

# ORGANIZATION AND RETRIEVAL OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC RECORDS IN AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA – NIGERIA

By

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## Abstract

*The study was undertaken to investigate how students' academic records in Ahmadu Bello University are organized and retrieved. A descriptive survey research design and purposive sampling procedure were employed for the study to find out the effectiveness of students' records organization in the Various departmental records offices of the 12 faculties. The number of staff identified managing students' academic records were 480 and the study used Krejcie and Morgan statistical table to determine the sample size which was 216. A total of 216 questionnaire were distributed but 210 were filled and returned which gave a response rate of 97.2%. Data analysis of the bio-data variables were presented in frequencies and percentages. Two research questions as well as two research hypotheses were raised and tested the hypotheses. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the split-half method. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics tested whether relationship exist among the respondents' opinions on the individual items that made up each research hypothesis. The decision to accept or reject any null hypothesis was at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The study revealed that retrieval of students' academic records in the study area was slow and time consuming due to poor records organization. The study concluded that students' records organization is below standard and so should be allocated good time in processing the students records to help researchers and administrators experience fruitful search for specific records and timely retrieval. The research proposed that staff managing the students' academic records should be professionals or trained to monitor students' records either in manual or electronic format to ease accessibility. The National University Commission (NUC) should as a matter of urgency design and implement a policy that will compel all Universities in Nigeria to provide functional records centres that will make students' academic data available to the commission and other relevant organizations at all times.*

## Introduction

Records are documented or captured information or images capable of conveying reliable and complete information in any media, created or received by an individual or organization in the course of a business transaction and serve the purpose of accountability and continuity. Office of corporate and Legal Affairs (2005) defined records as information created, received and maintained as evidence of business activities. The National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (2004) defines records as all documents, papers, letters, maps, books (except books formally organized in libraries), microfilm, magnetic tapes or other materials made or received in pursuant to law or ordinance or in performance of functions by any agency.

Looking at these definitions, it can be discerned that record has the ability to serve as evidence of an event, has legal value and is a complete document in content, context and has

structure. Some records are ephemeral while others are for long time use and may be preserved for eternity. What makes records different from other information entities is the word “recordness” that is, having quality or value also called characteristics of records (attributes). Basic concepts and principles of Archives Management (2013) stated that recordness requires that records are;

- \* Complete
- \* Fixed
- \* Organized
- \* Contextual
- \* Authoritative/official
- \* Unique

There are many types of records, many literature however grouped them into two major types. For instance, Uhegbu (2007) grouped records into personal and official records with many sub-classes. Personal records include documents like birth certificates, academic certificates, medical reports, marriage certificates etc. On the other hand, official records include among others those records that are vital to organizations, such as certificates of occupancy, legal documents, nominal roles, contract agreements, medical expenditures, staff development file. When an organization has decided to keep a record for a later date, such a record must be stored, protected and retrieved on request when the need for it arises.

Activities commonly found in Universities are academic in nature. Some of these activities are programme advertisements, sales, purchase and filling of admission forms, short listing of prospective candidates for post UMTE test, short listing of successful candidates for admission, screening of newly admitted students for registration and change of courses, orientation, matriculation, lectures, examination and continuous assessments etc. As these activities are being carried out, various records and information are generated which include among others, examination results, academic transcripts of graduated or transferred students, semester examination, faculty and departmental board meetings, staff and students’ disciplinary reports, payments of fees details, issuance of statement of results and certificates to graduating students, National Youth Service Corp Mobilization List, release of Special Bulletins, academic conferences and workshops, medical records and reports, senate standing committee meetings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Ideally, students' academic records generated from the point of admission into the university up to graduation and beyond should be organized to ease access and retrieval when the need arises. Contrary to this expectation, most students in Ahmadu Bello University hardly gain access to their academic records when requests are made. Although many scholars have observed and reported that the size of students' academic records generated in the universities could constitute reasons why efficient records organization and retrieval is difficult, affecting accurate, prompt and timely administration and decisions making (Onwudebelu, Fasola and Williams, 2013). Atumola (2011) reported that the inability to retrieve records at the right time is a serious and embarrassing issue in Nigerian Universities and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is not an exception. He gave factors such as poor records systems, unskilled human resources, space problem as well as little attention given to records keeping by the University management. Could this be the blame? What must be done to salvage Ahmadu Bello University records offices with particular reference to students' academic records is the crux of the research work.

