Records management procedures and service delivery in private universities: a case study of the Islamic University in Uganda

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Abstract

The effectiveness of delivery of services in universities lies in their ability to develop and adopt records management procedures to assist staff in managing records. This study utilised life cycle model to discuss records management procedures and service delivery in universities, with particular emphasis on the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), a private university. The objectives were to find what types of records were being generated and their formats, establish who is responsible for managing the records, and eventually, make suggestions for improvement. The purposive sampling approach was used to select top managers and heads of departments in the university while simple random sampling was used to select administrative assistants. Data was collected using a questionnaire, interviews, observation and document analysis. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data was analysed using interpretative analysis. The findings revealed that although IUIU maintained both manual and electronic records, it lacked adequate records management procedures and records were managed on an ad hoc basis. There was also a shortage of trained records management personnel, leading to challenges with the creation, distribution, use, maintenance and disposal of records, which affected service delivery. The study recommended that IUIU should develop and adopt records management procedures to ensure that there is a standard approach to managing records.

1. Introduction

As universities carry out their mission, they create various records, which provide evidence of university statutory business in teaching, research and community work (Kulcu 2009). Failure to develop procedures for managing the resultant records could have adverse effects on service delivery in a university (Musembe 2016). Records management procedures entail the adoption of standard methods that explain how various aspects of an organisation's records management work should be carried out. Records management procedures are set out as a reminder of all the steps that need to be adhered to if records are to be created and retained as evidence of the policies and activities of organisations while delivering the services they are mandated to (Crockett 2016). The International Standards Organisation (ISO 2016) defines records management procedures as specific instructions for the creation, capturing and management of records. The United Nations

Archives and Records Management Section (2010) states that records management procedures are the vital steps that an organisation needs to take to have complete and reliable records that enable the making of well-informed decisions. A number of authors, such as Franks (2018), Peltier (2016) and Read and Ginn (2016) have also defined records management procedures as a set of steps or instructions organisations follow to complete records management tasks in a predictable and orderly way while carrying out business functions and in service delivery.

The primary purpose of records management procedures is to establish systematic controls at every stage of the records life cycle (Peltier 2016). All organisational records go through five stages in their life cycle, i.e. creation or receipt, distribution, use, maintenance and disposition (Read & Ginn 2016). Knowing what stages records go through helps with identifying the necessary procedures that need to be undertaken to protect and properly organise an organisation's records in relation to service delivery.

Several studies have vouched for the benefits of records management procedures to service delivery in organisations. Ngoepe (2014) argues that records management procedures lead to an orderly and efficient flow of information, which enables institutions to perform their functions successfully and efficiently. Healy (2010) states that procedures support continuity and productivity in service delivery since they standardise records management practices. McLeod (2012) observes that records management procedures ensure that appropriate attention and protection are given to all records, so that the evidence and information they contain are made available to authorised officials. In a case study undertaken by Seniwoliba, Mahama and Abilla (2017) in the University for Development Studies, they found that records management procedures are considered an indispensable tool for enhancing service delivery since records were required for decision-making and that without this tool, it is not possible to plan and make sound decisions.

Records management procedures help a university to conduct its business and deliver its services in a consistent and equitable way. Seniwoliba et al. (2017) observe that records management procedures would facilitate universities to define the protocol to follow in managing their records, thus fostering accountability and good governance. Kemoni and Wamukoya (2000) emphasise that records management procedures support key records management functions, such as creation, capture, classification, access, storage, security, maintenance, transfer, disposal and preservation, to take place in a standardised way across a university. Without sound records management procedures, a university's ability to provide evidence of and information about its business is difficult (Purcell 2012). Purcell reports that failure to establish procedures for managing records could contribute to failure by employees or systems to create records in the first place. This would also lead to the creation of records that are inadequate to meet university administrative and accountability requirements and to the arbitrary disposition of records. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) observe that a university's ability to function efficiently and to account for its actions could be compromised if proper records management procedures are not applied. Kemoni and Wamukoya (2000) hold the view that without procedures, managing records will be constrained as this would, in turn, create the risk of failing to locate evidence that a university did what it did under contract or according to regulations. This is so because the steps to follow would not be known to the managers and users of records.

