Assessing the Impact of Records and Information Management Policy in Nigerian Public Universities: A Qualitative Review

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Abstract

At the organizational level, records and information policy is regarded a key component in regulating and controlling information-related management and operations. However, literature and information from the field show that its structure and responsibilities are somewhat anonymous. Information policy components and other needs necessary for the practical application of information management policy remain underdeveloped, despite the fact that its basic aspects have been addressed in a number of publications. To understand information management policy within an organizational setting better, qualitative research using a case study approach with a semi-structured interview technique was used to elicit data from eleven stakeholders in records and information management which are more credible to answer research questions through the descriptions of roles played by information policy in

regulating information management in the university. Qualitative research analysis software ATLAS-ti 7.0 was used to aid the data analysis. The research finding shows that managing records and information in the university is carried out without a standard policy which led to so many inconsistencies in the records and information management process. This situation has presented a vacuum in the circle of information resource management. However, the study recommends that the university should establish an information management policy, especially on information security issues. This policy should be conveyed to employees, documented, and reviewed frequently. Personnel must conform to the policy and any violation of the policy must attract disciplinary actions.

Keywords: Records management, Information management policy, Nigerian universities, Records management policy, Education.

Introduction

The act or construction of an information strategy for the goal of meeting information objectives within the whole force of available resources is known as information management policy (Orna, 1990). As a result, a realistic information management strategy along this line would include plans and measurements that the institution would use to guide and govern its information activities in accordance with its mission. This is in line with ISO 15489-1, 2016, which states that "Policies on record management should be developed, published, and implemented." These policies should be derived from company objectives and backed up by records management business rules or procedures."

Records and information management policy, or standard office advice in some cases, specifies how an organization's records and information should be managed. These policies can be used as guidance for employees and as a source of staff training (Bates, 2014). In a university context, the unavailability of these policies is an indication of poor records and information management in the university. These policies should be written for the long term and in conformity with the university's applicable laws.

A university must be able to dispose of its records and information in a manner that is orderly, accountable, and auditable, in accordance with established and legal obligations. It should include a record retention schedule as well as suitable action dates. Organizations must follow

the policies and procedures of their provincial jurisdictional body for identifying, maintaining, and disposing of data, according to ISO 16175:1 (2016). Formal and informal initiatives adopted by universities in managing their records and information resources, together with people and information technology resources, should be examined, particularly on the creation, storage, use, and dissemination of information, to determine the nature of records and information management policy and how it has developed and impacted records management in universities.

This will help researchers figure out what has made information management policy elusive, as well as what circumstances may have hidden the existence of information policy in universities. Gaps and attritions in the acceptance, development and implementation of the university's information management policy will be identified as a result of the findings, and solutions will be presented to fix the gaps.

Literature review

This section includes a comprehensive review of the study topic's literature. The themes are organized in such a way that they provide a comprehensive image and scenario of conceptual records and information management policy, as well as empirical contributions from prior studies.

Development of records and information policy

Information policy is highly interdisciplinary, with far too many components in its idea. According to Bates (2014), the study of information policy is growing and is on the verge of becoming a separate discipline. In terms of empirical development, it is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, in light of numerous breakthroughs in information-related fields, the amount of attention paid to information policy as a study topic is continually increasing.

Various economic, technological, and societal challenges have served as both a forerunner and a hindrance to the growth of information sciences. When it comes to conceptual and theoretical advancements, information policy is usually related to 'complexity' and 'uncertainty.' The scenarios are attributed to a wide conceptual and empirical component that is offered, rather than a shortage of studies. These circumstances call for research into the topic, as well as many options for improving the conceptual and empirical components and

features of information policy in general. Two popular causes, according to Gbaje and Mohammed (2013), are the convergence of media, technologies, and services, and the possibility for information policy to contribute to economic and social well-being.

This development, however, does not correspond to the amount of empirical research done, which has inhibited the theoretical development of the subject matter's conceptual underpinning. Analytical methodologies linked to the principles of information policy are diverse and inconsistent, according to detailed reviews of information policy publications. This has contributed to the lack of agreement on definitions, classifications, and models, which are the foundations of information policy. There are a variety of classification systems available, but a unified theoretical framework is still lacking (Kasymova and Usmanova, 2015).

In information policy studies, there are a variety of motives, frameworks, and instruments. This is evident, for example, in the reflections of almost all, if not all, empirical studies of information policy, such as Costantino, Gravio, Shaban, and Tronci (2015), Kasymova and Usmanova (2015), Owen, Cook, and Mathews (2012), and Nielsen (1997), where a variety of methodologies, frameworks, and concepts of information policy were used.

