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RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN ENGINEERING DEPARTMENTS IN BAUCHI STATE METROPOLIS HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Purpose*: This study examined the Records Management Practices in Engineering Departments in Bauchi State Metropolis Higher Institutions comprising Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Federal Polytechnic Bauchi (FPB), and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (ATAP).*

Design/Methodology/Approach*: The objectives of the study were to identify, types of records are created in the engineering departments of higher institutions in Bauchi Metropolis, and to examine records management practices in terms of Selection, Acquisition, Organization, Preservation and Dissemination. A qualitative research design was adopted, and purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) participants comprising Heads of Departments and departmental secretaries who provided both academic and administrative perspectives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews.*

Findings*: The findings revealed that the engineering departments maintained various categories of records, including students' academic records, staff records, financial documents, departmental memos, and correspondence with regulatory agencies. Records management practices were largely manual, with limited integration of digital technologies. Existing management strategies included filing systems, record categorization, and physical storage facilities. Major challenges identified were inadequate digitization, insufficient storage facilities, lack of formal records management policies, and inadequate staff training. The study concludes that records management practices in the engineering departments of the selected institutions remain inadequate and inconsistent despite the critical role of records in institutional administration.*

Originality/Value*: The study recommends the adoption of digital records management systems, regular staff training, strict implementation of records management policies, and increased investment in ICT infrastructure to enhance the efficiency, accessibility, preservation, and sustainability of records in tertiary institutions.*
Implication: Despite the centrality of records to effective administration, teaching, learning, and research in engineering departments, the lack of professional record managers, absence of formal policies, limited ICT infrastructure, and inadequate staff training constitute significant constraints.

Keywords*: Records Management Practices, Engineering Departments, Bauchi State Metropolis*

Paper type: *Empirical Research*

Introduction

Academic records are important documents that include important details about students' educational programs. In North-East Nigeria's Bauchi State, tertiary institutions receive a variety of records. Academic records of the students are among these records. Admission files,

letters of admission, payment records, medical records, transcripts of continuous assessments, exam scripts, results of exams, records of accommodations, academic progress reports after the semester, etc. (Shehu, 2023). The challenges of the twenty-first century have increased the pressure on administrators to develop effective records management policies and procedures for higher education institutions in Nigeria to operate as self-sustaining entities, just like business concerns, and to stay competitive in this global era. Institutions of higher learning in the community that are dedicated to teaching, learning, research, and development produce and utilize a variety of records in the process. A healthy university sub-sector in the Nigerian economy might be created by the development, adoption, and use of appropriate records management policies and procedures, which could also positively impact the institution's accountability and good governance.

Tertiary institutions are strategic to society's life. They innovate learning processes and foster training, research and social re-engineering. Official records generated are valuable resources for planning purposes and their management is of vital importance to institutional success. Official records represent the tangible product of the work of staff and to recreate them in the event of a total loss would cost millions. Official records from tertiary institutions include correspondences, acquisitions, accounting documents, personnel files, payroll, minutes of meetings (senate, university council, faculty and departmental boards), students' admission and examination records, students' registration, offered course lists, lecture time tables, speeches, legal documents, queries, financial records, letters (appointment, confirmations, promotions, admissions, sick leave) etc. Other available record types include books, diskettes, and files containing confidential information on institutional events (academic and non-academic activities, important events), who is at the institution at any given time (staff, students, and visitors), the state and layout of the institution plan as well as other information about the growth and development of the institution. Tertiary institutions create records to support the activities that they carry out. If these records are not managed properly, they will not provide the necessary support and information might be lost causing problems for the institutions. To provide an efficient and effective administration that ensures that the business runs as smoothly as possible, there should be proper management of records.

Academic records hold significant value as they compass crucial details regarding students' educational pursuits within educational institutions. These records, which comprise a variety of information, are required by tertiary institutions in Bauchi Metropolis in Bauchi state, located in the North-East region of Nigeria. Among the content of these records are students' admission files, admission letters, payment records, medical records, continuous assessment records, examination scripts, examination results, accommodation records, as well as end of semester academic progress reports, as stated by (Shehu, 2023). A record is therefore according to him is any recorded information that is created, received and maintained as evidence of what happened and when it happened in pursuance of legal and regulatory obligations, regardless of the format in which it was created. Records can either be electronic (e.g., emails, internet content, documents, databases, digitally recorded images, etc.) or physical/printed (any information that is paper-based, e.g., books.