2. Institutional context

The Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) was established in 1988 as the first private university in Uganda (IUIU 2016). It is financed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which serves the higher education needs of the English-speaking Muslim community in Southern and Eastern Africa (Eastchance 2014). The university started with one campus, 80 students and two faculties: the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language. Now, the university has grown to a student population of 7,000 with six faculties and four autonomous campuses; with the main campus being located at Nkoma, Mbale; the Kampala Campus on Kibuli Hill, east of Kampala Capital City; the Female Campus at Kabojja, west of Kampala Capital City; and the Arua Campus in West Nile Region, northern Uganda (IUIU 2017).

As a matter of resolution, the management of IUIU has set up more ICT services and equipment to meet curricular and administrative demands (IUIU 2016). It is steadily integrating its information system through strengthening its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. This has enabled the university to buy computers, thus improving the student-computer ratio. Construction of modern student computer laboratories is one of the major projects aimed at increasing ICT knowledge and making the internet accessible to all lecturers and students (Orinda 2015). IUIU is the only university with a student e-voting system in operation and where computer-mediated learning is also conducted.

The university offers a number of training programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. It also runs day, evening and weekend programmes to suit as many student categories as possible. It has a range of records related to conveying knowledge (such as courses run by the unit, curricula for the courses run, timetables, student examination scripts, students' continuous assessment marks), conferring credentials (such as personal files of students and students awarded degrees) and conducting research (such as research grants management and annual reports of research output). With the various records required to discharge the university's business functions, greater volumes of records are generated in both paper and electronic formats (Oyare & Menya, 2013).

3. Statement of the problem

Ndagire's (2016) study revealed that records at IUIU were mixed up, making it difficult or nearly impossible to access the required information. The study observed that records were not produced on time when needed by the administration and that it was virtually impossible to retrieve the required information from old files. Information relating to the activities carried out at the different campuses was not readily available when required. It appears as if the procedures for managing records at IUIU are lacking and this could have adverse effects on service delivery, performance and the reputation of the university. This prompted a serious need to carry out this study on records management procedures and services delivery at IUIU.

4. Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the records management procedures at IUIU. The study hoped to bring the observed gap in records management procedures at IUIU to light and offer potential solutions to lessen any possible effects thereof on records management. The specific objectives were to:

1. find out the types of records are generated at IUIU and the format in which they exist.
2. establish who is responsible for managing records at IUIU.
3. determine the procedures used for managing records.
4. provide recommendations necessary for developing acceptable records management procedures for IUIU.

5. Theoretical framework

This research was based on the records life cycle theory (see Figure 1), which provides a conceptual guide for the development and implementation of records management procedures (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003). According to the theory, there are five key elements in the cycle, which also represent the stages in managing records in any media by following set procedures from the time the records are created or received, through distribution, use and maintenance, until they are finally destroyed or permanently archived (Joseph, Debowski & Goldschmigt 2012). The theory is relevant to this study because if records at IUIU should be managed consistently and accurately, procedures must be applied *from creation to disposition.* Several authors (Asogwa 2013; Purcell 2012; Atulomah 2011; Bantin 2001) also applied the records life cycle theory to the study of records management in universities and found that the cycle provides better understanding of the nature of records, records management and records management procedures.
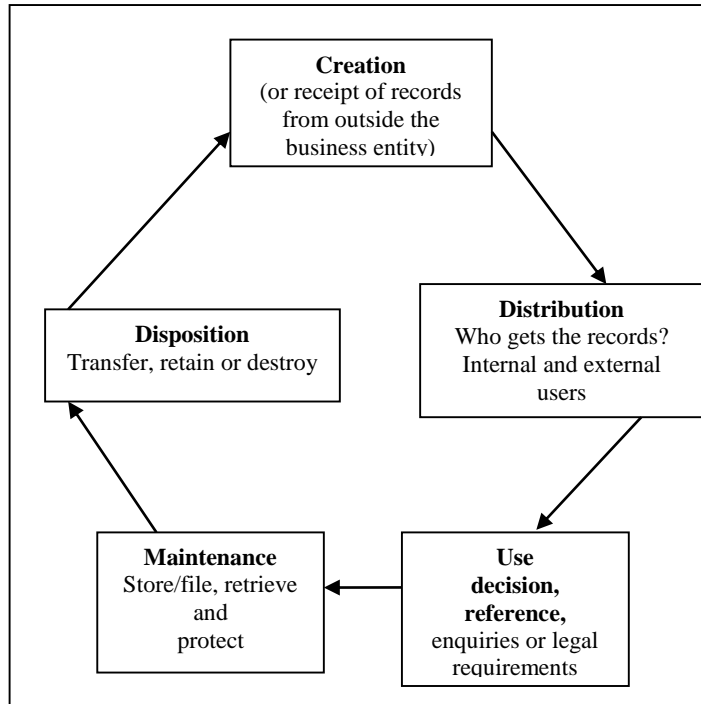
Figure 1: The life cycle of a record (Smith, Ginn & Kallaus 2002)

