Records Information Management Practices: A Study on a Faith Based University

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ABSTRACT

Records information management is regarded as one of the pillars of any organization because organization's activities are based on access to information contained in records. This article evaluates the practice of effective records management at Valley View University in Ghana. The targeted population for the research was centered on employees who handle students' academic records in Valley View University. The university has a total of thirty- two (32) personnel who deals with students records on a daily basis. A simple random technique was used to select a sample size of 25 records officers. Data was collected with a self-structured questionnaire. A total of 24 copies of the questionnaire were validly completed and returned making it 96% return rate. Percentage frequency tables and simple pie chart and bar graph were used to present the data from the field. The key findings of the study revealed that there is a positive level (64%) of effective students' records information management practices in the university. The study also revealed that only 43.75 percentage of the records officers have professional qualifications and in-service training relating to information and records management. There were some challenges that hinder the records managers from an excellent achievement of records information management effectiveness. The paper concluded with some recommendations that will help the university management and the records officers deal with those challenges.

Keyword: Records information management; Records officers; Valley View University

1. Introduction

The smooth running of any organization or university depend on its effective and efficient records information management. Ndweije-Sichalwe et al. [1], Southern African records management experts, pointed out that without records, no assessment can be made of whether individuals, private and public institutions have actually carried out the actions and transactions that they need to execute. Also, records ensure that these actions and transactions met the criteria of efficiency, legitimacy or the principles of good governance and whether they had done things which they were supposed to do.

Records, whether in paper or electronic format, are important resources for academic institutions and should be harnessed for effective records information management practices. Suffice it to say that the

planning, coordinating, organizing, controlling and implementing an organization would be a leap in the dark in the absence of accurate and accessible records keeping practice.

According to Tagbotor et al. [2] records information management is crucial to all organization unless records are managed efficiently; it is not possible to conduct business, to account and audit for stewardship of management. Records are vital corporate assets and are also required to provide evidence of actions and decisions. Kennedy and Schuder [3] add that without proper information, a decision maker is never certain about the outcome of her decision.

Records are invaluable. Keeping complete records information from the beginning can save time and money. It has been observed that accurate, reliable and trustworthy records that fulfill evidential requirements are being created in the university system but not properly managed. This, therefore, becomes an issue of great concern to the students of public and private universities.

1.1 Statement of Problem

In recent past, prior to the 22nd Congregation of Valley View University, a section of the registry office encountered a fire outbreak on graduation weekend. Also, on that same weekend, there was a heavy thunderstorm and lighting resulting to heavy rainfalls that could lead to a flood. Fear allured the minds of the staff concerning the situation. And raised a lot of concerns amongst students and the graduands regarding the safety of their academic records in the registry as well as in the other academic departments of the university. This issue motivated the researcher to examine the effectiveness of records information management practices in the university.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are;

1. To establish the level of effectiveness of the records informationmanagement practices of the university.
2. To determine whether the records management officers of the various departments have adequate training on records keeping or management.
3. To identify challenges faced by the records officers in the effective management of students records information.
4. To make recommendations to the university administrators and records officers on how to deal with the challenges.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the level of effectiveness of the records information management practices of the university?
2. What percentage of records officers have adequate records information management training?
3. What are the challenges faced by the records officers in the effective management of students records information?
4. What are recommendations to the university administrators and records officers on how to deal with the challenges?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to bring to the awareness of the Valley View University administrators and records officers their level of records management effectiveness. The findings will help the university leadership to be aware of the challenges faced by the records officers and address them according.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Records Information Management

Records information management (RIM) is a corporate area of endeavor involving the administration of all business records throughout their life cycle.

According to Tagbotor et al. [2], "the primary function of records management is to facilitate the free flow of records through an organization, to ensure that information is available rapidly where and when it is needed. To carry out this function needs an efficient, effective records management programme. Given that an organization's records are unique to it, they need to be managed explicitly, just as the organization would manage its other resources, e.g. people, money, and estate." For records to be effectively managed, it has to go through a record life cycle.

