

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT: The integrity of students' academic records is a critical pillar of quality assurance in higher education institutions (HEIs) globally. However, recent incidents in Northern Ghana have revealed significant deficiencies in academic records management systems. In one of the public university, a number of students were denied graduation certificates due to discrepancies in Cumulative Grade Point Averages (CGPAs) and final grades, attributed to clerical errors and, in some cases, suspected data falsification. This study investigated the institutional and operational factors contributing to these irregularities and proposed strategic interventions to restore and safeguard records integrity. Using an action research design and a qualitative case study approach, the study engaged key stakeholders involved in the creation, management, and use of academic records. Findings indicate that the existing hybrid records management system, combining manual and digital processes, lacks reliability, leading to data fragmentation, procedural delays, and increased risk of error. Institutional weaknesses such as inadequate staff training, poor data security, and deficient backup protocols further undermine system integrity. The absence of audit trails and weak access control mechanisms exacerbate vulnerabilities, especially in cases involving grade appeals and transcript verification. Additionally, the study found a disconnect between institutional expectations and the competence of staff managing academic records. Staff awareness of ethical standards and data protection protocols was also limited, informal, and inconsistently applied. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive institutional reforms, including capacity-building, modernization of recordkeeping infrastructure, and the establishment of robust data governance and compliance frameworks to ensure the long-term integrity of academic records in HEIs.

KEYWORDS: Academic records, Quality Assurance, Digital records, Higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' academic records, such as grades, transcripts, certificates, and enrollment history, constitute the official documentation of their academic journey and achievements. These records form the basis for awarding degrees, verifying qualifications, and facilitating further education or employment (UNESCO, 2019). While institutions themselves generate core academic transcripts and examination results, other components, such as entry qualifications, are verified externally, often from examining bodies like the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in the case of Ghana.

The integrity of the academic records is a fundamental pillar of institutional quality assurance frameworks globally (Yidana & Akuna, 2025; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). When academic records accurately reflect students' performance and progression, institutions are better positioned to graduate competent professionals, and employers are more likely to recruit individuals equipped with the necessary skills. This alignment ultimately supports economic growth by ensuring that management places the right individuals in the right roles within the workforce (World Bank, 2020).

Recognizing this, institutions of higher learning have adopted various measures to safeguard the integrity of students' academic records. For instance, many universities in Ghana require that all entry certificates submitted during the admissions process be verified with the relevant issuing authority (e.g., WAEC). However, the increasing digitization of academic records, while offering

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

efficiency and accessibility, has introduced new challenges related to data security, privacy, and system reliability (Okello-Obura & Kigongo-Bukenya, 2011).

To address these challenges, universities have developed records management policies and implemented various systems, including paper-based, electronic, and hybrid approaches. The successful implementation of these systems depends not only on robust policies and supportive technologies but also on the capacity of institutional personnel to manage these technologies effectively (Yidana et al. 2023; Akotia, 2020). However, in recent years, concerns have escalated regarding the reliability and authenticity of academic records due to incidents involving data manipulation, unauthorized access, administrative errors, and outright falsification (Ogunrombi & Kehinde, 2015). These weaknesses compromise institutional credibility, jeopardize students' academic and professional futures, and erode public trust in the higher education system.

In Ghanaian universities, administrative heads and their support staff frequently grapple with complex issues during the computation and validation of final-year students' records. Cases of incorrect data entry, mismatched student identification numbers, and missing grades are not uncommon. These often lead to last-minute corrections, some of which involve the arbitrary replacement or omission of records, practices that undermine professional standards in records management. More alarming are reports of deliberate falsification of academic records, sometimes perpetrated through collusion between staff and students (Mensah & Badu, 2022).

While staff bear responsibility for professional lapses, students also contribute to breaches of academic integrity through acts such as cheating and the submission of fraudulent documents. These unethical practices collectively diminish the value of academic credentials and pose a significant threat to the integrity of higher education. This study aimed to investigate the causes of lapses in academic record integrity and suggest measures to mitigate them.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The integrity of students' academic records is a cornerstone of trust in university education systems. In a well-functioning university, academic records should accurately reflect students' academic achievements and be free from manipulation, error, or falsification. In an ideal university environment, management upholds the integrity of students' academic records through robust, accurate, and tamper-proof systems. Academic data, including course grades, cumulative grade point averages (CGPAs), and graduation records, should be accurately entered, processed, and securely stored in a centralized digital system. University management should consistently verify the data through quality assurance and auditing processes. In this ideal state, university management will not withhold students' certificates due to clerical errors, record tampering, or falsification, and all records would be consistent, transparent, and verifiable.

Recent incidents at C.K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences highlight significant gaps in record management. Several students had their certificates withheld due to discrepancies in CGPAs and grades, either from clerical errors or suspected falsification. This situation highlights systemic weaknesses in academic data management, including inadequate data entry validation, insufficient quality assurance mechanisms, and limited accountability. These lapses not only affect individual students, denying them timely recognition of their academic efforts, but also cast doubt on the reliability of the institution's records. If left unaddressed, this poses a threat to the university's reputation, exposes it to legal and ethical risks, and erodes stakeholder confidence. There is therefore a pressing need to investigate the factors contributing to these irregularities and to propose strategic interventions to restore and uphold the integrity of academic records.

1.1.1 The Evidence or Indicators/Negative Effects/Consequences of the Problem

The problem of compromised integrity in students' academic records has had wide-ranging and measurable consequences across multiple levels of the university structure—individual, departmental, and institutional. At the individual level, affected students have suffered delays in receiving their academic certificates, which have hindered their ability to pursue further education or secure employment. At C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences, several students had their certificates withheld due to errors in CGPA computation or suspected grade falsification. These students faced uncertainty, reputational damage, and financial losses due to missed job or scholarship opportunities.

At the departmental and unit levels, academic and administrative staff responsible for records management face immense pressure, especially during graduation audits. Staff often engage in rework, re-verifying grades, manually correcting errors, or reconstructing lost data, resulting in a significant loss of time and productivity. Inaccurate records also create bottlenecks in the processing chain, delaying other departments (such as Exams and Records, IT Services, or the Registrar's Office) that depend on verified data to

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

prepare certificates or organize convocations.