As indicated in Figure 1, the theory focuses on managing records through stages. By applying this theory, IUIU will assess compliance with standard records management procedures at each stage of the records life cycle. At the creation stage, IUIU will create records from internal sources or receive them from an external source. The records' physical form (paper or electronic) and information content will be established in this phase. Records management staff will introduce procedures to follow to establish the creation of complete and accurate records that provide evidence of the university's business functions and activities. The context of the records will be interpreted appropriately, i.e. who has created or added to the record, when, during which business process, and how is the record related to other records. This stage typically consists of initial records being placed into a physical file folder. The creation stage of the life cycle is very important because it lays the foundation for the lifespan of the records life cycle (Shepherd & Yeo 2003). Then, the records will be distributed to the persons responsible for their use. Records are commonly distributed by postal systems, messengers, courier companies and email systems (Read-Smith, Ginn & Kallas 2002). IUIU will use the records in decision-making by referring to them in answering queries. A record will be used only for the intention for which it was created and never for an individual employee's personal gain or purpose. The procedures to follow will require ensuring that only authorised users are allowed access to the records.

Maintenance of the records will be required while they are in use and afterwards (Joseph et al. 2012). IUIU will protect the records against both environmental and human interferences so the information they carry is secure. IUIU will then store the records to preserve their integrity. At the disposal stage, the university will destroy some records in accordance with consistent and documented disposal procedures while those to be stored longer, such as policies and contracts, will be transferred to the archives by following archival procedures. By applying this theory, IUIU

will easily determine whether the procedures required to manage records are developed to ensure that services are delivered effectively.

6. Literature review

According to the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO 15489 2016), records management procedures are about doing the right things. These are set steps followed at each stage of the records life cycle. Therefore, an effective records management procedures regime is a measure of the degree to which predefined steps are achieved while managing records. Asogwa (2013) observes that besides being a compliance measure, records management procedures are documentable, repeatable and proven processes that are prerequisites for managing records management processes in service delivery. According to Crockett (2016), procedures are predetermined guidelines providing a framework within which records management processes must operate if organisations must deliver effective services. Procedures describe how a particular records management activity should be conducted, for example, records-filing procedures require you to first check whether the appropriate file on which the record is supposed to be placed exists. If it does not exist, you create a new file and titles it accordingly. Then you assign a reference number to the record to differentiate it from other records on file (Read-Smith et al. 2002). Again, preparing a requisition is the first step in the retrieval process (Read & Ginn, 2016).

Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu (2007) further indicate that each business section will develop procedures to address all records, regardless of media type, making sure to include positions on electronic records and e-mail practices. Kulcu (2009) recommends that procedures should be accessible and communicated clearly and consistently as universities deliver their services. However, without appropriate monitoring and reporting processes, agencies cannot be sure that their procedures are being complied with and their objectives met (Read-Smith et al. 2002). Universities are judged as effective based on the implementation of their records management procedures and they must strive to demonstrate "good faith" efforts across all aspects of their records management processes (Musembe 2016).

