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SCHOOL RECORDS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: PANACEA TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Information from school records supports evidence-based management of schools, thereby ensuring quality of education. It improves administrator's reporting quality to higher levels and help to inform and mobilize support from local stakeholders, while developing practical skills needed to manage and use school records among school administrators, teachers, ministry officials and other staff. There have been wide acclaimed poor standard of education in Nigeria. This may be as a result of inadequate data availability and use in the decision-making process by school administrators and ministry officials, thereby making the management of schools and educational systems to be unsatisfactory to the public. Creating and managing school records manually has also posed challenges, particularly when school administration changes. In this globalised world, engendered by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), creating and managing school records for effective and efficient decision-making is facilitated. Previous studies had concentrated on improving the standards of education in diverse ways, but school records have always been a neglected aspect of research. Hence, this research is investigating school records management system as panacea to quality assurance in education in Nigeria.

Introduction

There is a widespread awareness about the need for transparency and accountability within the education system. This is possible only with the application of appropriate records. Therefore, more systematic collection, dissemination and use of information will be key to informing stakeholders at all levels, in order to mobilize their active

participation and support (Gatei & Sevilla, 2004). School records are generated and used by various persons in the school. However, poor recording of key school management activities and poorly managed school records can seriously affect the efficiency and effectiveness of schools. School here embraces all levels of the educational system: primary, secondary and tertiary. The school is a place where citizens or those who hunger for knowledge go, to be educated or to satisfy the urge to acquire certificates.

Records are written or documented account of transactions kept. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education Records Management Policy (2004) sees records as a corporate asset and a resource of administrative, evidential and historical data. They are vital for current operations, accountability, and for an understanding of institutions, history and procedures. Records are more than just information or discrete pieces of data. Hence, records must have content, context and structure, to give the information meaning. Content, context, and structure contribute to a document's authenticity and to its ability to be used as evidence. Records are created to document business transactions, policies, procedures, programmes, and events in the school.

Record keeping is an important activity in schools and it is mandatory for all schools. The school administrator has the responsibility of ensuring the smooth running of the school system. As such, the extent to which he succeeds in carrying out this responsibility depends on a number of factors, one of which has to do with records that he is expected to keep and manage. School records are documented evidence of what a school does. School records contain data and information about various aspects of a school's operations, including data about its students, teachers/lecturers, classes/levels, facilities and finances. They are official transcripts or copies of proceedings of actions, events, or other matters kept by the school administrator. School records could be viewed as authentic register or instruments or documents of official accounts of transactions or occurrences, which are preserved in the school office (Sunmola, n. d.).

Sunmola (n. d.) averred that these records give a lot of information about the school that would enable the administrator to keep decisions and also assess the progress of the school. Oyedeji (2003) posits that the law requires the certain records must be kept for schools, which helps in the achievement of organizational goals. Oyedeji further posits that the various records kept in schools range from mandatory or statutory to non-mandatory or non-statutory ones. School administrators keep statutory records, which include: admission/matriculation register, log book, copy of the national policy on

education, attendance register, school timetable, diary of works, visitors book, curriculum, accreditation reports of programmes, senate, council, library resources/services, examination record book/transcript, time/movement book, faculty/schools, etc., while the non-statutory records include inventory book, health record book, school calendar, PTA records, alumni records, income and expenditure account, staff minutes book, discipline, etc. (Sunmola, n.d.). These records are kept for the purpose of administrative conveniences and should be properly managed for a robust school administration.

Records management is the planning, organization, monitoring and control of records and records procedures, through efficient and effective classification, storage, retrieval and application of agreed disposal schedules (IRMT, 1999). It is a major support function of the clerical and executive classes that covers current records in records offices, semi-current records in the records centre and non-current records in the archival institution. Adoption of a systematic and planned approach to the management of school records, from the moment the idea is conceived and created to their ultimate disposal, enables an institution to control both the quality and the quantity of the information it generates. The availability and the use of school records would make for better school administration and quality assurance in education. Without relevant records and their use in decision-making, students' progress, teacher/lecturers' productivity and physical advancement of the school cannot be monitored or ascertained.

