

Assessment of records management in National Examinations Council (NECO) branch office, Rivers State

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Abstract

The study examined records management practices at the National Examinations Council Office in Rivers State. Four (4) research objectives and research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The population of the study comprised 23 staff of NECO in the Rivers State branch. A questionnaire was employed as the method of data collection. Given the relatively manageable sample, a census sampling was used. Descriptive statistics was employed in the study's analysis of research questions, using percentages, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that the type of records managed at NECO include students' results, students' bio data, and examination records. For students' results, 12 respondents (63.16%) strongly agreed, and 6 respondents (31.58%) agreed. Regarding students' bio data, 10 respondents (52.63%) strongly agreed, while 7 respondents (36.84%) agreed. Lastly, for examination records, 9 respondents (47.37%) strongly agreed, and 8 respondents (42.11%) agreed. The methods employed for records preservation at NECO primarily include students' results, students' bio data, and examination records. However, the use of electronic databases, recruitment of records managers, and acidification were not common practices at NECO. Similarly, the procedures utilized for records disposition at NECO mainly involve waste management agencies, waste bins, destruction/shredding, recycling, and archiving, with digital deletion being rarely used. Despite the efforts made in records management at NECO, several challenges were encountered, including lack of records management policy, bad attitudes of staff towards record keeping, lack of skills to adopt electronic records management systems and cloud storage, corruption, lack of facilities, lack of database, and lack of record managers. The study recommended that records management be prioritized.

Keywords: Records, record management, records management practices, records preservation

Introduction

Records management is the application of systematic and scientific controls to recorded information required in the operation of an organization's business. Records management includes activities such as: setting policies and standards; assigning responsibilities and authorities; establishing and promulgating procedures and guidelines; providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records; designing, implementing, and administering specialized

systems for managing records; and integrating records management into business systems and processes. Ajao and Olaweke (2020) opine that records management can play an important role in charting the course of policy and determining program priorities. It can also introduce a sense of unity of purpose into the whole administration. Thus, it seeks to create records necessary for the efficient and successful running of an organization; to produce the records when they are needed; to conserve records relevant to the continued operation of the organization; and to create only those records that are necessary. Going further, records management does not only mean just the classification and segregation of files, it involves how to take care of the documents. Good records management can enhance organization's performance even its decision-making abilities.

Records management plays a pivotal role in the functioning of organizations, particularly in educational institutions like NECO. The organization deals with vast amounts of data related to examinations, students, examiners, and results. Properly managed records are essential for maintaining transparency, accountability, and integrity in the examination process. They also facilitate efficient decision-making, historical documentation, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Furthermore, managing records involves three major practices; records creation, storage and disposition. Records creation emanates from the routines of NECO such as the conduct of exams, results, staff hiring, firing and promotion, meetings, etc. These records can be stored and maintained in two methods namely manual method and electronic method. Manual storage method involves storing printed records on the files, the shelves or in the drawers, while electronic method involves storing vital information in electronic devices such as computers, flash drives, card readers and disks (Anuar et al., 2023). Records disposal could be by burning, use of waste basket, use of scavengers, shredding, etc. Good records management practice is therefore, essential in NECO due to its enormous benefits to the establishment like fulfilling its mandates, managing students' examinations, improving information access and accountability, reducing costs of record retrieval, ensuring the creation, management of accurate and reliable records, and reducing costs of storing records.

Statement of the Problem

The National Examination Council (NECO) is involved in numerous activities that generate records, some of which are crucial for its effectiveness, providing evidence of the past and serving as vital documents to sustain the council in the future. These important records must be properly preserved and disposed of, as improper management could distort and negatively impact the council's activities. Despite NECO's heavy investment in data processing, including the upgrade of its computer facility and the recruitment of professionals, records management appears to be ineffective, particularly in the Port Harcourt center in Rivers State. This inadequacy may be attributed to insufficient records management practices. Therefore, this study aims to assess records management at the National Examination Council office in Rivers State.

Research Objectives

The study sought to assess records management at the National Examination Council office in Rivers State. The specific objectives were:

1. To identify the types of records generated and stored at the NECO Office in Rivers State.
2. To examine the methods employed for records preservation and security at the NECO Rivers State.
3. To investigate the procedures utilized for records disposition at the NECO office in Rivers State.

4. To explore the challenges encountered in records management at the NECO office in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the types of records generated and stored at the NECO office in Rivers State?
2. What methods are employed for records preservation and security at the NECO Rivers State?
3. What procedures are utilized for records disposition at the NECO office in Rivers State?
4. What challenges are encountered in records management at the NECO office in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Records management encompasses the systematic control of record creation, maintenance, use, reproduction, and disposition. Alegbeleye (2021) delineate three stages through which records progress: current, semi-current, and non-current. During the current stage, records are actively created and utilized, while in the semi-current phase, they are occasionally referenced. Ultimately, non-current records are archived following appraisal. Anyiam (2020) defines records and information management as a comprehensive activity spanning from control, correspondence management, reports management, active files management, records inventory and appraisal, retention and disposition, as well as archives management and reproduction (reprography). In traditional paper-based organizations like local government councils, paper remains the predominant medium for administrative documentations (Babalola et al., 2021).