6.1 Types of university records and the forms in which they exist

Universities often have a particular set of records that typify the nature of their business and activities (Samuels 1992). Samuel (1992) further states that these records provide evidence that the university in question is carrying out its mandate. Kemoni and Wamukoya (2000) explain that university records are almost the only reliable and legally verifiable source of data that can serve as evidence of the actions and transactions executed in a university. Studies by Iwhiwhu (2005) and Egwunyenga (2009) confirmed that a university's records provide evidence of the functions, decisions, procedures, policies and operations which are done at different levels, and in different departments and offices in the university. According to Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005), the decisions taken should adhere to the core business of the university and its vision, mission and core values. A study by Coetzer (2012) explains that university records are a vital asset in ensuring that a university is governed effectively and efficiently, and is accountable to its staff, students and the community that it serves. Coetzer further states that records are central to the university's operation and managing them effectively is an important responsibility that involves all members of staff. According to Popoola (2000), if there are no records, a university will be crippled in its

planning and decision-making processes. Iwhiwhu (2005) also observes that records reduce uncertainties and facilitate decision-making.

Abdulrahman (2015), in his study on the management of university records for effective administration in North Central Nigeria, states that universities today possess huge amounts of records. Abdulrahman (2015) gives the following examples of records available in universities: correspondence; accounting documents; personnel files; pay roll; minutes of meetings (senates, university council, meetings of faculty and departmental boards); students' registration; students' admissions and examination records; inventory of facilities; budgetary information; list of courses offered; timetables for lectures; speeches; legal documents; deeds; financial records; letters (appointment, confirmations, admissions, sick leave, queries); and so forth. This view is supported by Kemoni and Wamukoya (200) who point out that for a university to run its affairs in an open, democratic, transparent and accountable manner, it must create students', teaching and administrative records. According to Kemoni et al. (2002), university records are expected from the various faculties, schools, university committees, the senate, the student welfare committee, the council, staff and the personnel department.

A growing body of literature confirms that universities create their records in different formats as they deliver services. For example, scholars such as Musembe (2016), Asogwa (2013), Coetzer (2012) and Egwunyenga (2009) revealed that universities continue to create and maintain records in manual and electronic formats. However, Tagbotori, Adzido and Agnabu (2015) observe that university records, especially in developing countries, are managed largely in paper-based systems which are characterised by slow retrieval and misplacement of records, thus undermining service delivery. A study conducted by Seniwoliba et al. (2017) revealed that the approach of many universities is to adopt new technologies that enable them to create electronic records, and the record creation can be either active (adding data to a database) or passive (automated logging of system updates). As universities deliver services, they continue to create and store records in electronic mail systems, as web-based publications, and as administrative information systems (Seniwoliba et al. 2017). Commenting on the state of the technologies used by universities, Akor and Udensi (2013) point out that the major trend leading to the different formats of records created in universities today resulted from the computer-based information systems and the internet, which have revolutionised the ways business is carried out in universities today. Atulomah (2011) also contends that as universities continue to use information systems to deliver services, they need to pay more attention to records management procedures because ignoring them may affect the competitive performance of a university.

Thornhill (2008), Akporhonor and Iwhiwhu (2007) and Bantin (2001) indicate that universities need to plan for the procedures required to manage the mounting plethora of records if they are to deliver effective services. This being the case, more proactive, consistent and comprehensive procedures to manage records are desirable (Robek et al. 2015). Asogwa (2013) argues that procedures are required because they make it simpler to find the records when needed. Purcell (2012) agrees that there is a need to implement records management procedures if university business should run efficiently and university administration should be effective.

6.2 Requirements for setting up procedures for managing records

According to Joseph et al. (2012), organisations need to comply with records management procedures, as prescribed by ISO 15489 of 2001. Universities, therefore, need to be familiar with these ISO 15489 (2001) provisions and those as revised in 2016 to understand how and under what circumstances the records management procedures should be applied. According to Healy (2010), the procedural requirements in ISO 15489 will assist jurisdictions that are developing their own records management procedural specifications or looking to adopt them from elsewhere, or will inform the update and revision of previously existing procedures, including electronically captured, stored and retrieved records. With the existence of more records and in different formats, the need for records management procedures for all types of records becomes immense (Kyobe, Molai & Salie 2009). Smith (2012) recommends that full support from top management and commitment to the development and implementation of records management procedures are essential.

