



Original Article

The Efficiency of Records Management in Selected Private and Public Secondary Schools in Urban Districts of Central Uganda

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This study established the extent or quality of records management in selected private and public secondary schools in urban districts of central Uganda, employing cross-sectional and descriptive comparative survey designs. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 161 teachers and 36 school administrators, to answer two research questions on; 1) the extent of records management; 2) differences in the extent of records management between private and public secondary schools. Data analysis was done using frequencies, percentages, means and the student's two independent samples t-test. The findings showed that there were more male teachers (53.3%) compared to females (46.7%), most of whom were 20-39 years (49.2%) and 40-59 (44.2%), the majority had a bachelor's degree (74.4%), (31%) had taught for at least 11 years, and most them were from Government schools (64.0%). The extent of records management was generally good ($M = 3.27$) and very good in terms of financial records ($M = 3.26$) and communication ($M = 3.50$). There was no significant difference in the extent of records management between public and private secondary schools ($t = 0.831$, $sig. = 0.407$). The researcher recommended that schools should stock more ICT facilities like computers and printers to improve records.

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INTRODUCTION

The management of records in any organisation is increasingly becoming important for management or administrative tasks at all levels (Campione *et al.*, 1990). Efficient records management has enabled not only competitive decision-making but also the development of management models in various fields of study. The evolution of Information Communication Technology (ICT) greatly benefited from improved data records management. Since schools deal with large numbers of people, the need to be efficient in the management/administration and execution of tasks becomes paramount.

One of the areas where managers and staff must be efficient is in records management. Ben-Zion *et al.* (1995) indicated that good records management is the foundation for good governance in educational institutions. Well-managed records increase efficiency in the policy documentation, transactions, and activities of institutions and provide a trusted source of information to support decision-making and accountability.

While records management is becoming increasingly dependent on technology, its importance has not been taken away by computers, and so computers are just enhancing efficiency, and their development has increased the importance of records management. Over time, schools and educational institutions are now more dependent on information derived from records kept to carry out their day-to-day functions and decision-making.

Some of the areas where institutional data needs to be effectively managed for efficient educational administration include but are not limited to student records, staff payroll and financial accounting records, school inventories, personnel records, and library system records (Ben-Zion *et al.*, 1995).

While there has been recognised growth in the establishment of educational institutions in Uganda in recent years (particularly the establishment of secondary schools), there is still a long way to go as far as the general management of these institutions is concerned. Despite the obvious benefits of proper records management, uncertainty exists about their effectiveness in schools. Against this background, this study sought to establish how efficient schools are in the management of their records, addressing two objectives, which included determining; 1) the extent of records management in terms of financial records, students' exams, and communication; and 2) whether there is a significant difference in the extent of records management between private and public secondary schools.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Records Management

Records management is the planning, controlling, directing, organising, training, promoting, and other managerial activities involving the life cycle of information, including creation, maintenance (use, storage, retrieval), and disposal, regardless of media (John, 2003). Records management procedures are used to achieve adequate and proper documentation

of policies, transactions, economics and operations (John, 2003). Records management has types; for example, Files Management applies records management principles and techniques to filing practices in order to organise and maintain records properly, retrieve them rapidly, ensure their completeness and facilitate appropriate disposition.

A record is defined by ISO 15489 (2001) as “information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of businesses.” (p3). Records provide corporate memory of the state and evidence of its policies and activities (International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (1999). Records are further defined as sources of evidence, information, and artefacts (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003). They are sources of evidence when users want proof that a particular activity took place or that it took place in a particular manner. Records provide evidence not only in courts of law but in any situation requiring confirmation that something was done correctly (Luyombya, 2010). Records are sources of information and objects when users are interested in their aesthetic qualities, tangibility, physical form, saleroom value or associations (Otoole, 1993).

Management of records, as an integral part of school processes, is associated with workflows and is based on administrative and quality necessities (Smith, 1986). According to ISO 15489 (2001), records management is a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposal of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records.

Managing records is one of the cornerstones for the effective delivery of public services. Barrett observed that records are an indispensable element of transparency both within government institutions and externally in the private sector institutions

(Barrett, 2005). Records must be accurate and complete, with appropriate access and effective maintenance. It is due to this that ICTs are needed to achieve these virtues.