Records constitute a fundamental aspect of organizational operations, facilitating decision-making, compliance, historical documentation, and knowledge preservation. Barros (2023) emphasizes the significance of operational records, essential for daily business operations, including transaction records, order forms, and inventory logs. Financial records, as noted by Katuu (2023), encompass documents pertinent to an organization's financial transactions, such as balance sheets and income statements. Human resources records, highlighted by Huda et al. (2023), pertain to employee-related documents, such as personnel files and performance evaluations. Legal records, crucial for safeguarding legal interests and ensuring compliance, include contracts, agreements, and litigation records (Hassan et al., 2020). Similarly, customer records, encompassing contact information and purchase history, are vital for customer relationship management (Derua, 2020).

Storage facilities are integral to records management, offering a secure and organized environment for record storage. Physical storage involves tangible formats like paper documents, microfilm, or magnetic tapes, housed in file cabinets or shelving units (Netshakhuma & Mkahura, 2022). Conversely, digital storage relies on electronic formats, stored on servers or cloud platforms, offering scalability and enhanced security (Mutsagondo & Khumalo, 2023). Offsite storage facilities, as reported by Musa and Jacobs (2021), provide external locations for record storage, aiding in space optimization and compliance with retention regulations. Hybrid storage combines physical and digital approaches, maximizing space utilization and accessibility (Odenyi & Adeyanju, 2020).

Effective records management is crucial for operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and strategic decision-making. However, several barriers impede its implementation and success. Lack of awareness among employees about proper recordkeeping practices and associated policies leads to inconsistent practices and compliance issues (Simwaka, 2022). Technological challenges, including outdated systems and compatibility issues, hinder the effective management of digital

records (Babalola et al., 2021). Resource constraints, such as limited budgets and inadequate infrastructure, pose significant challenges to effective records management (Anyiam, 2020). Resistance to change among employees further impedes the adoption of new practices and technologies (Allahmagani, 2014). To address these barriers, organizations must prioritize records management, invest in modern solutions, and allocate sufficient resources to support ongoing initiatives (Alegbeleye, 2021).

From the reviewed studies above, it appears that no study has been conducted to assess record management practices in the organization under study, therefore, the study sought to investigate the record management practices in the NECO Office in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Methodology

The research employed a descriptive survey design to explore the records management practices at NECO Office in Rivers State. Descriptive survey research is suitable for examining the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of a population and is particularly effective for data collection through questionnaires. The target population consisted of 23 staff members at the NECO Office in Rivers State. Due to the manageable size of the population, the study employed census sampling, involving data collection from all members of the population. A self-designed 4-point Likert Scale questionnaire was utilized for data collection. This questionnaire comprised statements concerning records management practices, with respondents indicating their level of agreement or disagreement on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire. Percentages were used for demographic data analysis, providing insights into the characteristics of the study population. Mean and standard deviation were utilized to analyze responses to the research questions, offering information about the central tendency and variability of the responses.

A set of 23 questionnaires was distributed among the staff members of the NECO Office in Rivers State, with 19 completed copies returned, yielding a response rate of 82.6%. Analysis of the demographic data indicates that 68.1% of respondents were male, whereas 31.9% were female, indicating a higher representation of male respondents. Additionally, the findings reveal that 67.4% of the participants held senior officer positions, while 32.6% occupied junior officer roles, indicating a prevalence of senior officers among the respondents. Moreover, a significant proportion of respondents reported possessing university degrees.

Results and Discussion of Findings

The findings were analyzed using mean and standard deviation ranging from Tables 1 to 4.

Research Question 1: What are the types of records generated and stored at the NECO office in Rivers State?

Table 1: Specific types of records generated and stored at NECO

S/N	Items	N	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
1	Examination records	19	9	8	2	0	3.43	.522	Accepted
2	Students results	19	12	6	1	0	3.79	.441	Accepted
3	Memoir/mail/letter	19	8	7	3	1	3.34	.696	Accepted
4	Financial records	19	6	8	4	1	3.18	.607	Accepted
5	Employment records	19	5	6	6	2	2.98	.712	Accepted
6	Students-bio data	19	10	7	2	0	3.53	.515	Accepted

S/N	Items	N	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
7	Staff appraisal	19	7	8	3	1	3.31	.701	Accepted

Data in Table 1 indicates the specific types of records generated and stored at the NECO branch office in Rivers State. Data further indicates that records generated and stored by the personnel at the organization under study ranged from student results, examination records, student-bio data, memoirs/emails/letters, staff appraisal, financial records, and employment records. This finding agrees with the results of Alegbeleye (2021) who found that examination records, students results and students bio-data are the types of records managed by secondary schools in Lagos. Also, this finding also validates the studies by Allahmagani (2014) and Ajao and Olawale (2020).

