Conceptualization of Policy Challenges in Academic Records Management Strategies in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana

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Abstract

Academic records and final achievements of students in many higher Educational institutions in Africa are becoming subjects of empirical investigation due to several factors. For example, the fluidity of the technology environments, the ubiquitous technological platform for recordkeeping and management practices coupled with human interface and the exigencies associated with the educational service delivery systems. Every effort of practitioners to ensure quality of products and authentic academic records systems have proved futile. This study therefore explored the typology of records management practices in tertiary institutions in Ghana and also presents a conceptual framework to explain policy challenges in management of such records. A descriptive research paradigm was adopted with a cluster sampling technique to select a total of 1,990 study participants from ten tertiary institutions across five regions of the country. This consists of 2public universities, 800(40.2%), 5 professional training institutions such as Colleges of Education, Poly techniques and Nursing Training Colleges, 635(32.0%) and 3 private universities, 555(27.9%).The study used inferential statistical approach for the data analyss.The results indicates that there is no national policy directives for academic records keeping and management practices and as a results every institution adopts its own unique policy for its records keeping and management activities and handle their records security challenges as criminal issues. All these have not solved the problem.

1. Introduction

The ever increasing abysmal academic performance among students in many tertiary institutions leading to a well calculated plans by some of them or their agents who sometimes involves lecturers acting as reliable intermediaries for some students to influence their colleague lecturers and some internal and external stakeholders of the institutions to change students' poor test scores and academic records clandestinely or surreptitiously have become a big hurdle to climb by people engaged in management of higher education in Africa. All these attest to the realities of this phenomenon of unsubstantiated academic achievements and inauthentic records systems and fallen standard of education in Africa including Ghana. It is an open secret which characterises records keeping and management practices in today's educational enterprise. None of us in Ghana can boldly deny its existence particularly in our contemporary tertiary educational systems.

One major knowledge gap in literature about the short and long run impacts of the malpractices associated with recordkeeping and management practices in many tertiary institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa is the lack of a conceptual framework with an explainable diagram that help to outline the policy challenges tertiary institutions face in academic records keeping and management strategies. . This lack of relevant conceptual framework and theories make it extremely difficult to explain convincingly the degree to which this phenomenon impacted negatively on human society.

However, this is not to overlook the contribution in earlier studies by Adegoke (2003) Adekale(1993) Adesina (2005) and the report from the Federal Republic of Nigeria(2004) on malpractices in academic

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environments and the effects on corporate organizations and knowledge economy of nations and educational systems in particular. Academic recordkeeping and management practices in higher education in Sub Saharan Africa including Ghana have suffered a wide spread debacle. Consequently, this had made academic qualifications and final records on the achievements of graduates produced from various tertiary institutions less credible and inarguably inauthentic.

This isn't a new phenomenon. For decades academic and educational assessments and achievements of students including their records in many tertiary institutions have been plagued with inherent subjectively either by deliberate human activities or due to inadvertent procedural challenges beyond human control. Experience has shown that misconducts in many human organizations happen as results of several factors which may include poor conditions of service and some other personal selfish interest of some individuals. In academic environments in particular, malpractices among students and some staff members' hinge on factors such as poor remuneration, inordinate sexual desire and lack of moral uprightness and the inability to control oneself.

Problem Statement

Academic records centres and other registries data base including online information sites and students portals of many tertiary institutions in Africa and perhaps some of the advanced nations have become the last destination where some students who do perform abysmally in their academic pursuit and test performance sought to regain their cognitive ability and academic self-efficacy. By this, they try use every frantic efforts within their means to influence people to alter their grades for them, or change their test scores or even hack the records systems themselves if feasible. Aside these, they sometimes use hired agents who are professional systems hackers or service providers; this is often accompanied with a very huge financial offer. Most often the broader repercussions of such behaviours and attitudes among practitioners and students manifest itself in the corporate world after such individuals have graduated and occupy reputable positions in societies. Practitioners and who indulge in such clandestine activities sometimes become nation rockers and economic saboteurs. Materialism which has become the order of the day may involve some products from tertiary institutions in various societies.

