



IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL FORMS AND RECORDS IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges and prospects of implementing digital forms and records in the administration of public secondary schools in Rivers State. The study reviewed the various types of digital forms and records used by school administrators to elicit information from students, teachers, and parents/guardians. The forms include electronic application, registration, consent, survey, incident, scholarship and financial aid, and parents/teachers invite. In addition, the records were categorized into electronic statutory and non-statutory basis. In spite of the advantage of integrating digital forms and records, the study observed that some principals in public secondary school in Rivers State seems to be relying heavily on the traditional method of paperwork in carrying out eminent administrative duties despite the awareness of computer assisted methodology. Judging from the UNESCO, the study described digital forms and records system as an organized classification and filing of the school archives in a way that makes it easy to search, access, retrieve and use the data information for school functionality. The study accounted that, the absence of power supply, digital facilities, Poor knowledge of ICT, resistance to change, Management of database, paucity of fund, technical support and maintenance are some of the challenge impeding the implementation of digital forms and records by school administrators. Irrespective of these foreseen challenges, the study upholds that implementing digital forms and records has the prospects of; promoting work efficiency, cutting cost, speedy accessibility to database, modernize effective communication. However, the study suggested among others that Rivers State Ministry of Education, and Private donors whose activities are domiciled in the state should see the need for regular power supply across schools, procure digital facilities, provide grant, sensitize school members on how to use of emerging technologies.

Keywords: Digital Forms, Digital Records, School Administration, Challenges and Prospects

Introduction

Integrating technology in the administration of school is an expedite approach to effective service delivery. It helps school administrators to foster quality educational delivery. In the 21st century, there is a clarion call for schools globally to embrace information and communication technology in storing and disseminating information (Amie-Ogan & Tagbo, 2021). This action is necessitated to improve the performance of the education sector. To achieve this, the place of school forms and records cannot be undermined. School records constitute corporate memory which supplement human memory and serve as guides to decision making and effective planning (Ezekwe & Enweani, 2019). Organization



like schools depends absolutely on forms and records to facilitate effective communication, transparency and accountability, proper origination, accessibility of historical records, and data-driven decision making. Knowing that digital forms and records are the most tangible materials that helps teachers and school administrators access and retrieved what is needed from the comfort of their homes without being physically present in the school. To corroborate this assertion, Koc (2005) posits that using digital facilities enables students to communicate, and share information from anywhere, any time.

In this article, digital forms are electronic approach that enables school administrators, teachers, students and researchers' source, retrieved and manage information online using laptop, desktop, smartphones backed up with internet connectivity to obtain and disseminate vital information. The unique aspect of digital forms lies in their distinct ways it is used to render service either to the school's administrators, students, teachers, parents/guardian or visitors. Owolabi, Idowu, Okocha and Ogundare (2016) asserted that, individuals can access current and up-to-date materials, faster and easier. More so, Khan (2016) stated that these materials can be accessed from remote corners of a country, thereby increasing the use of information, literature and the efficiency of information services. Examples of digital forms include; online class enrolment form, school registration, online consent form, online survey form, online incident form, online parent/teachers invite form, online scholarship and financial aid form, among others.

On the other hand, digital records are electronic aspect of the traditional paperwork that are stored, presented and managed by the school. Basically, two types of digital records are said to be used in the school. These are e-statutory and non-statutory records. The statutory records are compulsory records which under the confines of education law are to be kept by each school by the school administrator. According to Gede (2011) these records encompass admission register, attendance register, syllabus, scheme of work, lesson note, diary, time table, log book, visitors' book, staff record book, corporal punishment book. On the contrarily, the non-statutory records are required by law to be kept in each school but, they are kept considering that, they help to provide useful information not only to school members and community but to people outside the confines of school environment (Peretomode, 2000). It covers information about student's scholarship achievement, students' performance index, etc. based on the relevance, the Public Education Edict of 1974, stipulated that every school records and books shall be kept and managed by the person in charge and produced at request of an inspecting manager or an officer (Koko & Nwiyi, 2019). These documents can also be saved in a word document, PDF and test files can be seen and shared when needed.