Research work by Coetzer (2012) and Magara (2006) suggest that it is policies and internal regulations that drive records management procedures. Popoola (2009) agrees that a policy defines procedures for all records regardless of the records format, whether paper or electronic. Thornhill (2008) notes that it is also important for managers to ensure that staff understand how records management procedures affect their work. Employees need to bear in mind that it is their responsibility to develop and adopt records management procedures.

Kendall and Mirza (2006) emphasise that, for sound records management practices to take place, the head of the university should appoint a records manager at senior management level to whom the university can delegate the responsibility of ensuring that sound records management procedures are put into practice. A trained records manager is needed to spearhead the implementation of records management practices (Muhenda & Lwanga, 2011). Atulomah (2011) cautions that records managers should develop records management procedures and ensure that they are endorsed by the heads of the institutions and their top management teams, otherwise their full implementation will not be realised. Ifedili and Agbaire (2011) recommend that a records manager should be appointed to facilitate the free flow of records through the university, so as to ensure that information is rapidly available where and when it is needed. Nasieku, Kemoni and Otike (2011) hold that the records manager should be appointed to help the records users do their jobs better and more easily by enforcing the application of records management procedures. Purcell (2012) advises that adherence to records management procedures should be continuously monitored and reviewed by the records manager to ensure compliance.

Ensuring compliance with records management procedures implementation would require continuous sensitisation of the university staff (Ifedili & Agbaire 2011). This will help in understanding the procedures required to facilitate the control, custody, care and disposal of the university's records in an effective manner for quality and better services (Ifedili & Agbaire 2011). Consequently, Asogwa (2012) and Iwhiwhu (2005) advise that there is a need to streamline records management procedures in universities through continuous training of staff to enable them to manage records efficiently and effectively. One can, therefore, assert that service delivery requires focus on records management procedures as the most effective vehicle for managing records in today's universities.

The above literature indicated that without proper records management procedures, universities cannot effectively carry out their business functions and deliver efficient services. However, no study has been conducted on the nature of records, records management and records management procedures, and how these can support effective service delivery at IUIU, which is the knowledge gap this paper intends to fill.

7. Methodology

This study adopted a case study design because the researchers wanted to investigate the records management procedures phenomenon within its real-life context (Ngulube 2013). The target population of this study consisted of 119 respondents (13 top managers, 34 heads of departments [HoDs] and 72 administrative staff) (IUIU Staff Establishment Structure List 2017), who were sampled to 52. Only 52 respondents were sampled because, this being a specialised subject, the research inquiry was restricted to only respondents who could adequately provide data relevant to the study (Ngulube & Ngulube, 2015). Two top managers and 21 HoDs were purposively sampled while simple random sampling was used to select 29 administrative assistants. The purposive sampling technique proved useful in the selection of those who were decisive in the creation and use of records as part of their daily activities. Simple random sampling was used specifically to give the respondents an equal opportunity to be engaged in the study (Kumar 2019).

The data collection tools consisted of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, general observation and document analysis (Creswell 2014). The questionnaire was administered to the administrative assistants because it saved time through reaching out to a big number of respondents (Leedy & Ormrod 2013). In-depth interviews were held with the HoDs and the top managers to allow the participants freedom to express their opinions, experiences and views on records management procedures at IUIU. They also helped the researcher to probe for further details on the challenges faced. The study also analysed documents, such as the University Strategic Plans 2016/2021, the Islamic University in Uganda Act 1990 and the university policy statements to ascertain the history and environment of IUIU within which the quest for records management procedures was being studied. The documents were also analysed for the availability of evidence of procedures for managing records at IUIU. The study observed the nature of the records and their volume as well as the environmental factors that would mitigate the development and adoption of records management procedures (Bernard 2013). Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (Bryman, 2012) while qualitative data presentation was interpretative in line with the objectives of the study (Miles, Hubermand & Saldana 2014). Data was then coded and summarised to make meaningful interpretation.

8. Findings and discussion

8.1 General response rate

The general response rate was as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Response rate

Category of respondent	Target population	Actual respondents	Percentage respondents in each category
Administrative assistant	72	29	56
HoD	34	21	40
Top manager	13	2	4
Total	**119**	**52**	**100**

Table 1 shows that out of the 52 respondents, the majority (28: 56%) were administrative assistants, followed by 21 (40%) HoDs, and two (4%) top managers. The participation of many administrative assistants implies that the university relies on this category of staff for records management functions and, perhaps, that they had concerns regarding how they could manage records successfully.

