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INFORMATION GOVERNANCE RETENTION AND DISPOSITION PRINCIPLES FOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN THE REGISTRY OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY GUSAU, ZAMFARA STATE

Dr. Abdulfatah Abdulrahim
Department of Library and Information Science,
Faculty of Education,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,
Kaduna State, Nigeria.
abdulfatahabdulrahim@gmail.com
08037547446
Hauwa Muhammad Zayyana
Kashim Ibrahim Library,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,
Kaduna State, Nigeria.
hauwauzayyana@gmail.com
08065972454

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the application of the information governance retention and disposition principles to records management practice at Federal University in Zamfara State. The study addressed two research questions: How is the Information Governance Retention Principle applied in records management at the Registry of Federal University Gusau, and how is the Information Governance Disposition Principle applied. This study adopts a quantitative research method with a survey research design. The population consisted all 524 registry Staff as obtained from the institution. The method of proportionate random sampling was employed to choose 52 (10%) from the total population. A self-developed questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was put through face and content validity testing from research professionals. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was carried out with ten (10) Kaduna State University registry staff. The retrieved and completed copies of the questionnaire were subjected to Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) analysis where Coefficient value of 0.876 was obtained denoting that the instrument is reliable and can be used for the research work. The collected data were analysed and interpreted descriptively using tables, frequencies, and means, respectively. The findings show that while the university follows approved retention schedules and transfers permanent records to the archives, it lacks a comprehensive retention policy, systematic classification, staff training, regular audits, an appointed archivist, standardized disposal procedures, and proper documentation of destroyed records, revealing both strengths and gaps in applying the Information Governance Retention and Disposition Principles. It was recommended that the University should establish and enforce formalized retention and disposition policies, including records appraisal by a university archivist, regular destruction using established guidelines, detailed documentation of destruction, and obtaining supervisory and witnessing signatures, while consistently transferring records of permanent value to university archives per disposition schedules.

Keywords: Retention, Disposition principle, Information governance, Records, Information management

Introduction

In the modern landscape of higher education institutions, effective records management stands as a cornerstone for ensuring organisational transparency, compliance, and operational efficiency. Within the registry of universities,the management of records is paramount for maintaining the integrity of academic and administrative processes.Universities continuously generate large volumes of recordsand information on a daily basis both in paper and digital formats.Their content has different values (legal, historical, administrative, fiscal value) and different levels of significance for organisational functions and can therefore present many challenges if not properly governance; it becomes imperative to implement robust information governance (IG) practices, specifically focusing on retention and disposition principles. Information governance encompasses the framework of policies, procedures, and controls that govern the creation, use, retention, and disposition of records within an organisation (Smallwood, 2019). By adhering to established IG principles, institutions can mitigate risks associated with data breaches, legal liabilities, and regulatory non-compliance while optimising the value and utility of their records (Wigmore, 2017, Yunusa, Abdulrahim, & Muhammad, 2024).

At the core of a legally compliant IG programme lies the records retention schedule. This schedule serves as a directive, delineating how long records are to be retained and when they should be disposed of (Dewah, 2018; Amatayakul, 2012). Adherence to these established retention schedules, which specify the duration records and information should be retained before disposal, ensures organisational compliance with regulatory mandates and legal obligations (ISO, 2018). Saffady (2016) characterizes the records retention and disposition schedule as a document typically formulated through archival appraisal principles and an analysis of business and legal frameworks within relevant jurisdictions. It outlines the requisite duration for retaining various types of records and information before they can be discarded. Universities, like other entities and government agencies, must retain records and information beyond immediate utility requirements. The implementation of sound records management practices and the provision of retention schedules within an organisation are crucial, as they optimize operational cost savings.

Corens, Peters and Walsham (2016) emphasize the variability of records to be retained and their respective durations across different organisations. They underscore that the format be it paper or electronic does not determine a record's value or retention period; rather, its content is the determining factor. An effective records retention and disposition programme is integral to proficient records management, which is a cornerstone of information resources management. Moreover, adopting appropriate disposition practices, such as secure destruction or archival preservation, is vital for mitigating risks associated with unauthorized access, data breaches, and information leaks. By managing the disposition of records effectively, organisations can shield sensitive information, uphold privacy standards, and preserve the integrity of institutional records (NARA, 2019). Consequently, organisations face a compelling need to establish a records retention and disposition schedule. Such a schedule serves as a blueprint guiding the disposal of both active and inactive records based on pre-established criteria (Kusiima, Arinaitwe, Kiconco, & Nansubuga, 2022).