However, it has been observed that principals in some public secondary schools in Rivers State give optimal preferences in issuing forms to people to fill and bring back for documentation and filling. Conspicuously, most of these filed records and other important school documents are usually kept in an overstretched file. Despite the clarion call for schools globally to embrace technology. These obsolete practice of accessing and managing information seems to have brought about serious damages and loss of staff and, student's vital information. This phenomenon is possibly caused by natural disaster (flood), roof linkages, rodents and pest vandalization, fire outbreak, and malicious damage. While they persist in this approach, Lefuna (2017) noted that low internet bandwidth budget cuts, lack of up-to-date Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, inadequate searching skills, shortage of staff and high cost of subscription fees are among of the many threats to access and use digital forms and records. Consequent upon this, school administrators are still immersed with the usual traditional method of paperwork in schools. Thus, causing them strained in effort to retrieve information. It is against this backdrop that the study examined the challenges and Prospects of implementing digital forms and records in school administration in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to examine concept of school administration, concept of digital forms, concept of digital records, types of digital forms types of records, benefits of digital forms and records for effective school



administration, challenges faced by school administrators in using digital forms and records and possible solution for mitigating these challenges.

Concept of School Administration

Maligida (2020) described school administration as the managerial skills needed for smooth functioning and execution. Relatively, Umoh and Wey-Ameawhelu (2020) termed school administration as the coordination of both human and material resources within the school for the optimal achievement of the predetermined objectives of education. It is well known that the administrative duties are carried out by school administrators who are professionals in keeping a school running smoothly, who are responsible for duties such as;

- (i) Overseeing teachers and support staffs.
- (ii) Discipline
- (iii) Setting rules and security procedure
- (iv) Monitoring student achievement data
- (v) Implementing curriculum standard
- (vi) Handling the school budget
- (vii) Communicating with parents as needed
- (viii) Rating positivity with the community.

The Concept of Digital forms and Records

School digital records system is described as the organized classification and filing of the school records in a way that makes it easy to search, access, retrieve and use the recorded data and information (UNESCO 2018). Dale and Cory 2021 described digital records and forms as any computing hardware that is used to store, part, extract data file and object. Garry and Dave 2021, digital forms and records as collective methods and technologies that capture and retain digital info on electromagnetic, optical or silicon- based record keeping media.

Prospects of Implementing Digital forms and Records in School Administration

Emerging technologies such as digital forms and records have shown to be the new normal for rendering effective in schools. It has shown to be a viable means for disseminating and storing of information dissemination and storage for effective service delivery. Hence, it is imperative for ministry of education, private donors, and those who have stake in education to embrace this lofty approach as;

1. It promotes real-time updates: it gives its users the opportunity to access updated school record. This means that the individuals need not to think about visiting the supposed school but they stay anywhere to access the needed information.
2. It helps to cut cost: it avails school administration to forgo the burden of excessive paperwork and procurement of wooden shelves, files, envelope and bulky A4 papers
3. It increases data accuracy: data stored in a digital system are more accurate and reliable for decision making by the management.
4. It modernizes effective communication: The digital platform tends to create effective method of disseminating information to parents, teachers, and the students.
5. It promotes speedy accessibility of school records. Information stored on database is easily access by the users without too much energy.
6. It speeds up data-driven decision making. It enables school administrators to implement decisions based on the available data in their possession. Since the data can stand as a testament for accountability.
7. It helps school members to adapt to emerging technologies: adopting a digital environment in records keeping will drive and uphold the current technologies to handle challenges that may arise thereafter.

Challenges of Digital Forms and Records in School Administration.



Over the years, secondary school administration has witness tremendous issues at providing effective service delivery. These issues are regarded as administrative challenges. Administrative challenges are hindrances to the process of school administration and they are the problems encountered by school principals in coordination of the human and materials resources for optimal attainment to educational goals, (Olurunsola & Belo 2018). These issues seem to make it difficult for school administrators to implement digital forms and records base on the following;

according to Anyim (2019) encompass poor internet connectivity, lack of steady power supply, lack of information retrieval skills, inadequate ICT infrastructure and insufficient functional computers.

