The students' records provide a readily available reference point from which to get information to write one's reference report about the student.
- School records also help higher institutions of learning who may need information about pupils' scholastic achievements.

- Parents may want to know how their children or wards progress in school as regard behaviour, social relationship and general performance in school subjects, also school records help the school authority to easily provide the needed information
- Availability of record enables inspectors of schools or supervisors of instruction to objectively assess pupil or staff performance and offer advice and make concrete proposals or suggestions for improvement.
- School record serves as information bank from which the school administrators and his staff can recall or restore information.
- Record keeping enables educational managers or planners to identify areas of need that should be accorded priority. Records therefore facilitate the work of educational planners, especially in the improvement of the curriculum.
- Records when properly preserved, make everyone to become cautious and to act within the framework of the law of the school system. School record for instance, assist the school head in discussing issues concerning government policies with facts and figures, with staff, students, parents, Ministry or Board officials and so on. (Okpetu & Peretemode, 1995).

Rationale for Keeping Records in the Twenty First Century

The process of keeping documents such as letters, receipts, results in a box and kept far away in the store that are often used as a dumping ground which tends to cause delay when important documents are needed. This necessitates the need to utilize and exploit the fast processing capability of a computer which can store many data in its large memory and same could be retrieved within seconds when needed. Also, schools are producing increasingly large amount of information and consequently, greater volume of records in paper and electronic forms. It is therefore essential that information are captured, managed and preserved in an organized system that maintains its integrity and authenticity.

Computer based record system are more economical. If maintained in an organization, information about categories and members of staff can be easily obtained and provide immediate information about staff (Salau, 2005). There are new ways of improving record keeping and management in our schools. For instance, through electronic record keeping, documents can be stored in discs and this provides several benefits over paper based method. According to Suleiman (2009), some of the benefits of electronic record keeping include:

- It replaces the long search for important documents i.e. documents are easily located and retrieved.
- It improves efficiency and increases security of important documents or files which can be pass worded to prevent unauthorized access.

- Electronic record keeping saves precious space in the office.
- It saves time through instance access, retrieval and easy correction of documents.
- Records or data can be up-dated with ease, (deletion, insertion and other amendments) to previously prepared document.
- Mobility or record of data is easy, less costly, less risky and fast.
- Paper records are very susceptible to fire, water, willful damage, distortion and malicious destruction but electronic record keeping can have back ups that can be deposited in different places, even inside hand bag or chest pocket e.g. flash drive. With this approach, when the original is tampered with or destroyed, the entire information remains intact in original form in the back-up-device (Suleiman, 2009).

Electronic records keeping offer a robust storage of data and reliable data retrieval which can be generated easily if electronic records keeping format are available for educational administrators. It facilitates effective presentation and retention of information with quick processing and also saves use of papers. Yahya (2007) asserted that during the later part of the 20th century through the present 21st century, tremendous developments were recorded in information storage and retrieval, communication and technology (ICT) which have caused a more profound revolution in the world than the printing press revolution of the 15th century. Information Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed the whole world into a "Global Village" where information can be recorded and shared electronically and instantly from any part of the world (Yusuf, 2014).

Record keeping in the 21st century will have to confront the fact that the very definition of what constitutes a record is dynamically changing. Previously in Nigerian educational institutions, there had been a paper-based record of students' information (admission list, academic programmes, time table, school calendar, and academic background of students). The advent of information, communication technology has modified the old way of records keeping, everything is automated through the use of computer and has drastically minimized the use of paper-based records and also saves time and reduce wastages. This has made work online easily accessible for other researchers to make use of. Records keeping in 21st century therefore include: word processing with embedded hyperlinks; voice and objects in varying multimedia forms; using information and communication technology to place lessons; manage student details and record student achievement; design course structures; assign students to classes; manage students details; creates and view time table and calendars in days, weeks, and terms; and mark and generate reports.

Record Management and School Administration in Nigeria

School as a formal setting where skills, knowledge and experiences are given require good organization of the environment as well as the staff and students involved. In doing this, thorough planning is essential. This encompasses the totality of the process through which appropriate human, material and financial resources are made available and judiciously utilized for the accomplishment of educational goals and objectives in the school system. Management of school system involves planning, organizing, controlling and decision making in order to ensure its smooth running and also to realize the purpose for which it is set up. Accurate, up-to-date and timely data are necessary to carry out all these functions. It is important to understand that information and records are assets of the school, and as such need to be managed actively and properly.

Electronic records management are neither new nor unique, but its incorporation and practices provide structure, consistency, security and control over others. The State of Florida (2010) asserted that electronic records must be managed through their entire life cycle from creation, when the records are created or received, through their active life, when the records are accessed frequently; through their inactive life, when the records are no longer active but have to be retained for a period of time for legal, fiscal, administrative, or historical reasons, until their final disposition which could be destruction or preservation as a permanent record.

Problems of record keeping

Records are vital to the smooth running of the school system, but for such records to be useful to the school administrators or others, they must be complete, objective, factual or truthful and available, or accessible to the persons who need them. Poor record keeping habits, however, may militate against the positive role that records can play in the day-to-day running of a school. Poor record keeping may be due to lackadaisical attitude towards the job, or lack of understanding of the situation and mastery of the job. It could also be attributed to the inability to write down events as soon as they happened, inability to document records appropriately (wrong filing), falsification of records, failure to preserve vital records, not knowing what to keep and how to keep them, not properly securing records that need to be preserved and inadequate and bias recording.