Furthermore, tasks are frequently delayed or not performed at all due to incomplete data, leading to inefficiencies in broader institutional processes. For instance, when one officer delays record submission due to data inconsistencies, other officers who rely on that data to complete their tasks are rendered idle or must resort to informal workarounds. This delay creates a ripple effect of inefficiency throughout the university.

At the corporate or institutional level, the university suffers reputational damage when such errors become public or affect stakeholder confidence. Employers and accrediting bodies may question the credibility of issued certificates. Additionally, the cost of correcting such errors—through audits, reissuance of certificates, and administrative reviews—translates into financial losses and misallocated resources. The time and workforce spent addressing these issues could otherwise be used for strategic institutional development.

1.2. Main Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the factors that compromise the integrity of students' academic records at the Northern University and to propose strategic interventions to improve records management systems, enhance institutional credibility, and ensure academic quality assurance.

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

The researcher derived the following specific objectives from a classification of the significant causes identified in the literature review and practical analysis. Each objective targets a class of factors suspected to contribute to the performance gap:

A. Technological and Systems Factors

1. To assess the adequacy and reliability of the current academic records management system (manual, electronic, or hybrid) used by the university.
 - This specific objective examines whether outdated systems or poorly integrated platforms contribute to data inaccuracies or loss.
2. To evaluate the university's capacity for data security and protection of academic records against unauthorized access, manipulation, or system failure.
 - Focus on cybersecurity, system redundancy, and data backup protocols to ensure optimal performance and reliability.

B. Human Resource and Capacity Factors

3. To examine the competence, training, and professional capacity of staff involved in the management and processing of academic records.
 - Determines whether limited expertise or lack of training contributes to data entry errors and mishandling.
4. To explore the level of staff awareness and compliance with records management policies and ethical standards.
 - This specific objective assesses whether professional negligence or ethical lapses are prevalent among records officers.

C. Institutional Policy and Control Factors

5. To assess the effectiveness and enforcement of institutional policies, quality assurance mechanisms, and audit systems governing academic records.
 - Identifies whether there are internal control weaknesses or gaps in policy enforcement.
6. To investigate the institutional culture and ethical climate regarding academic integrity, particularly incidents of collusion or document falsification.
 - Focuses on organizational values, ethical behavior, and relationships between staff and students.

D. External and Student-Related Factors

7. analyze the role of student behavior and external document verification practices in contributing to records manipulation and entry errors.
 - Includes examination of fake certificates submitted during admissions or attempted fraud during academic progression.

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

8. To assess the impact of inaccurate or delayed academic records on students, staff, and overall institutional performance.
 - This specific objective confirms the real-world effects of the problem described in the earlier sections.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework of the Study

In higher education institutions (HEIs), managing academic records is crucial for ensuring that student and institutional records are preserved, accessible, and maintained with integrity over time. This research takes an empirical approach using the records continuum theory to explore how universities manage these records in HEIs. The records continuum theory (RCT) provides a robust framework for understanding records management practices, especially given the increasing complexities in recordkeeping due to technological advancements. The theory highlights the importance of collective memory, managing both organizational and personal memories for future generations, and how records evolve through transactions and processes, along with the ways they are documented visually (Muthoni, 2018). Myburgh (2005) describes it as a philosophical shift that effectively ties records management with the responsibilities of archivists, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these roles. The continuum model focuses on the management of records throughout their lifecycle, rather than simply their creation or duration, which, as Dodge (1997) notes, does not adhere to a specific "time" or "place."

The application of the records continuum theory helped the researcher to analyse the growing complexities of change, innovation, and the varied nature of records resulting from technological progress. Again, the theoretical framework is applied in the empirical review to analyze how academic records are created, managed, and archived in educational settings and the various potential integrity challenges of those records. The study aimed to highlight the pivotal roles that records managers and archivists play in the processes surrounding the creation, editing, management, and archiving of students' academic records, while also identifying the challenges and opportunities present in their work.

2.2. Problem/Situation Analysis

A review of the literature and practical experiences across higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, reveals that several interrelated factors commonly contribute to the deterioration of academic records' integrity. These factors span technical, administrative, institutional, and human-related domains.

2.2.1 Inadequate Records Management Systems

Many universities still rely on manual or hybrid systems that combine paper-based and electronic records. These systems are often fragmented, outdated, and vulnerable to data loss, tampering, or duplication (Okello-Obura & Kigongo-Bukenya, 2011). The absence of integrated student information systems (SIS) and automated verification tools increases the risk of human error in the computation, recording, and reporting of student data.

2.2.2. Weak Internal Controls and Oversight

A common cause of compromised academic records is the lack of standardized quality assurance processes and audit trails. In many cases, there are no independent checks to verify the accuracy of data before finalizing student transcripts and issuing certificates. Without adequate oversight mechanisms, inaccuracies or fraudulent alterations can go undetected (Ogunrombi & Kehinde, 2015).

2.2.3. Limited Staff Capacity and Training

University administrative and academic staff often lack adequate training in records management, data security, and the use of digital tools. As noted by Akotia (2020), record management personnel in many Ghanaian institutions have limited technical knowledge and rely heavily on informal or outdated practices. Limited knowledge leads to frequent data entry errors and inconsistent documentation, particularly during periods of high workload, such as end-of-semester assessments or graduation processing.

2.2.4. Technological Challenges and Digital Vulnerabilities

Poor infrastructure, limited server capacity, outdated software, or cybersecurity vulnerabilities frequently undermine electronic systems. Inadequate data backup protocols and system redundancies further increase the likelihood of data loss or unauthorized access, putting academic records at risk (Makori, 2013). Universities often lack robust firewalls or encryption, exposing sensitive data to breaches.

2.2.5. Institutional Culture and Ethical Lapses

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

Another underlying factor is the presence of weak institutional cultures of accountability and ethics. University management has found that some staff members have manipulated records in collusion with students, driven by bribery, favoritism, or pressure from stakeholders. As observed by Mensah and Badu (2022), a lack of consequences for unethical behavior and a poor reporting culture embolden such misconduct. Additionally, students themselves contribute to the problem by submitting forged documents or influencing outcomes through dishonest means.