1. Absence of power supply: it is highly appalling that most of the secondary school buildings in Rivers State with exemption to private schools does not have functional electrical points where principals and teachers can easily charge their electronic gadgets. Conspicuously, where some of the electrical points are functional, the buildings are not connected to power supply given that, the school administrators do not have the physical will to clear off the huge amount of outstanding bills. This situation makes it irrelevant for school administrators and teachers to make use of digital forms and records to manage information. Based on these happenings Abraham (2013) accounted that most school administrators are likened to a workman who is hired on a farm, and is not given the necessary farm implement.
2. Absence of digital facilities: The absence of digital facilities such as hardware as well as internet connectivity can give rise to slow transmission of information within the management, and between the school and the general public. This constraint hampers effective decision process.
3. Poor knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT): lack of vital cognitive and technical knowledge over time has impaired school administrators from using digital forms and record to gather, store and access information. They however prefer the traditional method of paperwork to the emerging method. Kenneth et al... (2019) observed that in most schools, there may be persons who finds it worrisome to learn new skill. They rather die with their existing knowledge than to advance themselves knowledge know-how. Schools needs Provide professional development activities related to technology to update teachers' skills and knowledge to offer technical support when needed (Al-Bataineh et al. 2008)
4. Resistance to change: some school administrators may not be willing to explore new technologies based on they feel about it. Sometimes, technology particularly emerging technology like digital ones can be overwhelming and discomfoting rather than stimulate optimism, when this happens such situation tends to cause discomfort. (Nwogu,2013). This behavior is detrimental to meeting the demands of the world best practice.
5. Management of database. Some school principals are naive on how to effectively manage the database of their school. They obviously do not god knowledge of creating files for specific purpose. Hence, they find it difficult to store and retrieve these digital records when needed.
6. Paucity of fund: The importance of adequate funding in educational development cannot be overemphasized. No organization like the school can carry out its function effectively without adequate financial resources at its disposal. According to Obe (2009), that without adequate funding, standards of education at any level shall be tantamount to a mirage that is building castles in the air. Money is important in a school because it is used to construct buildings, purchase needed facilities, prepare staff for better tomorrow through training and development, pay staff' salaries and allowances, maintain the plants and keep the services going.
7. Absence of technical support and maintenance: as a result of absence of digital facilities in most of the public secondary schools, the school administrator see it needless to hire the services technicians to carry out routine check for better functionality.



Types of Digital Records

Dale and Cory (2021) disclosed that primary and secondary digital records are the two types of records that exist for school administrators to use and keep other documents safe. The primary digital records are smaller in size and are built to hold data temporarily. These devices are internal to the computer, examples include RAM and cache memory. They can hold both temporarily & permanently information (Amie- Ogan & Tagbo, 2021). While, the secondary devices have larger capacity and can store data permanently. These types of devices include hard disk, optical disk drive and USB record device (Ryan, Tracy-Lee & Mohana 2020).

Benefits of Digital Forms and Records for Effective School Administration

Nweke and Onuekwa (2021) disclosed that management of records is a vital responsibility of the day activities of the school system. Based on this, Nidiganti (2019) disclosed the following as the benefits of digital forms and records:

1. **Time and cost saving:** using digital forms instead of paper-based forms provides a significant impact in the improving time and cost saving on printing, storing and distribution.
2. **Increases accuracy:** data can be accessed by multiple department within the school at the time, if the data is not digitalized, it takes more time and effort to access it.
3. **Easy Accessibility:** Documents digitalization enables an institution to access the data in the digital form anywhere, which breaks the barrier of location, time and simultaneous access. Easy Accessibility of data improves the data flow within the institution, resulting in enhanced productivity.
4. **Data Storage and Recovery:** Digitalized data is easy to store at multiple locations, which assured the data safety. Data storage in multiple locations gives extra protection against data corruption or loss. Physical documents are more likely to get damaged in case of natural disasters, whereas digitalized data is more secure and easy to replicate. Natural calamities are often unpredictable to storing it at multiple secure location adds reliability to documents.
5. **Environmentally Friendly:** With digitalized data there is no need to print it for distribution, also handling of Digitalized data is easy. An email is all one needs to share the data

Possible Solution for Mitigating these Challenges.