According to Shepherd (2006), there are three key values which can be met by good records. First, organisations use records in the conduct of current business to enable decisions to be made and actions to be taken. Secondly, organisations use records to support accountability when they need to prove that they have met their obligations or complied with best practices or established policies. Thirdly, records may also be used for cultural purposes: to promote awareness and understanding of corporate history (Shepherd, 2006). Records, therefore, need to be captured, managed and safeguarded in an organised system in order to retain their value as formal corporate records (Luyombya, 2010).

Previous surveys of records management in Ugandan institutions have revealed a number of problems, such as the lack of suitable premises to house the paper records in adequate repositories, the paper records are often incomplete with inaccurate data and difficult to retrieve (Luyombya, 2010). There has been no establishment of a Records Centre repository in secondary schools.

A record centre is a facility which would house the vast quantities of records which are no longer required for active use in schools but that need to be retained for administrative, legal, financial, or historical reasons. The absence of the records centre implies that full physical and intellectual control of paper-based records cannot be achieved to cover all phases of the record continuum (International Records Management Trust, 1999).

Archival records are records selected for permanent preservation after establishing that they have permanent or ever-lasting value. The state of Florida writes, “Archival records are often referred to as historical records, but their value can be historical, administrative, legal, or financial” (Richard, 2005).

An archive is an agency responsible for collecting, preserving, and making available records determined to have archival value. “Archives” also refer to the building in which an archival institution is housed.

When archivists appraise records to determine archival value, they consider a number of factors in addition to age and format. Records and information being created today can have an archival value equal to that of records created over 100 years ago. Information maintained electronically can have an archival value equal to that of records on paper or bound in a volume. The characteristics of records that justify their continued retention as archives include values like evidential value – the value of the evidence records provide of the origins, structure, functions, and operations of the agency that created them. Informational value – the research or reference value of the information contained in the records. Financial, legal, and administrative value – the value of the records for the conduct of current and future agency business Campione *et al.* (1990).

A well-run records management operation has many benefits to administrators, students, managers, parents, and other supervisory bodies such as the Ministry of Education and Sports. Some of these benefits are Space savings, reduced expenditures for filing equipment, increased efficiency in the retrieval of information, compliance with legal retention requirements and the establishment of administrative, fiscal, and historical retention requirements, protection of vital records, control over the creation of new records among others Setareki and Opeta (2005).

Luyombya, D. (2010) contend that networked systems provide the opportunity for a range of people (teachers, administrative staff, parents, and students) to access these records where appropriate (security can be maintained using levels of access). Particularly in secondary educational institutions, the use of software to support recordkeeping has

become important. Similarly, the financial management of an educational institution can be very complex and therefore, the use of appropriate software including databases and spreadsheets, is required. This is particularly important in schools which have a high level of autonomy in their financial management (e.g., private schools). This may be simply broadcasting notices to staff or providing bulletin boards and chat facilities. Teachers or administrators may also use computer communications to transmit or receive data files on students, administrative tasks, policies and so on.

Setarekiand Opeta (2005) argued that ICT presents opportunities for recordkeeping in developing countries, such as enhanced retrieval systems and online search facilities. Opportunities for compact storage through electronic and digital storage devices are becoming more enticing to those responsible for records as they offer an alternative to bulky paper records that need a considerable amount of space for storage. However, there are challenges and issues that need to be considered; for example, increased usage of ICT decentralises recordkeeping more and more.

Records Management in Secondary Schools

Despite the overwhelming need for proper records management in schools, there is scanty literature on this issue. This is a sign that the importance attached to records management research is still less. The few existing studies on records management have risen recently and most of them have considered the role of ICT in managing records. For example, Luyombya (2010) revealed that the problems in records management are largely due to the absence of ICT facilities with recordkeeping functionality and a lack of clear policies, guidelines, and procedures. On the other hand, Sibangani (2006) noted that if ICT facilities like computers and internet connections are put in place, they can result in the more efficient management of records such as students’ examinations, finance, communication, and teaching. While it is important to use ICT to

improve efficiency in the management of school records before records are loaded into computer systems, they have to be prepared in a well-organised manner to avoid the problem of garbage in and garbage out.

The over-concentration of researchers on ICT to identify problems and inefficiencies in records management was further indicated by Devon (2004) who showed that recording data electronically, storing it centrally and sharing it with colleagues is vital to reducing workloads through structures. For cases of missing marks in the various class levels, if efficient records management systems are developed and fully implemented, such problems would be eliminated.

Devon (2004) points out that with respect to the management of students' examinations, there are various types of information systems that can be available in making informed decisions at all levels and in improving the efficiency of operations, such as executive decision-making management information system, collaborative information systems, electronic messaging systems, and group decision support system. These would enable multiparty participation in the schools' activities (Huseman & Miles, 1988).