The international standard organization on the other hand views records management as a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation receipt, maintenance use, and disposition of records management focuses on procedures and systems for the creation, storage retrieval and disposal of records [2].

2.2 Seven Effective Records information Management Programme

According to the Ohio State University [4], there are six foundational elements: to an effective records management programme that are enveloped in an articulated set of Policies and Procedures which is the seventh. These are reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

1. *Records Inventory & Classification*

Weise [5] states that one of the most important elements in gaining control of an organization's records is the records and information inventory. Simply put, you need to know what records and information you have and are responsible for before you can manage it. This ties in directly with one of Weise's favorite general management principles – "you cannot manage what you don't know about". An inventory is a systematic process for identifying all of the records and non-record information in an organization, who creates, uses, or receives the information, and where users store it. A completed inventory provides a complete picture of the information environment on how and where they are physically stored, volume of storage, how they are classified for future use and retrieval and sensitivity of information and access, and its retention period.

The inventory also helps to identify inconsistencies in how information is created, stored, accessed, and managed. The benefit of doing the inventory is that it serves as the foundation for your records management programme and is the basis for many of the other instruments required to manage records effectively [5].

2. *Retention Scheduling:*

A retention schedule according to El Paso Community University [6] is a policy document listing all the titles of an organization records series, length of time each document or record will be retained as an active record, the reason for its retention (administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical) with their ultimate disposition.

3. *Records Storage & Conversion:*

Once an organization has determined what records they have and how long they need to be retained, Ohio State University Records Management Programme [4] recommend that organization develop a filing and storage strategy and/or determine if their existing filing and storage strategy is adequate. Questions the organization needs to address include:

- How do you classify your records for easy retrieval?
- What are the access procedures for sensitive records?
- Where and how do you store your active records?
- Where and how do you store your inactive records?
- Do you have a "records hold" procedure in event of litigation?
- What are your procedures for transferring records of enduring historical value to the archives?
- How are you storing your electronic records?
- Have you identified your vital records?
- What is the environmental condition of your storage facilities?

At some point in a records life, it may be converted to a digital image, to microfilm, or both to enhance access, reduce physical storage, or to provide disaster recovery and preservation tools [4].

4. *Vital Records:*

The term vital record is applied to any record that is necessary to the continuation or resumption of your operations. This means that if a disaster occurred, you would need these records to remain in business. Probably, only about 10% of your records are vital. The purpose of identifying vital records is to plan for their protection [7].

5. *Disaster Prevention & Recovery:*

Ohio State University Records Management Programme [4] states that "**a** disaster prevention and recovery plan (DPRP) is a written, approved, and implemented plan for the prevention or mitigation of records loss in an emergency or disaster, as well as a plan for recovering records in such circumstances. A DPRP should include a listing of vital records and should part of an organization's larger business continuity planning process. A DPRP should include at a minimum the following components:"

- a chain of command with contact information
- a decision tree for appropriate actions
- a listing of emergency management officials with contact information
- a listing of records reclamation vendors
- a listing of vendors (supplies, computer equipment, records storage, etc.)
- a list of supplies needed to help mitigate loss,
- identification of an alternative operational site
- Backup policy & procedures for electronic files, with backup preferably stored offsite at least 5 miles from an operating system.
- System restoration procedures
- General "what to do" procedures for a variety of scenarios including but not limited to fire damage, water damage, loss of access to facility, and total loss of facility.

6. *Disposition:*

A disposition determines the final destination of records once they meet their required retention periods. It is the final stage of record management in which a record is either destroyed or permanently retained. Records disposition actions typically fall into two categories:

- destruction via disposal in trash or recycling, shredding, macerating, incinerating, pulping, and deleting or other electronic obliteration;
- Transfer to archives for permanent preservation

7. *Policies & Procedures:*

Ultimately, all the above should be rolled together into a written, adopted, and implemented set of policies and procedures [4]. Records Management Policy and procedures manual are designed to aid the university and its individual departments and offices in effectively and efficiently designating, maintaining, and disposing of institutional records.

