An Assessment of Records Management Systems of Administrators in Senior High Schools in the Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana

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Abstract: *The paper presents results of an empirical study on records management system of administrators of senior high schools in three educational districts in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. The study intended to disclose the extent to which headmasters, their assistants and other administrative staff have embraced electronic records keeping as opposed to manual records system, among others. The descriptive sample survey utilized a semi-structured questionnaire to generate data to address the research questions. It emanated from the study that the administrators keep both manual and electronic records systems in the schools. They, however, encounter some challenges with both systems of records keeping. While the challenges with manual records keeping system mainly concern infrastructure and data security, that of electronic records system have to do with lack of funds, non-availability of computers and their accessories and delay in maintenance of equipment. It was also revealed that although the administrators had not received formal training in electronic records keeping they do not have issues with it. Sufficing to aver that with in-service training, they can be superfluous in electronic records system. It is therefore worthwhile for educational authorities in the region to upgrade the competence of administrative staff of the senior high schools to enable them improve on their electronic records management.*

Keywords: Data, records management system, manual and electronic records systems and challenges of records keeping

1. Introduction

Information is the heart of school administration, which makes it very essential for heads of schools and other administrators to ensure its safety. Both internal and external publics of schools use information for varied purposes. Some decades ago, information was solely kept manually on paper and in files for later usage. However, with the advent of computers, information is kept electronically in addition to the traditional manual system. Many sectors are actually strivingto go paperless, where information would be kept electronically only. This happens when the operations of organizations are digitized. The educational system, particularly, the secondary school sub-sector of education makes use of huge information that needs to be kept judiciously. Ideally, the senior high school needs to make good use of electronic records system to improve its academic and social functions. So the extent to which administrators of senior high schools make use of electronic records systems is the purpose of this endeavor.

Right from admission of students into senior high schools, administrators take a lot of information from them. Students' bio-data, admission details and many more are taken and in the course of their stay in the school, their performance, conduct and other activities are solicited and used for current and future decisions by stakeholders of education. Information about teachers, non-teaching staff and other relevant bodies is also kept and managed by administrators for proper functioning of schools. The volumes of information on students, staff and others, which are used for varied reasons call for proper and appropriate records management. Pali (2009) explains records management as a systematic control of all records, either in media format or printed materials from their creation until its final disposition including the development and application of standards to the creation, use, storage, retrieval, disposal and archival preservation of recorded information.

According to the World Bank (2006), records are very vital for effective operation of public and private sector institutions. Records serve as means to direct institutions' decisions and activities. They aid to ensure effective transparency and accountability in decision-making and contribute to national development (International Records Management Trust [IRMT], 2003; Kemoni, 2007). Effective management of records requires that procedures for the timely discarding of records that institutions do not need to support present daily actions or those that they do not need to retain for legacy purposes (ISO, 2001).

The relevance of records in the operations of educational institutions cannot be over-emphasized. It has been found that there is a direct relationship between investment in records and productivity improvements (Sing, 2002).Shepherd (2010) contends that institutions and individuals build records to support administration to ensure accountability and to meet the needs of society for communal recollection and the safeguarding of individual and community identity and history. Blake (2014) also contends that properly managed records can help reduce operating expenses, enhance customer service and ensure that the institution is in compliance with laws and regulations. The benefits of records and their management have been recognized by organizations to be essential in organizations (Sanderson & Ward, 2003).Records help institutions and people to have rule of law and accountability working (IRMT, 2003; World Bank 2006). In an apparent support of the importance of records, Ngoepe (2004) contends that thorough and sound records

management is the underpinning any high educational institution requires to offer services and to fulfill its responsibilities of accountability towards immediate community, students and staff.

There are two main means of records management, which are manual and electronic. A manual record keeping is the putting of information on paper and keeping it in files. However, electronic records management is the storing of information on the computer. The introduction of computers has been assisting institutions immensely to achieve objectives and add value to the activities of organizations (Johare, 2001).Electronic records management provides unrestricted storage space as opposed to the traditional method of office cataloging that entails categorizing several ink printed papers in a cabinet to allow for retrieval when needed (Iziomo, 2014) For a few decades now, institutions have had the privilege of electronic records system courtesy the widespread use of computers. When a record is created or received, it is up to the user to ensure that it is filed and documented correctly to allow for easy tracking and further use by the organization (Azman, 2009).