To empower school to meet the world best practices of implementing task. There is need for school administrators to collaborate with the following bodies;

1. **Sensitization of school members:** School administrator should collaborate and sensitize parent/teacher' association PTA on the need and benefit of embracing the culture of digitalization in school. Doing this would foster the zeal to remain resilient on other emerging technologies.
2. **Training and retraining of school members:** Rivers State Ministry of education should organize capacity building programmes such as workshops in batches for school administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians to enable these individuals develop their proficiency in digital skills.
3. **Procurement of digital facilities in schools:** school administrators and ministry of education should collaborate with private donors such as banks, companies and non-governmental agencies to purchase hardware, software and internet connectivity so as to support digital method of implementing task.
4. **Recruit information and technology experts and deploy them across schools.** Ministry of education should hire the services of experts in IT field and deploy them to various schools. Their duties involve updating the software, hardware and enforcing anti-phishing measure so as to avoid the activities of fraudulent persons. Also. They can help maintain the procured facilities



and help school members come out of their struggles especially when having issues of troubleshooting.

5. Provision of grant: Organization whose activities are domicile in the state like Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and other private bodies that possess strong political will should provide grant for schools to aid in their functionality.

Types of Digital Forms

1. **Online class enrollment forms:** This refers to e-form usually adopted by schools that insist students pays and register for every new session. The forms are forwarded to parents/guardians to enable them fil and pay off the said fee. And for their ward to provide basic information about their home address, extracurricular activities and interest, and academic history.
2. **Online registration forms:** This refers to an online used basically to at the start of student's enrollment at any level and contains pages relevant pages where the school administrators are generally concerned about. At point of seeking for admission, this form can be forwarded to a student parents/guardian through WhatsApp, telegram, email and any other online that apps promote such interface.
3. **Online consent form:** This refers to the type of e-document provided and forwarded to parents/guardians to seek the indulgence to provide the legal consent showing that they are in support or not in support of their ward to engage in any school extracurricular activities. Knowing that some students have health related issues and would not be nice to expose them to activities that would trigger their health issues.
4. **Online survey forms:** refers to e-document built to gather feedback from students, parents/guardians and staff on performance appraisal. Basically, it is used to generate opinions about a given phenomenon. For instance, when new programme and policies are made in school, the survey e-forms are disseminated across members of the school to ascertain its impact. Doing this would help school administrator to take rational decision on the way forward.
5. **Online incident forms:** These are e-forms provided by school administrators to parents to fill and report issues of bullying and sexual harassment, such as physical assault, sexual assault, and issues of accidents should it occur to keep the school on the known.
6. **Online parent/teachers invite form:** these are e-forms used to inform parents/guardians about the propose meeting for Parent Teachers Association (PTA) so as to keep them inform with the happening and further update them of their ward academic state.
7. **Online scholarship and financial aid forms:** This are e-forms forwarded to school administrators by either by Non-government organization, elite from school host community, government, industries, banks and other well-meaning individuals and organization to support to either provide full scholarship or subsidize scholarship to students. Often times, the principal is mandated to forward such forms to parents/guardians of disable students, students from the school host communities, best performed students either in mathematics, English language, physics, chemistry, or other interrelated subjects.
8. **Online application form:** during advertisement, the online application forms are used to advertise recruitment and school admission. These helps the school administrator to expedite it operations

Conclusion

Based on the finding of the study, the following conclusions are drown from the study. That Rivers State Ministry of Education, and private donor whose activities are domiciled on the state should see the need for regular power supply across schools, procure digital facilities, and provide great sensitize school members on how to use the emerging technology.

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