In this context, this paper examines the importance of implementing IG retention and disposition principles for records management in the Registry of Federal University Gusau. Through the effective implementation of IG retention and disposition principles, the Registry of Federal University Gusau can enhance its records management practices, promote transparency and accountability, and support the institution's mission of providing quality education and services to its stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

The Registry University supposed to adhere closely to IG principles for records management, ensuring systematic handling, retention, and disposition of records in alignment with established policies and regulations. This would involve implementing comprehensive retention schedules and disposition procedures, guided by international standards such as ARMA GARP 8 Principles, which outline best practices for records

and information management (ARMA, 2013). According to Nahid and Maryam (2020) as cited in Kusiima et. el (2022) there is need to retain information or records in a way that they should be made accessible in the future, thus the necessity for organisations like University to have a well-established records retention and disposition schedule (RRDS). An organisation with a solid foundation of proven successful records management practices will preserve the right information for the correct length of time, meet legal requirements faster and more cost effectively, control and manage records storage and destruction, archive vital information for business continuity and disaster recovery, provide information in a timely and efficient manner regardless of urgency of request hence a need to develop an efficient records retention and disposition schedule for universities.

However, the current state of records management in the Registry of Federal University Gusau presents lack of clarity on the use of Retention and Disposition guidelines. This was observed during a preliminary investigation by the Researchers.Due to shortage of space and the ever increasing volumes of records, registry officers practically use their individual expertise to decide on what to keep and what to dispose of. In some incidences, vital records are lost and others are misplaced in unlabeled boxes, which delay the decisions that have to be made. It's against this backdrop the Researchers investigated the application of IG retention and disposition principles for records management in the Registry of Federal University Gusau.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. What procedure used for application of the information governance retention principle in records management practice in Registry of Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State?
2. What procedure used for application of the information governance disposition principle in records management practice in Registry of Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State?

Review of Related Literature

Information Governance Retention Principle

Organisations find it costly to maintain records indefinitely, regardless of their format, and typically seek to benefit from the proper deletion of expired records and information (ARMA International, 2010). To facilitate this, records retention programmes establish how long business records must be kept. Records retention schedule catalogs all types of records generated and utilised by an organisation in its operations, specifying the duration each type of record must be retained. Defined by the Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms (2010), a records retention schedule is a detailed inventory of record series, outlining the retention period for each series and its disposal. A record series refers to a set of interconnected records treated as a single unit for retention and disposal assessments.

The retention programme operates on the premise that information follows a life cycle, spanning from its creation to its final disposal. Retaining records is based on specific assessments made about them, informed by record appraisal. Organisations must adhere to federal, state, and accreditation agency regulations when formulating their record retention policies and schedules (Cunningham & Wiedemann, 2013). This includes considerations of laws like the National Archives Act, the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), and regulations from bodies like the National Universities Commission (NUC) in Nigeria.

Reich *et al*. (2012) emphasize that one of the initial steps in developing record retention policies is compiling an inventory of existing records and information. This involves engaging with departments and personnel responsible for storing information. Creating a record retention matrix is a practical approach, detailing key elements such as the description of records, their format (paper, digital), physical or digital location, and the designated custodian responsible for managing and safeguarding the records throughout their lifecycle.Once the inventory of records and information is complete, the next step is to identify the

regulatory, legal, fiscal, historical, and business retention requirements for each (Reich *et al.*, 2012). ARMA International outlines several criteria to consider for proper retention.

Regulatory and legal requirements mandate that records be kept for specific periods as determined by federal, state, local, and international laws, with noncompliance potentially resulting in severe penalties and the loss of legal rights; therefore, legal research and consultation with legal experts are essential to ensure adherence. Fiscal considerations involve retaining records with financial or tax significance to support timely payments, accurate receivables, and compliance with financial audits and tax reporting, necessitating collaboration with legal counsel to meet these obligations. Operational needs require organisations, after fulfilling legal, regulatory, and fiscal requirements, to assess how long records are needed for day-to-day functions, typically through consultation with those most familiar with each record's operational value. Historical records, such as articles of incorporation, bylaws, charters, and board minutes, which document an organisation's history, should be retained for the life of the organisation, even though they generally make up only a small portion of the total records volume (ARMA International, 2009).