By all indication, in the midst of the prevailing circumstances final achievements and records of students in academic institutions of many developing countries have lost their true potency and the high esteem which was once accorded individuals who made it to the ivory tower. No wonder many of the heinous crimes that are perpetrated against humanity are masterminded by scholars in various sectors of human organisations which include even the clergy in religious sects of the nations. Political positions which are meant to improve upon the economic wellbeing of citizens of a country are rather become family goldmines for those individuals, despite their level of education, the ecstasy associated with their profession as well as financial and material rewards. Employers are cheating their employees including many injustices and inequality in the distributions of resources of many human communities are recommitted by people who were taught to be scholars who should know better, but opposite is the case. Sometimes we all burry our heads in shame and scratch our heads when stories of continuous irregularities are told from academic circles.

The Purpose of the Study

The study sought to investigate the typology of records management practices in tertiary institutions in Ghana and development of a conceptual framework to explain the policy challenges of managing academic records in all categories of tertiary institutions.

2. The Theoretical Foundation and Literature Review

The fallen standard of education in almost every country, especially in Ghana has reached a record high and to the extent that products of the institutions can be termed as lemon products: per the lemon market theory, the market for lemon is a place where it is impossible to assess the quality of a product or service. The truth of this theory in a market where a seller of the products has more information than the buyer, the market will gradually deteriorate and may even eventually disappear when the market get to know the true nature of

the product. According to George A. (1972) the proponent of the theory, the main issues is that quality is inaccessible beforehand, thus giving sellers' incentives to present the product/ service as being of higher quality than its reality. The buyer however knows this will not take the average quality of the market into consideration at the initial stage of entry into the market until post purchase dissonance. This will have as a results that the quality of the product or service as being of higher quality than its reality. The buyer however knows this will not take the average quality of the market into consideration. This will have as a result that the quality of services or product will leave the market since they will only sell for average market of quality goods and services, therefore the lemon products and the market will shrink. The theory also talks about the cost of dishonesty which lies not only on the amount by which the purchaser is cheated, the cost, also must include the loss incurred from living legitimate business out of existence. Alluding to this theory in this study, products/services from contemporary tertiary institutions in many African countries may be described as lemon markets and products. The quality of academic achievements and students records cannot be ascertained any longer. This is due to the degree of dishonesty and less competitive nature of the achievements and records generated thereof. Students graduating from some of the public and private universities and as well as polytechnics' in Ghana confirm the polarized nature of the records keeping systems in the those institutions and the degree of malpractices which are associated with the final academic achievements of some students which no one has ever taken the trouble to investigate even when there are enough evidential proof of wrong doing. The wider effects are what happen in many business organizations where people occupying positions of trust abuse their positions through corrupt practices and some avoidable ill moral behaviour which have been the order of the day. People take pride in getting wealth through corrupt practices once they weren't caught in the act. With this, educational institutions have become the breeding grounds for looters and wreckers of nation's resources to the disadvantage of the voice less people in the society. In the educational institutions itself some high office holders prefer having their tribes men to work with for obvious reasons. These practices have execrably deepened the nepotism, tribalism and ethnic segregation in many academic institutions not only in sub-Saharan Africa but also in some of the far eastern countries of the world. China for example there is a concept known as Guanzi, this means you rob my back I also rob yours. This is a higher level connection leading to corrupt practices. There is therefore a high level of academic malpractices in many schools and colleges in China from time immemorial. The concept of meritocracy in academic achievement for-instance was borrowed from Ancient Chinese political philosophy where individuals who are so desirous of occupying a political office or vying for positions in government must be subjected to rigorous written test and public scrutiny and declare as successful before. During the era of the ancient Greece humanistic philosophy for an individual to occupy any public office he or she has to receive approval through public testimony of his or her moral uprightness and public oratory so to speak. The lessons from these historical records have not made any impact on the emerging generation and society. Several theories have explained these challenges and this study two of the have used to provide the theoretical foundation for the study. These are: The illusion of control and socio-Technical theories.