Records as important resource for organizations should be harnessed through proper records management practices (Mutula & Wamukoya, 2009). So for effective records keeping, administrators need to ensure some level of confidentiality, proper maintenance security and safeguarding the contents and contexts (Uwaifo, 2004, Akporhonor & Iwhiwhu, 2007). However, there are some challenges with records keeping and management in institutions. A study conducted by Egwunyenga(2005) found lack of record manuals and filing guidelines which lead to loss of vital information as a major problem of records keeping in educational institutions. Oketunji (2002) also observed that inadequate computer terminals are a problem for records keeping while Egunleti (2000) found difficulty in records retrieval and lack of appreciation by management and staff of the need for well controlled records as challenges of records keeping and management.

Awe (2000) considered the problems in records keeping in educational institutions from the angle of owners, management, staff and students. The author attributed unavailability, inaccurate or incomplete and dishonest records to these stakeholders. These adversely affect planning for and provision of structures and facilities, adequate finding, proper formulation and review of policies for record management (Ututlu, 2001). Lawal (2007), however, attributed the challenges associated with records management in most organizations to corruption or inadequate finance. Egwunyenga (2009) confirmed that African records keepers lack the basic skills and competences for handling records and archives in the public sector. Afolabi (1999) further asserted that record management practice in Ghana has a number of problems which include insufficient skilled and experienced record management personnel and possibly, low priority of records management in the scheme of things.

In addition, Otuama (2010) mentioned the following as the problems associated with records management in most organizations; Absence of an archival institution, inadequate skills and high staff turn-over, inadequate funding, poor housing and equipment, absence of an archival law, high levels of illiteracy and communication network. Ilana (2008) also identified loss of records and records storage as challenges associated with records management. The challenges with records management in institutions require administrators to have good knowledge and skills in systems of records management.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The following are the specific objectives that the study sought to achieve:

1. To find out the record management system(s) that the schools adopt.
2. To ascertain the extent to which the schools utilize electronic records system.
3. To examine the knowledge and skills in electronic records management of the administrators of the schools.
4. To identify challenges associated with records management in the schools.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What records management system do the schools adopt?
2. To what extent do the schools utilize electronic records system?
3. What is the administrators' knowledge and skills in electronic records management?
4. What challenges are associated with the records management systems in the schools?

1.4 Methods and Materials

1.4.1 Study Design

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design to guide the study. The design helped to select part of the target population in the study context to describe the records management system of the senior high schools and the challenges that they encounter in adopting it.

1.4.2 Population and Sample

The target population of this study consisted of headmasters, assistant headmasters, accountants, secretaries, house masters and their deputies and storekeepers in the senior high schools in the Brong Ahafo regions of Ghana. However, the accessible population came from eight senior high schools which were randomly selected from the Tano north district, Sunyani east municipality and Sunyani west district. As all senior high schools keep records of staff, students, the education service and other stakeholders of education, all districts in the region were given equal chance to be represented in

the study via the simple random sampling technique which was adopted.

Whereas the districts and the schools were randomly selected to provide all of them the opportunity to participate in the study, purposive sampling method was chosen to select the headmasters and other administrators to serve as respondents due to the nature of their functions vis-à-vis the rationale of the study. The respondents voluntarily participated in the exercise after explaining the rationale of the study to them and why they were specifically and purposively chosen to be participants.

1.4.3 Research instrument

The instrument which was developed and used to collect data from the respondent is a semi-structured questionnaire. The instrument had both close and open ended items intended to gather factual and non-factual data to help address the research problem. The questionnaire was piloted in a district in the region which had similar characteristics with the districts where the main study was conducted. The piloting aided immensely in identifying questions that were not in good taste, which were eventually expunged and additional useful information was added. Fully incorporating the suggestions from the pilot study assisted in improving the quality of the instrument. After that, the reliability of the instrument was tested and it was found to be reliable. The instrument was administered personally to the participants in the selected schools and all relevant research protocols were observed in the course of the data gathering.