Official records contain information that is a valuable resource and is an important business asset. A systematic approach to the management of records is essential for organizations to protect and preserve records as evidence of activities and transactions.

The University of Nigeria Nsuka (2021) likewise defines a record as recorded information, regardless of format or medium, which has been created, received, and used. Accessed and maintained by the university at large (and/or by its predecessors) as evidence and information in pursuance of its legal obligations or the transaction of business, and this includes e-mails and records in electronic form. and records other than correspondence. Like all higher education institutions in Nigeria, Bauchi High institutions received a portion of their funding from the federal and state government students' fees and stakeholders. Through its activities, the institutions generate large volumes of physical and electronic data and documents daily. These documents and data are important and need to be preserved. Institutions, like other semi-government or government institutions, are legally bound to retain and preserve documents as a record of their activities and proceedings (Register, 2020).

This study is prompted by the fact that in Nigeria, government departments and institutions are required by law to adopt a systematic and organized approach to the management of records. For example, the

National Archives and Records Service of Nigeria Act (Act No.43 of 1996) provides the legislative and legal framework according to which records management practices in governmental bodies are regulated. By section 13 of the National Archives and Records Service of Nigeria Act, 1996. the National Archivist: I Determines classification systems to be applied by governmental bodies; ii examines public records to issue disposal authorities on all public records to enable governmental bodies to dispose of records no longer required for functional purposes; iii. Determines the conditions subject to which records can be microfilmed or electronically reproduced to ensure that the requirements for archival preservation are addressed timeously; iv. Determines the conditions subject to which electronic records systems should be managed to ensure that sound records management practices are applied to electronic records systems from the design phase onwards; V. Inspects public records to ensure that governmental bodies comply with the requirements of the National Archives and Records Service of Nigeria Act; vi. Issues directives and instructions for the management and care of public records in the custody of governmental bodies: and vii. Provides training to records managers, senior administrative officials training officials, work-study officials and registry heads to teach the basics of records management and explain the National Archives and Records Service's role in promoting efficient records management.

Records management as the management of information resources in a manner that makes information easily accessible, securely protected stored, and correctly disposed of when necessary. Thus, records management controls and oversees the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of records. Records management is the process by which internally or externally generated physical or electronic records are managed from their inception, receipt and storage, all the way through to their disposal. Management therefore seeks to efficiently and systematically control the lifecycle (creation, use, maintenance, archive or disposal) of records that are routinely generated as a result of activities and transactions. This means that records management is also based on the principles of regular review and controlled retention or destruction with the general aim of ensuring cost-effective business processes, and legal and regulatory compliance and corporate accountability.

It will be an impossible task to plan and administer any known organization in which records are not kept, or are carelessly or fraudulently kept. The education system as a social organization

has numerous sub-systems or levels that are managed to ensure some coherence and continuity. To successfully achieve this, records must be safely kept and managed. In Bauchi Metropolis, a look at the way official records are generated, used, stored and disposed of in higher educational institutions could reveal the lack of expertise and efficiency in its handling. As sensitive as official records are in higher educational institutions, it has become worrisome that vital records for teaching–learning, research and general administrative purposes may be very difficult and time-consuming to trace and use even if they exist. Recorded information in files is usually mixed up or lost. Files may not have been properly labelled and kept in designated cabinets for easy access and use. This study will evaluate the management of official records in the engineering department of higher institutions in Bauchi metropolis. It dealt with types of students' academic records generated, formal records management systems, formal policies, procedures and filing systems of academic records, and challenges associated with the management of students' academic records.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the types of records that are created in the engineering departments of higher institutions in Bauchi Metropolis.
2. To examine the records management process in terms of:
    a) Selection
    b) Acquisition
    c) Organization
    d) Preservation
    e) Dissemination
3. To identify the challenges affecting Management of records

Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted. The population of this study was the secretaries and HOD'S from the three (3) higher institutions offering engineering courses in Bauchi metropolis. From the preliminary study conducted, there was one federal university, one federal polytechnic, and one state polytechnic offering engineering courses in Bauchi metropolis upon which secretaries and HOD'S are available. Purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) participants comprising Heads of Departments and departmental secretaries who provided both academic and administrative perspectives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. Narrative analysis was employed to identify patterns, similarities, and

differences in the views of the participants. The findings were then interpreted and presented thematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of records management in engineering departments of the selected tertiary institutions in Bauchi Metropolis.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What types of records are created in the engineering departments of higher institutions in Bauchi Metropolis?