Stakeholders and constantly complained of the low level or poor standard of education in Nigeria, from primary through the secondary to the tertiary level. Parents, examination bodies, educationists and government had also expressed their dissatisfaction with certificate examinations at one time or the other or the quality of the present day graduates. It behoove on all to find out what could be responsible. Often, when officials of the ministry of education ask school administrators to supply data, they are obliged to make a special effort to collect and summarize the data so they can meet the reporting deadlines for submission. As a result of such last-minute rush some of the data might either be incomplete or inaccurate, or both.

Hence, the researchers imagined if the school heads, inspectorates of education and the ministry of education keep, managing and rely on records of pupils/students, teachers/instructors, facilities/equipments, among others for decision-making to

ensure the quality of education in Nigeria. What data are available for schools management? Is there a database or repository to facilitate educational decision-making process? These posters necessitated the researchers to explore the use of school records management system in ensuring quality assurance in education.

Purpose of School Records

Records are necessary tools for any institution to run efficiently. Records serve as a collective memory and offer future staff details about what they may have already known or what they take for granted. Records may also be needed for a wide variety of reasons such as: personal and educational research; public accountability; and to support or defend legal action. According to Ogunsaju (1989), the purpose of record keeping and reporting system is to:

- ensure that accurate and proper records of student's achievement and growth during his school days are kept;
- ensure that an up-to-date information on any school matters or students is made available to users when requested for; and
- facilitate research activities that will promote efficiency and effectiveness of the school system.

In the same vein, Oyedeji (2003) stated that school records should be kept to:

- provide useful information to an employer of labour who may want to recruit pupils/students for jobs, such as testimonials, transcripts, certificates and references letter.
- supply the necessary information to inspectors of education who may visit the school on general or routine inspection.
- provide useful information to educational planners and administrators.

Quality Assurance in Education

Quality Assurance (QA) is a systematic way of establishing and maintaining quality improvement of activities as an integral and sustainable part of systems or organizations (School District of Palm Beach County, 2011). Quality information and clear objective advice can significantly reduce the risk of taking decisions that fail to achieve school's objectives or have serious unintended consequences (OPM & CIPEA, 2004). In the education systems, QA includes all activities that contribute to the design, assessment, monitoring of standards agreed upon by all stakeholders and improving quality of services delivery, client satisfaction and effective utilization.

Quality assurance reflects the actions taken to ensure that standards and procedures were adhered to and that delivered products and services meet optimal performance requirements (Gatei & Sevilla, 2004). Heras, Casadesus and Dick (2002) stated further that an educational institution would ensure that the services it provides meet the needs and expectations of its customers, that there is a focus on continuous improvement and that the system inspires confidence in both customers and management that quality objectives were met.

At the World Education Forum held in April, 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, education policy-makers from all the countries together with representatives of relevant development agencies, NGOs, institutions and educationists jointly adopted the Dakar Framework for Action which aims at achieving six Education For All (EFA) goals by the year 2015 of which improving all aspects of the quality of education ... is part (OPM & CIPFA, 2004). As such, more relevant and reliable data are needed to help raise consciousness and generate actions at the policy level and within local communities and schools.

More capacities to systematically record, analyse, share and use data and information at all levels of education administration, when strengthened, can help to more effectively identify bottlenecks, problems and issues, and make sound evidence-based decisions (UNESCO, 2011) to address them. At the same time, it has been realized that a wide range of data have been and can be collected for use in monitoring progress of the school. Hence, Kim (2011) stated that all people who are concerned with education should play a role in promoting education for themselves and for others.

In the context of records management and information quality, Crown Publication (2011) posits the institutions need to ensure that their staff was fully trained in records creation, use and maintenance, including having an understanding of:

- i. what they are recording and how it should be recorded;
- ii. why they are recording it;
- iii. the need to differentiate fact from opinion and how to represent information supporting the opinion;
- iv. how to validate information with the patient, client or careers or against other records – to ensure that staff are recording the correct data;
- v. how to identify and correct errors – so that staff known how to correct errors and how to report errors if they are found;

- vi. the use of information – so staff understand what the records are used for (and why timeliness, accuracy and completeness of recording is so important); and
- vii. how to update information and add information from other sources.