### **Research Questions**

The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways are students' academic records organized in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
2. What are the factors militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were advanced to guide the investigation;

1. There is no significant relationship between students' academic records organization and students' academic records retrieval in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
2. There is no significant relationship between students' academic records organization and factors that militate against timely retrieval of students' academic in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study was designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To find out how students' academic records are organized in A.B.U.

2. To identify the factors militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

### **What Constitutes Students' Academic Records**

In the study area, students' academic records includes application for admission, admission letters, course registration, continual assessment results, semester examination, statement of results, academic transcript etc.

In another development, Records Management Focus White Paper (2013) listed the following as students' academic records in Universities:

- \* Admission List and Letters
- \* Course registration
- \* Academic Transcripts
- \* Semester Results
- \* Personal File
- \* Statement of Results for Graduated students
- \* Undergraduate and Postgraduate Certificates
- \* Graduation List
- \* Payment Details of School Fees/Accommodation
- \* Examination Malpractices, Minutes and Reports
- \* Dissertation, Theses and Projects
- \* Postgraduate Seminars and Defense

### **Records Organization**

Records organization refers to records arrangement for the purpose of orderliness. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) posited that proper organization of records entails establishing physical and intellectual control over records that are entering the records system. This idea concurred with Iwhiwhu (2007) who was of the view that record keeping must be guided by some level of confidentiality, proper maintenance, security, preservation of the content and context. Records organization is the physical unit of records management, so, need physical and mental training for effective arrangement of records due to the sensitive nature of the human resources needed to manage records system. Iguodala (1998) believed that personnel (secretaries and filing clerks) who maintain the registry systems with filing cabinets containing the paper evidence of university business are inadequate and infact ignorant of their responsibilities. Records arrangement is the registration of every record group or series that enters the record

system, identify its proper location in the system, classify it, giving it an index based on the information the record contains etc. In other words, it is a process of breaking down the mass of records or archival materials into structured series and levels of groupings. Poor records organization will result to delayed access to records Fabunmi (2004) is of the view that educational institutions are generally, centres for data generation and by extension records keeping. He further stated that, it has become a recurrent issue for records to be irretrievable when required especially in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The reason for this according to Oberg and Borglund (2006) is that information organizing has been the key to its accessibility. From this assertion, one can understand that records arrangement is a vital aspect of “behind the scene” activities of records managers and archivists responsible for the level of functionality in any record or information centre.

For any effective records organization, there need to be modern storage facilities and equipment that will help in the arrangement of records. Stewart and Melosco (2002) listed the following record storage supplies:

- \* File cabinets
- \* Open file shelves
- \* Mobile system
- \* Containers and accessories such like file dividers and labels, folders, file pockets, filing boxes, notebooks and computer print out binders.

Record storage facilities protect records from harm, such like wear and tear, fading of print information resources, protection from dust in order to prolong records’ life span. The most common records arrangement is the alphabetical order. Uhegbu (2007) stated that alphabetical system of arrangement arranges files according to the sequence of letters (alphabetic) from A-Z. Other filing systems noted by him include:

- \* Subject filing system - topical filing
- \* Geographic filing system - area or location filing
- \* Numeric filing system - number filing
- \* Chronological filing system - filing according to dates/periods

### **Benefits of Records Organization**

For any effective planning, decision making and control of activities in a university setup as well as other organizations that depend so much on information for operations, quick access

to records should be of central importance. Popoola (2000) posited that what actually keeps the civil service going and any modern system of government are recorded information which are used for planning, decision making and controlling. Office of Corporate and Legal Affairs (2005) also stated that information and records management systems support and guide all aspects of the administration of records. It went further to list the following as benefits of records organization:

- i. Efficiency - records are better organized, located and retrieved more quickly
- ii. Consistency - existence of documented policies
- iii. Good decision making - ready access to all necessary records
- iv. Economy: People, money, space, equipment and supplies etc are cost effective.
- v. Legal protection: Interests of the university and stakeholders are effective.
- vi. Enhanced image: Image of the organization and stakeholders are improved due to orderliness
- vii. Ensures preservation of important records: Records of continuing value are preserved.
- viii. Continuity: Passing on knowledge of records from past to the next generation

Likewise, Harvard Library (2013) stated that good records arrangement will benefit an organization the following:

- \* Control costs associated with records and information management
- \* Improve efficiency and access to information
- \* Meet compliance obligations
- \* Minimize the legal risks posed by inadequate records management practices
- \* Ensure that permanent and historical records are captured and maintained.

Considering the above benefits of organizing records, it won't be out of place to say that records arrangement worth the labour in which records managers pass through. This is due to the fact that when a record is needed for an immediate decision making, the pains and loss of employment opportunity or scholarship award by victims of circumstance will be far more expensive than the pain of managing the records. Popoola (2000) stated that information and records organization are the bedrock of business activities. He further posited that if records are not readily made available, the management is crippled in its planning and decision making processes.