1.4.4 Data Analysis Technique

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 22) was the statistical tool that was used to analyse the data collected from the respondents. After subjecting the data into scrutiny, it was analysed and the results are presented in frequency counts and percentages for easy interpretation.

1.5 Results of the Study

The results of the study are presented in two sections. The first section presents the demographic data of the research participants whereas the second one presents outcomes of the analysis of data which address the main research questions of the study. All the results are shown in tables. There was a 100% return rate of the instruments used to collect data for the study.

1.5.1 Demographic Data of Research Participants

The first section of the results deals with the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The table below presents the gender distribution of the participants of the study.

Table 1: Gender of Participants

Variables	Freq.	Percent
Male	58	69.0
Female	26	31.0
Total	**84**	**100**

The results as show in table 1 clearly indicate that almost 70% of the administrators of the participated schools in the region were males while only about 30% were females. The female administrators were way weigh less than the males which smacks off male dominance in the administrative positions in the senior high schools. This situation is not surprising as administrative positions such as accounts officers, store keepers are usually held by men.

The age distribution of the participants is displayed in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Age of Participants

Variables	Freq.	Percent(%)
< 30 years	7	8.3
31-40 years	13	15.5
41-50 years	34	40.5
51-60 years	30	35.7
Total	**84**	**100**

The figures displayed in table demonstrate that greater numbers of administrators in the schools were advance in years. More than 70% of the research participants were over 40 years. Only about 20% of them were less than 40 years. Most of the participants were advanced in years which apparently imply that they may not have studied Information Technology as a course in school as a few decades ago IT was not a common feature of the curriculum of the Ghana's educational system. Apparently, prior to the 2000's, students in the jurisdiction did not study IT due to non-availability of IT infrastructure in the system.

Table 3 presents positions of the participants who provided data for the study.

Table 3: Designation of Participants

Variables	Freq.	Percent(%)
Heads	8	9.5
Assistant heads	20	23.8
Bursars	8	9.5
Stores keepers	8	9.5
Secretaries	8	9.5
House staff	32	38.2
Total	**84**	**100**

The results in the table 3 above show that the headmasters and their assistants and the house staff formed majority of the participants. The headmasters and their assistants constituted over 32% while the house staff formed about 38%. The rest of the administrators, cumulatively, constituted only 38% of the participants. This is the situation because some administrative positions do not need deputies as one officer respectively can conveniently and competently handle the duties associated with them.

1.5.2 Main Research Data

The second section of the results covers the analysis of the data which addresses the main research questions. The research sought to unearth records keeping practices of administrators of senior high schools in the study area. The table 4 below displays the type of records keeping system by the participants.

Table 4: Types of Records Keeping System

Variables	Freq.	Percent (%)
Manual	16	19.1
Electronic	-	--
Both manual and electronic	68	80.9
Totals	**84**	**100**

The results as shown in table 4 conspicuously reveal that majority of the administrators use both manual and electronic record keeping system in the schools. Less than 20% of the participants solely use manual records keeping system while none of the administrators uses only electronic system of record management. Majority of the administrators using both systems and largely electronic records system is an indicative of the fact that the schools are in tune with current developments. However, the non-usage of electronic system of records keeping solely implies that the schools are nowhere near the paperless office mantra by some organizations. The few administrators using only manual records keeping may be due to lack of ICT infrastructure in the schools and lack of knowledge to operate it. The use of only manual records system is in line with the findings of Igwoku (2008) that some secondary schools still continue to view papers as the materials for records in administrative documentations.

Table 5 presents data analysis of the challenges that the administrators encounter in the use of manual records system in their work.