2.2.6. Inadequate Policy Frameworks and Enforcement

Although most universities have policies on records management and academic integrity, the enforcement of these policies is often inconsistent. Ambiguities in roles and responsibilities, lack of documentation standards, and non-compliance with existing procedures make it challenging to ensure systematic recordkeeping (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Resource constraints and administrative inertia further weaken policy implementation.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed an action research approach to investigate and address the situation-specific challenge of compromised integrity in students' academic records at the Northern University. Action research was deemed suitable due to its participatory and problem-solving orientation, as well as its capacity to generate context-specific solutions involving relevant stakeholders.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study research strategy tailored to each specific objective. Given the multifaceted nature of the problem, encompassing technological, institutional, human, and ethical aspects, the data collection methods and instruments were tailored to each domain to identify the root causes and performance gaps contributing to the integrity challenges.

Table 1. Recalled Specific Objectives and Corresponding Methods

Objective	Information Needed	Target Respondents	Data Tools/Methods	Collection
1. To assess the adequacy and reliability of the current academic records management system	Type of system (manual/electronic), usage effectiveness, system challenges	Records officers, Exams office staff	ICT System audit checklist, structured interviews	
2. To evaluate the university's capacity for data security and protection of academic records	Data backup practices, cybersecurity measures, and the risk of unauthorized access	ICT officers, Registry staff	Interview guide, document analysis (policy/manuals review)	
3. To examine the competence, training, and professional capacity of staff	Staff qualifications, training history, job description, experience, challenges	Records officers, HR	Staff questionnaire, training audit checklist	competency
4. To explore the level of staff awareness and compliance with ethical standards and policy	Knowledge of data policies, reporting lines, sanctions, and ethics training	Records staff, Unit heads	Focus group discussion, ethics and compliance survey	
5. To assess the effectiveness and enforcement of institutional policies	Availability of policies, internal controls, audit trails, and frequency of enforcement	Academic affairs, Internal Audit, Quality Assurance	Document review, structured interviews	
6. To investigate the institutional culture and ethical climate	Staff perceptions of ethical climate, corruption reporting culture, and observed misconduct	Academic and admin staff, student reps	Anonymous reporting form	incident
7. To analyze student behavior and document verification procedures	Admission procedures, prevalence of fake documents, verification mechanisms	Admissions Students	Interviews, process audit, and policy document review	verification
8. To assess the impact of poor records on institutional effectiveness	Errors experienced, delays, withheld certificates, time/resource loss	Final-year Examinations Deans	Student survey, case study of affected students	

3.2. Population and Sampling

The study population includes all stakeholders involved in the creation, management, and use of student academic records at the

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

university. These include:

1. Records Management Officers
2. ICT and MIS staff
3. Admissions Officers
4. HR and Administrative staff
5. Academic Deans and HODs
6. Quality Assurance and Internal Audit officers
7. Students (particularly final-year and affected students)

The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to select key informants whose roles directly impact academic records management.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

1. Interview Guides – For in-depth engagement with heads of departments, ICT officers, and records managers.
2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Conducted with frontline records staff to explore lived experiences and systemic issues.
3. Document and Policy Reviews – Analysis of institutional records, policies, standard operating procedures, internal audit reports, and examination regulations.
4. System and Infrastructure Audit Checklist – Used to assess the adequacy of electronic systems, server security, and backup practices.

3.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed thematically, guided by the specific objectives. The researcher used the triangulation method to validate findings across different sources.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent, maintaining participant anonymity, and ensuring confidentiality for all participants. The researcher sought ethical clearance from the University Research and Ethics Committee. The researcher further ensured that no personal identifiers were linked to the collected data. The researcher additionally informed all participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.5. Limitations of the Methodology

Given the institutional sensitivity of academic records, some respondents may withhold critical information or underreport unethical practices. The researcher employed measures such as anonymous response mechanisms and triangulation of sources to mitigate this limitation.

4.0 FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented according to the specific objectives that guided the research.

4.1. Specific Objective 1: To assess the adequacy and reliability of the current academic records management system

The integrity of academic records is central to the credibility of any higher education institution. This study aimed to evaluate the adequacy and reliability of the university's current academic records management system. The study addressed this objective through a system audit and semi-structured interviews with records officers, ICT personnel, and examination office staff. The findings indicate that the university employs a hybrid system, combining manual (paper-based) records with an electronic academic management system (MIS). University management uses an electronic system mainly for course registration, grade entry, and transcript processing. However, historical records and some sensitive academic data are still kept manually in physical files. One of the record officers intimated:

“While current student records are in the system, files from before 2018 are still only available in hard copy”.

On the effectiveness of the system, staff generally found the electronic system user-friendly for routine operations (e.g., grade input, registration). However, system downtimes and slow response times during peak periods (e.g., end-of-semester exams) affected

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

efficiency. There was limited training for newly deployed modules, resulting in inconsistent data entry practices across departments. For instance, an examination officer stated:

"I mostly rely on colleagues to show me how to use the grade input portal because formal training was never provided".

The analyses further revealed system challenges, including data inconsistencies arising from partial digitization and a lack of integration between departments. The analyses also found issues ranging from weak data backup mechanisms and security vulnerabilities to limited access controls. One of the IT officers admitted that:

"There is no way to trace who made a change in the student file unless someone admits it. We share passwords."

The current academic records management system also shows moderate adequacy but limited reliability. The hybrid nature of the system reflects a transitional phase where university management adopts digital solutions but legacy practices persist. This dual approach results in data fragmentation, slows down processes, and increases the risk of errors. The findings also highlight significant institutional weaknesses in system training, data security, and backup protocols. These issues expose the institution to risks such as data loss, manipulation, and reputational damage, especially in cases involving student grade disputes or transcript verification.

4.2. Specific Objective 2: To evaluate the university's capacity for data security and protection of academic records.

Data security and academic record protection are essential for ensuring the credibility, confidentiality, and availability of academic information in universities. With the increasing digitization of academic records, universities must adopt effective data management systems and robust cybersecurity frameworks to protect against threats such as data loss, cyberattacks, and unauthorized access. This study assessed the current capacity of the university in securing academic records, with a focus on data backup practices, cybersecurity measures, and the risk of unauthorized access. ICT officers reported that data backup is conducted weekly for most critical systems. One respondent stated:

"We run weekly backups to an external hard drive and cloud server for the student information system, but not all departments follow a centralized procedure."

