

# Management of Students' Records at Koforidua Polytechnic: Implications for Good Governance

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## Abstract

The study examined the management of students' records at the Koforidua Polytechnic and the implication for good governance. Governance is the essential purpose of any organisation. Governance is the process by which individuals organise themselves, function, exercise authority and ensure continuity. In this study, records keeping is a core component of good governance and records enable programmes and services as well as public access to them. Archival records support a variety of functions and help institutions and society exploit the value of individual and collective experience. Student records are particularly important records series in any educational institution. Student records are created for the student once they enroll on the programme of the polytechnic. The completeness and reliability of the records are critical to the polytechnic system itself and to the student. The study relied on the case study method which was qualitative and investigative. Data collected was through interview and observation and analysed qualitatively. A total of 15 people been primary users of student records participated in the study. The records life cycle was used as the theoretical framework. Finding revealed the absence of a records management policy and a weak programme structure for managing records.

**Keywords:** Student records, Records management, Koforidua, Polytechnic, Good governance

## Introduction

For any organisation to function effectively and carry on with its services there must be one form of record or another (Iwhiwhu, 2005). Consequently records regardless of their formats are important sources of information and knowledge. Kemoni and Wamukoya (2005), state that effective records management provides information required for the proper functioning of organisations.

The World Bank (2006) and IRMT (2003) concur that records are essential for the effective and productive functioning of private and public organisations. They assert that records register decisions and activities of government and other organisations and serve as benchmarks against which they can measure their future decisions and activities.

For academic institutions to manage student records effectively, they must develop the capacity to manage records and information. The reason is that, the challenges of conceiving, initiating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating activities will always require reliable, pertinent and timely records as well as information (Kalusopa 2011).

## Records as a Basis of Good Governance

Records are vital to virtually every aspect of the governance process. The effectiveness and efficiency of the public service across the range of government functions depends upon the availability and access to information held in records. Badly managed records adversely affect the broad scope of public service reforms, and development projects are often difficult to implement and sustain effectively in the absence of well managed records (World Bank, 2000b). Well managed information is essential for accountability, which in turn is the foundation of democratic governance. Accurate official record should provide the basis for the protection of human rights, poverty reduction, rule of law, economic development democratization and accountability framework.

According to the World Bank (2000b), there is a relationship between key governance objectives and the records required to support them as illustrated below

Governance Objectives	Key Records Required
Rule of law	Legislative records, court records, police records and prison records
Accountability	Accounting records, procurement records, tax records, customs records, electoral registers, policy files, case files
Management of state resources	Budget papers, policy files, accounting records, personnel records, payroll records, procurement records, fixed assets register, property registers
Protection of entitlement	Pension records, social security records, land registration records, birth and death records
Service of citizens	Hospital records, school records, environmental monitoring records
Foreign relations and international obligations	Treaties, correspondence with national and international bodies, loan agreements

Source: world Bank (2000b)

### Statement of Problem

Records management is a logical and practical approach to the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of records and therefore of the information that those records contain. With a viable records management programme in operation, an organisation can control both the quality and quantity of information that it creates; it can maintain the information in a manner that effectively serve it needs, and can efficiently dispose of recorded information when it is no longer valuable (Penn et al 1994)

In the Koforidua Polytechnic, there are limited storage facilities for managing current and noncurrent records. Facilities such as filing cabinets and shelves have records on top of them with some clogging up prime office space with no plan for their storage and maintenance. There is paucity of literature on the management of student's records in the polytechnics in Ghana. The problem is that no serious review and evaluation of all the records systems capacity of the polytechnic has ever been undertaken.

The study thus seeks to examine the weakness of the records keeping infrastructure for the management of student records.

### Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to examine

- The mandate of records management
- Standards and practices for the life cycle management of student records
- Availability of resources including trained staff, equipment and space for the management of student records
- To make recommendation that will help solve some of the problems the study will reveal.

### Research Questions

- How effective are the policies that provide mandate for the creation, use and preservation of records?
- Are there suitable standards and practices for the management of student records?
- Are there trained staff and other resources to support records care?
- What are the recommendations that will solve the problem?