Table 5: Challenges of Manual Records Management System

Variables	Yes		No	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Shortage of filing space	49	58.3	35	41.6
Misfiling of records	23	27.4	61	72.6
Security issues	35	76.2	20	23.8
Damage of records	58	69.1	26	30.9
Poor condition of storage location	52	61.9	32	38.1
Poor knowledge on record keeping	15	17.9	69	82.1
Missing of files	30	35.7	54	64.3

The results in the table above show that majority (58.3%) of the administrators had problem with misfiling of records while 47.7 did not have that problem. Majority of the administrators also did have challenges with the following as they either solely use manual records keeping or with electronic records keeping: poor knowledge on records keeping and missing of files.

On the other hand, majority (72.6%) of the administrators did not have filling space to be a challenge. It is only less than 30% percent of them who had problem with filling

space in the school. Majority (76.2%) had problems with security issues and majority (69.1%) of them also had problems with damage of records. On this issue, only 30.9% of the administrators did not encounter this situation in using manual records system. Lastly, majority (82.1%) of the administrators had issues with poor condition of storage facilities with only about 18% of them who did not encounter this challenge.

Generally, the administrators had challenges with inadequate filling space, security, damage of records, storage facilities and poor conditions of location of storage. These challenges are related to physical infrastructure for records keeping but not human capacity. This finding is consistent with what Ilana (2008) identified in a study as loss of records and records storage as challenges associated with records management. These challenges of manual records would not make the administrators to ensure high level of confidentiality, proper maintenance security, safeguarding the contents and contexts as asserted by Uwaifo (2004), and Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu (2007).

The researcher sought to ascertain factors accounting for the continuous use of manual records system in spite of the challenges encountered in its use. In other words, the researcher wanted to know why the administrators were not using electronic records system only. The table below presents the answers to the question posed to this end.

Table 6: Factors Influencing Manual Records Management systems

Variables	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Lack of computers and accessories	52	61.9	32	38.1
Lack of funds to procure computers and accessories	65	77.4	19	22.6
Damage of electronic equipment and loss of data	22	26.2	62	73.8
High cost of maintaining electronic equipment	34	40.5	50	59.5
Inadequate personnel to handle ICT equipment	36	42.9	48	57.1
Incompetence in electronic records management system	16	19.1	68	80.9
Lack of confidence in the security of electronic record systems	21	25	63	75
Inadequate space for electronic equipment	34	40.5	50	59.5

The results in table 6 disclose that 64.9% of the respondents believed that electronic record system is not used for records keeping in the schools due to lack of adequate number of computers and accessories although 38/1% of them did not hold that view. Again, majority (77.4%) of the respondents contend that lack of funds to procure computers and accessories account for administrators' non-usage of electronic records system in the schools.

However, majority of them did not believe damage of electronic equipment and loss of data, inadequate personnel to handle ICT equipment, incompetence in electronic management system, lack of confidence in the security of electronic records system and inadequate space for electronic equipment account for their continuous use of manual records system either solely or in addition to electronic records system.

The administrators were requested to rate their knowledge and skills in computer usage. This question sought to find out the computer programmes they have competence in and can do. The results are shown in table 7.

Table 7: Knowledge and Skills in Computer Usage

	Not at all		Low		Moderate		High	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Knowledge in Computer Usage	8	9.5	16	19.0	33	39.4	27	32.1
Skills in Computer Usage	8	9.5	14	16.7	42	50.0	20	23.8

The data analysis reveals that majority of the administrators have good knowledge in the usage of computer. Thirty three (37) representing 39.4% and 27 representing 32.1% of the administrators respectively indicated that they had moderate and high knowledge in computer usage. It is only eight of them who pointed out that they did not have any knowledge in computer usage.

The results also show that eight of the administrators did not have skills in computer usage and 14 representing 19% claimed they had low skills in computer usage. However, majority of them, 42 representing 50% and 20 representing 23.8% respectively indicated that had moderate and high skills in computer usage. In aggregate, the administrators seem to have good knowledge and skills in computer usage and for that matter electronic records keeping. This is a good development as they would use their competence in computer usage in their administrative responsibilities in general and records keeping in particular.

