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Research paper

Records Management Practices in Public Institution Archives

Nurul Hanis Kamarudin[1], *Saiful Fairuk Mat Yatin[1], Alwi Mohd Yunus[2], Kamarul Azwan Azman[3], Jafalizan Md Jali[4], and Mastura Md Zali

[1]Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Perdana, Selangor, Malaysia
**Corresponding author: *Nurul Hanis Binti Kamarudin: Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Perdana, Selangor, Malaysia*
Email: nurulhaniskamarudin@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore about records management practices in public institution archives. Identification types of records, policy, procedure, filing system and records management system is among the most important aspect in managing a record in the archives. This article was based on one propose case study that will be conducted in one of the public institution archives. The objectives of this case study are aiming to identify types of records kept, the policy and procedure used, the filing system and records management system used in one of the public institution archives in Malaysia. All objectives is to give awareness about the importance of good records management practices in ensuring all archival material collections of public institution archives can be protected for future reference. Future findings from this study can become a guide for proper records management practices, particularly in academic institutions, which are still lacking in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Records, Records Management, Public Institution Archives, Records Management Policy*

1. Introduction

Each Higher Educational Institution (HEI) has its own vision, mission and objectives, which must be achieved in order to increase the number of students with a good education background. In Malaysia, many HEI either public or private offer students in different courses as part of fulfill job requirements with various fields. Moreover, public institutions are under government's institution that has been divided into three categories, which are research universities, focused universities and comprehensive universities. Official Website of Ministry of Education Malaysia states there are 20 public institutions has been established, comprising of 5 research universities, 4 comprehensive universities and 11 focused universities [1].

Each category has its different functions, and it was in line with the objectives of Ministry of Higher Education. Other than that, public institution has various departments such as Administration, Registrar Office, Bursary, Library, Hal Ehwal Akademik (HEA), Hal Ehwal Pelajar (HEP) and so on. Each department kept different records. So, good records management practices are required because the public institution deal with the huge number of records such as student's record, academic staff records, non-academic staff records, financial records and others in order to run their functions in daily activities. The term "records" and "records management" sounds annoying for some people that do not have a good practice on records management because they need to handle records properly and lack of proper handling can give a big problem on retrieval process and evidence. People also need to change their file plan structure from beginning to the end when the right practices have been ignored. Nowadays, records and records management become the priority as part of ensuring all public institution functions run smoothly since records contain actual information, daily transactions and others.

Furthermore, college and university archives do not aware about the records management program where the process of preserving manuscript, records and document were neglected [2]. So, it is needed to have good records management practices in public institution archives in order to preserve all the archive's collections. The focus throughout this study is to focus on the records management practices in public institution archives because based upon the observation through the Internet and web browsing about the availability of archives department/archive's unit and archive's policy in public institution archives, researcher found that out of 20 public institution, 12 institutions already have archives department/archive's unit and only one public institution has an archive policy.

2. Problem Statement

There are several problems regarding the records management practices of the archives department of the public institution as stated below.

Types of Records

Burckel in his article assumes the basic principles articulated in works on archival administration require a good and fundamental program [3]. Moreover, a greater commitment to survey all segments of the academic community generally focuses on various collecting activities. Archives department of public institution has their own resources such as staff records, student records, administration records and vital records, which were valuable for historical reference, research and development. In the future, it archives

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resources can be good evidence if a failure to interpret or understand something correctly occurs and as mentioned by Ngoepe, resource and asset can increase the organization's efficiency which it is important to have an effective records management program that covers the full life cycle of record [4]. With the improper records management program in managing various types of record will surely affect the image of the institutions. So, all of this task should be conducted by records professional because they are qualified professionals as compared to other staffs.

Lack of Records Management Policy

Research by Barritt states the staff of the University of Michigan Archives and Records Program did not "do" records management and were reported to Director of a State Archive and NARA Administrator [5]. In truth, the staff did not handle a comprehensive records management program, but were using designated records management techniques and traditional archival procedures. Furthermore, it looks like records management, as practiced by Michigan State University Archives and Records Program and other colleges and universities do not meet the criteria for the records management program. Other than that, organizations may not effectively demonstrate the essential of managing recorded information as part of organization's performance and accountability without formal records management policies [6]. Another similar research on the lack of records management policy is found that four (4) out of nine (9) companies studied operated without formal records management policies during their exploratory case study of selected companies in Tanzania regarding the management of business records [7]. Records management audit that has been conducted [8] revealed that the absences of records management policies were quite challenged in managing records in organization.