To answer Research Question, participants were asked to identify the types of records created in their engineering departments. Their responses are presented below.

P1 stated:

"*We generate a high volume of records ranging from student academic files, attendance sheets, project supervision records, to accreditation documents."*

P1 further noted:

"We also keep continuous assessment scores, departmental meeting minutes, and correspondences with the Dean's Office and external bodies like NUC."

P2 explained:

"Our department creates records such as internal memos, staff performance reviews, financial requests, and students' course registration records."

P2 also added:

"SIWES documentation and students' industrial training records are among the most frequently updated records in the department."

P3 revealed:

"*The records mostly used are students' assessment records, departmental memos, and staff leave records.*

The responses of the participants converged on the fact that engineering departments create a wide range of academic, administrative, and staff-related records. All participants identified student-related records as an important category of records created in their institutions. However, their responses differed in emphasis. While P1 focused on academic records, accreditation documents, and departmental correspondence, P2 emphasized administrative records, financial requests, and SIWES documentation. P3 highlighted assessment records, departmental memos, and staff leave records. These differences reflect the varying operational activities of the institutions studied.

The findings indicate that engineering departments create diverse records to support academic, administrative, and regulatory functions. These records include student academic files, attendance sheets, assessment records, course registration records, project supervision records, accreditation documents,

departmental correspondence, staff performance records, financial requests, SIWES records, industrial training records, and staff leave records. The variety of records created reflects the need to document departmental activities, support decision-making, and ensure accountability. The findings further suggest that record creation is a continuous process that supports teaching, learning, administration, and compliance with institutional and regulatory requirements.

Research Question 2: What are the records management processes in terms of selection, acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination in the engineering departments of the institutions under study?

To answer Research Question, participants were asked to explain the processes involved in the management of records in their departments. Their responses are presented below.

Responses:

Participants across the three institutions Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (ATAP) identified various strategies adopted for managing departmental records. These strategies largely revolved around filing systems, categorization, and storage methods for physical records, with minimal integration of digital tools. The emergent theme for this section is "Filing Systems, Categorization, and Storage."

P1 explained that record management in the department follows a semi-structured approach:

"We follow a semi-structured filing system. Files are labeled by academic session and course code, but there is no electronic records management system."

Further clarification revealed that records are arranged manually where P1 also mentioned :

"Records are organized chronologically and alphabetically and kept in steel cabinets for preservation."

P2 noted that records are grouped based on functional categories:

"We maintain categorized cabinets student records in one cabinet, staff records in another, and financial documents separately."

However, limitations were highlighted:

"Due to limited cabinets, some files are misplaced, and there is no clear policy on how long records should be kept."

P3 described a more basic and informal strategy:

"Record organization is mostly manual—folders with handwritten labels. We keep

records based on what we feel is important."

The issue of preservation was also emphasized:

"Some folders are old and torn, and documents are exposed to dust and moisture."

The responses of the participants converged on the fact that records management in the engineering departments is largely manual and dependent on physical filing systems. All participants indicated the use of folders, cabinets, and manual classification methods for organizing records. However, their responses differed in terms of the level of organization and preservation practices. While P1 described a relatively structured filing system with chronological and alphabetical arrangements, P2 emphasized functional categorization of records and challenges relating to storage limitations. P3, on the other hand, reported a more informal approach characterized by handwritten labels and poor preservation conditions. These differences reflect variations in records management practices across the institutions studied.

The data reveal that manual record management strategies dominate across all three institutions. ATBU employs a relatively organized but outdated semi-structured filing system, relying on labeled folders and steel cabinets without digital support. Federal Polytechnic Bauchi demonstrates functional categorization of records but faces challenges related to inadequate storage facilities and absence of retention policies, leading to misplacement and personal archiving of files. ATAP operates the most rudimentary system, characterized by handwritten labels, subjective categorization, and poor preservation conditions. Overall, while basic filing and categorization strategies exist, the lack of electronic records management systems, standardized policies, and adequate storage infrastructure significantly undermines the efficiency, security, and sustainability of records management practices in the engineering departments studied.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges affecting the management of records in the engineering departments of the institutions under study?

To answer Research Question, participants were asked to identify the challenges affecting the management and use of records in their departments. Their responses are presented below.