## Analysis and Discussion of Findings

### Demographic Distribution of Respondents by Position

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Position**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Dean	9	4
HOD	31	15
Faculty Exam Officer	10	5
Dept. Exam Officer	23	11
Faculty Officer	12	6
Secretaries to Dean/HOD	55	26
Executive Officers	34	16
Clerical Staff/Office Assts	36	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

The distribution of respondents by position revealed that personal secretaries to deans of Faculties and Heads of Department had the highest score of 55(26%). The reason behind this is that secretaries work in offices of Deans and Heads of Department where students' records are kept. The implication of their positions is that they are duty bound to make students' records secured and available whenever requests are made.

This finding is in line with the views of Iguodala (1998) and Iwhiwhu (2007) who believed that personnel (secretaries and filing clerks) maintain the registry systems with filing cabinets containing the paper evidence of university business. The implication is that more secretaries responded to the questionnaire because they are directly involved in records generation, receiving records or correspondence within and outside the University as well as maintaining those records or correspondences for the present and future use as duty demands or on behalf of the deans and heads of department.

The deans with 9(4%) had the lowest score and it can be explained that their busy schedules of teaching, supervision of postgraduate students and administrative obligations made it difficult for them to attend to the questionnaire. Another reason is that positions of deans and Departmental Heads are political in nature for a period of 3 years and to a maximum period of two terms, therefore many of them depend so much on their personal secretaries for administrative functions.

## Organization of Students' Academic Records in A.B.U. Zaria

Research question one sought to find out the ways students' academic records are organized in A.B.U. Zaria. The analysis of the data are presented in table 2.

**Table 2: How Students Academic Records are Organized in A.B.U. Zaria**

S/NO.	Items	Response Category					
		SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD
1.	Alphabetic order	133	65	10	2	3.57	0.401
2.	Numeric order	62	98	40	10	3.01	0.621
3.	Alpha numeric order	195	8	4	3	3.88	0.345
4.	Chronological order	11	65	100	34	2.25	0.635
5.	Geographical order	65	98	40	7	3.05	0.388
6.	Subject order	80	100	15	10	3.210	409

**Cumulative Mean – 3.251**

**Decision Mean – 2.5**

Table 2 showed the responses on the order in which students' academic records are organized in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The overall response in the table is thus positive since the cumulative mean of 3.251 is greater than the decision mean of 2.5, more specific details revealed that the highest mean was item three which stated that "students' academic records organization in A.B.U. Zaria is in Alpha-numeric order" gaining the highest mean of 3.88, as details of responses on the item revealed that 195 strongly agreed. The reason is that alphanumeric arrangement of records is the simplest way of organizing records, it is easy to understand, not complex because each number or alphabet is distinct from another, no duplication of registration numbers or record indexes and brevity is achieved. On the other hand, the lowest mean was item four with the mean of 2.25, which revealed 11 response rate that students' academic records in Ahmadu Bello University are arranged in chronological order, that is according to date, 65 agreed, 100 disagreed while 34 strongly disagreed that students' academic records in Ahmadu Bello University are arranged in chronological order.

Therefore, it can be concluded that students' academic records organization in Ahmadu Bello University are carried out in 6 different ways as can be seen on table 2. However, the most used order is the alpha-numeric where students' academic records are arranged using their registration numbers that combines alphabets and numbers or figures denoting year of entry and the course of study. Arrangement of records is a time saving device because it allows easy access to a particular record. If records are poorly arranged, the result is that they could be mishandled or misplaced. There could be frustration in accessing them, delays and disappointments. This is in line with the assertion of NECC (2004) that failure to arrange records in good order will results



to “costly delays, lost business opportunities, frustrated office personnel and managers, business and citizens being forced to make decisions based on inadequate information”. This implies that records arrangement is an indispensable activity in the business of records keeping.

**Factors militating against Timely Retrieval of Students’ Academic Records in A.B.U., Zaria.**

Research question two attempted to identify the factors militating against timely retrieval of students’ academic record in the study area.