The Theory of Illusions of Control

The theory of the illusion of control (IOC) was first defined by Ellen Langer (1975) as an expectancy of a personal success probability that exceeds the objective probability that the outcome. This type of overconfidence is likely when an event that is at least partially determined by chance is characterized by factors that normally lead to enhanced outcomes under skill-based situations, such as choice, stimulus or response familiarity, competition, and passive or active involvement) anger, 1975). These skill-related cues thus give rise to individual's perceived control over an outcome, which in turn leads to an unrealistic subjective probability of success. While this effect was originally demonstrated with predominantly chance-driven events, the illusion of control can be even more pronounced in situations that have elements of both skill and chance, since individuals are even more apt to attribute success in the outcome due to skill factors.

Extensions to this theory have shown that factors other than skill-related cues may create and illusion of control. Outcome sequence (Langer and Roth, 1975), foreknowledge (Presson and Banassi, 1996), and the degree of correspondence between the normative solution and the encouraged solution of the problem frame

(Kahai et al., 1998) also increase individuals' perceived control over a task's outcome, resulting in an unrealistic expectation of the probability of success.

While Langer's original theory proposed that either passive or active involvement could lead to an illusion of control, individuals may be even more prone to the illusion of control with an active, collaborative exercise. Thus user confidence for decisions made with decision aids may be marked by overconfidence when the outcome is partially determined by change (Kottemann et al., 1994)

Diagram/Schematic of Theory
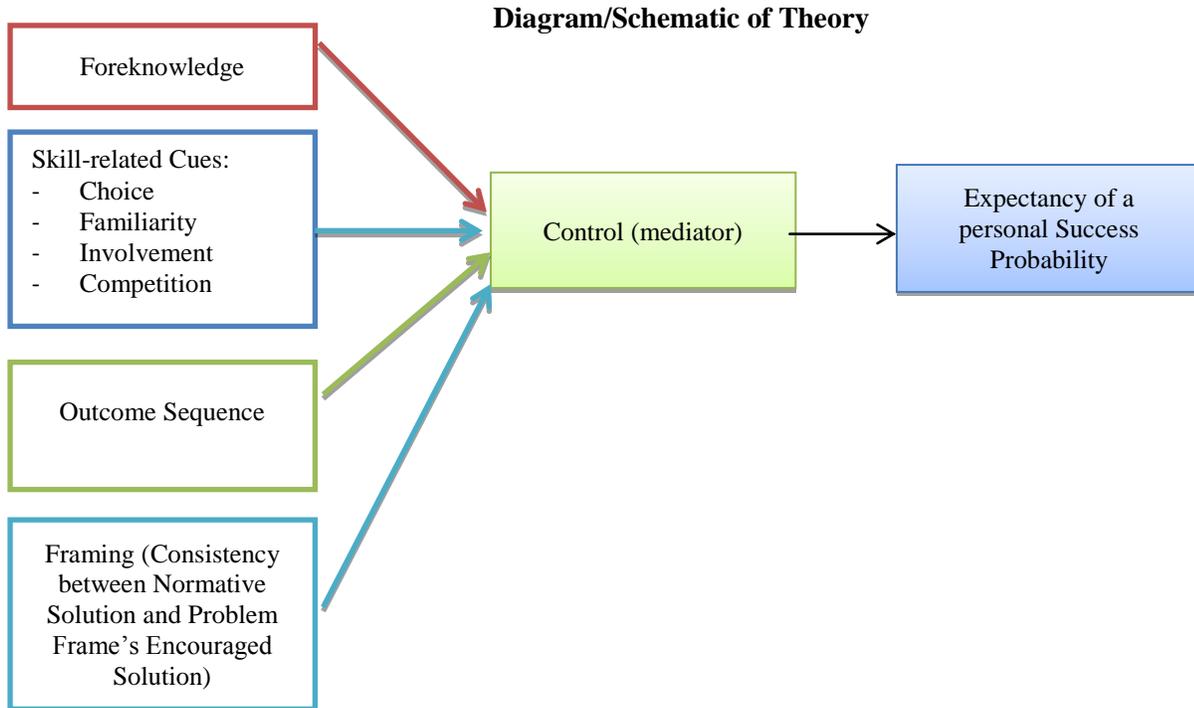
**Educational Records Creation and Management Strategies**