The respondents were asked whether they have received formal training in electronic records keeping. Their responses are provided in table 8 below.

Table 8: Formal Training on Electronic Records System

Variables	Freq.	Percent (%)
Yes	25	29.8
No	59	70.2
Total	**84**	**100**

The results in table 8 clearly show that majority of the administrators have not had formal training in electronic records keeping. It is about 30% of them who have had the opportunity of learning electronic records keeping. Only a few of them have had the privilege of formally or informally learn tissues in electronic records management. The majority who had not had the opportunity to formally learn electronic records keeping may be relying on their competence in IT for their records management in the course of their duties.

The last issue that the study dealt with concerns the challenges the administrators who keep electronic records system encounter. In this case, the 68 administrators who indicated they make use of eleectronic records system provided data for this item. Table 8 presents responses on the challenges they faced in electronic records management in the schools.

Table 8: Challenges of Electronic Records Management System

	Yes		No	
Variables	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Lack of computers and their accessories	68	80.9	16	19.1
Non-functional computers and accessories	48	57.1	36	42.9
Frequent breakdown of computers	38	45.2	46	54.8
Delay in maintenance of computers	49	58.3	35	41.7
Inadequate basic skills in ICT	25	29.8	59	69.2
Frequent outages which interrupt work	71	84.5	13	15.5
Loss of information and data insecurity	46	54.8	38	45.2
Difficulty in retrieving information	26	30.9	58	69.1
Lack of confidentiality of data	30	35.7	54	64.3
Lack of technical support	58	69.1	26	30.9

Of the numerous items that serve as challenges to electronic records management, majority of the respondents had challenges with only the following: majority (80.9%) faced the challenge of inadequate computers and accessories for electronic records keeping, majority (57.1%) had non-functional computers and accessories, majority (58.3%) had issues with delay in maintenance of computers, majority (84/5%) faced the challenge of frequent outages which interrupt work, majority (54.8%) had issues with data security and majority (69.1%) had lack of technical support as a challenge of electronic records keeping in the schools. The findings on the challenges confirm the findings of Egunleti (2000) and Oketunji (2002) that inadequate computer infrastructure was a problem for records keeping.

The findings, however, contradict Egwunyenga (2009) study findings that African records keepers lack the basic skills and competences for handling records and archives in the public sector. The findings also contradict Afolabi (1999) assertion that records management practices in Ghana have a number of problems which include insufficient skilled and experienced records management

personnel and possibly, low priority of record management in the scheme of things.

1.6 Conclusions

Records management system is a crucial and central function of administrators of educational institutions. Data about staff, students, authorities and other stakeholders of education is received, kept and disseminated to appropriate places when the need be. It is essential for administrative staff to properly manage information to enable schools to execute its mandate. Effective management of information requires capable staff, infrastructure, and appropriate records system. It would ensure maintenance of privacy and confidentiality of the records as well as making records available for use when needed.

This study has disclosed that administrators of the senior high schools in the study area use both manual and electronic records keeping systems. Although the administrators had not received formal training in electronic records keeping, the challenges they encounter with the electronic records system has to do with inadequate computers, delay in repair of computers and lack of funds to procure and maintain computer infrastructure for their work. They seem to use their knowledge and skills in Information Technology to manage the electronic records system. To attenuate the challenges that the administrators have and to move to the use of only electronic records keeping system which is the dream of modern day institutions, the regional educational authority needs to step in to upgrade the competence of the administrative staff in electronic records keeping. The schools also need to be retooled and resourced with workable computers and their accessories to enhance the administrative work of the administrators of the schools. Timely and appropriate support services also need to be extended to the administrators, when the need be to boost their operations and enhance their records keeping activities.

To have a comprehensive understanding of records keeping system of administrators of schools in the country, this study needs to be replicated in other senior high schools. The study could be replicated in the basic and tertiary institutions to unravel what pertains there as well. Finally, future research could look at which data are electronically recorded and those that are manually recorded in schools in the jurisdiction which keep both systems of records management.

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