**Table 3: Factors Militating Against Timely Retrieval of Students’ Academic Records in A.B.U. Zaria**

S/NO.	Items	Response Category					
		SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD
1.	Unskilled personnel managing students’ academic records	183	27	0	0	3.87	0.402
2.	Insufficient storage facilities, equipment and space	80	95	25	10	3.17	0.301
3.	Inadequate financial support from management	115	95	0	0	3.55	0.601
<b>Cumulative mean - 3.52</b>							
<b>Decision mean – 2.5</b>							

The views from the respondents on the factors militating against timely retrieval of students’ academic records in the study area are basically three. The respondents were in agreement with all the three items in the table because the cumulative mean response of 3.53 was found to be higher than the decision mean of 2.5.

Item one on the table which stated that unskilled personnel managing students’ academic records in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, attracted the highest score with the mean response of 3.87 as details showed that 183 of the respondents strongly agreed that unskilled personnel managing students’ academic records is the main factor militating against timely retrieval of students’ academic records, 27 of them agreed while none of the indicated disagreed nor strongly disagreed. Next was item three that had the second higher response mean of 3.55 which the details showed that 115 of the respondents were in strong agreement that inadequate financial support from the management in the study area to the business of records keeping is a strong factor that militates against timely retrieval of students’ academic records in A.B.U. Zaria. In a similar development item two, having the least response of 80 respondents who were of the view that insufficient record storage facilities, equipment and space contributed significantly to the

factors that militate against timely retrieval of students' academic records in the study area with the mean response of 3.17.

These findings are in line with Azzopardi and Vinay (2008) who opined that the inability to retrieve records were due to poor Management Information Systems (MIS), lack of records personnel as well as basic infrastructure. Poopola (2003) in a similar view noted that this crises is reducing the internal efficiency rate of the universities because the method of retrieving records is time consuming while in another development, Peretomode (1999) blamed it on human resources.

### Testing of Research Hypotheses

The following two research hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics to find out if significant relationship exists between the organization of students' academic records and retrieval from their storage locations.

**Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between students' academic records organization and students' academic records retrieval in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.**

**Table 4: Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Statistics on the Relationship Between Students' Academic Records Organization and Students' Records Retrieval in A.B.U., Zaria**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Correlations index R	DF	Sig (P)
Students' academic records organization	210	71.1476	5.17744			
Students' academic records retrieval	210	19.8714	3.419299	0.618	209	0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.5 level (2-tailed)

An understanding of the above table 4, Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics revealed that significant relationship exists between students' academic records organization and records retrieval in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. This is because the calculated significant (P) value of 0.000 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlation index r level of 0.618 at d.f. of 209. The relationship between the two is directly proportional. This shows that records organization directly influences the retrieval of students' academic record in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. This implies that if records are properly organized, their

retrieval from their storage locations will be easy and vice versa. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between students' academic records organization and records retrieval in the study area is hereby rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between students' academic records retrieval and factors militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records in A.B.U. Zaria.

**Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Statistics on the relationship between students' academic records retrieval and Factors Militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records retrieval in the study area.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Correlations index R	DF	Sig (P)
Academic records retrieval	210	18.333	11.012	(872	209	0.003
Factors militating against timely retrieval of records	210	10.690	6.051			

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Hypothesis 2 presents the Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics which revealed that significant relationship exists between students' academic records retrieval and factors militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records in Ahmadu Bello University. This is because the calculated significant (P) value of 0.003 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significant at correlation index r level of 0.574 at degree of freedom (df) 209. This indicates that the relationship between the two variables is directly proportional, meaning that if the factors militating against timely records retrieval are corrected, students' academic records retrieval will be carried out successfully but on the other hand, if the factors are not dealt with, retrieval of the records would be difficult, time consuming and frustrating as posited by Fabunmi (2004). This also shows that records retrieval could be affected negatively by the various factors such as unskilled records staff managing academic records of students, insufficient records storage facilities and equipment as well as inadequate financial and moral support from management to the business of records management of the institution. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between students' academic records retrieval and factors militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records is rejected. This means that if records are managed by skilled personnel, good and modern records storage facilities and equipment are made available for students' academic records as well as sufficient support from the university top level management, then records keeping in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,

will come to a near perfect records system where academic transcripts of students will be a thing of the past.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis and findings of the study, it could be concluded that Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has insufficient skilled records personnel managing the students' academic records with few and outdated records storage facilities and equipment as well as poor support from the University top level management.

## **Recommendations**

1. The existing available records storage facilities, records storage space and equipment need to be upgraded by purchasing sufficient modern storage facilities and equipment to make students' academic records secured and ease their access and retrieval.
2. The University need to formulate and publish a record policy that would take care of the integrity of students' academic records, security and accountability.
3. The management as a matter of fact and urgency should tackle the factors militating against timely retrieval of students' academic records by providing computers in the various records centres of the University and train and retrain staff managing her records systems.

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