However, registry staff shared a contrasting perspective:

"We sometimes save copies of results on pen drives or external devices, but we are not always sure if they are being backed up centrally."

Further analysis of the available documents revealed that no institutional backup policy was available in the reviewed ICT policy documents. University management did not maintain backup logs consistently across all departments.

The findings further suggest an apparent disconnection between ICT operations and end-user departments, such as the Registry. While university management does backups at a technical level, there is a lack of awareness and consistency in data recovery plans. This lack of awareness and consistency increases the risk of partial or complete data loss in the event of system failure.

Regarding cybersecurity measures, interviews with key ICT personnel revealed the existence of basic cybersecurity protocols. One of the ICT staff members intimated:

"We have antivirus software and firewalls installed. We also have an acceptable use policy for all staff and students."

However, the study revealed critical weaknesses as indicated by the following response:

"Our antivirus is not always updated, and we do not have any intrusion detection systems in place," one officer admitted. Most staff use weak passwords, and some share login credentials when someone is absent."

Analysis of Documents, such as UCT policy and user manuals, suggests that they date back to 2018 with no updates since. There was no documented cybersecurity strategy or incident response plan in place. While some foundational cybersecurity measures exist, they are outdated and insufficient to address modern cyber threats. The lack of regular updates, monitoring tools, and cybersecurity training creates a vulnerable environment, potentially compromising academic records and the institutional reputation. On the issue of risk of unauthorized access, the registry staff expressed concerns about access to student records:

"There are no role-based access controls. Once you log in, you can view everything,

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

including grades, transcripts, and personal details."

Another ICT officer added:

"There is no two-factor authentication; as long as someone has the password, they can log in from anywhere."

Analysis of the available documents revealed that no formal access control policy, password rotation, or credential management policy was in place, and access rights logs were either unavailable or not maintained. The absence of granular access control, weak authentication mechanisms, and poor password practices significantly expose the academic records system to internal misuse and external breaches. These weaknesses undermine both data confidentiality and accountability.

The results thus suggest that the current state of data protection at the university poses serious risks. Loss or corruption of academic data due to weak backup strategies. Susceptibility to cyberattacks owing to obsolete cybersecurity measures. High potential for unauthorized access and data manipulation. These issues, if unaddressed, could lead to compromised academic integrity, legal consequences, and loss of stakeholder trust.

The university has made preliminary efforts toward securing its academic records, particularly through basic data backups and acceptable use guidelines. However, the absence of a coordinated institutional framework, outdated security policies, and lax access control practices leave the system exposed to significant risks. Strategic reforms in policy enforcement, technical upgrades, and staff training are crucial to enhancing the institution's data security capabilities and ensuring the integrity of its academic records.

4.3. Specific Objective 3: To examine the competence, training, and professional capacity of staff managing academic records.

The effective management of academic records depends heavily on the competence and capacity of staff in key offices such as the Registry and Human Resources. Staff qualifications, training, and role clarity are essential for maintaining data integrity, ensuring regulatory compliance, and supporting efficient academic administration. This assessment sought to evaluate the professional background, skill gaps, and training exposure of records management personnel.

Records Officers and Human Resource (HR) Officers were the target population for this specific objective. The researcher used a staff competency questionnaire, a training audit checklist, and other data collection tools, such as tracking training attendance, relevance, and frequency. Frequency counts of qualifications and training attendance supported thematic analysis of qualitative responses and audit data.

The analysis revealed that 70% of records officers held a Bachelor degree in information studies or business administration. In comparison, only 30% had a Master's degree or higher in relevant fields such as Records Management or Information Science. A senior records officer noted:

"I have been working here for 12 years, but I was trained on the job. My academic background is in secretarial studies."

Further analysis of the human resource data revealed that the majority of staff lacked formal certification in records management. While some officers have gained extensive experience, the lack of academic and professional qualifications directly related to records management raises concerns about technical competence, especially in adopting digital systems.

Regarding training history and professional development, an audit checklist revealed that 40% of records officers had not attended any formal training in the last 3 years. Of those who had received training, most sessions were ad hoc, internally organized, and lacked certification. A respondent indicated that:

"The last time I had training was during the migration to the new system in 2021. It lasted just one day."

Another respondent stated that:

"We are usually informed about training late, and sometimes they are not directly related to our core tasks."

These results indicate a notable gap in ongoing professional development, with limited exposure to contemporary best practices in digital records handling, data security, and student information system operations. The data also indicate that 50% of records officers reported having no written job description, relying instead on verbal instructions and routines learned from colleagues. One officer noted:

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

"We do not have a clear scope of duties. Sometimes, we handle academic records, attend meetings, respond to student queries, and even take on HR tasks."

The absence of formal job descriptions contributes to role ambiguity, inconsistent performance, and inefficient task delegation. These weaknesses also limit accountability and performance evaluation.

Emerging themes from the interview data revealed several challenges, including a lack of resources (computers, updated software), limited staff numbers resulting in work overload, the absence of training or refresher courses, and poor communication between departments. One of the respondents stated that:

"Sometimes I use my laptop to do official work because our unit has only one working computer. We are few, and when someone is absent, the whole office slows down."

These operational challenges erode staff motivation and compromise the quality of academic recordkeeping. The study identified the burden of multitasking, outdated infrastructure, and lack of recognition as major demotivating factors.

The university is over-reliant on experience-based competence, without ensuring that staff meet the academic and professional standards required for their roles. Inadequate training structures hinder staff adaptation to evolving academic records systems, including digitization and cybersecurity expectations. Job ambiguity and under-resourcing reduce efficiency and increase the risk of errors or non-compliance with academic data protocols.

This assessment revealed a mismatch between institutional expectations and the existing competence and capacity of staff managing academic records. Though many staff members are experienced and dedicated, they lack the necessary academic background, structured training, and resources to function optimally in an increasingly digitized environment. Strategic investments in recruitment, training, and job design are essential for ensuring the integrity, efficiency, and sustainability of academic records management.

4.4. Specific Objective 4: To explore the level of staff awareness and compliance with ethical standards and policy in academic records management.

Compliance with ethical standards and institutional policies is fundamental to safeguarding the integrity of academic records and maintaining institutional accountability. Staff members who manage academic records are expected to adhere strictly to rules concerning data confidentiality, reporting procedures, and institutional codes of conduct. This study assessed staff awareness and adherence to ethical guidelines, focusing on their knowledge of data policies, reporting structures, sanction regimes, and ethics training.

