Management of Files in a Nigerian Polytechnic Registry:
The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Nigeria as a Case Study

[1]A. Ayankola Ibrahim and [2]A. Oyeboade Samuel
[1]The University Library, Federal University of Technology,
P.M.B. 04, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria
[2]Department of Research and Statistics, CBN Library, Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract: This research discussed the procedure of files management at the registry of the Polytechnic, Ibadan. The data, thus, collected were mainly through questionnaire, observation and interview due to the peculiarity of the study. The questionnaire was personally administered on 180 personnel that comprised the entire workforce in the registry, out of which 152 personnel responded. This invariably gave a response of 84.4% and the coefficient of reliability of the instrument used was 0.72. This research revealed that various categories of files were created and kept by the registry. Such files are those pertaining to the institution's characteristics such as; policy, personnel, fiscal, students, payroll, etc which were mainly filed through numeric, chronological, alphabetical, functional and subject order. The methods of retrieving files and storage facilities put in place were also examined and forms of modern technological equipment used by the registry were also examined. The study further revealed that there were no qualified files managers saddled with the responsibility of managing files in the institution and based on these, the study gave some recommendations that included the recruitments of competent hands, installation of preservation method, periodic fumigation of files to prevent infections, etc.

Key words: Nigeria, files management, polytechnic registry

INTRODUCTION

Files management requires real management support for such to go on with which main functions and processes have to do with records creation, control, scheduling and disposal of which cheerily encompasses, receiving and opening, allocating, recording, classifying of correspondence, indexing and filing of all correspondence. Production of files on demand by other sections or offices, as well as preparations and dispatch of mails, as well as custody of all files and documents relating to staff and students of the institution.

In the course of time, the growing bulk of files may make it necessary to separate those constantly in use for current transactions and consultations from those which are rarely used and are kept permanently in the care and protections of some arm of the registry. Filing is, therefore, a good tool. Adequate management of records begins with proper file which needs to be efficiently handled in such a way that required information which can be provided in the right format to the right people, at the right time and at the least cost.

The management of files also entails planning, implementing and reviewing of the functions for administering the systematic and scientific control of quantity, quality and cost of recording information that are required in the smooth operation of an organization.

Nigerian polytechnics create lots of various records in the course of their day-to-day administration, some of which have been classified through filing system and are such generated from students and staff. Transactions with other establishments in form of physical records and correspondence, all of which need to be controlled, quantified and well managed in order to serve as major information tools that are very useful in achieving the goals of administrative functions of the institution. As such they must be carefully controlled and organized and those that are no longer needed be efficiently disposed of (Iwhiwhu, 2005).

Files creation is, thus, the filing of information on a medium from which it can easily be retrieved when needed and disposed of when no longer in use. Popoola (1997) averred, when describing the stages of files disposition, as the fourth stage of files management which is vital due

Corresponding Auther: A. Ayankola Ibrahim, The University Library, Federal University of Technology, P.M.B. 04, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria

to the decision involving destruction or retention of files based on the perception of values by the files manager. Disposition however, is a stage that shows in clear terms what finally happens to a file or group of them.

Research method: The research method used involved questionnaire, interviews and personal visits to each of the divisions under the institution's registry. This enabled the researcher to clarify certain issues which arose from this questionnaire.

The population of the study was 180 registry personnel. The structured questionnaire contained 45 items with the combination of both open-ended and close formats.

Reliability and validity of the instrumentation: Both pre-test and pilot studies were done to validate the constructed questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument used was 0.72 using Spearman Brown's methods. Of the total number of 180 sampled registry personnel, 152 responded and their questionnaire found useful for analysis, thus making the response rate achieved to be 84.4%.

The objectives of this study include the following:

- To determine the components of files management process and procedure of operation in the institution's registry of the Polytechnic, Ibadan.
- To investigate files and the retrieval system in use at the institution.
- To determine how files are classified and retrieved when needed.
- To examine the methods used in files dispositions at The Polytechnic, Ibadan.
- To find out the caliber and qualifications of the files management personnel at the registry under survey.
- To suggest ways of improving files management at the institution's registry.