ARMA International further advises conducting a risk assessment to determine the appropriate retention period for each type of information once the organisation's retention criteria are established. The retention period for each file is calculated from the closure date of the file (Mabera, 2020; Mohammed, Tetteh, & Azumah, 2018). Hughes (2014) explains that if a record is scheduled for destruction after 5 years and was closed on March 25, 2022, it should be retained until March 25, 2027. The presence or absence of records can significantly impact an organisation, either positively or negatively, making it crucial for retention decision-makers to be mindful of this fact. Hence, it's essential to promptly dispose of records once their retention period expires to mitigate associated risks and costs. The absence of a record retention schedule can lead to the retention of unnecessary records while essential ones are destroyed. This lack of a systematic approach to record-keeping can result in the loss of vital evidence and institutional memory (ARMA International, 2009). Research conducted by Tanimu (2017) on Records Retention Strategies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, revealed the absence of standard retention schedules, indicating a gap in guiding the records lifecycle.

Balasu's (2009) study on records retention schedules in the public sector in Ghana, cited in Alegbeleye and Chilaka (2019), found that no public sector organisation in Ghana utilizes agency-specific schedules due to their nonexistence, highlighting a critical flaw in the government's disposition framework. Similarly, Abdulrahman's (2015) study on records management in universities in North Central Nigeria identified the absence of a uniform policy on document retention and disposal, underscoring challenges in effective administration. Chansa, Munsaka, Namangolwa, and Zimba's (2018) research uncovered flaws in the records management policy of universities in Zambia, particularly the absence of guidelines for record retention and destruction.

Records and Information Disposition Principle

In literature, the principle of disposition is closely linked with retention. The retention schedule outlines how long records should be kept before they are discarded. Sometimes, these terms disposal list, disposition schedule, records schedule, retention schedule, and transfer schedule, are used interchangeably. However, in this context, disposition specifically refers to discarding records once their retention period ends. Most organisations follow proper channels to dispose of records. ARMA International (2009) emphasizes that organisations must securely and appropriately dispose of records no longer needed, following applicable laws and internal policies. When information becomes obsolete, it should be destroyed and documented. This ensures organisations can respond to requests for information handled in this manner, demonstrating adherence to proper policy and practice. Disposal schedules are an effective documentation technique (Smith, 2016). According to Alegbeleye and Chilaka (2019), record disposal doesn't always mean complete destruction.

Records can also be stored physically, transferred internally, or moved to external storage facilities like university archives after being retained for a certain period, depending on their importance.

Nwaomah (2017) suggests that once records have fulfilled their retention periods, disposition determines their fate, marking the final stage of records management where a record is either destroyed or retained indefinitely. Disposition generally falls into two categories: destruction, which involves methods such as shredding, recycling, incineration, or electronic deletion; and transfer to archives, where records are moved to historical archives or similar institutions for permanent preservation. Coetzer (2012) further explains that records disposal involves either transferring records to archives or physically destroying them. Destruction of tangible records must comply with legal regulations to prevent unintended disclosure of sensitive information. Beginning with a data retention plan and approved policies, the disposal process should be carefully documented to track discarded records. Records appraisal, as described by Ngoepe and Nkwe (2018), involves evaluating records to determine their permanent preservation value and what can be

deleted. Archivists play a key role in this process, assessing whether a record holds ongoing evidentiary or research value (Anderson, 2011).

Various methods of appraisal are used by universities, including value-based approaches, functional analysis, and hybridization models (Netshakhuma, 2019; Ngulube, 2004). Value-based approaches focus on the primary values of records, while hybridization combines different document management techniques. The Macro-appraisal model, originating in Canada, emphasizes governance and community impact assessment rather than organisational structures (Foscarini, 2017).

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research method with a survey research design. The population consists of 524 registry staff members at Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State, from which a sample size of 52 (10%) was selected. Data collection is done using a self-developed questionnaire containing 7 items for the two research questions. The questionnaire employs a modified 5-point Likert-type scale for responses, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The validity of the questionnaire was assessed through face and content validity testing by research professionals. Descriptive analysis, including tables, frequency, and means, was used to analyze and interpret the collected data. Responses with a mean score of 3.0 and above were considered positive, while those below were considered negative.