Information management policy concept

Information management policy refers to policies that practically influence information flow, operations, and management in a particular context. In this context, the term "information management policy" appears to be used to refer to both organizational and national information management policies. Moore (1993) stated that there are three separate policy levels to consider when analysing policy: industrial, organizational, and social. Information technology, information market, information engineering, human resources, and legislation and regulation are the five factors that must be addressed at each level.

In terms of the organizational side, he proposed that the organizational policy's goals should be to encourage the use of information in research and development, promote information use among managers, develop and implement communication facilities and standards to help with information transmission between or within organizations, and increase worker productivity through the use of technology. Information policies, which are generated from public laws, rules, and other government policies, influence information flow and management at the national level.

Several authors have proposed definitions for this policy, such as Weingarten (1989), who defined it as "the set of all public laws, rules, and policies that encourage, discourage, or restrict the development, use, storage, and communication of information." Later, Weingarten (1996) defines information policy as "...the set of formal and informal regulations that explicitly prohibit, encourage, or otherwise affect information flows." Information management rules can in a variety of institutional forms, including official and informal policies."

"...information policy is a phrase used to define a set of linked principles, laws, guidelines, rules and regulations, directives, processes, judgments, interpretation and practices that regulate the development, management, access, and use of information," writes McClure (1996, p.214). Policy on information can be decided at the national level, by the federal government, state and local governments, as well as by other authorities and institutions."

Universities in Nigeria are known for unprofessional destruction, poor organization and description, and a lack of a good catastrophe protection strategy due to a lack of norms for managing data lifecycle management (Abdulrazaq, 2015). "Nigeria does not have fundamental records management policies for managing ordinary records," Asogwa (2013: 8) adds, "and records are routinely misplaced or lost owing to misfiling." They don't have any basic uniform records classification schemes, nor do they have any retention and disposition schedules for the electronic documents they create."

In a study conducted by Ojo, Mairiga, Idakwo, and Mohammed (2019) on policy guidelines for records management in Nigerian university libraries, it was discovered that poor policy guidelines, insufficient funds, inadequate housing, poor electricity supply, low staff morale, lack of training and retraining, and lack of strong support from the top managerial staff are among the major challenges of staff records management in Nigerian university libraries. As a result, educators, administrators, planners, and policymakers must adhere to order in the volume of information collected and kept.

Methodology

Qualitative research using an exploratory case study approach was used for this study to examine and seek to know the issues of records management policy in Nigerian universities. The study used semi-structured interviews to gain knowledge of the phenomenon in accordance with the experiences of the respondents in the universities. The qualitative

research procedure is considered best for this study because it has the capacity of extracting data from the respondents in their natural settings. They gave an account of their experience and attached meaning to the happening in their interaction with the university records and information.

A single case study approach is chosen for this study. The use of a case study for the purpose of this research is in line with the view of Yin (2018), which points out that case study research has to do with an empirical inquiry that enquires about a current phenomenon, which is explored by the researcher within its real-life context. This research is characterized by a rich context and lack of control over the events, which are the major characteristics of a case study, hence the decision to use the method.

The respondents for this study were selected purposively based on their schedule of duties and knowledge of records and information management of the university. This is also consistent with Yin (2018) who highlighted that, in conducting a case study, it is advantageous in that the researcher can choose representatives who have the desired characteristics. This case study was conducted using open-ended interviews as the primary data collection technique. This was after seeking approval to carry out the research at the university and getting the interviewee's full consent to participate in the research. The interviews were conducted between June and September 2019.

Research participants include the University's Registrar, three senior lecturers, a records officer, three faculty officers, two clerical officers, and one departmental officer. These officers and their schedule of duties were adopted from Phiri (2016) who conducted a study on "Managing university records and documents in the world of governance, audit, and risk" through a case study in South Africa and Malawi. The study used a semi-structured interview method as it has the advantage of using a list of proposed themes as in a structured interview while ensuring enough flexibility for the interviewees to talk freely about any issue raised during the interview (Wahyuni 2012).

Qualitative analysis software called ATLAS.ti 7.0 was used to facilitate the interview analysis. The interview data collected was subsequently transcribed into Microsoft word before coding. The purpose of data transcription is to assign meaning to the raw texts based on category and context. The transcription stage involved clustering data into two main categories namely; verbatim transcription and followed by the assignment of themes and contexts to the text (Strauss & Corbin 1998). To contextualize its selection for the research, a brief introduction of the case study university is necessary. University X was used instead of the university's

name to protect the identity of the university and the interviewees.

Justification for choosing University X

University X was established in October 1980, as a fully fledge and autonomous degree awarding institution. The university is categorized in Nigeria as a technical university offering several vocational degrees in 42 academic departments that cut across its 6 faculties. These faculties include: the Faculty of Engineering and Engineering Technology; Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology; Faculty of Science; Faculty of Technology Education; Faculty of Management Science and Faculty of Environmental Technology (University X Annual Report 2017). Being in existence for 40 years now, this university is the oldest university that offers degrees in technology-based courses in one of the six geo-political regions of Nigeria.