The status of records management in the registries of Ghana higher institutions, stated by Asante (1989) is responsible for the gross inefficiencies and lack of continuity in the policies and procedures of many institutions of education. This statement is aptly applicable to the situation in Nigerian polytechnic registries where files of various categories are being dealt with. Often, there was no file management policy in place in any polytechnic or establishment registry.

Files managers realized that the problems of managing today's files must be solved, having been convinced that those problems will not vanish by itself, except adequate and urgent measures are taken. Indeed, left to itself, it will continue to grow.

The survey conducted on Federal Government of Nigeria files between 1935 and 1938 by the National Archives revealed the chaotic methods of keeping files in government establishments and agencies, as revealed by Maedke *et al.* (1981). Since then, no efforts have been made to eliminate unnecessary duplication of files of worthless records, or to consolidate and systematize file keeping procedures. Overall planning and supervision were, however, almost completely lacking. The National Archives, however, encountered serious problems when it tried to carry out its basic task of selecting the files considered worthy of permanent retention and reporting all others to the disposing agents for disposal.

The advents of the two world wars, particularly the 2nd world war, increased the need for effective management of files with no organized plan for disposition and no restraint upon quantity (Viola, 1992). The National Archives took the initiative in encouraging and collaborating with other agencies in the establishment of files administration programmes. Hence, files continued to accumulate at a greatly accelerating rate. The need to keep the accumulation from becoming unmanageable resulted in the establishment of files administration programme on records disposition by the Federal Government, using low cost space and equipment, provision of efficient system for storing and servicing inactive files, added Maedke *et al.* (1981).

Enquiries into the problems of proliferation of files in the registries of various government establishments created more interest and general support for files administration than they had ever been. Attention was focused on the problems resulting from the implementation of new procedures. Atkinsons (1991), suggested for the establishment of records centres to pave for files centres that could give needed relief to the agencies which offices were glutted with non-current files. He stressed for the promotion of files in three programmes:

- Standard and guidelines.
- Evaluations.
- Technical assistance.

Be it as it was, the idea of files management in Nigeria came up in early 1914 during the colonial era when guidelines on management of files cum records for the examination with a view to destroying obsolete ones was put in place. Evbrokhai (1980) reported that it was suggested that the examination, with a view to determining the archaic ones, should be adequately supervised by competent authorities so as to ensure that careful regard had been taken not only to their official utilisation but to other potential historical interest.

Meanwhile, these initial stages did not really materialize to a systematic functional files management until many other efforts were put in place by groups and individuals who aroused the interest of government. Adegboye (1991) said that all the attempts so far taken to formalize files records management in Nigeria do not seem to be readily acceptable. Asiwaju (1985) on the other hand, complained that since independence, the country could still be described as being at a stand still in term of managing files/records.

Modern trends in files management: Shiff (1977), took time to discuss the impact which the new technology and the concept of records keeping are likely to have on files management in the wake of new trend. He mentioned heroic achievement of cost reduction, increment in services and productivity, which are both today's key challenge to files management. Proper filing of records produce accelerated means of finding them. Adio (1990), noted that filing systems could either be alphabetical, numerical or chronological. More specifically, geographical and colour coding could also be employed. But basically, the manner in which files are referred to determines their arrangement.

The modern trend in the management of files of contemporary registry has since been shifted to automation of files information or data. Alegbeleye (1990) while lending credence to the above statement maintained that files management may involve the development of newer systems for storage of information on non-paper media such as microfilms/microfiches, filmstrips and computers, in a bid to provide maximum service and protection to records. Viola (1992) asserted that the use of computers should be introduced, in the registry, as this will enhance storage and retrieval of information without much difficulty.

Alabi (1990) listed some advantages of this modern trend in the management of files. Some of these advantages included:

- Storage of large volumes of files.
- Frequent updating of database.
- Manipulation of files at a high speed.
- The databases are useful in conducting on demand retrospective searches through complex search logic.