Data Analysis and Results

The Procedure for Application of the Information Governance Retention Principle

In an attempt to identify the procedure used for application of the Information Governance retention Principle in records management practice in Federal University, Gusau, the respondents were asked to tick as many as possible from the likert scale options provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Procedure Used for Application of the IG Retention Principle

S/N	Information Governance Retention Principle	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1	There is a Retention policy document listing all the titles of an organisation records series, length of time each record will be retained as an active record	3	13	15	10	2	2.89
2	Every record series have an approved retention guideline	4	8	12	15	4	3,16
3	University has implemented a system for identifying and classifying records based on their retention periods	5	13	15	7	3	2.77
4	Records retention schedules are based upon the administrative, Legal, fiscal and historical value	2	5	5	27	4	3.60
5	the records and information life cycles is clearly stated in the retention guideline	3	6	10	17	7	3.44
6	Staff members are trained on the proper retention and disposal procedures for different types of records in accordance	5	13	15	8	2	2.74
7	University conducts periodic audits to ensure compliance with retention policies and identify any records that require preservation or disposal.	7	12	13	8	3	2.58

Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 shows that the university consistently adopts record retention schedules based on

administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical value. Each record series has an approved retention guideline, and the guideline clearly states the life cycles of the records and information. The mean scores for these guidelines surpass 3.0. However, the university falls short in several areas.It does not have a retention policy document that lists all organisational record series, specifies the duration each record will be kept as an active record,establishes a systematic process for identifying and classifying records based on their retention periods and disposal requirements, provides training forstaff members on proper retention and disposal procedures in accordance with university policies, or conducts periodic reviews and audits to ensure compliance with retention policies. These areas scored below the mean of 3.0.

Procedure for Application of the Information Governance Disposition Principle

In an attempt to identify the procedure used for application of the Information Governance disposition Principle in records management practice in Federal University, Gusau, the respondents were asked to tick as many as possible from the likert scale options provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Procedure for Application of the Information Governance Disposition Principle

S/N	Information Governance Disposition Principle	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1	There is a Disposition policy document that specify the final destination of records once they meet their required retention periods	4	13	18	8	0	2.70
2	Establishments of Records appraisal by university Archivist who assess records to determine what is of value for permanent preservation	5	15	10	8	5	2.60
3	Records destruction is done on a regular basis through shredding, burning, recycling etc using disposition guideline	6	8	20	6	3	2.81
4	There is a documents specifying records destroyed including date and method of destruction as well as Signatures of the individuals supervising and witnessing the destruction	8	15	15	4	1	2.42
5	Records worthy of permanent value is transfer (through the guidance of disposition schedules) to university Archives on a regular basis	5	8	10	25	5	4.09
6	Appropriate systems and controls are in place for legal information discovery upon requests	1	9	19	11	2	3.0
7	Staff members are trained on the proper procedures for the disposition of records, including secure destruction, transfer to archives, or other approved methods, in accordance with the university's policies and procedures	5	13	15	8	2	2.74

Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows that the university has effective systems and controls in place for legal information discovery upon request. Records of permanent value are regularly transferred to the university Archives, following disposal schedules, with a mean benchmark of 3.0 and above. However, Federal University, Gusau falls short in several areas. They have not appointed a university archivist to assess records for permanent preservation. They also do not regularly dispose of records using guidelines such as shredding, burning, or recycling. Additionally, they do not maintain documents that specify which records have been destroyed, including dates and methods of destruction. Lastly, there are no signatures obtained from individuals who oversee and witness the destruction. Furthermore, staff members do not receive proper training in records disposition

procedures, with a mean below the benchmark.

Discussion of the Findings

Previous studies by Abdulrahman (2015) and Tanimu (2017) have confirmed the weaknesses in the university's records retention practices. These studies found that the university lacks a retention schedule to identify records with historical, cultural, and scientific significance. Inadequate records retention practices can result in the loss or destruction of critical information, leaving the organisation exposed to risks such as litigation, compliance violations, and reputational damage. Inability to provide necessary records can hinder decision-making and accountability, and inefficient allocation of resources may occur, such as dedicating excessive storage space to unnecessary records, leading to higher operational costs. Moreover, inaccurate or incomplete historical data due to improper records retention can hinder informed decision-making, as historical records are often essential for trend analysis, forecasting, and planning. The absence of these records can result in suboptimal decisions.