8.2 Duration in service

The participants were asked to indicate their length of service. Table 2 gives the details.

Table 2: Year of service (n=52)

Duration	No. of respondents	Percentage
10 and above	33	63
5–10 years	17	33
0–5 years	02	04
Total	**52**	**100**

The above table indicates that the majority of the respondents (33: 63%) have worked for the IUIU for more than 10 years, followed by 17 (33%) who have worked there for 5–10 years, while only two respondents (4%) have worked for the university for less than five years. However, all the respondents have worked long enough to be well informed about the records management procedures in IUIU.

8.3 Types of records

The study sought to find out what types of records were found at IUIU. The study revealed that the most popular record type produced and retained by the university departments were correspondence, minutes of meetings and reports, contracts and equipment documents. The administrative assistants indicated that the records were managed in offices where they were

created, used and maintained. During interviews, it was pointed out that various records were created, such as:

- The records maintained in an employee's file by the Human Resources and Academic Affairs Department
- The university budget created and maintained in the Finance Department
- Expenses and project reports maintained by the Accounting Department
- Policies and procedures maintained by the Office of the University Secretary
- Students' admission letters, examination results and transcripts maintained by the Office of Student Records

The responses revealed that there were many records in the university and that different offices generated their own records, which assisted in carrying out their administrative functions. This finding was in agreement with Abdulrahman's (2015) and Kemoni and Wamukoya's (200) observation that universities create many records today.

The researcher observed that record series relating to students were available in almost every office. There was generally no answer to questions connected with how many records were being managed at the time of the study, the projected growth rates of records and for how long the records must be kept. A top manager observed: "We face a tremendous growth in records generated and each school and unit of the university keeps their own records so it is not possible to tell how many records exist in the university."

One HoD lamented that "very many records are created and received here, but I am not sure how many files are in storage."

It was observed that records continued to be created but most of the records storage areas were full, with no more space left for other records yet to be created. It was also observed that the offices were congested and lacked adequate records shelves, so that some records were scattered wherever space was available, including on top of cabinets. The closed files were kept together with the active ones and no procedures were followed when records were deposited into the storerooms. The records were neither arranged nor documented, which made it difficult to approximate the total number of records in IUIU.

8.4 Format of records

The administrative assistants were asked to indicate the format of the records they created. The results indicated that 18 (62%) kept records in paper format and 11 (37%) generated records in electronic format. The findings revealed that many universities, including IUIU, generated and kept records in paper format (Tagbotori et al. 2015).

The findings revealed that there were electronic records at the university. During interviews, the top managers also reported that over time, the electronic format of records would become more prevalent. One top manager was asked about the kind(s) of system(s) the university used to create and manage records in electronic format and he reported that "the university management has put in place the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system with the hope of reducing reliance on paper records across the university."

According to this top manager, the ERP system software was developed to harmonise and consolidate the different departments of the university to function as a single solid system. Observation showed that the ERP system had several modules, including the Human Resource Management module that houses staff data on recruitment, performance appraisals, development and training; the Academic Registry Management Module with records of curricula for the courses run, students' assessment marks, transcripts and statistics; the Staff and Student Intranet for viewing personal information; the Finance Information Management Module for monitoring payments and banking; and the Library Resource Management Module for library services. The system was used by all branches of the university. However, records were not stored correctly electronically and a backlog of information not matched to the correct types of files. Versions of documents were named differently, hence much time was spent checking file names and drives. The ERP system had no records management module to classify and store large volumes and types of records. Another top manager reported:

"It is a challenge to ensure that the records in the ERP remain a reliable and authentic representation of the business activities of the university. Many records are created but not filed at the end of a day. As a consequence, staff fail to locate records generated in the ERP."

The above opinions by top managers were affirmed by the administrative assistants as they reported that they were not able to manage those records in electronic format. Procedures for managing electronic records constituted a major constraint on keeping records by the administrative assistants.