Denyer (1976) believed that computers are necessary for fast and accurate production of information by stating that it is an aid to the provision of management information due to the fact that data can be produced quickly. Hence, the advent of File Transfer Protocol (FTP)

that allows users to look through files stored on computers around the world and at the same time allows the users to copy files of interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research is reported under eleven areas, which are the administration and retrieval of questionnaire, respondents by academic qualifications and registry respondents, length of service, authority charged with the management and control of files, methods of filing records, time used in retrieving files, modern technological equipment, location of inactive files, files considered vital, methods of disposing useless files and staff awareness of National Achieves Decree.

On the whole, 180 questionnaires were distributed while 152 are returned in the Fig. 1, representing a response rate of 84.4%. The questionnaires were distributed according to the population of each of the units.

The Registrar's office with its high number of staff was given the highest number of copies of questionnaire (45) while the Establishment unit had the least number of copies of questionnaire (20). Out of the number given to the staff of the Registrar's office, 37 were returned representing 82.2%. The response gotten from Admissions unit was most encouraging with 93.3% while the faculties were 17(68.0%).

Out of the 152 respondents, 36 (23.7%) were secondary school certificate holders, 69 (45.4%) were Ordinary National Diploma (OND) holders, 13 (8.6%) were Higher National Diploma (HND) holders, while 14 (9.2%) were first degree holders and 9 (5.9%) and 11 (7.2%) were
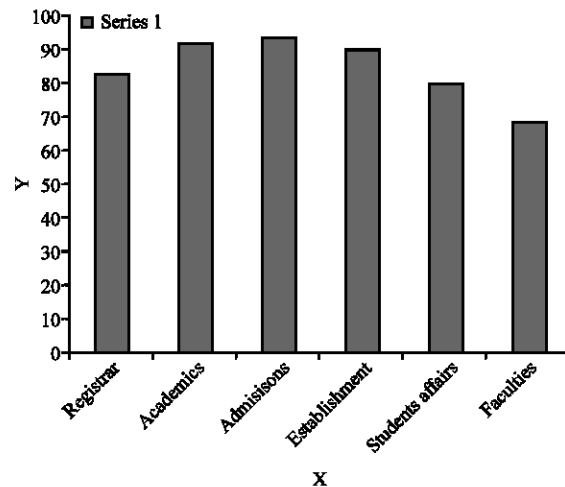

Fig. 1: Bar chart illustrating admnistration and retrieval of questionnaire

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Highest Academic Qualifications

	Highest academic qualifications					
Registry	School cert	OND	HND	Bachelor degree	Post graduate	Professional qualification
Academics	12	19	3	-	-	3
Registrar	9	11	3	-	3	6
Establishment	-	8	3	5	1	1
Students Affairs	7	6	2	4	-	1
General Admin	5	16	1	5	1	-
Faculties	3	9	1	-	4	-
Total	36	69	13	14	9	11
Percentage (%)	23.7	45.4	8.6	9.2	5.9	7.2

postgraduates and administrative certificate holders, respectively (Table 1). Conducted interview showed that, these categories of files personnel do not have former training in files management. Thus, the institution did not entrust its files management to competent hands.

Table 1 also shows that 11 (7.2%) personnel who had professional qualifications went through Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM) courses to acquaint themselves with administrative management skills contrary to the needed skills in managing files/records.

Table 2 revealed that those who had served between 1 and 5 years in the institution's registry had the highest percentage of 19.7%, which means that 30 personnel out of the 152 personnel had served for those years. Meanwhile, the average length of service years of personnel service in the registry falls within the range of 11-15 years. It is therefore, opined that by the time majority of these personnel reached their retirement ages, they must have been competent enough to manage the registry's files efficiently.

The conducted interview revealed that most of the activities embarked upon by the 6 registry departments involved checking of results of new in-takes, preparing the in-coming and the out-going mails, preparing students academic transcripts and general administrative tasks. An increasing volume of recorded information were generated and received, as well as used in the course of carrying out these services.