These findings are consistent with Babalola, Abdulrahim, and Duada (2024), who emphasized that non-compliance with established records and information management principles, such as having a well-designed retention and disposition schedule, negatively affects quality service delivery in academic institutions. Similarly, Kusiima, Arinaitwe, Kiconco, and Nansubuga (2022) as well as Naisanga, Naseenya, Nakiganda, and Nandutu (2023) demonstrated in their studies that organisations lacking formal retention and disposition schedules struggle to preserve vital records and often face challenges in ensuring compliance, accessibility, and accountability. In line with this, Evans (2022)

found that the absence of structured retention and disposal policies in organisations not only heightens compliance and litigation risks but also undermines operational efficiency, especially when dealing with large volumes of both physical and digital records. Lee-Gulley and Drudi (2022) further argued that improper records retention and disposition practices increase risk exposure, particularly in contexts where legal, regulatory, and organisational obligations require meticulous adherence to retention schedules.

These findings contradict the submission of ARMA International (2009a), which states that "An organisation shall provide secure and appropriate disposition for records that are no longer required to be maintained by applicable laws and the organisation's policies." According to this principle, when information is no longer needed, it should be destroyed and documented. This ensures that organisations can respond to information requests and assures the public that official material is being disposed of properly. The findings also contradict the perspective of Datskovsky, Hedges, Empel, & Washington (2015), who state that the Information Governance (IG) disposition principle involves the secure and appropriate management of information that is no longer required to be maintained. This includes proper retention and disposal in accordance with established schedules and best practices. These findings implies that the absence of proper records disposal practices and clear policies on records' final destination can lead to unnecessary storage costs in both physical and digital environments.

Conclusion

It was concluded that the application of information governance retention and disposition principles for records management in the Registry of Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, presents a mixed picture but leans toward being inadequate. While the university demonstrates some positive practices, such as the use of record retention schedules based on administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical values, and maintains effective systems for legal information discovery and archival transfers, significant gaps remain. The absence of a comprehensive retention policy document, lack of systematic classification and disposal procedures, failure to appoint a university archivist, inadequate documentation of record destruction, and insufficient staff training all indicate weak implementation of core information governance principles. These deficiencies suggest that the overall application of retention and disposition practices in the university’s registry is

currently poor and requires urgent improvement to ensure accountability, compliance, and effective records management.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the Federal University Gusau should create comprehensive retention policy documents detailing the duration for each record series and establishing approved retention guidelines. Develop systematic processes for record identification and classification, including staff training in proper retention and disposal procedures in alignment with university policies. Implement routine reviews and audits to ensure compliance with retention policies and to identify records warranting preservation or disposal.

2. The Federal University Gusau should develop and enforce formalized disposition policies and procedures, including records appraisal by a university archivist, regular records destruction using established guidelines, the maintenance of detailed records of destruction, and the acquisition of supervisory and witnessing signatures. Ensure that records of permanent value are consistently transferred to university archives in accordance with disposition schedules.

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AUTHORS' PROFILES



Dr. Abdulfatah Abdulrahim is a lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Science, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, with over a decade of experience in Academic librarianship and information management. His professional journey began in 2012 as an Assistant Librarian at the Kashim Ibrahim Library, ABU, Zaria. Over the years, he served in several critical units, including Circulation Services, Research and Bibliographic Services, Faculty Librarian, and later as Institute Librarian at the Institute of Agricultural Research, ABU, Zaria. Recently, his service was transferred to the Department of Library and Information Science, where

he continues to contribute to teaching, research, and mentorship. In pursuit of academic excellence, Dr. Abdulrahim obtained his MLIS degree (2016), followed by a Ph.D., both specializing in Records and Archives Management. His scholarly and professional interests focus on records and archives management, physical and digital preservation, and Information Governance areas. He has been an active member of professional associations, notably the NLA, and the Society of Nigerian Archivists (SNA). His academic and professional journey reflects a strong commitment to service, collaboration, and leadership within the field of library and information science.



Hauwau Muhammad Zayyana is a Librarian at the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, with over a decade of progressive experience in academic librarianship, records, and information management. Hauwau, began her professional career in 2009 after obtaining her Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science from ABU, Zaria. Over the years, she has worked across different units of the University Library, gaining valuable expertise in information organisation, user services, and research support. In pursuit of academic and professional growth, she obtained a Master's degree in Library and Information Science in 2017, specializing in Records and Archives Management. In September 2022, she went on secondment, further broadening her

professional exposure and strengthening her capacity in library and information services. Her scholarly and professional interests revolve around records and archives management and knowledge management fields that are increasingly crucial for sustaining effective academic information services in Nigeria and beyond. She is an active member of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Society of Nigerian Archivists (SNA), through which she continues to engage in professional development, collaboration, and the advancement of librarianship and archival practice. Her career journey reflects a deep commitment to service, knowledge knowledge sharing, and the promotion of best practices in library and information science.