The inherent subjectivity of records being managed in tertiary institutions cannot be over emphasized as a result of several factors including human frailty or exigencies which would continue to rear its ugly heads in human societies. Generally, educational practitioners have devised number of measures for managing human errors in keeping of records and its management. These strategies   come in several forms which include the non-perfection in many of the things done in educational environments have shown profoundly that many things go wrong on detected by the ordinary human mind and eye. There were some instances where some individual s who claimed to be proficient in quality assurance unjustifiably denied students the right to pass through the educational systems for lack of poor academic work yet at the Sam times people who were rated perfect with their works were judged incorrect by other external assessors, this indicates that quality assurance in any human activity may be relative and should not be the one stop measure for deciding people's faith in many organisations including educational institutions across the societal divides.
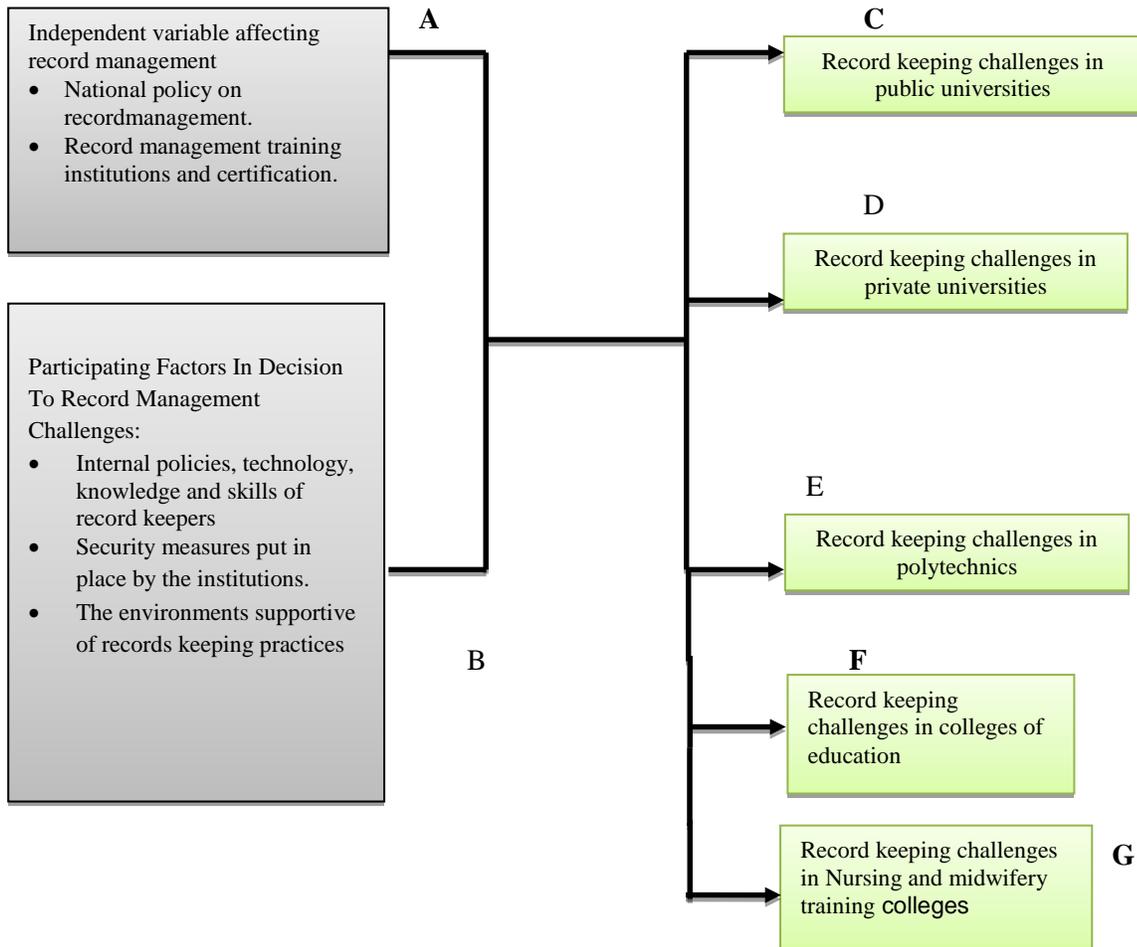
Socio-Technical Theory