### Methodology

A qualitative paradigm largely guided this study. The study was to look at managing student records at Koforidua Polytechnic in Ghana. In all 15 people participated in the study. 11 staff of the student records office, 4 administrators of the four schools in the polytechnic. The choice of the population was because they are the primary users of student records in their respective departments. The single – stage census sampling technique was employed. This single – stage census sampling procedure maximized the total number of respondents within the sampling frame in order to achieve a closer representation of the real issues under investigation. Data was obtained through structured interviews and observations.

### Findings and Discussions

Records of various kinds are created in every institution in accordance with their function, activities and transactions. The essence of a records keeping system is to capture, maintain and make the document available when they are needed. In outlining the findings of the study, it is important to emphasis that records management

theory and practice underline the need to develop a records and information framework that complies with international records management standards. In particular, the ISO 15489 – 2001, is a useful guide.

The findings and discussion are presented under the themes below:

- Policy and regulatory framework
- Records creation and capturing of records
- Procedural manual
- Classification and coding schemes
- Records appraisal, retention and disposition
- Records storage and preservation
- Personnel training and development

### **Policy and Regulatory Framework**

Records management policy is a written document fundamental to the establishment of a records programme. The goal of the policy should be the creation and management of authentic, reliable and useable records capable of supporting business functions and activities. The policy should be adopted and endorsed at the highest decision making level and promulgated throughout the organisation (ISO 15489:2001, Clause 6).

Findings at the SRO of the Koforidua Polytechnic revealed that, there is no such policy guiding the management of student records. In the absence of such a policy the polytechnics lack the mandate and direction for the creation, use and preservation of records. This study confirms the findings of several studies that reveal the grave challenges associated with effective policy and regulatory framework in managing records regardless of their format (IRMT 2008, Nengomasha 2009, Adams 2010 and Mensah 2013)

### **Records Creation and Capturing**

The records creation activities at the SRO include generating, collecting, capturing and receiving records. Scholars of records management theory and practice agree that organisations in principle, should create and capture records of every activity that involves more than one party and they should identify and record every process that generate records (Shepherd and Yeo 2003, Reed 1997)

Findings reveal that the SRO maintains both academic and administrative records. These records are kept in a file made up of stiff manila, a little larger than the documents filed. The file cover encloses the documents so as to minimise damage resulting from handling and use. They are pre printed covers with the name of the Polytechnic and other details. Individual documents within a file are secured by a tag made up of twisted threads known as treasury tag.

Information is most appropriate if captured on an appropriate medium after creation so that they are readily available for institutional support. At the Koforidua Polytechnic, information is captured on both paper and electronic medium. However the main medium of capturing information is paper. Keakopa (2006) confirmed that, in all government agencies, there were records in both paper and electronic formats, with the bulk of the records usually in paper format.

### **Procedural Manual**

A procedure manual is a document which outlines statements of duties and defines responsibilities of staff to enhance efficiency. In the view of Ellison (2006), the purpose of a procedural manual is to help users understand and implement the procedures of the records management programme. A procedural manual serves three main purposes; training of new staff, reference point for staff that have been transferred or assigned new roles and to avoid duplication of roles. In the absence of a procedural manual, management practices become very difficult. Findings revealed there is no such manual guiding staff in the management of student records at the polytechnic.

### **Classification and Coding Schemes**

The timely and accurate retrieval of records depends largely on how well organised and classified the records are. Therefore, records classification systems should reflect the business activities of organisations. Shepherd and Yeo (2003) points that classification schemes are based on an analysis of functions, processes and activities and document the structure of a records management system and the relationship between records and the activities that generates them. A classification scheme provides rules by which each file or document is given a unique identifier. This is known as coding.

At the Koforidua Polytechnic, the coding scheme used is alpha – numeric combining alphabets and numbers.

### **Records Appraisal, Retention and Disposition**

Organisations cannot retain files, irrespective of their format indefinitely. Records management theory and practice, emphasis that it is necessary to use appraisal techniques to support decisions about retention that is

which record can be destroyed and which record merit longer term or indefinite retention (Shepherd and Yeo 2003).