2.3 Training in Records information Management

Training is a process of acquiring knowledge and skills in a particular discipline to enhance performance of work in an organization, or institution or vacation.

Challenges are more on the quality of the records management personnel, professional or not, and the well-adapted training programme. Though with the electronic solution, progress has been made but the challenge is still present if we do not want poor records [8].

The advent of electronic recording has reduced some of the challenges through training programmes. But the consistency of training programmes helps universities to build competitive advantage in their various academic programmes and to deliver the best service when personnel's are updated to suit the current issues and ways of managing records.

Also, based on the value of records in the life of a university, it is necessary to train the personnel, because this will help them to gain confidence in what they are doing. For the work to be more professional, it would be necessary to send African youth or workers for further studies on records management in archives institutions and universities [9]. Therefore, records management could only be enhanced when personnel in charge are properly trained.

3. Methodology

3.1 Description of the Study

Valley View University was established in 1979 by the West African Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1997 it was absorbed into the Adventist University system operated by the West Central Africa Division (WAD) now West Central African Division of Seventh-day Adventist with headquarters in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. The Ghana Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, (organized in 2000), serves as the local manager of the University.

The University was initially called the Adventist Missionary College (AMC) and was located at Bekwai-Ashanti. It was transferred to Adenta near Accra in 1983 where it operated in rented facilities until it was relocated to its present site near Oyibi (kilometer 31 on the Accra-Dodowa Road) in 1989 with her official name as Valley View College.

The Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) has, since 1983, been evaluating and reviewing the accreditation status of the institution. In 1995, the University was affiliated to Griggs University in Silver Springs, Maryland, USA. This allowed the University to offer four years' bachelor's degrees in Theology and Religious Studies. Then in 1997, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) of the Ministry of Education in Ghana granted Valley View College national accreditation thus permitting her to award her own degrees. Thus, Valley View University became the first private institution in Ghana to be granted national accreditation.

The University serves students from all over the world. It admits qualified students regardless of their religious background, provided such students accept the Christian principles and lifestyle which forms the basis for the University's operations [10].

Valley View University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution, emphasizes academic, spiritual vocational and technological excellence in a context that prepares lives for service to God and humanity. Stated below are the university vision statement, core values, and mission statement.

Vision Statement

To be a leading Centre of Excellence in Christian Education

Core Values

VVU seeks to pass on a passion for excellence, integrity, and service.

- **Excellence**- The commitment to attain higher standards and expectations
- **Integrity** – A life that matches convictions with actions. Integrity encompasses honesty, authenticity, and trustworthiness
- **Service** – The willingness to serve God and humanity in a selfless manner.

Mission Statement

Valley View University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution, emphasizes academic, spiritual vocational and technological excellence in a context that prepares lives for service to God and humanity.

3.2 Population And Sample Size

The targeted population for the research was centered on employees who handle students' records in Valley View University. The university has a total of thirty-two (32) records officers who deal with records on a daily basis. Based, on the homogeneous characteristics of the population, a sample size of 25 was chosen among staff who handle students' academic records.

3.3 Sampling Techniques and Design

The researcher used simple random sampling procedure to select those who participated in the study since the population is homogenous in nature.

3.4 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Primary Data: An investigator- structured questionnaire was designed specially to meet the objective of the study. "*An evalution of Effective Records information Management Practices Questionnaire"* was used to collect data from the respondents. Section A of the questionnaire focused on respondents' demographic data. Section B elicited information on respondents' perceived effective records management practices. Section C elicited information on respondents' professional qualification/specialized training relating to records information management. While Section D elicited information on the challenges faced by respondents with effective records management practices.

Secondary Data: was gathered from books, journals, internet and other relevant publications.

Data Analysis: The descriptive analysis was facilitated with tables of frequencies and percentages with the help of Microsoft Excel. The analysis provided insight into distribution of the respondents based on demographic characteristics and responses to the survey statements.

