

Between Policy and Practice: Challenges of Implementing Student Records Retention and Disposal Schedules in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges of implementing student records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal secondary schools. A quantitative research approach was employed, and data were collected from 62 respondents, including heads of school, academic masters, records management assistants, class teachers, administrative staff, and normal teachers, using a structured survey with a five-point Likert scale. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means. Findings revealed that inadequate training, unclear procedural guidelines, insufficient human and financial resources, limited storage facilities, and low staff awareness and motivation hinder effective records management. Notably, 57.8% of respondents agreed that insufficient training poses a major challenge, while similar proportions identified other barriers. These findings indicate a gap between policy intentions and practical execution of records management practices, compromising the retention, organisation, and disposal of student records. It is concluded that records management in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools is constrained by both human and institutional factors. Targeted capacity-building programmes, clear and accessible guidelines, adequate storage infrastructure, proper resource allocation, and initiatives to enhance staff awareness and motivation are recommended. Implementing these measures is essential to improving compliance, strengthening administrative efficiency, and ensuring accountability in school records management.

Keywords: *Student records management, records retention and disposal, secondary schools, staff training, administrative challenges*

1.0 Introduction

Records management is a critical component of effective governance and institutional administration. In educational institutions, student records are essential for monitoring academic progress, supporting administrative decision-making, and ensuring institutional accountability (Franks, 2023). Proper management of records throughout their lifecycle, from creation and storage to retention and disposal, is necessary to ensure that institutions maintain reliable information while avoiding unnecessary accumulation of obsolete records

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(Mojapelo & Marutha, 2023). Records retention and disposal schedules provide guidelines on how long records should be kept and when they should be destroyed or transferred to archival repositories. Effective implementation of these schedules helps institutions manage information resources efficiently and comply with legal and administrative requirements (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021).

Globally, governments and institutions have increasingly emphasised the importance of effective records management systems to enhance transparency, accountability, and institutional efficiency. With the growth of digital technologies and information systems, organisations are generating large volumes of records that require systematic management (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021). Studies indicate that well-implemented records retention schedules enable institutions to control record growth, facilitate information retrieval, and reduce administrative costs associated with record storage (Franks, 2023). Despite structured frameworks and policies, many organisations still face difficulties implementing effective records management practices (Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021).

In Africa, records management practices have gradually received greater attention due to governance reforms and increasing demands for accountability in public institutions. However, studies revealed that many institutions across the continent still struggle with poor records management systems characterised by inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and insufficient professional expertise (Ngoepe & Keakopa, 2022). In many cases, records are retained indefinitely because institutions lack clear disposal procedures or fail to implement existing retention schedules effectively. This situation often results in overcrowded storage facilities, loss of vital records, and difficulties in retrieving information for administrative purposes (Abioye & Wamukoya, 2021).

In East Africa, educational institutions face similar challenges in managing records effectively. A study conducted in Uganda by Kataike et al. (2024) showed that records management played a significant role in supporting administrative decision-making and improving institutional accountability in schools. However, the study also found that many schools lacked adequate facilities, trained personnel, and technological infrastructure necessary for proper records management (Kataike et al., 2024). Consequently, records retention and disposal schedules were rarely implemented systematically, and schools often stored records indefinitely without proper appraisal or disposal procedures.

In Tanzania, the government has established legal and institutional frameworks to guide records management in public institutions. The Records and Archives Management Act No. 3 of 2002 sets out directives for the creation, maintenance, retention, and disposal of public records. These guidelines are intended to ensure that institutions manage records systematically and maintain accountability in administrative processes. However, empirical evidence suggests that many institutions still face challenges in implementing these guidelines effectively. Studies indicated that limited awareness of records management policies, inadequate storage facilities, and a shortage of professional records management personnel continue to affect records management practices in Tanzanian public institutions (Lwoga & Ngulube, 2022).

Despite the importance of effective records management in educational institutions, empirical research focusing on the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules in secondary schools remains limited. Most existing studies (Lwoga & Ngulube, 2022; Malekani & Mubofu, 2023; Manase et al., 2024) have focused on records management practices in government ministries, universities, and other public-sector organisations, with little attention to secondary education institutions. As a result, there is limited understanding of the challenges that schools face when implementing records retention and disposal schedules. This gap is particularly significant because student records are essential for monitoring academic performance, facilitating administrative processes, and ensuring institutional accountability.

This study, therefore, examines the challenges secondary schools face in implementing student records retention and disposal schedules within the Tabora Municipal Council. Using a mixed-methods research approach, the study investigates how records retention and disposal schedules are implemented in secondary schools and identifies the institutional, technical, and organisational challenges that hinder effective implementation. By integrating quantitative data, the study provides comprehensive insights into the gap between policy provisions and actual records management practices in secondary schools.