In the middle of the 20th century some of the optimistic predictions of the impact of technology on business efficiency and productivity were being confounded. There were many examples of the introduction to technology being associated with implementation problems often linked to resistance by the work force and failure to achieve the expected benefits. Researchers, notably at the Tavistock Institute in London, with a background in the behavioral sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology) suggested that what was needed was a fit between the technical sub-system and the social subsystem which together made up an organization.

The technical subsystem comprises the devices, tools and techniques needed to transform inputs into outputs in a way which enhances the economic performance of the organisation the social system comprises the employees (at all levels) and the knowledge, skills, attitudes values and needs they bring to work environment as well as the reward system and authority structures that exist in the organization. Later some authorities broadened the definition to encompass the wider reach of the organization by including customers, suppliers, and the rules and regulations, formal and informal, which govern the relations of the organisation to society at large. This became known as the environmental subsystem.

Diagram/Schematic of theory
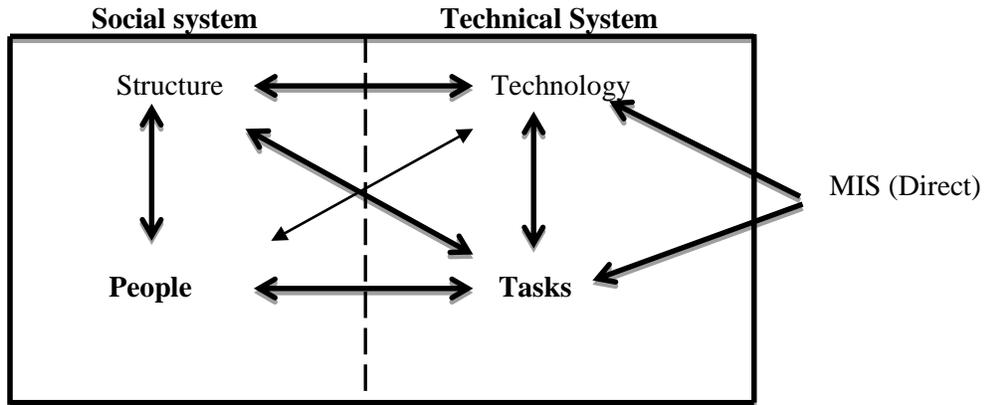
The conceptual Framework

The cornerstone of the sociotechnical approach, as the work of these researchers became known as the environmental subsystem. The cornerstone of the sociotechnical approach, as the works of these researchers become named, was that the fit was achieved by a design process aiming at the joint optimization of the subsystems: any organizational systems will maximise performance only if the interdependency of these subsystems is explicitly recognized. Hence any design or redesign must seek out of the impact each subsystem has on the other and design must aim to achieve superior results by ensuring that all the subsystems are working in harmony.

A number of authorities have outlined the way sociotechnical principles can be implemented. Albert Cherns enunciated a set of sociotechnical design principles in 1976 (Cherns, 1976) and these were updated in 2000 by Chris Clegg to encompass the new Internet based ICT (Leg, 2000). Enid Mum ford based on IS development methodology called ETHICS on sociotechnical principles (Mumford, 1995. Mumford 2003). She has published many detailed case studies involving the use of Ethics..