Research Question 2: What methods are employed for records preservation and security at the NECO office in Rivers State?

Table 2: Methods employed for records preservation and security

S/N	Items	N	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
1	Binding the records together with rope	19	3	5	7	4	2.55	.794	Accepted
2	File cabinets	19	14	5	0	0	3.81	.551	Rejected
3	Use of electronic databases	19	2	4	6	7	2.13	.870	Rejected
4	Recruitment of records managers	19	1	2	6	10	1.14	.945	Rejected
5	Restricted access	19	7	8	3	1	3.31	.610	Accepted
6	Fumigation	19	5	7	5	2	3.11	.721	Rejected
7	Acidification	19	2	3	7	7	1.99	.981	Rejected

Data in Table 2 indicates the methods employed for records preservation and security. Data further indicates that file cabinets, restricted access, fumigation, and binding of records together using rope were the methods employed for records preservation. However, data further reveals that use of electronic databases, recruitment of records managers and acidification were not used for preserving records at NECO. The finding of the study is in line with the results of Ajao and Olawale (2020) who discovered that records are preserved with the use of file cabinets and fumigation of the environment.

Research Question 3: What procedures are utilized for records disposition at the NECO office in Rivers State?

Table 3: Procedures utilized for records disposition

S/N	Items	N	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
1	Waste management agency	19	9	8	2	0	3.50	.513	Accepted
2	Archiving	19	4	9	5	1	2.69	.794	Accepted
3	Destruction/Shredding	19	5	7	4	3	2.76	.901	Accepted
4	Recycling	19	4	7	6	2	2.67	.850	Accepted
5	Dumping on the waste bin	19	6	7	4	2	2.98	.770	Accepted
6	Digital deletion	19	2	3	6	8	1.71	.971	Rejected

Table 3 indicates the procedures utilized for records disposition at the NECO office in Rivers State. Data further shows that waste management agencies, waste bins, destruction/shredding, recycling and archiving were used for disposing records at the institution under study. Nonetheless, digital deletion was not used for disposition. This could be as a result of the poor deployment of computer technologies in the management and preservation of records. The results of this finding is similar to the findings of Netshakhuma and Makhura (2022) who revealed that disposed records are destroyed, recycled and sometimes thrashed in bins.

Research Question 4: What challenges are encountered in records management at the NECO office in Rivers State?

Table 4: Challenges encountered in records management

S/N	Items	N	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
1	Corruption	19	7	9	2	1	3.32	.628	Accepted
2	Lack of facilities	19	6	9	3	1	3.29	.666	Accepted
3	Lack of database	19	3	5	6	5	3.11	.689	Rejected
4	Lack of records manager	19	4	5	6	4	3.21	.656	Rejected
5	Bad attitudes of staff towards records	19	12	6	1	0	3.80	.410	Accepted
6	Lack of skills to adopt electronic records management systems and cloud storage	19	11	7	1	0	3.79	.441	Accepted
7	Lack of records management policy	19	3	4	6	6	3.54	.551	Rejected

Data in Table 4 indicates the challenges encountered in records management at NECO office in Rivers State. Findings reveal that the challenges encountered in record management include lack of records management policy, bad attitudes of staff towards record keeping, lack of skills to adopt electronic records management systems and cloud storage, corruption, lack of facilities, lack of database and lack of record managers. This finding is in line with the findings of Anuar et al. (2023), Anyiam (2020), Babalola et al. (2021) and Alegbeleye (2021) who found that lack of digital platforms, unskilled personnel and attitude of staff constitute serious challenge to effective record management.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the records management practices at the NECO branch office in Rivers State. The study identified the various types of records generated and stored, including student results, examination records, student bio-data, memoirs/emails/letters, staff appraisals, financial records, and employment records. In terms of preservation, NECO primarily employs methods such as file cabinets, restricted access, fumigation, and binding with rope. However, more modern practices, such as the use of electronic databases, recruitment of records managers, and acidification, are not commonly used. For records disposition, NECO largely relies on waste management agencies, waste bins, destruction/shredding, recycling, and archiving, with digital deletion being infrequent. The study also highlighted several challenges, including the absence of a records management policy, poor staff attitudes towards record-keeping, insufficient skills in electronic records management systems and cloud storage, corruption, lack of facilities, and inadequate staff for managing records.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Records management should be prioritized and considered as essential as other organizational resources such as finance, materials, and staff.
2. NECO's management should develop and implement a formal records management policy to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of records management among staff.
3. It is recommended that NECO hire a dedicated records manager to oversee the management of records at the Rivers State office.
4. Staff should receive comprehensive training in utilizing cloud technologies and electronic devices to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of records management.
5. NECO's management should implement a robust database system to facilitate the efficient management and retrieval of the council's records.

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