Auma (2006) considered making end-of-year reports, which determined the ability of students for promotions and showed that the process was a disaster. The author indicates that after the completion of examinations, many students look forward to getting their reports in the near future, but their dreams get shattered most times. If there is effective records management, the speed of processing such documents will increase. While JISC (2001) indicates that such marks for assessed work can be recorded within the virtual learning environment (VLE), it is important that such records are processed, or the process through which they are managed is clearer, faster, and more efficient. This also implies that marks must have been well recorded and arranged for them to be transferred to

a computer system and to be shared among different users.

An efficient system of records management ensures accuracy, timeliness, and effectiveness in managing the performance of the organisation, that is, the whole process of examinations, finances, communication, and teaching. It allows an easy flow of information and risk monitoring systems that are appropriate (BECTA, 2000). It has however been observed contrary that the level of accuracy, timeliness, efficiency, and effectiveness has not been fully realised in many secondary schools. Bearing in mind the tasks of manning a large number of students in school for example, when they are doing exams in small examination rooms, the exercise becomes tedious and at times marred with examination malpractices, consequent loss of marks yet with proper records, there could be easy monitoring of students and marking coupled with increased speeding handing in results.

For years, academic institutions like secondary schools have been using manual systems to gather, manage, process, and disseminate information to users (John, D. (2003). But unfortunately, the record management processes are roughly existent. The advent of ICTs has found many institutions in this stagnation and so we may expect less benefit from this technological advancement in improving institutions' management systems, as may be the case in the developed world; the advancement in ICT found well-developed systems, making it easy for them to maximally benefit from this paradigm shift. ICT strengthened the capacity of institutions to handle administrative work since tasks can be accomplished effectively and efficiently. The question however is whether African or Ugandan education institutions can and are ready to benefit from such.

In secondary schools, records management is one of the tedious exercises, but with an efficient records management system, work would be made simpler for all school administrators and teachers to

maintain records. Auma J. (2006) contends that poor records management has caused serious impediments in several aspects of public sector management. This has negatively affected prompt payments and employment practices, revamping of institutional functions and organisational structures, and strengthening of financial management. In the absence of a culture of proper records management, monitoring and evaluation, quality control, and verification cannot proceed as a well-kept record provide the basis for all these, which also endangers the rule of law and accountability. It is imperative, therefore, for school administrators to adopt good recordkeeping practices since this will support effective, transparent, and accountable institutions.

Huseman et al. (1988) believed that what is wrong with education management records can be fixed with technology. They note that it is not uncommon to find that many educational institutions still keep records in files and stuck them away in filing cabinets where they accumulate dust. Many of these files are often eaten up by rodents and cockroaches thus rendering them irretrievable. A great deal of routine administrative work in educational establishments is still done manually with few schools showing interest in embracing ICT. They point out that in many schools, officials still go through the laborious exercise of manually registering students, maintaining records of pupil performance, keeping an inventory list of supplies, doing cost accounting, paying bills, printing reports, and drawing architectural designs. The huge man-hours spent on these exercises can be drastically reduced with a proper/efficient system to enhance the overall records management procedure.

A study on ICT developments in Uganda and management of digital records in the Uganda Public Service by Luyombya (2011) revealed that in Uganda, a critical gap exists in the approach since the management of public sector records is not being addressed as part of this initiative. Other weaknesses identified related to gaps and poor linkages between records management and the

Information Technology Department, as it failed to address the requirements for Digital records management.

There is no doubt that secondary school education has become more complex and its management demands more from the managers. The enormous rise in the number of students in schools as well as the multiplicity of programs has made school heads handle large quantities of data which they must process speedily to provide information for the Education Service Commission and Ministry of Education for effective management and decision-making International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (1999). Hence the use of proper and efficient records management systems in the management process is imperative for sustainable development.

Based on studies reviewed, which indicated the need to improve records management but the implementation of which is characterised by inefficiencies, this study sought to examine, in the Uganda secondary school's context, the level of efficiency in records management in secondary schools of selected urban districts in Uganda.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The study employed a descriptive comparative and cross-sectional survey design to establish the extent of efficiency in the management of records based on data collected at once from a large number (197) of nine selected secondary school teachers (161) and administrators (36) in central urban districts of Uganda. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select only staff responsible for managing records from the lists that were provided. A researcher-made questionnaire with questions on finance, examination, and communication records, was utilised in collecting data for this survey. All questions in this questionnaire were also closed-ended based on a four-point Likert scale ranging from one to four,

where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree and 4= strongly agree.