Lack of Records Management Procedures

Burckel also explained in his article, there are some sensitive legal and administrative issues, requirements of additional staff and funding that related with archival programs which it was not a new thing for academic community [9]. These problems cannot be denied, and yet none seems intricate. Issues on storage of records, ensuring that the integrities of information were protected at all times and developing procedures for access to information is all of concern [10]. Moreover, organization that manages records without proper procedures of records management can cause any possible risks in the future. Findings from research at Moi University in Kenya indicate that poor records management caused by lack of records management procedures, insufficient level of awareness on records management, training and so on [11].

The Filing System is Not Well Maintained

The process of maintaining a provenance-based classification system is one of the frustrating problems faced by academic archivists because it was constantly changing and often puzzling lines of authority in colleges and universities [12]. At the same time, the outline of records group and subgroups is obsolete and no classification guide.

Improper Records Management System

The rapid development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) also has led organizations to wide use of computers and information system to support the operations of the archives department, in searching records that were required effectively. However, failure of organization in providing proper and user-friendly records system can give effects on the management of records at archives department and improper records system can give big problems in the future which records cannot be access for organization purpose [13]. In addition, it was a challenge for archives department when they lack of skilled staff because any changes or implementation of the new system requires proper training to make them familiar with the usage and functions [14]. Archives department should organize periodical training or workshop that related with work process or any latest development to increase knowledge and develop skills among staff.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate records management practices in one of the public institution archives in Malaysia. Research objectives are to identify types of records kept in public institution archives; analyze the policy used in public institution archives; find out the procedure used in public institution archives; explore the filing system used in public institution archives; and investigate records management system used in public institution archives.

2. Literature Review

Literature review for this study is reviewed based on research objectives as described below:

Types of Records

Archives department of public institution kept various types of records such as staff records, student records, administration records, academic records, corporate memories and so on. For example, one of the public institution in Malaysia were managing these various types of records such as a personal file of staff, student files, administration files and vital records, newspaper cutting and photo [15]. So, it is needed to conduct an appraisal process for all types of records to determine its retention period. Records that reach retention period and do not have value need to be dispose. Dispositions of records without value are necessary in order to reduce storage space. It became organization responsibilities to maintain an inventory of the types of records for future reference [16]. However, Saffady opines that there are several types of records must keep temporarily as part of compliance with laws and government regulations [17]. Records can be divided into two types, which are paper records and electronic records. Archives department of public institution has a huge number of paper records compared with electronic records. It has been confirmed by Keakopa that all government agencies have both types of records, but the volume of paper records is higher than electronic records [18].

Records Management Policy

A good records management requires policy as guidance and as stated by Emery records retention policy, retention period, classification procedures and destruction procedures are parts of records management in any organization [19]. The creation, storage, access, retention and disposal of records to an archives department of public institution require records management policy to avoid from any problems such as legal actions. Cook points out that establishment of policies and procedures before the creations of records are required for proper records management [20]. These policies and procedures also can assist organization through the auditing process. So, it is needed for any organization, including archives department of public institution to implement records management policy that complies with National Archives of Malaysia (NAM) to ensure all processes regarding the records management plan runs smoothly. Wamukoya mentions that work process in organization become more systematic when policy has been use as guidance, and also fulfills the need of records creators and users [21]. All records in the archives department of university must be arranged properly for easier access, and it is needed to be kept and protects records from accidental loss or destruction as describe in records management policy. London Borough of Bexley describes records management policy ensures that records are accessible and can be maintained through time [22].

Records Management Procedures

The implementation of records management procedures is necessary for any organization, including archives department of public institution because well documented procedures can protect records for long term access. ISO 15489 and the IRMT explained that tools and procedures in records and archive's management were needed in the implementation of policies about managing records [23-24]. Kalusopa and Ngulube highlight procedures for timely disposal of records that no longer needed is the most important to ensure the effective management of records [25]. Organization also must provide records management manual for all staff because Ricks, Swafford and Gow found that it was useful in standardization of procedures, training guides and contain information about updating policies and procedures [26].