According to National Universities Commission Academic Brief (2005), the system of university education is more or less the same across the country. Hence, it is against this backdrop that the university was chosen in order to investigate issues regarding records and information management policy and how it affects records and information management in the university.

Research findings and discussion

This section presents the outcome of the research based on the interviews conducted between June 16th and September 1st, 2019 with regard to the research objective. The 11 interviewees are the stakeholders in records and information management in the university gathered to tease out and determine their views on the issue of records management policy in the university. Results of the interviews provided prevalent themes among the participants arranged by responses to the interview questions. Respondents were assigned acronyms to represent him/her in the analysis (RP-n) i.e. Research Participant n; where "n" stands for a serial number of the respondent.

Table 1: Respondents' view on RIM policy

Research respondents	Responses
1. Registrar (RP1)	• No basic RIM policy
2. Records officer (RP2)	• Available rules and regulations

3.	Senior lecturer (RP3)	•	Non-functional RIM policy
4.	Senior lecturer (RP4)	•	No functional guidelines for RIM
5.	Senior lecturer (RP5)	•	No basic RIM policy
6.	Faculty officer1 (RP6)	•	No written plan for RIM
7.	Faculty office2 (RP7)	•	Need for written guidelines for RIM
8.	Faculty officer3 (RP8)	•	No written document for RIM
9.	Clerical officer1 (RP9)	•	Un functional RIM policy
10.	Clerical officer2 (RP10)	•	Un functional RIM policy
11.	Departmental officer	•	No manual for RIM

Coding/Conceptualizing

As stated earlier, this study used ATLAS.ti to aid the analysis of the data collected. At the beginning of the coding process through microanalysis of the transcripts (open coding) in order to identify concepts in the data, more than 100 codes were identified. Concepts together with their properties and dimensions were then developed which gave rise to categories through axial coding; and finally, the categories were linked to the central research question; guided by Strauss and Corbin (1998) cording paradigm. This paradigm helps to arrange the concepts by grouping or categorizing their base on a logical classification scheme. The concepts with their properties and dimensions were gradually developed into categories and themes. At this point, the six main themes (illustrated in figure 1) were developed as presented and explained below:
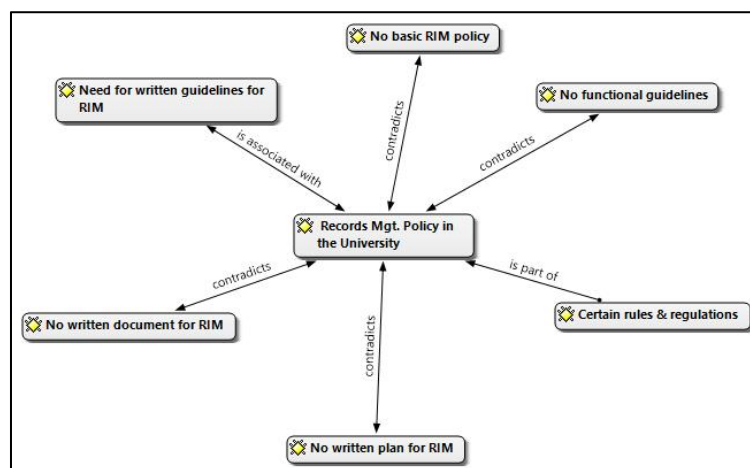

Figure 1: Respondents view on the central research question

Respondents believed that policy issue is paramount for records and information management in the university. However, data gathered provide proof that interviewees were not aware of the availability of information management policy in the university. The outcome of this study indicated the absence of a standard policy for records and information management. Although there are some pieces of loosely unwritten policies, they are loosely implemented and used in the university. In addition, there are inadequate documents to support the presence of policies in managing information resources in the university.

Commenting on the availability of records management policy in the university, the university's Registrar (RP1) shared that, "even though the university has an office each that handles staff and students' records, it does not have basic records and information policy that spelt out guidelines and responsibilities for managing records and information". Similarly, in his response, RPX5 clearly indicated absent of standard guidelines for managing the university's records and information, saying "*I am not so sure if the university has any formal guidelines concerning information management generally*". Moreover, RPX8 hold similar opinion when asked about the written plan for safeguarding important records in case of any disaster. His response "*I've never seen that, maybe the policy is there but I as a person I don't know about it. It could be there at the university level but at my own level, I don't know.*

Without standard policy or another official tool that is similar to it, other facets must have overtaken the functions which are assumed to be played by the policy on information management to direct and regulate activities and the flow of information. For instance, records retention and disposition rely on the availability of the guidance and permission of a superior officer and to some extent judgment of the units or departments or sometimes the decision of the university's top management level (RP8).