From the 152 respondents, 50 (32.7%) were aware that the institution had a central authority charged with the management and control of files while the bulk of those who claimed of its existence were from the Registrar's office whom are assumed ought to know better. The high number of this response, 50 (32.9%), could be adduced to the fact that the central authority in the institution is considered to be the Registrar's office (Table 3).

Majority of the respondents 58 (38.2%) were neither aware of the existence nor non-central of central authority within the institution charged with the management and control of files, while 44 (28.9%) were opposed to the existence of any central authority.

Table 2: Length of service of respondents

Length of Service (Years)	Mid class	X^2	Frequency	fx	(%)
1-5	5	25	30	150	19.7
6-10	14	196	25	350	16.5
11-15	17	289	26	442	17.1
16-20	21	441	26	546	17.1
21-25	26	676	17	442	11.2
26-30	34	1156	25	850	16.5
31-35	35	1225	3	105	1.9

Table 3: Existence of central authority charged with the management and control of files by the registry

Registry	Yes	No	No response
Registrar	15	8	14
Academics	13	8	11
Gen. Admin.	9	7	12
Establishment	5	1	12
Students Affairs	2	10	8
Faculties	6	10	1
Total	50	44	58
Percentage (%)	32.9	28.9	38.2

N = 152 respondents

Table 4: Methods of filing records

Filing systems	Frequency	(%)
Alphabetical	38	25.0
Functional	26	17.1
Chronological	15	9.9
Subject	22	14.5
Numeric	51	33.5

The institution's filing records were done mainly through numeric, 51 (33.5%), alphabetic, - 38 (25.0%) and functional -26 (17.1%) in a bid to speed up retrieval. Other means included subject -22 (14.5) and chronological -15 (9.9%). This as come to show that the most accelerated means of retrieving files in the institution's registry was alphabetical (Table 4).

Since the retrieving period or time of needed files were relatively minimal as shown in Table 5. In less than 11 min majority of the needed files are retrieved, representing 57.3%. The highest number of the respondents, 58 (38.2%) are of the agreement that the retrieving of files was between 1-5 min 29 (19.1%) of them agreed that files could be retrieved within 6-10 min.

It was discovered in Table 6, that the institution's modern technological equipment to manage her files were mainly on floppy A diskette with the highest frequency

Table 5: Time taken to retrieve needed files

Time	Frequency	(%)
1-5 min	58	38.2
6-10 min	29	19.1
11-15 min	18	11.8
16-30 min	24	15.8
A day or more	23	15.1
Total	152	100.0

Table 6: Modern technological equipment use by the registry to manage its files/records

IT device	Frequency	(%)
Computers	24	15.8%
Diskettes	50	32.9%
Flash-Drive	15	9.9%
Photocopier	45	29.6%
Spiral Binder	6	3.9%
Microfilms/microfiches	-	-
CD-Rom	-	-
Lamination	12	7.9%
Others	-	-
Total	152	100

of 50 (32.9%) while photocopier closely followed with 45 (29.6%). The need for photocopying is very essential in files management but much control should be exercised in its usage to avoid over production and porousity of records.

The emphasis on the use of desk-top computers, 24 (15.8%) cannot be over-emphasised for filing and retrieval of needed files. The essence of automated files management system is to quicken the pace of producing and disseminating information.

However, much was not known by the respondents about flash-drive, 15 (9.9%). This could be due to the fact that this device was new in the management of files in the researched registry.

According to observation, the institution registry used mainly metal cabinets and wooden shelves for the storage of its active files. Noteworthy is the fact that majority of the departments kept their vital and active files under lock and key.

The usage of microfilms/microfiches and CD-ROMs as well as other devices known to be effective in records storage were not in usage. A minimal of 12 (7.9%) were devoted to the storage of CD (Compact Discs).

It could be seen in the Table 7, that majority of the inactive files 86 (56.6%) are kept in the institution's files centre. The establishment of files centre is essential for files of permanent values which are very vital for the up-keeping and running of the institution.

In the disposition of files, the institution's registry, however, preferred to dispose her non-current files through burning, basically at the expiration of the retention period of such files.