A content validity index of the instruments was computed from experts' judgements on the relevance of questions/ items in the questionnaire, with a coefficient of 0.83 being greater than the minimum CVI (0.7), as per Amin (2005). A Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.8 > 0.7 was

computed using SPSS, and so the instrument was declared valid and reliable. Data analysis was done using simple frequencies and percentage distributions, means and the t-test. An item analysis helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of schools in terms of managing records, from which conclusions were derived using the following mean ranges;

Table 1: Showing the four-point Likert scale

Mean range	Response range	Interpretation
3.26 - 4.00	Strongly agree	Very good
2.51-3.25	Agree	Good
1.76 - 2.50	Disagree	Poor
1.00-1.75	Strongly disagree	Very poor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 results showed that male respondents (53.3%) were slightly more than female respondents (46.7%), suggesting a smaller gender gap in the staff of secondary schools. For age, most teachers were in their early adulthood age of 20-39 years (49.2%), followed by those in the middle adulthood age of 40-59 (44.2%), and very few (6.6%) were in their late adulthood, coinciding with Uganda's retirement

age (65) and age structure where the majority of Ugandans are between 20 and 50 years. As for education level, a great majority of teachers had a bachelor's degree (74.4%) followed by Master's Degree holders (23.6%), and only 2.3% were Diploma holders, suggesting a well-qualified staff. For teaching experience, the majority (almost 80%) had taught for five or above years, indicating a highly experienced workforce. Finally, for the type of school, the majority came from Government schools (64.0%) as compared to only 36.0 from private schools.

Table 2: Profile of Respondents

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	105	53.3
	Female	92	46.7
	Total	197	100.0
Age group	20-39 (early adulthood)	97	49.2
	40-59 (middle adulthood)	87	44.2
	60 and above (Late adulthood)	13	6.6
	Total	197	100.0
Level of education	Diploma	4	2.1
	Bachelors	145	74.4
	Masters	46	23.6
	Total	195	100.0
Teaching Experience	Below 1	3	1.5
	2-4	28	14.2
	5-7	61	31.0

	8-10	33	16.8
	11 and above	72	36.5
	Total	197	100.0
	Type of school Private	71	36.0
	Government	126	64.0
	Total	197	100.0

Extent of Records Management in Selected Secondary Schools

Having cited the problem of poor record keeping in secondary schools, the researcher wanted to ascertain this thinking by measuring the extent to which there is efficiency in the management of records in the sampled schools. Three kinds of records were examined, namely, financial, communication, and examination records.

Efficiency in records management for each of these three was measured with several Likert scaled questions, with four scales ranging from 1 to 4, where 1=not available at all, 2=hand written copies available, 3=printed copies available, and 4=both printed and computer soft copy available. Respondents rated the extent of records management in their respective schools as shown in *Table 2*.

Table 3: Extent of Records Management of the Selected Secondary Schools

		Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Financial records	Copies of school expenditures for different terms	3.56	Very good	1
	Employees/teachers' salary payment lists	3.48	Very good	2
	Lists of students' fees payment status	3.21	Good	3
	Copies of external bills (e.g., electricity, water, etc.)	3.16	Good	4
	Records of school fees payment	3.12	Good	5
	Lists of teachers' salary structures	3.04	Good	6
	Average mean	3.26	Very good	
Students Exams	Copies of examination past papers for previous terms	3.88	Very good	1
	Lists of all previous candidates and their performance	3.70	Very good	2
	Copies of students' tests and examination marks for different terms	3.45	Very good	3
	Copies of examination timetables	3.34	Very good	4
	Copies of invigilation schedules	3.11	Good	5
	Average mean	3.05	Good	
Communication	Lists of all students in the school according to class, gender, etc.	3.80	Very good	1
	Lists of all students and their houses, clubs, or colours	3.70	Very good	2
	Lists of all staff in the school	3.52	Very good	3
	Lists of duties and responsibilities	3.50	Very good	4
	Copies of BOD meetings and proceedings	3.49	Very good	5
	Copies of staff meetings and minutes	3.48	Very good	6
	Lists of prefects for different terms	3.43	Very good	7
	Copies of all school assets (e.g., chairs, desks, etc.)	3.31	Very good	8
	Lists of teachers' teaching loads	3.22	Good	9
	Lists of all parents and their contacts	3.21	Good	10