It was observed that there were both paper and electronic records but no documented procedures existed to create and manage them. however, there was a high level of concern and even fear regarding the procedures for managing the electronic records. Observation also revealed that the management of electronic records was fragmented and vital records were in danger of being lost owing to the lack of documented procedures for managing them. These findings are consistent with Nasieku et al.'s (2011) observation that procedures for managing electronic records have remained undeveloped in many universities, especially in Africa.

8.5 Responsibility for managing records

This study also sought to determine the current level of staffing and skills for managing records at IUIU and thus establish the records management procedures in place. The university policy statements, the Islamic University in Uganda Act 1990 and the University Strategic Plans 2016/2021 did not show the presence of any established personnel responsible for making records management decisions and, therefore, guide the formulation of records management procedures at IUIU. Records management as a profession was not established within the university organisation structure. One top manager noted that:

"There are no professional records managers in the university. As an interim measure the administrative assistants are responsible for making decisions regarding which records to create and store."

The following statements from HoDs underscore the above observation:

"Records are created and stored by the administrative assistants as part of their everyday work and that's the practice."

"It is the administrative assistants who are responsible for classifying, storing and distributing the records when needed."

"Administrative assistants are sufficiently experienced in maintaining our records in a professional and objective manner, keeping in mind that the records are confidential."

"The administrative assistants have mechanisms through which they maintain the records they are keeping. They search and retrieve the required records."

"It is the administrative assistants who determine how long files should be retained."

"Historically, the onus of managing records has fallen to each of the individual administrative assistants."

When the HoDs were probed to identify the mechanism that administrative assistants followed to create and manage the records at IUIU, they could not give the details. This finding revealed that the university had inadequate personnel with formal qualifications in records management. Shortage of trained records management professionals will prevent compliance with records management procedures (Popoola 2009).

The interviews revealed that administrative assistants were accountable for records management and were a point of reference regarding records management procedures. It was observed that no administrative assistant was spearheading the development and adoption of records management procedures at IUIU. Although the HoDs believed that the administrative assistants were experienced in handling records, the situation on the ground was different. Each administrative assistant had her own approach. One HoD lamented:

"The administrative assistants will do a good job as long as still attached to your department but if she resigns or change department then it is a mess looking for a required correspondence. You have to rely on a particular administrative assistant to control records or look for a required record. This team is not trained in records Management, therefore not able to undertake the task of advising on records management procedures in the university. To a large extent there is a skills gap."

The HoDs affirmed that there was need for someone to possess skills and competencies in records management procedures in order for them to manage records at the university. Another HoD observed that:

"Despite presence of administrative assistants who control and organise files across administrative units, they fail to trace some files which delays decision-making and most of the time it takes a lot of time to extra records from files; the closed and old records are also difficult to deal with since there are no procedures to follow. I think we need to hire a competent records manager."

The concerns of the respondents corroborated the observation made by Atulomah (2011) and Purcell (2012) that the responsibility for managing records should be entrusted to a trained and skilled workforce.

8.6 Existing records management procedures at IUIU

The administrative assistants were asked if they followed any procedures when managing records at IUIU. This question was based on the five stages of managing records described in the records life cycle which guided this survey. This question was also asked to determine the level of awareness of records management procedures at the university. Table 3 summarises the responses extracted from the questionnaire.

Table 3: Existing records management procedures (n =29)

Records management procedures relating to	Yes	%	No	%
Creation or receipt of records	04	14	25	86
Distribution of records to internal and external users	02	07	27	93
Use of records by decisions-makers	01	03	28	97
Maintenance of records	11	38	18	62
Disposal of records	01	03	28	97

As Table 3 indicates, some administrative assistants indicated that procedures were in place and some indicated that they were not. The researchers understood this to mean that IUIU lacked detailed and uniform procedures for managing records across the university.

It was observed that procedures that act as a benchmark for the maintenance and use of records were non-existent. During interviews, the HoDs were asked whether they were aware of records management procedures being followed to manage records in their departments, as indicated by the administrative assistants. The HoDs were not conversant with any records management procedures. One HoD remarked that "our administrative assistants are trained in office systems and I believe they follow those approaches to manage the correspondences and files in their care."