4. Results and Discussion of Findings

Response Rate

According to Leedy and Ormond [11] the higher the response rate the more reliable the result from the sample. Of the 25 questionnaires distributed to the students' records officers of the university, 24 were recovered representing 96% return rate. The response rate was considered to be very good in accordance with the argument of Babbie and Mouton [12] cited in Ngoepe and Walt [13] that "the consensus in survey research is that a response rate of 50% is considered adequate for analysis, while 60% is good and 70% and above is considered very good" Thus, the results presented were based on the 24 copies of the questionnaire that were duly completed.

Table 1: Departmental Distribution of Respondents

Name of Department	Frequency(f)	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
		%	%	%
Registry	6	25.00%	25.00%	25.00%
Faculty of Sciences	4	16.67%	16.67%	41.67%
School of Business Studies	3	12.50%	12.50%	54.17%
School of Theology and Mission	3	12.50%	12.50%	66.67%
Faculty of Arts and Social Science	5	20.83%	20.83%	87.50%
School of Graduate Studies	3	12.50%	12.50%	100.00%
	24	**100%**	**100.00%**	

Source: Field Data, 2016.

The frequency table 1 above represents the names of departments in Valley View University that participated in the study. The Registry had the highest frequency of 25% because that is the major department in the university that deals with students' academic records.

Table 2: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency(f)	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
		%	%	%
Male	10	41.67%	41.67%	41.67%
Female	14	58.33%	58.33%	100.00%
	24	**100%**	**100.00%**	

Source: Field Data, 2016.

Table 2, illustrates the gender of the respondents. Out of the 24 respondents whose questionnaires were received, 10 were males representing 41.67**%** whiles 14 were females representing 58.33% indicating a slight difference in terms of gender. This indicates that the Valley View University does not give any priorities to employees in terms of gender.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency(f)	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
		%	%	%
Diploma	4	16.67%	16.67%	16.67%
First Degree	5	20.83%	20.83%	37.50%
Master's Degree	12	50.00%	50.00%	87.50%
Doctorate Degree	3	12.50%	12.50%	100.00%
	24	**100%**	**100.00%**	

Source: Field Data, 2016.

The table 3 above shows the respondents educational background. The majority, that is 12 (50%) of the respondents were master's degree holders. 5 (20%) were first degree holders and 3 (12%) were doctorate degree holders. Respondents with Diploma were fewer. This is expected especially in an academic institution.

Table 4: Work Experience of Respondents

Range (Years)	Frequency(f)	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
		%	%	%
1 – 5	5	20.83%	20.83%	66.66%
6 – 10	11	45.83%	45.83%	45.83%
11 - 15	3	12.50%	12.50%	79.16%
16 – 20	3	12.50%	12.50%	91.66%
20 +	2	8.33%	8.33%	99.99%
	24	**100%**	**100.00%**	

Source: Field Data, 2016.

The table 4 above shows the frequency distribution of respondents by years of service in the university. The result shows that 5 (20.83%) of the records officers had served for 1-5 years, 11 (45.83%) had served to 6-10 years, 3 (12.50%) had served for 11-15 years. Similarly, 3 (12.50%) had served for 16-20 year while 2 (8.33%) served 20-year plus.

The highest ranges of years spent in Valley View University (VVU) were within the range of 6-10. This suggests that majority of the respondents with first and master's degrees must have served the university for more than five years.

Table 5: Responses to the Effectiveness of Records Information Management Practices

Key: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Undecided (D); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD)

Question	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Using paper record/manual filling.	62.50%	37.50%	-	-	-	100.00%
Using electronic record/electronic filling.	29.17%	58.33%	8.33%	4.17%	-	100.00%
Information Management System for students' grades.	25.00%	70.83%	4.17%	-	-	100.00%
Complete filing of records (paper based or electronic)	12.50%	20.83%	25.00%	20.83%	20.83%	99.99%
Have a classification system that ease retrieval	66.67%	20.83%	-	12.50%	-	100.00%
Have retention and disposition schedule	12.50%	12.50%	41.67%	20.83%	12.50%	100.00%
Off-site electronic storage back up facility	41.67%	20.83%	16.67%	20.83%	-	100.00%
Adequate Storage facility and Record Security	4.17%	45.83%	20.83%	16.67%	12.50%	100.00%
Clear Policies relating to records management	8.33%	33.33%	-	41.67%	16.67%	100.00%
Total Percentage	262.51%	320.81%	116.67%	137.50%	62.50%	899.99%
Average Percentage	29.17%	35.65%	12.96%	15.28%	6.94%	100.00%

Source: Field Data, 2016.