	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Copies of the school annual and term program of activities	3.20	Good	11
Copies of student's attendance records	3.07	Good	12
Copies of prep supervision schedules	3.06	Good	13
Copies of letters sent to different stakeholders (e.g., parents, other schools, teachers, Ministry of Education and Sports, district, etc.)	3.04	Good	14
Copies of teaching syllabi for different subjects	3.02	Good	15
Copies of teachers' individual timetables	2.98	Good	16
Lists of staff telephone contacts.	2.98	Good	17
Teaching notes for some teachers	2.81	Good	18
A copy of the visitor's book	2.69	Good	19
Copies of lesson timetables for different terms	2.67	Good	20
Copies of students' cases and how they are managed	2.61	Good	21
Copies of all notices issued to students & staff	2.20	Poor	22
Lists of textbooks and pamphlets in the school	2.15	Poor	23
Lists of staff e-mail addresses	1.61	Very poor	24
Average mean	3.50	Very good	
Overall mean	3.27	Very good	

Results in *Table 3* indicated that financial records management was rated very good ($M = 3.26$), best in the maintenance of school expenditures for different terms ($M = 3.56$), followed by management of employees' salary payment lists ($M = 3.48$) while the least although good was lists of teachers' salary structures ($M = 3.04$) and records of school fees payment ($M = 3.12$).

Management of financial records was found to be good, possibly because it is a requirement by the ministry of education for all schools to systematise their records. Good financial management is the blood of any organisation, so schools give it a priority, whether private or government.

The findings in *Table 3* suggest that schools are very good at managing communication-related records ($M = 3.50$), being best on students' lists according to

class, gender etc. ($M = 3.80$), followed by lists of all students and their houses or clubs ($M = 3.70$), etc. The worst managed record was lists of staff e-mail addresses ($M = 1.61$, very poor), lists of school textbooks and pamphlets ($M = 2.15$, poor) and copies of all notices issued to students and staff ($M = 2.20$, poor). Overall, there is very good records management in the sampled schools ($M = 3.27$, very good).

Differences in Extent of Records Management: Private Vs Public Secondary Schools

A null hypothesis was tested that; the extent of records management does not significantly differ between private and public secondary schools. The t-test was used to test this null hypothesis, and the results are shown in *Table 4*.

Table 4: Differences in Extent of Records Management; Private Vs Public Schools

Elements of Records Management	School Type	Mean	t	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on H ₀
Financial Records	Private	3.29	.474	.636	No significant difference	Accepted
	Government	3.24				
Communication Records	Private	3.07	.431	.667	No significant difference	Accepted
	Government	3.04				
Examination Records	Private	3.53	.961	.338	No significant difference	Accepted
	Government	3.48				
Overall records management	Private	3.30	.831	.407	No significant difference	Accepted
	Government	3.26				

According to the findings in *Table 4*, there was no significant difference in the extent of records management between private and public secondary schools ($t=0.831$, sig. 0.407). There were no significant differences for all three records management aspects; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted, and a conclusion was made that the goodness or poorness in records management does not depend on school type. However, for all elements, private schools proved to be slightly better record managers compared to public schools, although the differences were not statistically big. The reason for no significant difference in the extent of records management is that both types of schools offer the same services and are governed by the same regulations. So, their needs and requirements are virtually similar.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions and generalisations were derived;

Strengths Identified

On the aspects of keeping copies of school expenditures for different terms and employees/teachers' salary payment lists, copies of examination past papers for previous terms, lists of all previous candidates and their performances, copies of students' tests and examination marks for different terms, copies of examination time tables,

lists of students according to class and gender, houses/clubs and so on, schools were found to be very good records managers.

Weaknesses Identified

The extent of records management was found to be poor in keeping copies of all notices issued to staff and students, lists of all books and pamphlets in the school, and lists of teachers' e-mail addresses.

Testing of Hypotheses

The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the extent of records management between private and public secondary schools was accepted, even though private schools are slightly better than public schools in managing records.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were generated;

- There is a need for secondary schools to introduce intranets by bringing experts to connect all the computers at the school. This will improve sharing and use of information.
- School administrators should also ensure that for each notice they issue to the teachers and students, they should keep a file copy. The copies should be used for future reference.

- It is also a good practice of records management to always keep lists of all books and pamphlets in the school. This is done through the practice called stock-taking every term, and the resulting lists are kept to show the trends.
- More attention should be put on putting in place the required ICT facilities and availing them to teachers by letting them access the facilities for purposes of improving their records management.

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