

**Action Research Study
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Title of the Study:
Documentation in Schools
Location or Institution
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Abstract
<p>Teacher and administrator documentation process in independent schools faces some challenges. The purpose of this study is to unravel the barriers behind the documentation process in an independent school and to find solutions and recommendations to overcome it. The study investigated both the role of the teacher and administrator in documentation. To find the reasons behind poor or lack of documentations; questionnaires, interviews and review of documents procedures were used as data collection techniques. Transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory methodology to determine common responses, and patterns in the perspectives articulated. Some of the reasons discovered behind the lack or poor documentation in the school were the employees' weakness in the writing skill, lack of training or PD in this matter, workloads and pressure and the limited understanding of the importance of documentation in a school context. The recommendations are; to provide constant professional development and training on documentation, to follow up on employees' documentation and provide feedback and to provide templates and a filing system to make it more accessible to employees.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• interviews• questionnaire• documents study
Subject/Topic: Administration

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Title: Documentation in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Teacher and administrator documentation process in independent schools faces some challenges. The purpose of this study is to unravel the barriers behind the documentation process in an independent school and to find solutions and recommendations to overcome it. The study investigated both the role of the teacher and administrator in documentation. To find the reasons behind poor or lack of documentations; questionnaires, interviews and review of documents procedures were used as data collection techniques. Transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory methodology to determine common responses, and patterns in the perspectives articulated. Some of the reasons discovered behind the lack or poor documentation in the school were the employees' weakness in the writing skill, lack of training or PD in this matter, workloads and pressure and the limited understanding of the importance of documentation in a school context. The recommendations are; to provide constant professional development and training on documentation, to follow up on employees' documentation and provide feedback and to provide templates and a filing system to make it more accessible to employees.

A) Introduction

1. Context

Documentation is one of the important aspects of any established institution; better documentation leads to better systems. It preserves the institutions' rights, accomplishments and achievements. Lack of documentation or poor documentation can lead any institution, such as schools, to serious problems. Documentation is an integral part of accountability issues in schools.

Documentation is an important part in an educators life; if teachers or administrators don't document failures, successes, accomplishments, grades or any kind of incidents, students', teachers and the schools' rights will be lost.

2. Problem Statement and Purpose of Research

Schools that lack documentation may face serious problems, such as honesty and accountability because of the lack of documentation. In an age of increasing accountability, schools must understand the importance of documentation and the vital role it plays in any institution. Schools not only can suffer from lack of documentation, but also from poor documentation produced by untrained staff.

The main cause of any accountability or school related issues in schools is the lack of documentation, in my opinion. I have noticed a lack of attention to documentation in my school from both teachers and administrators that led miscommunication with parents, unfairness in students' grading and clashes between the admin staff itself because no one can prove anything they say regarding any incidents they face. My purpose in this research, therefore, is to unravel the reasons behind schools' staff lack of documentation or poor documentation. Moreover, based on the findings I will seek solutions and suggestions and will put them on an action plan.

3. Research Question

Why do staff members have difficulties in documentation?

4. Significance

Documentation has impact on the quality of any service or system. Documentation must be accurate, clear, concise, complete, and timely. Documentation must have meaning today, tomorrow, and in the unforeseen future (Awareness productions, 2007).

B) Review of Literature

There is very little research on documentation or its effects (Awareness productions, 2007). Many leaders in institutions are uneasy about the level of documentation of their systems (Awareness productions, 2007). The response has always been: “We know it’s probably worthwhile to do something about it, but how can we justify it? And how can we get the developers to actually do it?” (HCI professional services, n.d).

Documentation has impact on the quality of any service or system. Documentation must be accurate, clear, concise, complete, and timely. Documentation must have meaning today, tomorrow, and in the unforeseen future. One of the difficulties with documentation is that we never know when what we document will be needed. You want to make sure the right information gets documented and that documentation is done correctly.

The lack of proper documentation can negatively impact all stakeholders in the school and can ultimately cause other problems. Medical research indicates that poor documentation by doctors and nurses led to unwanted consequences to patients. We can also imply this notion on the education sector if we relate it students' scores, behaviors, achievements and the schools' accountability. In one article, the author suggests that any institution must ask these questions regarding their documentation system "What does your documentation system include? Is your system working for you or against you? What does the staff gripe about when documentation (HCI Professional Services, n.d.). What is the organizational and individual attitude toward documentation --- a waste of time, a nuisance task, or a way to provide quality service? Is the attitude the one you want displayed at your organization?"