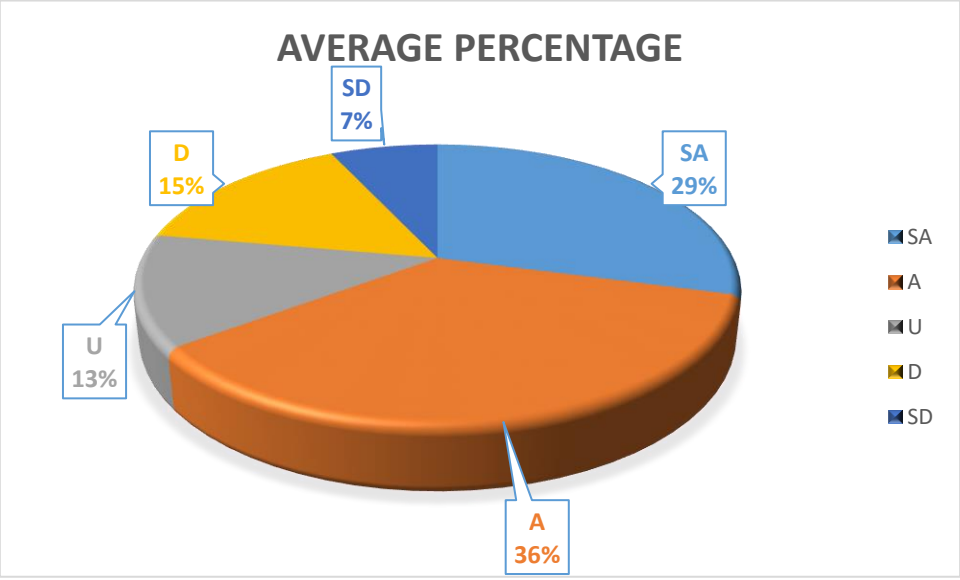

Figure 1a. Effectiveness of Records Management Practices

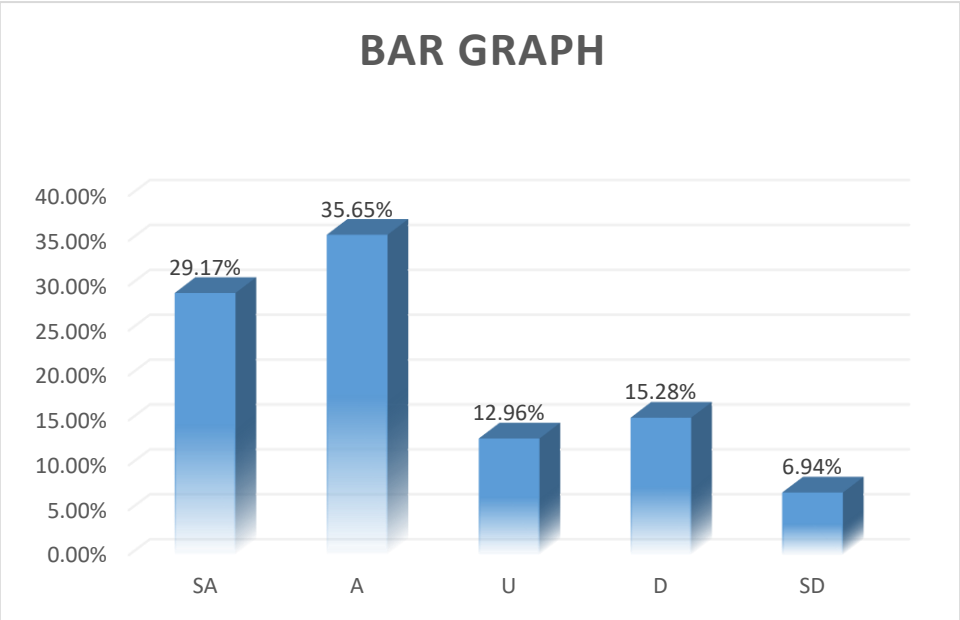

Figure 1b. Effectiveness of Records Management Practices

Table 5 and Figure 1 above shows that the respondents irrespective of their department have diverse view relating to the effectiveness of students records information management in the university and as result, 65% (put together SA & A) of the respondents attest to the fact that the management of students records is effective. 22% (put together D & SD) of the respondents disagreed while 13% did not make any decision. From the findings, it clearly shows that the Valley View University practices of effective records information management are more above average which is positive and implies moderately adequate. Though, going by the Valley View University's vision statement: "To be a leading Centre of Excellence in Christian Education and one of the university's core values "Excellence- The commitment to attain higher standards and expectations" it is expected that her effectiveness of students records information management practices would be highly positive as a level of excellence.