According to Fig. 2, students files 59 (38.8%) are mostly considered vital to the institution by the

Table 7: Location of the inactive files within the registry

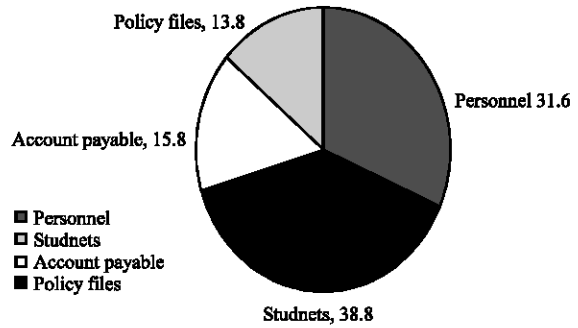| Location	Frequency	(%)
Files centre	86	56.6
Archives	36	23.7
No Specification	30	19.7

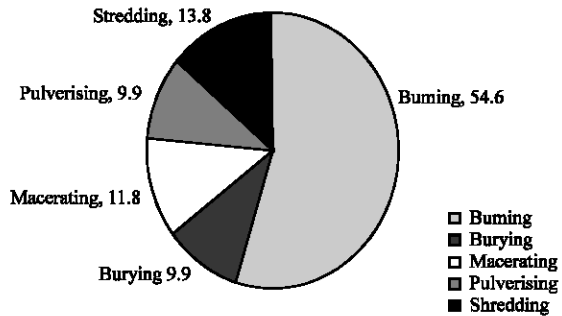Fig. 2: Pie chart illustrating files vital to the institutions

Fig. 3: Pie chart illustrating methods of disposing useless files

researched registry. This is as a result that most of these departmental registries deal directly with students' files i.e., 5 out of the seven registries. Personnel file, 48 (31.6%) was next to students file, while policy files, 21 (13.8%) was found to be considered the least vital to the institution as claimed by the respondents.

For a meaningful disposition of files; be it dormant, inactive or non-current, a comprehensive disposition schedule has to be drawn where descriptions of the phases which the files will pass through are stated before deciding on where it should be transferred. Ideally, for disposing of dormant files, the files must be sent to records centre from where they are taken to either the archives for permanent keep after appraisal based on their administrative, legal, or informational/historical/research values.

According to Fig. 3, the polytechnic registry disposed most of her files which are no longer in use through burning -83 (54.6%) so that the information in them would not be exposed. Some of these useless

Table 8: Staff Awareness of the National Archives Decree of 1992

Response	Frequency	(%)
Yes	59	38.8
No	93	61.2
Total	152	100.0

files are in turn torn (shredded) -21 (13.8%) into pieces, 18 (11.8%) are macerated while the remaining are buried -15 (9.9%) and pulverized -15 (9.9%) in order to conceal the enclosed information.

The respondents were asked if they were aware of the provisions of the National Archives Decree 30 of 1992 as related to files cum records management in Nigeria of which response prompted the above table.

According to Table 8, majority -93 (61.2%) of the institution's registry staff were not aware of the existence of the National Archives Decree and its attendant applications on files management while 59 (38.8%) out of the total respondents claimed their awareness through various contacts with colleagues and other institutions registries.

CONCLUSION

The general aim of this survey was to have a close look at the files management programme in a Nigerian Polytechnic with the Polytechnic, Ibadan registry as a case study with the view to sorting out the significant techniques in its files management.

From the analysed data, it could be seen that the institution's files records were its memory and physical points of reference when all human memories have been exhausted. It was deduced that bulk of the files emanated from daily activities of the institution. The files, thus, created were the ones pertaining to the institution's characteristics like policy, personnel, students, account, staff, etc.

Meanwhile, the maintenance and storage of files in the institution was very chaotic which has come to reflect the insufficient skilled and experienced files management personnel in the institution, low perception of files management in the scheme of things and insufficient funds that pervaded the institution registry.

Consequently, the institution's registry files management was in the care of personnel with little or no formal knowledge of files and records management. Thus, the disposition methods in place were mainly by incineration.