Some educators experience difficulty documenting children's work in early childhood setting because of a limited understanding of the importance of documentation, what or how to document, and the effective use of documentation; limited resources (time, tools and assistance; or predetermined curricular guidelines(J.Kroeger & T. Cardy, 2006) .

Documentation is a part of the process and, whether it is used to help teachers grow professionally, or to substantiate an initiative toward non-renewal, it is a task that is best accomplished when teachers and administrators share realistic assessments of strengths, weaknesses and goals (Charlton & Kristsonis, 2008).

Few school districts provide campus administrators with a blue print for documenting teachers. They provide guidance expressed through sweeping generalities that are subject to the individual administrator's interpretation. Compounding this problem is the lack of targeted, professional development to ensure that the quality of an administrator's documentation can withstand the scrutiny of a hearing officer or that of the court system should the possibility arise. Administrators are often left to discover correct documentation processes through trial and costly error, circumstances that continue to divide teachers and administrators (Charlton & Kristsonis, 2008).

There are a limited number of books and references that provides teachers with a proven method for documenting (collecting, analyzing, and displaying) young children's work at school. And shows principals, curriculum coordinators, and directors of Head Start and other early intervention programs how to develop children's portfolios to share with parents or to use for assessment and other accountability purposes.

There are no resources that show different curriculum models, by integrating the teacher forms, materials, and planning and more information on incorporating

standards in documentation. Moreover, discussing how to analyze and talk about documentation in professional learning communities and provides additional information on preparing teacher portfolios (Helm, Beeke & Steinheime, 2007). According to (Al Naif 2007) an education specialist, documentation has a big role in documenting school activities; documentation in this area has lots of benefits, such as: a) keeping the rights of the employees by documenting their efforts b) keeping an archive of the schools' accomplishments and for later use. He recommended also doing a visual documentation, by taking pictures and suggested that the documentation process is a good practice for writing for both the employee and the student.

C) Methods and procedures

1. Question

Through investigating my main research question that involves the barriers of documentation in the school; I wanted find answers of more questions that I divided into three categories:

1. Teachers: What leads teachers to poor documentations?

Why don't teachers document regularly?

2. Admin staff: Why don't staff document?

What exactly should they document?

3. School: What does the school do to train teachers on the importance of documentation?

How does the school follow up and supervise the documentation process in the school?

2. Subjects

My research setting was one of cohort two Qatari independent schools for girls. My participants were sixty two, both from the administrative staff and the teaching staff. I distributed a letter to introduce myself and my research project to the whole school staff prior to my interviews and data collection phase in the school (Appendix 1). Confidentiality consent was agreed upon with the school principal.

3. Data Sources

I used three main resources to obtain the triangulation of data. I wrote questionnaires in both languages (Arabic and English) and in two versions; one for teachers and the other for the admin staff to describe different practices of documentation done by teachers and administrators in the school(Appendix 2,3). Interviews were conducted with a random sample of the school's employees; twenty employees from the admin and teaching staff were interviewed. The last thing I did as a data collection technique was the study and investigation of the schools' document to investigate and analyze the documentation and writing level of the school staff, how often do they document from the dates they write, the templates they use and their filing system. I had to do some interventions; such as, stopping employees while answering the questionnaire to make sure they understand the questions and the concept of documentation. This intervention was due to the teachers not answering the questions simply because they don't understand what I mean by documentation. This intervention made me discover one of the major findings behind the lack and poor documentation in the school.

4. Analysis Methods

I used the coding method to analyze the information I got through the questionnaires I distributed. I divided the information through categories and used charts and graphs to display, both quantitative and qualitative data. For the interviews, I wrote transcriptions that I analyzed later on (Appendix 5).

D) Results/Findings

I investigated the years of experience of the employees of the school I did the action research on; to understand the depth of their understanding of educational concepts and to further study the findings based on their professionalism. Eighty percent of the employees had a range of years of experience between seven to ten years. As a result, we cannot consider the sample studied as unprofessional, untrained or newly graduate; which assume that this staff should have a certain level of professionalism and understanding of documentation.