The target respondents include records staff and unit heads. The study employed focus group discussions with records staff and unit heads. The researcher utilised an ethics and compliance survey to measure awareness of policies, ethical attitudes, and adherence. The researcher employed thematic content analysis for qualitative responses from FGDs and descriptive statistics for survey results. Some participants were aware of the existence of institutional policies but had not thoroughly reviewed them. A records staff member commented:

"I have heard about the data protection policy, but I have never seen the document or had it explained to me."

Several unit heads expressed concern about staff indifference:

"The policy documents exist, but staff rarely engage with them unless there is a problem."

The survey results further indicate that only 36% of respondents reported having read or reviewed any ethics or data management policy in the last 12 months. 45% could not identify where to locate official policy documents on ethics or data handling. The result suggests that there is a low level of policy literacy among staff responsible for handling academic records. Although institutional documents exist, they are not widely disseminated, nor are they incorporated into routine staff engagements. On the clarity of reporting lines and institutional channels, most staff members were unclear about formal reporting lines in cases of ethical breaches or data mishandling. A unit head stated:

"There is confusion. Some staff report directly to ICT, others to the Registrar. It is not always clear who handles ethical concerns."

The survey results indicate that only 41% of respondents said they knew whom to report to in the event of a data breach or ethical

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

dilemma. Again, over 50% felt that the reporting procedures for ethical concerns were not transparent or communicated. The ambiguity in reporting structures discourages ethical vigilance and weakens accountability. This weakness exposes the university to risk, especially where breaches go unreported due to a lack of clarity or fear of reprisal. Many participants were unaware of the specific sanctions for breaches related to academic records. One records officer mentioned:

"I do not think people know what happens if they share student results or access files they are not supposed to."

Survey data complemented this finding. 61% of staff were unaware of any disciplinary actions for ethical misconduct involving student data. A minority (18%) correctly identified sanctions listed in the university's disciplinary code. The lack of awareness about sanctions reduces the deterrent effect of ethical policies. Staff cannot be expected to comply with rules they are unfamiliar with, especially if they perceive ethical lapses to be inconsequential or unpunished. The analysis revealed that most staff had never received formal ethics training. A unit head shared:

"When staff are hired, there is no orientation on ethics. They learn on the job and pick things up as they go."

According to the survey results, only 22% of respondents had received ethics or data confidentiality training in the past two years. Staff who had attended training demonstrated higher awareness of reporting structures and policy details. There is a critical gap in ethics education and training. Lack of structured training contributes to a culture of informal practice and increases the likelihood of unintentional policy breaches.

The results have several implications. First, low levels of awareness and training on ethics-related policies create an environment of informal practice, which could lead to data mishandling or violations of student privacy. Second, ambiguity in reporting lines and lack of knowledge about sanctions diminish staff confidence in handling ethical dilemmas, making compliance reactive rather than proactive. The university's risk exposure is heightened, especially in the event of data breaches that go unreported or are mishandled by uninformed staff.

This study reveals a significant gap in staff awareness and compliance with institutional ethical standards and data protection policies. While most staff recognize the importance of ethical conduct, their knowledge is informal, fragmented, and unstructured. To ensure the integrity of academic recordkeeping and reduce institutional risk, the university must invest in ethics education, clarify policy communication, and foster a culture of accountability.

4.5. Specific Objective 5: To Assess the Effectiveness and Enforcement of Institutional Policies:

The effectiveness of institutional policies regarding academic records is fundamental in safeguarding the integrity of academic records. This research objective sought to determine the effectiveness of institutional policies within the Northern University. The Academic Affairs Directorate, Internal Audit Unit, and Quality Assurance Directorate were engaged to provide information for this objective. The researcher carried out a document review and structured interviews with the relevant stakeholders.

Document reviews confirmed the existence of several key institutional policies governing academic records, including the Records Management Policy (2017), ICT Usage Policy (2019), and Examination Guidelines (2020). However, interviews with officials from the Internal Audit and Quality Assurance units revealed notable inconsistencies in the enforcement of these policies. Internal audits were reportedly irregular and often constrained by limited human and logistical capacity. One respondent from the Internal Audit Unit remarked:

"We have the policies, but due to inadequate staff and competing tasks, we do not conduct regular audits. Sometimes it takes a major issue before any enforcement action is triggered." (Interviewee, Internal Audit Unit)

Another Quality Assurance officer commented on the reactive nature of enforcement:

"Enforcement is mostly complaint-driven. Until someone raises an issue or an error becomes public, most departments continue with business as usual." (Interviewee, Directorate of Quality Assurance)

The study observed a significant gap between policy formulation and implementation. While protocols for quality assurance exist on paper, their application was found to be uneven across departments. Some units maintained rigorous compliance routines, while

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

others had no structured internal checks. A member of the Academic Affairs Directorate highlighted this disparity:

"There is no uniformity. Some faculties are very particular about compliance; others do not even hold periodic reviews. There is no follow-through mechanism from management." (Interviewee, Academic Affairs Directorate)

Additionally, interviews revealed that some units lacked proper audit trails for academic records, which impeded accountability and traceability in cases of discrepancies. A respondent explained:

"The challenge is that we still rely on manual inputs for some critical processes. When something goes wrong, it is difficult to trace who made the change and when." (Interviewee, Records Officer)

These findings underscore the need for more robust and enforceable systems for policy compliance, regular auditing, and the establishment of automated audit trails. HEIs must strengthen their institutional capacity to transition from reactive to preventive enforcement strategies.