The task of files management in the institution registry is erroneously equated with the general administrative work and probably thought to be synonymous with clerical duties of filing and registering correspondences and other conventional administrative routine work.

Certain factors, however, militate against the effective management of files in the polytechnic. Some of which include:

- Lack of files management standard.
- Erratic electric power supply.
- Insufficient funding to procure modern equipment and hire competent hands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the findings, it is obvious that a lot of improvement needs to be done on the files management practice of The Polytechnic, Ibadan registry. Therefore, the underlisted are recommended for improvement of files in the institution's registry.

- That the surveyed registry should endeavour to recruit qualified files managers into its working force and at the same time organized periodic enlightenment programmes for such staff through in-service programmes/training to keep them up-to-date with the latest trends in files and records management.
- There should be a retention schedule progamme in the registry's departments to serve as a time-table for systematic disposal and transfer of files to the central store. Without the retention schedule, files can be arbitrarily destroyed and once this is done, the files cannot be recalled.
- Central store (files centre) where inactive files will be retained for a certain period of time for administrative purposes, after which they could be transferred to the archives for keeps should be established.
- The introduction of modern storages equipment are pertinent for a long term basis for files management, especially for students' academic records in order to strengthen staff potentials, quicken the pace of producing and disseminating information, as well as to enhance storage and retrieval of information without difficulties.
- A more effective preservation method such as air-conditioning installation in each of the registry's departments, central store.
- Periodic fumigating of files to safeguard infestation will prevent them from fast deterioration and possibly too, the use of alkaline or permanent papers could be introduced.

- Finally, The Polytechnic, Ibadan should see it as a matter of urgency to insure her active and vital files with reputable insurance firm against any possible disaster.
- Security measures for active files should be improved through the installation of fire detectors and extinguishers in the central store and office.
- A close access method to guard files from theft and mutilation should be put in place.

REFERENCES

Adegboye, O.A., 1991. A Survey of the Records Management Programme of Ibadan Municipal Government, Mapo Hill, Ibadan. An Unpublished MLS Dissertation. Library, Archival and Information Studies Department, University of Ibadan.

Adio, P., 1990. Basic Filing: Principles and Techniques. A Workshop on Records and Information Management, NLA Oyo State Chapter, Ibadan, pp: 1-30.

Alabi, G.A., 1990. Introduction to Computers and Information Technology. A Workshop on Records and Information Management, NLA, Oyo State Chapter, Ibadan.

Alegbeleye, G.O., 1990. Records and Information Management. Nigerian Library Association, Oyo State Chapter, Ibadan, pp: 6.

Asante, K.B., 1989. Closing Address at the 2nd West African Regional Workshop on Management of Semi-current Records. Accra, Ghana.

Asiwaju, G., 1985. The Need to Introduce Modern Records Management Operations in Nigeria. Memorandum submitted by the Federal Director on Culture and Archives to the Conference of Ministers/Commissioners responsible for Information, Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture, Owerri.

Atkinsons, G., 1991. Visit to the Public Record Office. Records Management Bulletin (45), pp: 25.

Denyer, J.C., 1976. Management Services. London: Macdonald and Evans Ltd., pp: 266.

Evbrokhai, A.O., 1980. The Challenges for Records Management Practice in Nigeria, in the National and its Record. Proceedings of the First National Seminar on Archives Records Management held in P/Harcourt, pp: 67-68.

Iwhiwhu, E. B., 2005. Management of Records in Nigerian Universities: Problems and prospects. The Electronic Library, www. emeraldinsight.com//ViewContentServlet, 23: 345-355.

Maedke *et al.*, 1981. Information and Records Management. 2nd Edn. Glencoe, California.

Popoola, S.O., 1997. Archives and Records Management in Nigeria: A Survey of Ibadan Municipal Council. J. Res. Edu., 1: 125-129.

Shiff, R.A., 1977. Records Management and the Office of the Future. ARMA Quarterly (II), pp: 5.

Viola, I., 1992. An Examination of Records Management in the University of Lagos Registry. Afr. J. Library Inform. Sci., 2: 39-46.