The major findings of barriers of good documentation in the school as stated by the employees are:

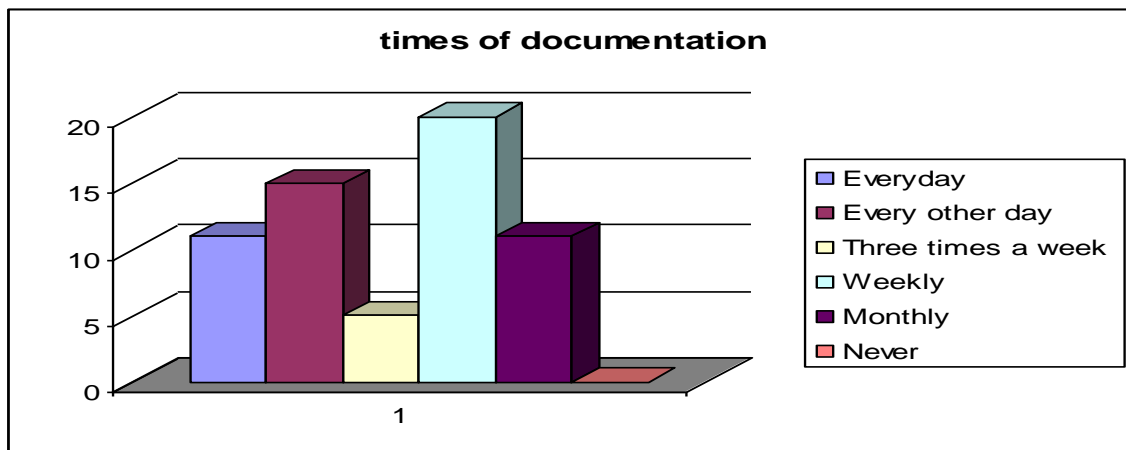
1. The weakness in the writing skill.
2. The workloads and the pressure of deadlines.
3. The limited understanding of the importance of documentation.
4. Lack or shortage of professional development and training on the traits of documentation.
5. Shortage of time.

When asked about the importance of documentation, all employees answered, (YES), they think that documentation is important. Also, when asked about facing difficulties and dilemmas in documenting, 98% said "yes".

In elaboration of their answers, teachers explained, that they needed supervisors to explain to them more about the concept and show them the appropriate way to do it. They also, emphasize the important role a supervisor's follow up can do to motivate them and to give the corrective feedback on their documentation processes that they follow. Teachers also complained, about having too many things to document, one teacher said "I can't document students' behavior, because it's too much" and another

said "I don't know what to document exactly". Moreover, they believe that this process is time consuming and adds more work pressure and load. Some of the teachers admit at their low writing skills saying "I have a weakness in writing". In addition, they admit of lacking the skills of organizing and filing that might make documentation easier.

Employees asked for readymade templates where they can document directly and quickly. When asked about the frequency of their documentation, 40% stated that they do it weekly, 30% every other day, 20% monthly and 10% three times a week.



When asked about professional development and training provided by the school to employees in the topic of documentation or writing reports; 20% only said that they received training in this regard and the other 80% express their need for training and professional development in this aspect.



When employees are asked whether they faced any problems or dilemmas regarding the lack of documentation; 80% admitted by saying "yes". Types of problems faced varied from, denial of people to incidents happening in the past, lack of recognition and appreciation from supervisors if things are not documented, parents ignore and deny verbal warnings if not documented and miscommunication. One teacher stated that "Sometimes students deny that I informed them of anything". One administrator explained it in a unique way "one of the most dilemmas to lack of documentation is the classical attitude (you did not tell me, I don't know)".

Moreover, they added, the lost of rights, legal and social problems, inventing the wheel and accountability issues. Teachers also, admit that if documentation is not in a frequent manner, grades might be lost and forgotten. One teacher said "I forget grades and achievements if I don't document".

Through this discussion and the findings listed above, we can highlight major themes from the topic. One of them is the importance of professional development, another is, the difference between teaching staff and admin staff documentation. Another major theme, are accountability and legal issues. For further charts and graphs see (Appendix 6)

F) Discussion

From these findings we can reach to the conclusion, that there are barriers of documentation in the school and to avoid these barriers and eliminate them, the school should provide professional development and constant training on the importance of documentation and how to document to both the admin and teaching staff of the school. Moreover, conduct constant supervisory follow ups and provide feedback to help employees' better document. Also, the school can provide readymade templates to help the teacher in their time consuming and workload.

Some of the implications I faced in my study, are the employees' contradicting answers in the interviews and the questionnaire and I relate this issue to their lack of understanding to the concept studied itself.

The limitations of the study were that the participants did not provide full answers wither orally or in the written form. In addition, their limited understanding of the questions and the topic itself' contributed to the depth of the study and I consider it as a limitation to my study. One of the major limitations I faced is the lack of literature, resources and articles on documentation in the school context.