4.6. Objective 6: To Investigate the Institutional Culture and Ethical Climate

This specific objective sought to determine staff perceptions of the ethical environment of the university, particularly about the integrity of students' academic records. The study examined the willingness of staff and students to report misconduct or unethical practices and assessed the broader ethical climate within the institution. Respondents included academic and administrative staff, as well as student representatives. Data collection tools included focus group discussions and anonymous incident reporting forms. Analysis of the data revealed a mixed ethical climate within the university. While a significant number of staff acknowledged efforts by university management to uphold professional ethics, there was pervasive scepticism about the effectiveness of internal accountability mechanisms. A senior administrator stated:

"The university talks a lot about ethics during orientation and official events, but in practice, people get away with unethical behavior. Reporting someone—especially a superior—is risky." (Academic staff member, Faculty of Education)

Several respondents echoed this concern about retaliation, particularly junior staff and student leaders. The fear of victimization emerged as a significant deterrent to reporting unethical conduct. One junior administrative officer shared:

"Even though we are encouraged to speak up, I know colleagues who were sidelined or transferred after reporting issues. There is no real protection." (Junior administrative officer, Registry)

The anonymous incident reporting forms reflected similar sentiments, with many respondents citing concerns about confidentiality. One incident form noted:

"I witnessed grade tampering once, but I did not report it because I knew the person involved was connected. There is no guarantee that anonymity will be respected." (Anonymous respondent, incident report submission)

Moreover, students and lower-level staff reported feeling excluded from key decision-making processes, which they perceived as fostering favoritism and undermining ethical standards. A student representative remarked during a focus group:

"Some students are given special treatment when it comes to results processing. We have raised these concerns before, but nothing changes. It feels like ethics apply only to those without power." (SRC representative)

The study identified the lack of a formal ethics oversight body as a structural gap. Respondents frequently cited the absence of a dedicated ethics committee as a weakness in the university's governance structure. One senior academic explained:

"We need an independent body to handle ethics complaints—not internal units that have conflicts of interest. Right now, it is like marking your script." (Senior lecturer, School of Business)

Additionally, many staff expressed the need for more regular and practical ethics training, especially for newly appointed officers.

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

A quality assurance officer suggested:

"We do not do enough when it comes to ethics education. A one-time briefing is not sufficient, especially given the pressure and temptations staff face daily." (Quality Assurance Unit respondent)

Institutional culture and ethical climate play a critical role in maintaining the integrity of academic records, ensuring transparency, and building trust in university governance. The findings from this study revealed a mixed ethical climate within the university. While there was general acknowledgment of formal commitments to professional ethics, many staff and student respondents expressed skepticism about the effectiveness and enforcement of ethical standards and whistleblowing mechanisms.

The concern raised by a senior administrator—that “reporting someone, especially a superior, is risky”—reflects what Brown and Cloke (2005) refer to as “ethical silence”, a condition in which organizational culture discourages dissent or reporting of wrongdoing, particularly when power asymmetries are pronounced. This finding aligns with Miceli, Near, and Dworkin’s (2008) analysis, which highlights fear of retaliation as one of the most significant deterrents to whistleblowing, particularly in hierarchical institutions such as universities.

Consistent with this literature, respondents in this study noted that whistleblowing is often met with subtle forms of retaliation—such as reassignment, exclusion, or professional stagnation. As one junior administrative officer put it, “There is no real protection.” This is emblematic of what Rothschild and Miethe (1999) term “symbolic protections”, where policies exist on paper but lack enforcement or institutional backing.

4.7. Objective 7: To Analyze Student Behavior and Document Verification Procedures

This objective sought to determine the university’s admission practices, document verification processes, and the prevalence and detection of forged or falsified academic documents. Admissions officers and students were targeted for information through semi-structured interviews and a document audit.

Interviews with Admissions officers revealed that while a formal process for document verification exists, its implementation is often constrained by limited access to external databases, a lack of modern verification tools, and human resource challenges. As one officer explained:

"We try to verify all submitted certificates, especially from unfamiliar schools, but without direct access to the WAEC database or similar systems, it becomes guesswork sometimes." (Admissions Officer 1, Central Admissions Unit)

A document audit of 100 randomly sampled student files revealed discrepancies in 7% of the cases, including altered certificates, missing verification stamps, and mismatched academic histories. Another admissions officer expressed concern about workload and verification time constraints:

"During peak admission periods, we receive thousands of applications. It is not always possible to verify each document thoroughly. We prioritize obvious red flags, but some slip through." (Admissions Officer 2, Faculty Desk)

Some students, when interviewed, acknowledged that instances of forged documents were not uncommon and often went unpunished due to weak investigative follow-up. One student noted:

"I have heard stories of people submitting fake results. It is like everyone knows, but no one checks or gets caught unless it is something undeniable." (Level 200 Student, Faculty of Arts)

This apparent tolerance or oversight has created a perception of impunity, particularly when cases are not escalated or when verification is based solely on manual inspection. Another student explained:

"You can even print a results slip, and it looks real. If you are lucky and the officer is in a hurry, it might go through. People know how to exploit the gaps." (First-year Student, Department of Business Administration)

Interviews with staff also revealed a lack of up-to-date procedures to detect sophisticated document fraud, particularly for applicants

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

from foreign institutions or informal educational settings. An admissions supervisor stated:

"The fraudsters are getting smarter. Some forgeries are so well done that, without digital verification, you would not notice. We badly need a system that can interface with WAEC and international exam bodies." (Senior Admissions Supervisor, Academic Affairs)

A review of the university's admissions policy confirmed that while procedures exist for document scrutiny, they have not been revised in over five years, leaving them out of step with current trends in credential fraud. Staff highlighted the need for inter-institutional collaboration and investment in digital verification tools.

"We are operating in a digital age, but still doing things manually. Until we adopt secure online systems and partner with source institutions, the problem will persist." (ICT Staff Member, University Admissions Support)

4.8. Objective 8: To Assess the Impact of Poor Records on Institutional Effectiveness

This specific objective sought to determine the errors in students' records, delays in graduation or issuance of certificates, and the time lost, as well as administrative inefficiencies in data or records management. Respondents included final-year students, examination staff, and Deans of Schools.

Survey data from 400 final-year students showed that 28% had experienced at least one error in their academic record, mostly related to course registration, grade computation, or transcript inconsistencies. Of these, 60% reported delays in accessing their academic transcripts or graduation clearance.

Case studies involving students affected by withheld certificates indicated that such errors could take between 2 and 6 months to resolve, often requiring repeated visits to departmental offices. One affected student lamented:

"I had to go to the exams office four times before they finally corrected my CGPA. Each time, I was told to bring new documents or see a different officer."

Another student shared:

"The delay in issuing my transcript cost me a scholarship. By the time I received it, the deadline had passed."

Examination staff acknowledged that the absence of a fully centralized digital records system and frequent manual overrides contributed to persistent data integrity issues. One officer remarked:

"We still use Excel sheets for some parts of the grading process. Mistakes happen, especially when different people enter data at different times."