Filing System

Filing system can ensure all the records are managed with the right ways for faster retrieval and access when it was needed. Other than that, classification of records must be developed during the creation of records to ensure an effective retrieval process [27]. Then, there is a relationship between classification roles and information retrieval [28]. In addition, each organization should have file plan structure to develop proper classification. Usually, records are classified based on functional activities within the organization, and centralized registry was required for standardized classification within departments. Shepherd and Yeo found that analyses of functional process and activities in organization were important for classification schemes [29]. At the same time, classification of records on the activities of departments must be related each other. Therefore, classifications are required for an effective records management program [30-31].

Records Management System

The advancement of technology requires the implementation of the records management system to manage records in the electronic form. It is important to develop the proper system that meets archives and records management requirements. Maguire points out that records management system can assist an organization in access information, enable sharing of documents, reduce problems on duplication of records, and it will ensure all the work process becomes more systematic [32]. Therefore, Electronic Records Management System (ERMS) is one of the records management systems that suitable for managing electronic records because National Archives of Australia define ERMS as automated systems used to manage records from the point of creation until disposal as part of evidence for future reference through the maintenance of appropriate contextual information (metadata) and links between records [33]. Besides that, a good records management system should have security aspects which only an authorized person can access the records. Aliza and Adnan opine that information security control is part of electronic system security which it can avoid from any alterations or changes on records content to ensure the authenticity, availability and reliability of records [34].

3. Conceptual Framework

Below is a conceptual framework to study records management practices in public institution archives. This framework has been developed based on research objectives. All the research objectives stated are required for the successful of records management practices in public institution archives.

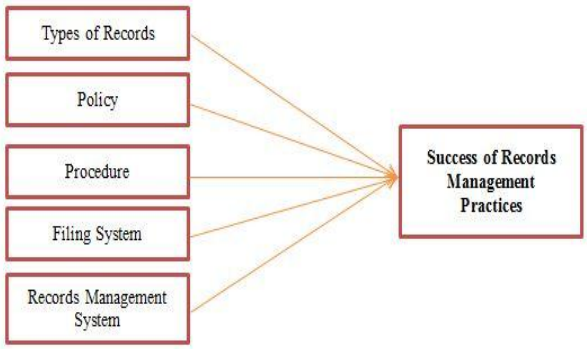


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for records management practices in public institution archives

4. Methodology

Research methodology is one of the ways for the researcher to get accurate result or decision based on the idea and knowledge. Effective research methodology is necessary for good finding. Researchers decided to use the qualitative study as methodology, and one of the public institution archives will be selected due to the time constraint and cooperation from a resource person. In terms of respondents, there is certain staff that can be key informants in this study that will be selected. In this study, the researcher proposes to collect data through a semi-structured interview with selected informants. Data will be analyzed using ATLAS.ti software because as mentioned by Ngalande, the researchers will get an accurate data analysis because it is a tool that can assist researchers to analyze unstructured data because there are certain data that cannot be analyzed by in a formal way [35]. The data also will be analyzed by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative encoding process which requires the coder to create, and themes must be listed based on the explicit code that has been created [36]. In this study, the process of thematic analysis will be conducted through several phases based on Braun and Clarke [37] as shown in the figure below.

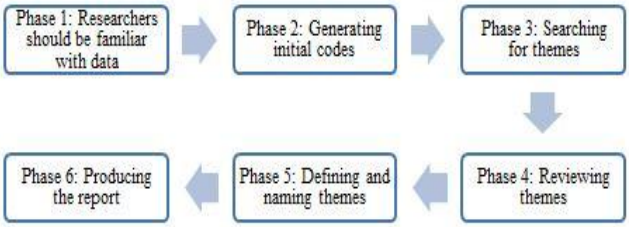


Figure 2:. Thematic analysis process

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, records management practices are important in managing archives department of public institution because records contain recorded information, which can be a good evidence for any claims or legal actions. Most of the public institution do not aware about the roles of archives department because it's significant are invisible. So, findings from this study can be a guide for other archives department of public institution to have effective records management programs. Public institution produced a huge number of records based on activities and transactions, which must be preserved for future use. All collections from public institution that have historical value should be retained permanently, and university archives are the proper place to preserve the collections to enhance research and development in related areas. Here, it can be concluded that types of records, policy, procedures, filing system and records management can ensure the success of records management practices.

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