I identified some areas of future research based on my findings, such as, Training employees in documentation, teacher and classroom documentation, and improving writing skills for report writing and better documentation.

I feel that by sponsoring and conducting this topic in the school, I somewhat raised the awareness of the importance of documentation in the school. Lots of the staff that I interviewed came back to me asking for more discussion of the topic, they wanted to understand more, because, as they say, it was a mechanical thing that they do and that they never thought of it in this depth of significance.

G) References

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H) Appendices

- 1. Consent letter**
- 2. Questionnaire for teachers**
- 3. Questionnaire for admin staff**
- 4. Interview questions**
- 5. Interview transcription**
- 6. More charts and graphs which are not included in the paper.**

(Appendix 1)

Consent and introductory letter

Dear Staff,

I'm Maha Al Romaihi, the curriculum coordinator in the school. I am currently undertaking Masters Studies program with Qatar University.

I'm doing now an action research project for a course I'm taking, and have an interest in doing the action research in our school. My research project title is "Documentation in the school". I want to investigate the different complications the teaching staff and the admin staff face in our school.

As part of my research project, I would like to distribute a questionnaire that contains questions about your practices regarding documentation in the school.

Moreover, I will conduct some interviews with a sample of the staff and study some of the school's documents.

I am working within guidelines for ethics and confidentiality of the University of Qatar. The results of the research will be completely confidential, and I would be very happy to disclose the result of my finished study to any interested parties.

If you would rather not to participate in the study, please kindly inform me at

mahawy2502@hotmail.com

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Maha Al Romaihi

(Appendix 2)

Questionnaire 1 (Teachers)

* Put a tick on the box that best describes your situation

1. How many years of experience do you have?

1 - 3	3 - 5	7 - 10	More than 10
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2. Do you think documentation is important?

Yes	No
-----	----

3. Do you face difficulties in documenting? Did you face any dilemmas while documenting?

Yes	No
-----	----

4. If yes, Can you list them below:

-
-
-
-
-
-

5. How often do you document students' behaviors, grades and actions in your class?

Every day	Every other day	Three times a week
weekly	Monthly	never

6. Do you use any templates to document?

Yes	No
-----	----

7. Did you have any training or professional development in documenting?

Yes	No
-----	----

8. Are there any follow ups for the documentation you do, from your supervisors?

Yes	No
-----	----

9. Did you face any problems regarding the lack of documentation?

Yes	No
-----	----

10. If yes, can you mention what kind of problems you faced?

- -----
- -----
- -----
- -----
- -----

(Appendix 3)

Questionnaire 1 (administration staff)

* Put a tick on the box that best describes your situation

11. How many years of experience do you have?

1 - 3	3 - 5	7 - 10	More than 10
-------	-------	--------	--------------

12. Do you think documentation is important?

Yes	No
-----	----

13. Do you face difficulties in documenting? Did you face any dilemmas while documenting?

Yes	No
-----	----

14. If yes, Can you list them below:

-
-
-
-
-
-

15. How often do you document incidents, progress, follow ups, or any tasks you have?

Every day	Every other day	Three times a week
weekly	Monthly	never

16. Do you use any templates to document?

Yes	No
-----	----

17. Did you have any training or professional development in documenting?

Yes	No
-----	----

18. Are there any follow ups for the documentation you do, from your supervisors?

Yes	No
-----	----

19. Did you face any problems regarding the lack of documentation?

Yes	No
-----	----

20. If yes, can you mention what kind of problems you faced?

- -----
- -----
- -----
- -----
- -----

(Appendix 5)
Transcription for admin VP (SAMPLE)