Deans reported that such inefficiencies not only affected student progression but also placed reputational burdens on faculties, especially when transcripts were required for scholarships or job placements.

"We have had instances where employers or foreign universities questioned the credibility of our transcripts because of date discrepancies or inconsistent formatting," said one Dean. Another noted: "Our staff spend too much time on error corrections—time that could have been used to support academic planning or curriculum review."

These findings underscore the far-reaching consequences of poor records management, from student disadvantage to institutional inefficiency and reputational harm.

5.0. DISCUSSION

The integrity and reliability of academic records management systems are essential for ensuring institutional accountability, protecting student rights, and enhancing the operational efficiency of higher education institutions (Mutula & Wamukoya, 2009; UNESCO, 2021). The findings of this study reveal that the university under review utilizes a hybrid system—comprising both manual and electronic components—for managing academic records. While this arrangement reflects progress toward digitization, it also exposes critical challenges that undermine both adequacy and reliability.

The use of a hybrid records management system—where current student records are managed electronically while historical records remain paper-based—is not uncommon in developing contexts (Asogwa, 2012; Kalusopa & Ngulube, 2012). This transitional state

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

often results in data fragmentation, procedural inconsistencies, and difficulties in retrieving complete student records. This finding is consistent with Ngulube (2004), who argues that poor integration between paper-based and electronic records can delay institutional response time and complicate administrative workflows, particularly during transcript requests or student complaints. While the electronic system was generally perceived as user-friendly for tasks such as registration and grade entry, its reliability is compromised by frequent downtimes during high-demand periods and insufficient user training. This mirrors findings by Kemoni and Ngulube (2008), who note that many African universities underutilize digital management systems due to a lack of sustained training and user engagement.

The absence of structured training leads to inconsistent data entry practices, which in turn compromise data quality and the overall credibility of academic outputs. One of the most alarming findings was the absence of user-level access controls and audit trails, raising significant concerns about data security and accountability. The practice of sharing passwords undermines any attempt to maintain data integrity or trace data manipulation. According to Roper and Millar (1999) and Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005), proper access control mechanisms, data authentication protocols, and change logs are non-negotiable components of a reliable records management system. Their absence increases the risk of fraud, unauthorized changes, and institutional vulnerability during external audits or accreditation reviews.

The limited integration between the Academic Management System (AMS) and other university units emerged as another barrier to system adequacy. Disconnected systems reduce the capacity for real-time data sharing, inhibit institutional decision-making, and impair service delivery (Mutula, 2010). The findings reaffirm UNESCO's (2021) position that integration and interoperability are foundational to modern educational governance, especially in the era of international academic mobility, where timely and reliable documentation is essential.

The protection of academic records is a fundamental component of institutional credibility, particularly in the context of increasing digitization and the growing frequency of cyber threats. Adequate data security ensures the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of academic information—a prerequisite for maintaining trust among stakeholders and complying with international best practices in higher education management (UNESCO, 2021; Mutula, 2010).

The findings show that although some weekly backup routines are in place—particularly for the student information system—there is no centralized or consistently enforced institutional backup policy. Backups are carried out on external hard drives and cloud servers in specific departments, but other units rely on ad hoc solutions such as pen drives, with little or no documentation. This fragmented approach not only reflects poor coordination but also increases the risk of partial or total data loss in the event of hardware failure, cyberattacks, or disasters.

These findings echo concerns raised by Asogwa (2012) and Kalusopa and Ngulube (2012), who emphasize that universities in sub-Saharan Africa often lack comprehensive digital preservation strategies. Without formalized backup policies and automated recovery systems, academic institutions face heightened vulnerability to data loss, which can significantly disrupt administrative processes and damage institutional credibility.

The university's current cybersecurity infrastructure, although rudimentary, is severely outdated and insufficient for the evolving digital landscape. Basic firewalls and antivirus software are installed, and there is an acceptable use policy. However, weaknesses such as non-updated antivirus software, lack of intrusion detection systems, and poor password management practices suggest that cybersecurity is treated as a peripheral concern rather than a strategic priority. The finding that the antivirus is not constantly updated, and there are currently intrusion detection systems in place, highlights a dangerous gap in proactive threat detection and response. As Reddy and Reddy (2014) argue, relying solely on passive defences exposes educational institutions to sophisticated cyberattacks, particularly ransomware and data breaches targeting confidential student records.

In addition, the absence of a cybersecurity strategy, incident response plan, or regular staff training violates the principles of best practice as laid out in international frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014). Institutions without these frameworks are unlikely to detect, mitigate, or recover from cyber incidents effectively (OECD, 2020).

Equally concerning is the lack of access control protocols, which compromises both data confidentiality and accountability. The study found no implementation of role-based access control (RBAC), two-factor authentication, or password rotation. Once logged in, users could reportedly access a wide array of student data—ranging from grades to personal information—without restrictions.

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

The findings further revealed the absence of role-based access controls. These findings reflect the absence of a secure identity and access management (IAM) system, a foundational element of data protection. According to Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005), poor user authentication and uncontrolled access to academic records increase the likelihood of data manipulation and reputational harm. These gaps may also constitute violations of student privacy rights under national data protection legislation, such as Ghana's Data Protection Act, 2012 (Act 843).

Survey data from 400 final-year students indicated that 28% had experienced at least one error in their academic record, mostly related to course registration, grade computation, or transcript inconsistencies. Of these, 60% reported delays in accessing their academic transcripts or obtaining graduation clearance. This finding aligns with Mutula and Wamukoya (2009), who argue that many African universities face significant challenges in managing student records due to inadequate digital infrastructure and staff capacity, resulting in frequent delays and administrative bottlenecks.

Case studies of students affected by withheld certificates revealed that such errors could take between 2 and 6 months to resolve, often requiring repeated visits to multiple offices. These testimonies reflect what Roper and Millar (1999) describe as a "systems failure" in academic records management, where fragmented workflows and poor interdepartmental communication significantly hamper student service delivery.

Examination staff acknowledged that the absence of a fully centralized digital records system and frequent manual overrides contributed to recurring data integrity issues. This finding is consistent with Ngulube (2004), who emphasizes that reliance on manual or semi-digital systems in educational institutions increases the risk of clerical errors, data duplication, and loss of institutional memory.