Two conflicting set of values underlie much sociotechnical thinking (Land, 2000). The first is a belief in the importance of humanistic principles. The main task of the designer is to enhance the quality of working life and the job satisfaction of the employee. In turn the achievement of these objectives will enhance productivity and yield added value to the organization. The second set reflects managerial values. Sociotechnical principles are merely instruments for achieving primarily economic objectives. Humanistic objectives have no value in themselves but if their achievement produces a better performance from employees leading to the fulfilment of the economic objectives well and good. This conflict has led to suspicion of sociotechnical ideas by managers and employees as represented, for example, by trade unions. Nevertheless, sociotechnical ideas permeate much in IS thinking even if not always referred to as such (Avgeroe et al, 2004).

The Conceptual Framework of Factors That Influence Record Management and Its Challenges in Tertiary Institutions, Ghana

The conceptual framework explains the deeper implication of policy lapses in management of academic records in many tertiary institutions in Ghana. The challenges emanate from lack of national policies directives for internal record management policies in various categories in tertiary institutions. Other participating variables include the scale competences of the record practitioners, the certification institutions from which they receive their training and the general application of the knowledge and skill acquired. Above all, the policy challenge in one institution may not differ from what happen in other institutions. However, the technological environment under which records are being managed also account for the challenges, as well as the human interphase which trigger the challenge. It means therefore that authorities in various institutions must put in place several strategies to ensure records security. This may include better conditions of service and general human resource organization policies

3. Results and Discussions

The below table shows that all the respondents agreed that their institutions have set policies and standards for managing academic records in tertiary institutions (mean = 2.5, stdv. = 0.80), assigned responsibilities and authorities (mean = 2.4, stdv. = 0.79), established and promulgated procedures for managing academic records (mean = 2.3, stdv. = 0.66), provided range of services relating to the management and use of records (mean = 2.4, stdv. = 0.82), and designed and administered specialised system for students' academic records (mean = 2.4, stdv. = 0.77). The formulation of these strategies is an indication of the commitment of the management of the institutions to protect the integrity of students' academic records. Despite these results from the study the reality underground in many of the tertiary institutions indicates that the irregularities associated with keeping and managing students records still persist. Students and some parents including practitioners in academic environments are influencing colleagues to redeem the abysmal academic performance and poor records of some students by changing their poor grades and exam scores without any official approval. These challenges apparently make management of   academic

institutions in the context of quality assurance in records creation, keeping and management practices insurmountable huddles to climb especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 1: Record Management Strategies in Tertiary Institutions

Strategies	Public univ.		Polytechnic		Nursing training		Teacher training		Private univ.		Total	
	Mean	Stdv.	Mean	Stdv.	Mean	Stdv.	Mean	Stdv.	Mean	Stdv.	Mean	Stdv.
Setting policies and standards	1.6	0.28	3.0	0.77	2.8	0.87	2.5	1.05	2.7	1.04	2.5	0.80
Assigning responsibilities and authorities	2.3	0.50	2.5	0.82	2.4	0.91	2.1	0.95	2.5	0.77	2.4	0.79
Establishing and promulgating procedures	2.0	0.79	2.3	0.57	2.6	0.55	2.2	0.79	2.3	0.58	2.3	0.66
Providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records	2.5	1.05	2.4	0.66	2.6	0.48	2.2	1.03	2.5	0.89	2.4	0.82
Instituting punitive measures for records keeping irregularities	1.7	0.73	3.1	0.83	2.8	0.67	2.2	0.69	2.6	1.16	2.5	0.82
Designing and administering specialized system for records	2.2	0.94	2.5	0.62	2.7	0.81	2.2	0.73	2.2	0.74	2.4	0.77
Integrating records management into business system and process	2.0	1.00	2.3	0.44	2.5	0.79	3.1	0.77	2.8	0.95	2.5	0.79

Source: Field survey, 2012   df = 12 $\chi^2 = 9.36$ P-value=

4. Recommendations

The stakeholders of the institutions should institute enforcement of moral Lessons in teaching in the class rooms for students and organise seminars on ethics and virtues in life for the staff members in the various departments, besides, employers must improve upon the salary and wages   and the long term benefits for their employees. These are some of the reliable measures to address the problem albeit lateral thinking approach.

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