INTERVIEW

Date: 24th May 2008

Time: 1:30 – 12:15

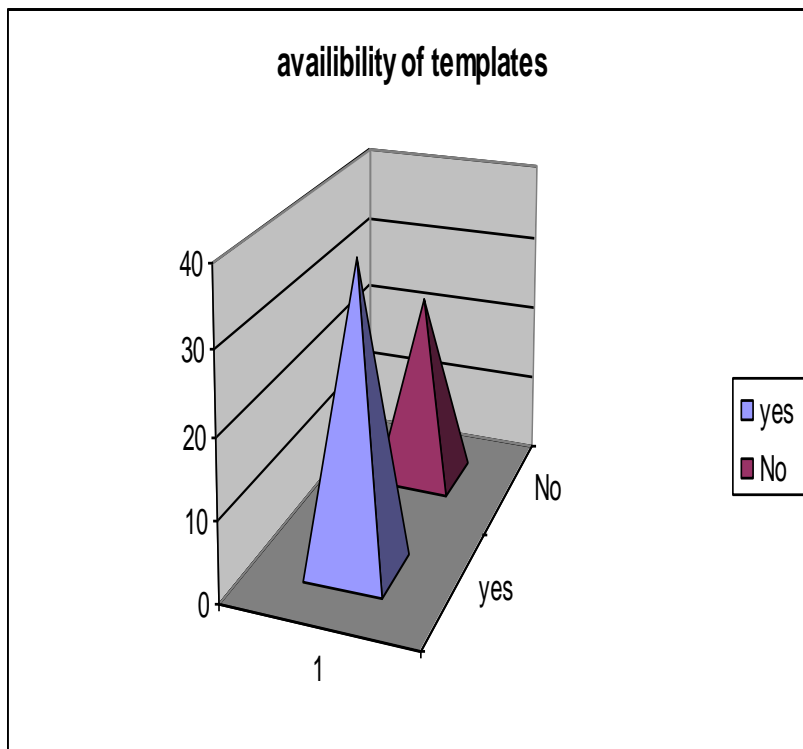
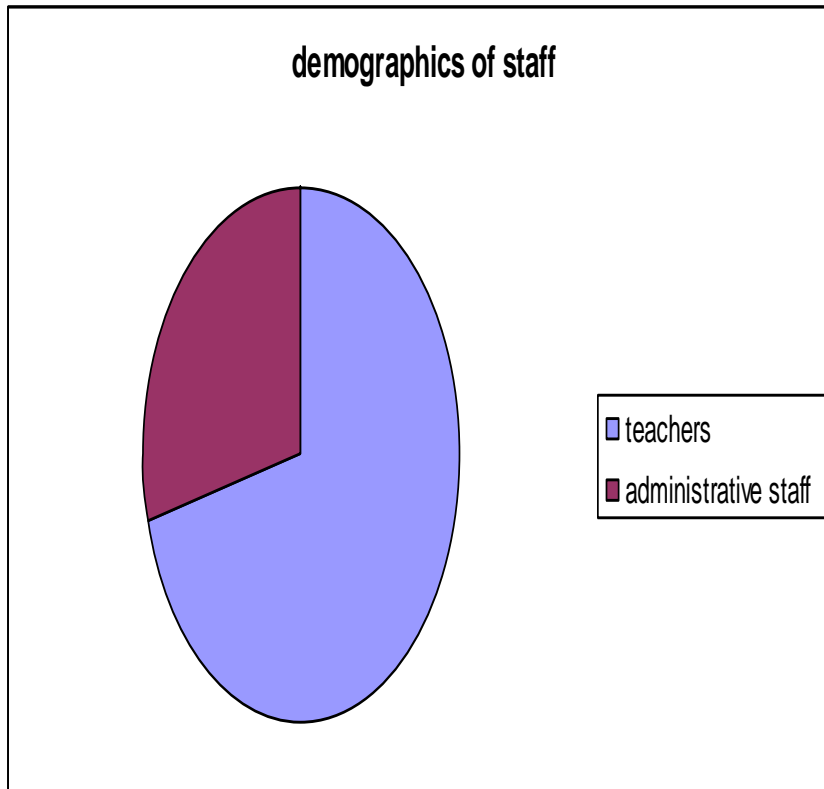
What are the problems you face in the school regarding documentation?

Lack of documents when we ask for proof- poor documentation- no dates- no subject line- not proper writing- important data are lost due to the lack of documentation- lack of the staff knowledge on importance of proper documentation and usage of the computer software to better documentation- accountability issues from the SEC.

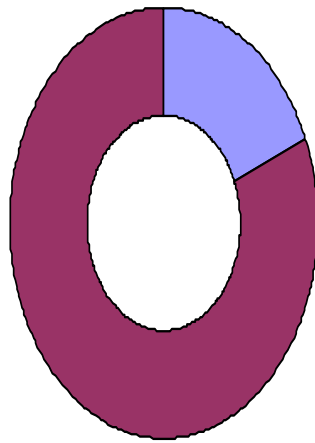
What kinds of guidelines have you been given in the school regarding documentation?

No clear guidelines were given- the school principal emphasized the importance of documentation in the school's meetings.

(Appendix 6)
More charts and graphs



Professional training recieved



Number of people facing problems with documentation in the past