Therefore, the effective management of records requires that there are procedures for the timely disposal of records that organisations no longer need to support current business. A retention schedule is a control document or policy statement which identifies records categories and the period of time for which they should be done away with or retained.

At the Koforidua Polytechnic there are no guidelines or policy on the disposition of student records. Records of students are kept in the SRO for as long as the student remains in the institution. Upon completion of their programmes of study, their records are sent to the "archives". Most regrettably, the absence of a records disposition programme, there exist a large backlog of noncurrent records at the polytechnic.

In a study conducted by Balasu (2009) she point out that there is no public sector organisation in Ghana that applies an agency specific schedule as they are not in existence. Balasu explains that the absence of an agency specific schedule is a serious weakness in the governments' disposition infrastructure. The IRMT (2003), showed that, among other challenges, there were no records retention and disposition policies in the ESARBICA region.

### **Records Storage and Preservation**

Records storage is essential for managing records because it ensures that records are secure, intact and accessible for as long as users need them (Shepherd and Yeo 2003). ISO 15489 – 1 (2001) SECTION 9.6 states that records require storage conditions and handling processes that take into account their physical and chemical properties. Findings at the Koforidua Polytechnic revealed that, current records are kept on wooden shelves and in metal filing cabinets with some occupying space on the floor of the SRO. However, noncurrent records of students' are kept in a room designated as an "archives".

Adams (2010), Mensah (2011) in a study conducted in the MMDA's and public hospitals respectively found out that most common storage equipment use in the public sector were steel cabinets and wooden shelves and that there were problems of inadequate storage equipment.

In relation to preservation strategies and practices, the study revealed that the polytechnic faced major challenges including absence of windows or an air conditioning to regulate temperature in the suppose archives. Such high temperature and humidity coupled with a dark environment is a breeding ground for rodents and insects.

### **Personnel Training and Development**

According to international records management practice (ISO 15489 -1: 2001: Section ii) organisations should establish ongoing programmes for training in managing records. Organisations can design or set up this training together with external bodies.

Findings revealed that out of the ten (11) staff of the SRO at the Koforidua Polytechnic only (two) 2 has formal training in records management. It is thus difficult in such a situation to ensure an effective records keeping system. Studies conducted by the IRMT (2003) in the ESARBICA region showed a lack of core competencies in managing records and archives. Nengomesha (2009) also cited the lack of training as one of the factors that led to poor records keeping in the public service in Namibia. Mensah (2011), Adams (2010) confirms this pattern in Ghana as most registry staff in the MMDA's does not have any training in records keeping

### **Recommendations**

In line with the objectives and findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made. Their implementation will go a long way to strengthen the records systems and practices.

### **Policy and Regulatory Framework**

The study revealed that there is no legislative framework for the management of records at the Koforidua Polytechnic. Therefore, for the polytechnic to become aware of, and comply with, any legislative requirement that relate to records and information, they will need to develop and introduce a range of internal policies, standards and procedures to enable them fulfill the statutory obligations and to improve their operational efficiency. The policy should cover a whole range of issues that will include the responsibility of records management programme, staff and capacity issues, funding, records management infrastructure among others. The policy should form part of the polytechnic – wide records management policy.

This strategy should start with the strategies as recommended by ISO 15489 (2001) which include; preliminary investigation, analysis of business activity, identification of requirements of records, assessment of existing systems and a post implementation review. The polytechnic can also benchmark countries such as South Africa, Australia, and United Kingdom as models or consult an agency such as the Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Ghana (PRAAD) in the development of such policies.

The policy should be adopted by the highest decision making body of the polytechnic and the staff should be made aware of such records management policy and procedures. The implementation of such a policy would ensure that records staff have the capacity to provide leadership and guidance on information and knowledge management issues. These include metadata standards, structure and classification systems, content management, long term access and preservation of information technologies.

### **Procedural Manual**

A procedural manual guiding staff in the performance of their duty should be developed. The manual should address all the stages of the record life cycle so as to enhance records service delivery in the polytechnic. The development of this manual could be outsourced to institutions such as the Public Records and Archives Administration Department in Ghana which has the capacity to develop such a manual.