Responses:

Participants across Abubakar Tafawa

Balewa University (ATBU), Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (ATAP) identified institutional, technical, and human capacity issues as the main barriers to effective records management. These challenges range from lack of digitization and inadequate storage to absence of policy frameworks and poor staff training.

P1 described digital and preservation limitations:

"Our biggest challenge is lack of digitization. Most records are paper-based, and retrieving them can be time-consuming."

P1 also added a preservation concern:

"No standard exists for preserving old records. Some have been eaten by termites or are too faded to read."

P2 highlighted spatial and staff capacity issues:

"Limited office space and outdated filing cabinets. Staff often have to store records at home."

P2 also emphasized training gaps:

"We lack training in record-keeping. Sometimes, we don't even know which file to discard or keep."

P3 explained policy and communication constraints:

"There is no policy guiding record management. Everything is done at the individual's discretion."

P3 added dissemination challenges:

"Most memos are delayed due to lack of courier systems or internal email usage."

The findings show that challenges in records management are pervasive across the three institutions, though their nature varies by context. ATBU struggles primarily with manual recordkeeping and preservation, reflecting broader ICT infrastructure gaps. Federal Polytechnic Bauchi faces space limitations and untrained personnel, which impede efficient record retrieval and consistent file maintenance. ATAP contends with policy vacuum and poor internal communication, leaving record management dependent on individual discretion. Across all institutions, the absence of digitization, inadequate storage facilities, and lack of staff capacity undermine the effectiveness, accessibility, and reliability of records. These findings echo the national literature, emphasizing the need for digitization, training, and formal record management policies to ensure efficiency, accountability, and institutional memory in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Danlami & Yusuf, 2023; Okonkwo & Ahmed, 2023; Mohammed & Olaitan, 2023).

Solutions for Improving Records Management

Participants were asked to suggest practical solutions and strategies for improving records management in the engineering departments. Their responses are presented below.

Response:

Participants across Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (ATAP) suggested strategies focusing on digitization, staff training, and policy formulation to enhance record management systems. Their recommendations reflect both practical experiences and alignment with contemporary literature on best practices.

P1 **mentioned** that;

"We need to implement a digital records system, with proper backup and access control." "Trainings for secretaries on electronic records management should be conducted regularly."

P2 mentioned that they should

"Establish a dedicated unit for record keeping with trained personnel. ICT tools must be made available."

The secretary added practical ICT support measures:

"Provision of scanners, computers, and cloud storage will reduce loss and improve accessibility."

P3 mentioned that;

"The institution must create record management guidelines and enforce them department-wide." P3 also mention that "Appointing records officers or archivists instead of leaving it to secretaries alone."

These insights demonstrate that ATAP requires policy-driven governance and professional oversight to strengthen records management. Usman and Alade (2023) and Danladi and Eze (2023) argue that centralized policies and employment of professional archivists are critical for consistency, compliance, and long-term preservation of records.

Across the three institutions, solutions to records management challenges converge on three interrelated strategies: digitization of records, staff capacity building, and formal policy implementation. ATBU emphasizes a combination of technology and training; Federal Polytechnic Bauchi focuses on specialized units and ICT infrastructure; while ATAP prioritizes policy reform and professional record officers. Implementing these strategies is

expected to reduce inefficiencies, enhance data security, and support administrative and academic decision-making. These findings are consistent with contemporary scholarship advocating for modernized records management systems in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Salisu & Bakare, 2023; Nwachukwu & Zubairu, 2023; Usman & Alade, 2023).

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how records are managed in engineering departments of higher institutions in Bauchi Metropolis, using a qualitative, narrative-based approach. Interviews with Heads of Departments (HODs) and secretaries from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (ATAP) revealed key insights into the types of records maintained, the strategies used for managing them, and the challenges and solutions identified in practice. This section discusses the findings thematically, aligning them with contemporary academic literature.

The study found that all three institutions maintained a variety of record types, including student academic records, staff employment files, research project documentation, departmental meeting minutes, and administrative correspondence. However, the level of modernization varied across institutions. ATBU reported the partial use of electronic formats for student results and memos, while ATAP still relied almost entirely on manual filing. This is consistent with the findings of Salisu and Bakare (2023), who observed that Nigerian universities are in a transitional phase, maintaining hybrid record systems due to resource constraints and inconsistent digitization policies.