There are many problems that are readily associated with poor record keeping. First, poor records keeping causes waste of time in trying to get records to work with, sometimes records are unavailable when they are needed because of difficulties of retrieving information due to the records that have not been properly kept or filled. Thus, poor record keeping may affect efficiency in decision making and consequently the effective administration of school. Furthermore, the academic progress of a school may be hampered if syllabus and schemes of work cannot be covered, because lessons are repeatedly taught due to lack of records of work done to serve as a guide to a new teacher.

Similarly, the absence of accurate records on students and staff will make it difficult for education personnel to objectively appraise the competence and usefulness of teachers and the performance of students in the school system. Finally, poor record keeping or lack of it increases administrative inconveniences and could also affect the welfare of staff. For instance, where school records are not carefully kept, handover between incoming and outgoing personnel becomes difficult and troubled prone, just as a missing file of a teacher in the school management board may delay his gratuity and/or pension. Thus, lack of records or improperly kept records may make difficult the much needed continuity in the running of our school system.

Management of data through manual technique creates a number of problems, such problems which militate against the performance of any organization using the technique, include the following (Folayan, 1998):

1. **Inaccessibility of Data:** when useful and relevant data are available in an organization, they are often not in form or location that makes it feasible or economical to retrieve.
2. **Inconsistent and conflicting Information:** In most cases, the same information supplied by different sources rarely agree and the executive does not know which one is correct.
3. **Duplication of effort:** Quite often, the same types of data and files are maintained in different units of the organization and reports are generated at different points.
4. **Response time:** In many cases, information is not available when it is needed, and when available, it is not of much value because data is not processed fast enough for managers or officials to react quickly and in time.
5. **Inaccurate and Unreliable Data:** The sheer volume of data makes it humanly impossible to be consistently accurate and reliable.
6. **Storage space:** the use of paper files, file cabinet, to store data requires too much storage space. For this reason, it is common in many offices to see files and other information materials dumped on the floor.

Problems of records keeping in schools can also be connected to the following:

1. Lack of uniformity of records
2. Apathy or laziness on the part of teachers to supply information
3. Lack of formal training/induction of teachers in records keeping

4. Lack of continuity
5. Security problems – destruction of records
6. False information
7. Inadequate records keeping materials (Ajayi, 2007).

Challenges and strategies for improvement

Though record keeping is meant to serve many purposes particularly when the modern time technology has improved upon the old ways of having information on paper and file written, sourced and stored. It finds some barriers a great menace to its users, which include:

- a) Inadequate power supply - Without the supply of power, the 21st century records and record keeping may be valueless although an alternative source of power (generating set) may be available.
- b) Cost Effective – It is necessary to enable effective access to information but it is also a question of cost effectiveness. The benefit of the 21st century record keeping is much more than the cost but the economic situation of most organization particularly schools in rural areas lacked the values of initiating it in their schools. And, not all urban schools are buoyant enough to purchase and maintain it for school administration.
- c) Man-made Error – This includes negligence in protecting the computer from virus, the use of any unprotected storage device that could cause damage on the system, not having so many storage device to keep important records, use of pirated software. All these may result to an unexpected crash of the hard disk which may lead to loss of important records. With all these, records in the system will not take years in the system without being defected and the system will be infected.
- d) Haphazard Planning – In Nigeria, rural areas against the urban centres are not too well structured in terms of social amenities that are prone to enabling modern facilities. Schools on such localities, therefore will find modern record keeping an upheaval task particularly poor web service delivery.
- e) Fraudulent Act – Younger ones in this century particularly are exposed to odd use of computer in searching for pornographic pictures and acts that are fraudulent, since trade facilitation are imbibed through internet, people do steal into other people's work if not properly secured.
- f) Virus Infection – Human beings are infected with virus as computers too are prone to things that can affect its working mode. These are programmers within but not suitable for

all modes. Any computer or its ware affected may result to virus infection. This may erase or delete items in the system.

g) Misplacement of Disc - devices are input devices for coping documents into and out of the computer system, its memory capacity depends on its size. Loss or misplacement of disc will result in total loss of records.

Despite the challenges that bedeviled the 21st century record keeping in schools, Fayeye (2009) suggested measures as follows:

- Provision of an electronic storage facility or various capacity that is attached to computer to secure use of a maximum period of time.
- The use of password to deny unauthorized accessibility to the records.

Conclusion

Record keeping is vital to the smooth running of our school system, but for such records to be of use to the administrators, they must be complete, objective, factual or truthful and they must be available, or accessible to the person who needs them. The benefits that could accrue from the use of modern system include the provision of flexible and easy to manage student records without the risk of alteration, elimination of multiple students' record keeping encountered during admission and registration processes, reduction in time and tedious paper work involved in managing the manual files. The system will also reduce to the barest minimum cases of students and staff missing files, altered record and could provide student management with accurate and timely information on students for effective decision making.

Keeping records should be one of the first things school administrator needs to decide on. He must, therefore, have basic grasp of records in any case. In this light of this, it is imperative that schools should be supplied with computers and trained personnel for competency not only in using computer to manage students' data but be of literacy level. Schools should not see computers as sophisticated equipment which characterize the modern age, but rather, as an essential support in the educational set up. Educational administrators should be challenged not to lose trend in the bid to become computer literate and acquire necessary skills which will assist them in utilizing the computer maximally to enhance proper record keeping and even for their own use. Therefore, record keeping should be computerized to automate the process, make it faster and more accurate.

Recommendations

There is need for constant training in order to keep up with rapid technological changes. There should be thorough maintenance of comprehensive existing records in order to reveal a pattern of performance and operation. Keeping good records will help a school administrator lift the school up to greater height to develop a competitive edge. Educational administrators should also employ people specifically to manage records.

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