The absence of standard policy on records and information management in the university has led to so many inconsistencies in the way records and information are managed; especially regarding the security of the records and staff ethics. Clear evidence of this is a lack of policy regarding records backup as stated by RP4 that they only have a backup of the hard copies, and perhaps raw results. This could be challenging especially in an event where you have a fire outbreak just like the way it happened previously where within a faculty, two departments were burnt down, that's business administration and accounting, and the university has to resort to going back to respective lecturers to collect raw results. Assuming those lecturers were careless to have misplaced their personal copies of the results, how could these records be recovered? So it took them over a year to retrieve old records.

The university needs to be able to dispose of its records in an orderly, accountable, and auditable way in line with prepared and juridical requirements. It should make provision for a retention schedule and appropriate action dates for records. According to ISO 16175:1 (2016), organizations need to comply with the policies and procedures of their provincial jurisdictional authority for identifying, retaining, and disposing of records.

In this situation, it seems that the university did not establish a records center for non-current records. As a result, the available spaces in departments and units were taken up with semi-active and non-active records. Many departments usually suffer from space constraints:

...and the university needs to also create more space for the records, a place where the records would be kept (I can see that the records are chucked up here and very close to your desk) Yes and from time to time the records may be in two to three years the records will increase since the number of students is always increasing yearly (RPX7). In addition to this, RPX8 also affirmed this same situation by saying *"Then another important thing is the space, office space as you can see the filing cabinets, the files and everything my table and everything are all chalked up in the same place"*.

With records management staff experiencing space scarcity, some respondents believed that in order for records to aid efficient and effective services, the university must shift from paper records systems, and establish more automated processes to store and manage records and information.

Usually, records management specialists and technocrats do not work in partnership to adequately manage and control the processes in records conversion. On the other hand, technocrats normally concentrate on the storage, dissemination, and in some instances parts of records access. Usually, they are unworried about areas such as retention, preservation, and conservation management. On the other hand, the records management specialists are not usually experts in information technology, and therefore the information exists in a platform that only the technocrats know about.

 In this process, records lose their integrity, reliability, authenticity, and usability. During the conversion process, when the records lose such characteristics, the university cannot stand to positively gain from an electronic system. Carelessness in the conversion of paper-based records and information is costly both in monetary terms and to the service of the university.

When unsuitable procedures are followed, then the project will be unsuccessful. This is mainly significant taking into account that there is the practice to terminate hard copies of

records once they are converted into digital format (PRX8). Every attempt should be made to apply suitable procedures through enacting a policy that can bring synergy between the specialist and the technocrats, to get the best retention and disposition of records in the electronic records management system.

Hence, senior managers working with records managers must make sure that the right procedures are adhered to during records conversion and be sure of compliance with the acceptable legal requirements before moving on to destroy original records.

Proper guidance on record retention and disposition should be created by the university based on the related policies and guidelines. Semi-active and non-active records from departments and units are usually deposited in the registry or records storage area. Thus, some records only become a part of the formal records system when they are no longer needed for day-to-day transaction activities and staff wants to tidy their workspaces. Though, where available, the records management unit is often unable to manage these unstructured records. For example, RPX7 shared the example of his faculty where records were left in a wrecked condition:

Yes facilities like these metal cabinets we are using, if to say the university will increase them, it will provide more storage facilities so it will help us to keep the records in an appropriate way. As you can see in the other offices, some of the records are on the floor and it will be easily affected by insects and termites.

This necessitates the need to have a standard records and information management policy which would be the backbone of records and information management in the university as gathered from the responses.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As discussed earlier in the case analysis, managing records and information in the university is carried out without a standard policy on information management in the university which led to so many inconsistencies in the way records and information are managed; especially regarding the security of the records and staff ethics. However, it was noticed that there exist some fragments of roughly unwritten policies which are loosely implemented and have an explicit impact on information management and use in the university. For instance, records retention and disposition rely on the availability of lawful guidance and to some extent

judgment of the units or departments or sometimes the decision of the university's top management level.

Even though no particular reference was made to these policies as information policies, their presence shows that the university took some planned actions to manage its records and information resources. To achieve this, the universities set up some strategies and initiatives surrounding information resources, people, and system resources. This acts as a general commitment from everybody to participate and play his role within the available resources.

These situations have presented a vacuum in the circle of information resource management. Established and standard policies and rules should be one of the elements of information management activities. Hence, the university should establish an information security policy. This policy should be conveyed to employees, reviewed frequently, and documented. Personnel must conform to the policy and any violation of the policy must attract disciplinary actions.

Universities should make sure that behaviors such as corruption, nepotism, etc. are countered for effective enforcement of policies. Hence, enacting a realistic information management policy that comprises plans and measures adopted by the universities to guide and control their information activities in line with their mission is recommended.

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