Table 6: Respondents Professional Qualification/Specialized Training in Records information Management

a) Have a qualification relating information and records or archives management

		Frequency(f)	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	YES	13	54.17%	54.17%	54%
	NO	11	45.83%	45.83%	100%
	Total	24	100%	100%	

b) Have attended in-service training on information and records or archives management

		Frequency(f)	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	YES	8	33.33%	33.33%	33%
	NO	16	66.67%	66.67%	100%
	Total	24	100%	100%	

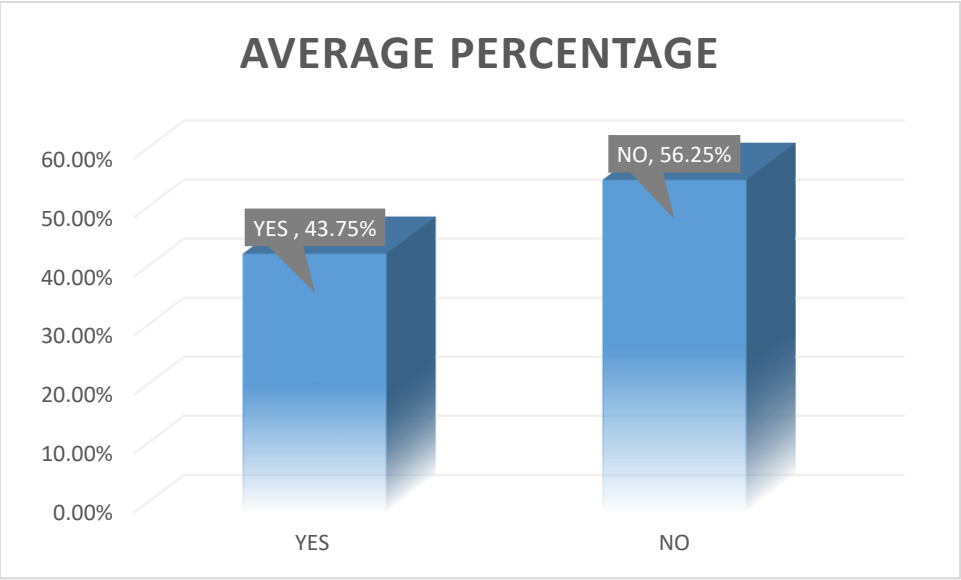

Figure 2: Respondents Professional Qualification/In-Service Training on Records Information Management

As shown by table 6a, 13 (54.17%) of the respondents confirmed that they have qualification relating to information and records or archives management while 11 (45.83%) declared they do not have qualification relating to information and records or archives management.

Table 6b also revealed that only 8 (33.33%) respondents attended in-service training on information and records or archives management during their service at the university while 16 (66.67%) respondents did not.