School Records Management System (SRMS)

Wider dissemination and more frequent use of data and information at all levels of education and by all stakeholders in support of informed decision-making and promoting understanding and participation are important. Since the mid-1980s, many countries have developed Education Management Information System (EMIS), which has developed into computerized EMIS databases in recent times thereby supporting policy-making, planning, monitoring and management of education (OPM & CIPEA, 2004). Also, Internet web-based EMIS system assist schools have access to the internet to directly enter data into EMIS forms online, and for the data to be immediately checked, processed, stored and use in calculating indicators, analysis and rapid feedback to the schools and local education offices (OPM & CIPFA, 2004). Use of the internet in disseminating information to both school managers as well as the general public is reinforcing transparency and accountability within the education system.

Past experiences have demonstrated that priority would be given to systematizing the collection, recording and use of data at the source, i.e. at the school. It is only when all schools regularly maintain and make use of data, that the completeness, reliability and consistency of data at local education authority, state and national levels can be guaranteed. School administrators regularly make decisions about their school's operations. To make good decisions, they need information that is up-to-date and accurate. A SRMS would help them to systematically collect, store and analyse information about their school so they have relevant and reliable information readily available to support decisions they make in running the school (Gatei & Sevilla, 2004).

The main purpose of a SRMS is to systematically record, store and update the school's data and information. The information from the SRMS is used to support evidence-based management of the school. People who are responsible for making education policy – for planning and managing the education system – realize that both the quantity and quality of data needed to support evidence-based decisions improve when schools systematically maintain and use school records (OPM & CIPFA, 2004). Furthermore, improving data and information management in schools is crucial to

decentralized management and accountability in the education system. The implementation of a SRMS can help to distribute accountability throughout the school system, and enable the schools to better inform and cooperate with their local communities.

The school records management process involves:

- i. **Creation** – beginning a new record and starting to record data and information.
- ii. **Storage** – keeping the records in an organized manner so they can be accessed by authorized people but kept secure from unauthorized access, loss or damage.
- iii. **Update** – adding new information to a record or modifying existing information in a record.
- iv. **Retrieval** – searching for, locating and extracting records from storage.
- v. **Use** – applying information from the records to help make management and policy decisions.
- vi. **Appraisal and retention** – determining whether and how long a record should be:
 - a. retained for active use;
 - b. archived; or
 - c. disposed of.
- vii. **Archiving** – storing inactive records so they can be later retrieved for use.
- viii. **Disposal** – discarding, deleting or destroying a record.

Each of the record management functions has a direct influence on the availability of information and their use for school management.

In a school, the SRMS should involve various school staff to systematically record data and information about different aspects of the school's operations. They use specific, pre-designed school record forms and follow procedures that are defined by school requirements. Different staff can be responsible for different school records and procedures in recording, storing, updating and retrieving information. At the end of each school year, the records that have been accumulated are appraised to determine which records should be retained, archived or disposed off.

A good SRMS is characterized by organized classification and filing of the school records in a way that makes it easy to search, access, retrieve and use the recorded data and information. To systematically manage school records, each person must assume

their respective roles in creating and updating school records using correct records forms, terminology and practices, and submit the record files to the designated place of storage of time.

OPM & CIPEA (2004) averred that based on a review of school management practices in many countries, school records should give priority to recording data and information about the following aspects of school:

- i. **Students** – personal and family characteristics, previous educational experience, current grade, attendance, academic performance, behavior, achievements/faults, outcomes (e.g. promotion to next grade, repeating grade, drop out, transfer, or graduation).
- ii. **Teachers** – personal characteristics, past education, qualification, pre-service and in-service training received, years of service, employment status, subject specialization, class/subject or level/courses taught, teaching load, special skills, attendance, performance, behaviour, achievements/faults.
- iii. **Finance** – school budget and income by source, expenditure by type, financial balance.
- iv. **Physical facilities** – quantity and conditions of school buildings, classrooms, furniture, equipment and other physical facilities; maintenance, repairs and new constructions; rate of utilization.
- v. **Teaching/learning resources** – quantity and conditions by type of resources, new acquisitions, rate utilisation.
- vi. **Learning achievement and outcomes** – results of tests, examinations and assessments (regarding academic, behavioural and other student attributes).
- vii. **Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities** – type of activities, schedules, staff involved, number of participants, results, impact.
- viii. **School and community interactions** – school management board meetings, parent-teacher association activities, school-and-community activities.