Deans of Schools reported that these inefficiencies not only delayed student progression but also undermined the institution's reputation, especially when transcripts were required for scholarship or job placement purposes. The literature further supports this concern. UNESCO (2021) underscores that academic record integrity is foundational to institutional accountability, international recognition, and quality assurance in higher education. Moreover, Asogwa (2012) emphasizes that effective records management is essential for transparency, timely decision-making, and efficient service delivery in African universities.

The findings from this study reinforce growing concerns within the global higher education sector about the integrity of admissions processes and the adequacy of document verification systems. The detection of forged academic credentials in 7% of audited cases, alongside staff and student admissions of known but unreported forgeries, aligns with existing literature suggesting that fraud in academic admissions remains an under-addressed issue, particularly in low-resource settings.

According to Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009), the massification of higher education—particularly in developing countries—has increased pressure on admission systems, leading to gaps in regulatory oversight and quality control. This challenge is compounded by limited technical infrastructure and weak inter-institutional collaboration, both of which were evident in the present study.

The admissions officers' remarks regarding high workloads and insufficient time to vet documents are echoed by Ziderman (2009), who argued that many African universities operate under administrative constraints that compromise their ability to enforce quality assurance standards. Limited staffing, outdated verification procedures, and a lack of integration with national examination bodies make systems vulnerable to exploitation by applicants with forged documents.

Fearon et al. (2021) observe that in contexts where technological solutions are lacking, document authentication becomes highly subjective, increasing the likelihood of error and the influence of informal networks. As revealed in this study, the perception that "connected" applicants can bypass verification checks mirrors this concern and points to systemic inequality in the enforcement of rules.

Furthermore, the student's admission that "everyone knows" about the potential to submit forged credentials without consequences supports the claim by Sastry (2004) that weak accountability mechanisms create a permissive culture for unethical behavior. This culture of impunity is further sustained when institutions fail to investigate reported anomalies—a trend also noted by Hallak and Poisson (2007), who argue that ineffective internal audit systems reduce trust and increase tolerance for corruption in education.

Notably, the findings highlight the absence of updated policies to address emerging forms of document fraud, such as digitally altered certificates and forged online transcripts. In this regard, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2021) advocates for the adoption of secure digital verification systems, interlinked with national and international examination boards, as a pathway

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

to strengthen integrity in admissions processes.

Digital solutions such as blockchain-based credentialing (see Grech & Camilleri, 2017) and credential evaluation portals like the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) offer scalable strategies for mitigating fraud. However, as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund, 2018) reports, many institutions in sub-Saharan Africa lack the financial and technical capacity to adopt such tools at scale, necessitating targeted investment and policy support.

The present study also points to a broader issue of ethical climate and institutional culture. The reluctance of staff to report suspected forgeries—driven by fear of victimization—suggests a lack of whistleblower protection mechanisms. This revelation resonates with Transparency International's (2016) findings that educational institutions often fail to protect individuals who report malpractice, thereby eroding confidence in accountability structures.

The effectiveness of institutional policies is essential for ensuring the integrity, transparency, and accountability of academic records management. While key policies such as the Records Management Policy (2017), ICT Usage Policy (2019), and Examination Guidelines (2020) were found to be in place, their enforcement appeared inconsistent and largely reactive. This gap between policy formulation and implementation resonates with the broader literature on higher education governance in Sub-Saharan Africa, which often highlights a disconnect between formal policy frameworks and day-to-day administrative practice (Materu, 2007; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). For instance, Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland (2012) observe that although many African universities have developed comprehensive internal policies, weak institutional capacity and governance challenges frequently impede their effective operationalization.

Interview data from this study confirmed this trend. A respondent from the Internal Audit Unit noted, "We have the policies, but due to inadequate staff and competing tasks, we do not conduct regular audits." This revelation suggests that staffing constraints directly impact policy enforcement—a concern echoed by Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006), who argue that public universities in Africa suffer from chronic under-resourcing, affecting the functionality of internal quality and audit mechanisms.

Furthermore, the finding that enforcement is largely complaint-driven underscores what McPherson and Schapiro (1999) describe as a culture of "reactive accountability," where institutions respond only when crises or errors arise, rather than building preventive systems. The quote from a Quality Assurance officer—"Until someone raises an issue or an error becomes public, most departments continue with business as usual"—illustrates this institutional weakness.

The lack of audit trails in some departments also aligns with literature on information governance and digital transformation in African universities. According to Asogwa (2013), the absence of integrated electronic records systems in many institutions leads to fragmented data, poor traceability, and increased vulnerability to manipulation or loss. This study corroborates such findings, as one records officer noted: "We still rely on manual inputs for some critical processes. When something goes wrong, it is difficult to trace who made the change and when."

In addition, the uneven application of quality assurance protocols across departments supports assertions by Cloete, Maassen, and Bailey (2015) that African higher education institutions often operate in silos, with weak interdepartmental coordination and a lack of institutionalized quality cultures. A respondent from the Academic Affairs Directorate emphasized: "There is no uniformity. Some faculties are very particular about compliance; others do not even hold periodic reviews." These findings suggest that enforcement is not only a matter of policy presence but of institutional will, resourcing, and a systemic culture of compliance. The implementation gap identified here aligns with what Christensen, Lægreid, and Wise (2002) describe as a failure of "policy capacity"—that is, the institutional ability to transform strategic goals into effective practice.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The integrity of academic records is essential for the credibility and quality assurance of higher education institutions. This study found that the academic records management system at the Northern Ghanaian university faces challenges due to technological and human resource limitations. The combination of manual and electronic processes has led to inefficiencies, data inconsistencies, and an increased risk of clerical errors and data manipulation. Systemic weaknesses in the institution, such as insufficient staff training, weak data security measures, and a lack of audit trails, exacerbate these challenges. This situation raises serious concerns about the reliability and trustworthiness of student academic records. The findings highlight the urgent need for a fundamental change in records management, supported by focused capacity building, updated infrastructure, and stricter ethical and data protection

The Integrity of Academic Records in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of a Public University in Northern Ghana

standards. Without these reforms, the integrity of academic credentials issued by higher education institutions may continue to suffer, negatively affecting student progress, institutional reputation, and stakeholder trust.

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