As revealed in figure 2 (the average percentage of table 6a and 6b) 43.75% of the respondents have a professional qualification and in-service training relating to information and records or archives management. While 56.25% of the respondents do not have. This revealed that only a few records officers are trained. Implying that most of those handling the students' records have no specialized training. Lack of this training must have contributed to respondents' level of efficiency to the effectiveness of records information management practices in the university.

5. Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of Records Information Management Practices at Valley View University

Through two open-ended questions answered by respondents revealed the following challenges faced by the records officers. This is also evident in the analysis on table 5.

- **No complete listing of vital records (paper-based or electronic) -** The purpose of identifying vital records is to plan for their protection. Lack of the complete listing of the students' vital records may negatively affect the university in emergency or disaster conditions.

- **An inadequate storage facility and records security-**There are insufficient cabinets and storage room or space for filing students' academic documents. This slows down the retrieval of students' records information and exposure of sensitive records to those who should not have access to them.

- **No retention and disposition schedule-**The lack of records retention and disposition schedule may have a link with the inadequate storage facility challenge above. The university can only develop a proper filing and storage strategy with the help of retention and disposition schedule.

- **No clear policies relating to records information management-** Records information management policy provides guidance in establishing and maintaining records management system. Lack of it and non-compliance are the main causes of ineffective records information management. This was evident in table 5 where the level of disagreement to clear policies relating to records information management was 58.34.00% which happened to be the highest in the area of disagreement.

- **Lack of funding for on the job training for those responsible for records management system**. As evident in table 6b, the number of Valley View University records officers (33.33%) who attended records and information management training programmes are minimal. There is less exposure to workshop, seminars and other training forums that should aid the employees' professional development.

6. Conclusion

The study analyzes the effectiveness of records information management practices in Valley View University. Covering departments that deal with students' academic records. A survey strategy was used. Survey questionnaires were issued to 25 respondents selected using the simple random technique. Microsoft Excel (2013) was used to analyze the data collected. Under this, percentage frequency tables and simple pie chart and bar graph were used to present the data from the field.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a positive level of effectiveness of records information management practices at Valley View University. The study further revealed there were challenges that hampered the records officers from achieving excellent records information management

effectiveness. Thus, this study offers the recommendations below to Valley View University administration.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Storage facility and Record Security

All student records created or received from the point of admission up to graduation are considered as vital records. With the argument of Saffady [14], vital records contain information that is essential to the institution's mission-critical operations. If these vital records are lost, damaged, destroyed, or otherwise rendered unavailable or unusable, mission-operations will be curtailed or discontinued, with a resulting adverse impact on the university. Thus, it is important for Valley View University Administrators and the Registry department to provide additional storage facilities- records center/archives outside the registry office for the storage of non-current records. This will help to decongest the current storage room in the registry and serve as backup in case of emergency or disaster

2. Records Information Management Policies and Procedures

With reference to Lyman and Varian [15] who asserted that "to effectively manage records and information, public and private organizations should develop, implement and maintain a codified set of records management policies and procedures. Thus, the Valley View University Administrators should develop, adopt or acquire relevant records management policies that will guide the management of records information in the university.

3. Implementation of the Records Information Management Policies and Procedures

The University Administration should through the Quality Assurance Department of the university ensure compliance with the university stated policies on effective records information management. This will contribute to the fulfillment of the university vision and mission statements to the students, stakeholders and the public in general. And also, reflect one of the university's core values- "Excellence- The commitment to attain higher standards and expectations"

4. Training

The University Administration should allocate adequate financial resources to the human resource development in the area of records and information management. Seminar/workshop and conference on information and records management for records officers should be funded yearly by the university. Training could be conducted inside the university by outside consultants or and by senior members who are qualified enough in records and information management.

University Administration should note that if their employees who handle students records information do not have guidelines, policies, and procedures on how to operate and are not trained about how to take records information through its life cycle, productivity cannot be improved. Therefore, affecting the whole university performance and defecting her mission.

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