All the efforts to create, store, update and manage school records will be wasted if the data and information are not fully and properly used to: strengthen monitoring and management in schools; report to higher levels of the education administration; and inform and mobilize support from the stakeholders. School record data and information can be used either directly, or as to facilitate analysis, interpretation, dissemination and use.

Therefore, to ensure quality of records in education, school records must be complete and be made available when the need arises. Records, which are not regularly kept, will be incomplete and misleading. Badly kept records can hinder the progress of the school. As such, the school administrator must see that school records are devoid of exaggerated reports or untrue statements. Only a small percentage of records continuous to have value indefinitely and are kept permanently.

An effective SRMS embodies clear and well-defined procedures, criteria, norms, mechanisms and practices to ensure that data and information recorded are complete, relevant, accurate and reliable. OPM and CIFEA (2004) outlined the following principles that are essential for maintaining a high standard of data quality in school records:

- i. **Regularity** – all relevant school staff and teachers adhere to the planned SRMS schedule and methods in systematically creating, storing and updating the school records for which they are responsible.
- ii. **Completeness** – data and information in school records possible. If there are data omissions or partial data, a footnote should be added with clear explanations.
- iii. **Accuracy** – data quality norms and practices are clearly defined, understood and followed while gathering and entering data into the school record.
- iv. **Consistency** – all the data are recorded using the same definition and measurement for all schools and overtime.

The steps to be taken by the Ministry of Education to develop policies for ensuring the implementation of a state or nationwide standardized SRMS include the following:

Summary

From the descriptions of SRMS in the preceding sections, we can see that a fully operational SRMS can produce many immediate benefits for school managers and education officers at the local and state levels, as well as long-term benefits for school managers and education officers at the local and state education officers should understand the importance of keeping systematic records of data and information about a school's activities. This would create awareness on the effective management of schools and the entire educational system through the use of quality data that flow from individual schools to other parts of the education system.

Education policy-makers and administrators at the national and state levels would understand the need to promote the practice of SRMS through the school system and ensure all stakeholders understand the importance of systematically managing school data that is required for monitoring, policy and decisions-making, planning and management. It will also make them know that school records should be standardized throughout the school system to ensure consistency, reliability and comparability of data and know how to develop policies to govern the management of data in the school system, while been able to provide instruction to schools that will enable them to develop and manage a standardized SRMS.

School records can, therefore, be used to assess: how the school uses various resources to organize educational programmes and activities, how such programmes and activities took place, and what were the outcomes, issues and lessons learnt. Such important information would allow the school manager as well as education administrators at higher levels to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the school's activities and to improve future policies, planning coordination and management of educational activities across the country.

Conclusion

Therefore, maintaining quality assurance in education requires the additional services of records managers who would ensure that all appropriate records are created/captured and managed. Quality assurance must be all embracing, considering every aspect of the school system. Segmented quality assurance practices in schools may yield incomplete results and the essence of engaging in such an all important exercise and the huge sum expended in it would be a wasted resource at the long run.

Recommendations

In actualizing, SRMS, the state Ministry of Education must lead this process of policy-making and oversee its implementation. Also, in ensuring that the objectives of the school records management system are achieved, the systematic and timely creation and maintenance of school records should be included as one aspect of staff performance appraisal and accountability. To help school staff to correctly perform their SRMS tasks, initial training should be organized. The training can include general school records management principles, terminology and practices, as well as training about how to manage specific school records. These among others would guarantee quality assurance in education.

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