### **Appraisal, Retention and Disposition**

The polytechnic should examine all legislative frameworks that affect the retention and disposition of records. A comprehensive survey of existing records should support this. They should determine their retention requirements for all the main categories of their records by assessing their value for supporting administrative, financial, legal, historical research or information needs.

### **Records Storage and Preservation**

The research revealed that storage and preservation of records are weak especially semi current and noncurrent records. The polytechnic should establish a functional records keeping management unit which would also lead to the rationalisation of their storage environment. The polytechnic should implement retention schedules which will create a balance between creating and disposing of records, that is, as the institution create new records, so they destroy older ones that are no longer useful.

In terms of preservation, thorough cleaning of the ‘suppose ‘archives’ should be undertaken thus limiting the activities of rodents and insects who are enemies to documentary materials. They destroy records thus limiting intellectual access to information contain therein. Regular fumigation and inspection of the storage facility should be undertaken.

### **Personnel Training and Development**

The essence of a well established records management programme is dependent on a very well trained, competent and experienced staff. The polytechnic should have a comprehensive programme to orientate staff about the central role of records in the institution and the need to manage them properly. The two staff of the SRO with competence in records management should provide an in – house training as a way of providing basic training in records management. Short courses, seminars, and workshops should be designed in collaboration with relevant agencies such as the University of Ghana (Department of Information Studies) for the records staff and should be continuous. Besides core records management programme, other areas such as computer application skills should be incorporated into these courses to keep staff abreast with current technological developments and the management of electronic records.

### **Disaster Preparedness**

In order to ensure the longevity of documentary materials, they must be protected from any disaster that has the potential of destroying them. Since disasters occur unexpectedly, the storage environment should be equipped with fire fighting extinguishers and smoke detectors.

The polytechnic needs to identify its vital records especially student transcripts and have them duplicated and stored elsewhere as part of the disaster preparedness plan for student records. The polytechnic should out – source the drawing up of a disaster plan since they do not have the capacity to do so.

### **Automation of the Students’ Records Office**

Based on the findings of the study, it is believed that introducing automated systems could improve on the retrieval procedures of students’ records. As such, functional computers for processing and retrieval of records should be automated to strengthen and promote fast retrieval.

The polytechnic should consider rolling out EDRMS to the entire sections. With an electronic records and documents management system, which links to a workflow system, not only are documents stored electronically, but these can also be automatically extracted or routed to recipient and escalations can be attached to these documents ensuring that they receive the attention they require within the requisite time frame.

### **Strategic Objectives**

The SRO requires a consistent pattern of oversight and control. In order to exercise control, the Office must

establish and maintain appropriate record keeping systems and procedures, set and monitor standards for the implementation of those systems and procedures, and to provide an easy to understand procedural manual and guidance materials. It also needs to determine media conversion for all records and ensure appropriate disposal under agreed schedules. A long – term strategy should be developed by the polytechnic from a carefully crafted policy. The external and internal threats that face records will not go away just because they must go. There are presently a range of strategies for digital preservation as well as the preservation of traditional materials.

While developing policy and strategies, the polytechnic must be assessing its preservation needs by undertaking a survey of record materials. The survey should examine at the conditions of the buildings, storage environment, security and the record holdings. This survey could provide a range of useful statistics about the level of preservation provision and enable prioritizing actions towards improved practice.

## Conclusion

Lipchack and McDonald (2003) observed that records' keeping is essential for governments and public institutions at all stages of development but particularly critical in developing countries. The study identified weakness in record keeping systems and practices in the Students' Records Office of the polytechnic. Gaps and weakness were particularly prominent in areas such as policy framework, effective storage facilities and trained records staff. Weakness identified in the study can impact negatively on the institutional governance.

There is a close relationship between records keeping and governance. Evidence of that relationship is that records and information can be used to support decision making and the delivery of programmes and services. With this awareness, the related records keeping infrastructure of policies, standards and practices, technologies and people could be put in place and consistently implemented.

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