In terms of relevance and currency, most participants indicated that while efforts were made to maintain up-to-date records, manual systems often led to backlogs and delays in retrieval. This situation was more prevalent in ATAP, where secretaries described frequent challenges in updating old files. According to Uzochukwu and Bello (2023), outdated records systems hinder operational efficiency and weaken the decision-making process, particularly in technical departments like engineering where timely access to data is crucial.

The criteria used for managing records were found to be informal and inconsistent across institutions. ATBU followed a more structured system based on institutional policy, with categorized filing and some electronic records sorted by departmental codes. In contrast, Federal Polytechnic Bauchi and ATAP employed individualized approaches, depending on

the experience and preferences of the secretaries. Ibrahim and Tanko (2023) emphasize that the absence of standardized procedures leads to fragmentation in records management and increased vulnerability to data loss.

In terms of acquisition and organization, it was discovered that records were generally created as part of routine operations such as admissions, project submissions, and staff documentation. However, there was no clear system for assessing the value of records or determining retention periods. This observation supports the argument made by Danladi and Eze (2023) that the lack of appraisal mechanisms in Nigerian tertiary institutions results in overcrowded storage and poor record lifecycle management.

Regarding preservation strategies, the institutions employed basic practices such as file shelving and locking cabinets. Only ATBU mentioned regular backing up of key records into digital formats. Federal Polytechnic and ATAP largely depended on physical file storage, which exposed records to environmental hazards. Okonkwo and Bello (2023) noted that inadequate preservation methods contribute significantly to the deterioration of academic records and compromise institutional memory.

Multiple challenges affecting the management were identified, including inadequate ICT infrastructure, limited training opportunities, absence of professional records managers, and poor enforcement of recordkeeping policies. These issues were most pronounced in ATAP and Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, where HODs admitted that records management was often an afterthought. This reflects the findings of Usman and Alade (2023), who argued that the root cause of weak recordkeeping in public tertiary institutions lies in institutional neglect and underinvestment in records management systems.

In summary, while all three institutions demonstrate awareness of the importance of records in academic and administrative functions, the practical realities reveal significant gaps in policy enforcement, digital readiness, and human capacity. The findings of this study affirm the need for a holistic approach that combines digitization, standardization, staff training, and strong institutional leadership. As highlighted by Eze and Mohammed (2023), the future of effective recordkeeping in Nigerian tertiary institutions depends not only on tools and infrastructure but also on the institutional will to prioritize and professionalize records management.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. The study found that engineering departments in the selected higher institutions create and maintain various records, including student academic records, attendance records, project supervision records, accreditation documents, staff records, financial records, departmental correspondence, SIWES records, and industrial training records. ATBU maintained the largest volume and diversity of records, while ATAP maintained a more limited range of records due to infrastructural constraints.

2. The study revealed that records management practices in the institutions are predominantly manual. Records are organized through filing systems, categorization, and storage in cabinets and folders. Although ATBU demonstrated a relatively structured filing system, all the institutions lacked comprehensive electronic records management systems and effective preservation mechanisms.

3. The study identified several challenges affecting the management of records, including lack of digitization, inadequate storage facilities, poor preservation of old records, insufficient staff training, absence of records management policies, and weak communication systems. To address these challenges, participants recommended digitization of records, staff capacity building, provision of ICT facilities, establishment of dedicated records units, formulation of records management policies, and appointment of trained records officers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the current state of records management in engineering departments of higher institutions in Bauchi Metropolis is inconsistent and underdeveloped, particularly in areas such as standardization, digitization, and strategic use of records. While institutions like ATBU are making incremental progress toward digital transformation, others remain dependent on manual and ad hoc systems that are vulnerable to data loss, misfiling, and inefficiencies. Despite the centrality of records to effective administration, teaching, learning, and research in engineering departments, the lack of professional record managers, absence of formal policies, limited ICT infrastructure, and inadequate staff training constitute significant constraints.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Engineering departments in the selected institutions should strengthen the creation, organization, and maintenance of records by ensuring that all academic, administrative, financial, and correspondence records are properly documented and preserved for future use.

2. The management of the institutions should develop and implement comprehensive records management policies and provide adequate storage facilities to guide the creation, classification, storage, retrieval, retention, and disposal of records.

3. The institutions should address the challenges affecting records management by digitizing records, organizing regular staff training programmes, employing qualified records personnel, and conducting periodic monitoring of records management practices.

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