None of the HoDs, however, was able to provide an adequate explanation for the records management procedures followed in their respective departments. This finding was worrying because authors such as Ifedili and Agbaire (2011) warn that a lack of systematic procedures for managing records results in records being misplaced and costly to retrieve, and in losing corporate memory.

When a top manager was probed with regard to how procedures of records creation, distribution, use, maintenance and disposal were handled, he explained that "officers create records and the administrative assistants help in this process but, unfortunately, procedures to assist with managing the records are not well defined." Indeed, he appreciated the importance of having procedures in place in the university.

Observation of the available records also revealed that the creation of the records in the university did not appear to follow any conventions, such as standardised formats and referencing. Some of

the records were in files without titles. This finding is another sign that it may be difficult to access records across the university when the need arises. The finding ties in with Popoola's (2009) assertion that creating categories of records without following procedures will affect accessibility to these records.

During the discussion, a top manager reported that "the university has defaulted in its responsibilities by not providing procedures for the proper management of records across the university." However, the manager did not provide additional details. The lack of procedures meant that individual administrative assistants had to take the initiative to implement records management processes and make decisions on an ad hoc basis. An appraisal of the responses by the top managers shows that the records management procedures in the university had not been considered or agreed upon in the policy proceedings of the university. These results concurred with Atulomah's (2011) observation that a lack of policy will affect standardising procedures for managing records and the quality of services delivered.

Interviews with top managers and HoDs also underscored the existence of several challenges with records management procedures. A top manager observed that:

"Records management procedures remain unarticulated, as there are no directives to deal with managing records. We have not appointed a manager specialised in records management to guide us with records management procedures. The position of records management officer has not been filled by a trained records manager. .... therefore, we are yet to handle the records procedures dilemma faced by the administrative assistants who are managing our records. This team is doing a good job but none had formal training in records management."

The views of top managers and the HoDs clearly indicated that IUIU employees did not have procedures to follow while managing records and that their records management roles lacked clarity. However, for effective services delivery, institutional records management procedures must be well planned and applied by the employees (Read & Ginn 2016). This is achieved through establishing procedures and training employees to acquire skills that are relevant to managing records throughout their life cycle.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of the study revealed that although records were vital to the running of IUIU offices, the university did not have well defined records management procedures. It was noted that no member of the senior staff had been assigned the overall responsibility of managing records in the university. Generally, there was no specific position of records manager in the university. As a result, records management procedures and practices were left to the discretion of individual administrative assistants, who did not have any records management training. So, there was no uniform records management procedures to be used across the university. The absence of records management procedures jeopardised service delivery in the university. Records management procedures are required at IUIU as the basis for managing official records and because they are crucial for effective service delivery. Gaps were identified that needed to be addressed to minimise the risk of not having records management procedures in place.

The study made the following recommendations:

- **There is need for a records management procedures policy**

  The IUIU top management should develop and promulgate a records management procedures policy. The aim of the policy will be to provide a framework for and commitment by the university to implement records management procedures. The policy will also define the scope of responsibility and the authority for the adoption of the procedures, and will also standardise records management procedures across the university departments and campuses.

- **A records manager should be appointed**

  The university should appoint a records manager with the specific responsibility of overseeing the adoption of a records management procedures policy across the university. Ideally, the appointee should be a graduate with training in records management. The records manager will serve as the official representative and point of contact for records management procedures and will help to support the development and coordination of comprehensive records management procedures at all university departments and campuses.

- **A records management procedures manual should be developed**

  The records manager should develop a records management procedures manual to guide the management of records in all IUIU administrative units. All staff should use this manual for purposes of consistency when performing any records management function.

- **Staff training in records management procedures should be undertaken**

  The records manager should arrange training and orientation sessions in records management procedures for both records managers and users. All staff should be made aware of the basic records management procedures and techniques.

The current research intended to explore the effects of records management procedures on service delivery in a private university. Further research can look at the application of records management procedures in public universities as provided for in the Uganda National Records and Archives Act, which legislation places certain requirements on public universities in Uganda when it comes to records management (Uganda 2001). A comparative study could be carried out to investigate the significant differences between public and private universities regarding the development and adoption of the records management procedures issues investigated.

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