The findings of this study are expected to improve records management practices in Tanzanian secondary schools by providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and records management professionals. Furthermore, the study supports national efforts to strengthen public sector information management systems and promote accountability in educational administration. Ultimately, the research contributes to broader national development goals aimed at improving institutional efficiency, transparency, and the quality of education in Tanzania.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was informed by Records Life Cycle Theory, proposed by Richard J. Schellenberg in 1956. The theory explains that records pass through several stages from creation to final disposal or archival preservation (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021). According to the theory, records move through three major phases: creation and active use, semi-active storage, and final disposition, which may involve destruction or transfer to archives. Effective records management requires institutions to manage records systematically at each stage of the records lifecycle to ensure accountability, efficiency, and information accessibility (Franks, 2023).

The creation stage involves generating records in the normal course of organisational activities. In educational institutions, this includes student admission records, academic transcripts, attendance registers, and examination results. Proper classification and indexing at this stage are essential for easy retrieval and for ensuring records are properly integrated into institutional information systems (Shepherd & Yeo, 2021). Poor management during the creation stage often leads to disorganised record systems and difficulties retrieving information when needed. The second stage of the records lifecycle

involves maintaining and using records. During this stage, records are actively used by administrators and staff to support decision-making and operational activities. For secondary schools, student records are frequently accessed to monitor academic progress, prepare reports, and support administrative processes. Effective records management at this stage requires appropriate storage facilities, proper filing systems, and trained personnel to manage records efficiently (Franks, 2023).

The final stage of the records lifecycle involves appraisal and disposition. Records retention and disposal schedules guide institutions on how long records should be retained and when they should be destroyed or transferred to archival institutions. Proper implementation of these schedules ensures that institutions retain only records with administrative, legal, or historical value and dispose of obsolete records systematically (International Council on Archives, 2022). Failure to implement retention and disposal schedules may lead to the accumulation of unnecessary records, loss of important information, and inefficiencies in record retrieval.

The Records Life Cycle Theory is therefore relevant to this study because it explains how student records should be managed throughout their lifecycle in educational institutions. The theory emphasises the importance of systematic record retention and disposal procedures for effective information management. In the context of Tabora Municipal secondary schools, the theory provides a framework for understanding the challenges associated with implementing records retention and disposal schedules and highlights the importance of effective records management practices in educational administration.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies worldwide have highlighted the importance of effective records management practices for improving institutional accountability and administrative efficiency. According to Shepherd and Yeo (2021), proper records management ensures that organisations maintain accurate and reliable information that supports decision-making and accountability. Similarly, Franks (2023) argues that institutions that implement structured records retention schedules are better able to control record growth, reduce administrative costs, and improve information retrieval.

In Africa, several studies have examined the challenges of records management in public institutions. Ngoepe and Keakopa (2022) found that many African institutions struggle to implement records management policies because of inadequate infrastructure, insufficient financial resources, and a shortage of trained personnel. These challenges often lead to poor recordkeeping practices, including improper storage and failure to implement retention schedules.

A study conducted in South Africa also indicates that limited professional expertise and a lack of institutional support continue to hinder effective records management practices. Makgahlela and Nsibirwa (2021) found that many public institutions struggle to manage records effectively due to inadequate training and limited technological infrastructure. The study emphasised the need for organisations to strengthen records management capacity by providing adequate training and resources to staff responsible for managing records.

In East Africa, studies have shown that educational institutions face similar challenges in managing records effectively. For example, research conducted in Uganda found that effective record management plays a critical role in supporting administrative decision-making in schools. However, many schools still face challenges, including inadequate storage facilities, limited technological resources, and limited awareness of records management policies (Kataike et al., 2024). These challenges often lead to poor record organisation and difficulties retrieving important information when needed.

In Tanzania, several studies have examined records management practices in public sector institutions. For instance, Malekani and Mubofu (2023) examined personnel records management in Tanzanian local government authorities and found that many institutions rely heavily on manual records systems, which often lead to inefficiencies. The study also identified inadequate storage facilities, limited financial resources, and a lack of trained personnel as major challenges affecting records management practices.

Similarly, Rutta and Ndenje-Sichalwe (2021) investigated records management practices at the Kinondoni Municipal Council and found that weak institutional frameworks and limited awareness of records management policies hinder the effective implementation of records management systems. The study recommended strengthening institutional capacity through training and adequate resources for records management. Another study by Manase et al. (2024) found that, despite the increasing adoption of digital technologies, many Tanzanian public sector organisations still rely on paper-based record systems.

Overall, while several studies have examined records management practices in public institutions, there is limited research focusing specifically on the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules in secondary schools. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining the challenges Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools face in implementing student records retention and disposal schedules.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the challenges faced by Tabora Municipal secondary schools in implementing student records retention and disposal schedules. Quantitative data were collected from 62 respondents, including heads of school (3), academic masters (9), records management assistants (3), class teachers (32), administrative staff (8), and normal teachers (3). Data were collected using a structured survey with a five-point Likert scale, designed to assess respondents' perceptions of the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules and the challenges encountered in practice.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents directly involved in records management and administrative processes, ensuring they had relevant knowledge and experience. The survey instrument was pilot-tested to ensure reliability and clarity. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant authorities, and all participants provided informed consent before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to summarise respondents’ perceptions of records management practices and challenges across staff categories. This analysis allowed the study to systematically capture numerical trends and patterns regarding inadequate training on records retention and disposal schedules. The findings provided robust evidence for strategies to improve the implementation of student records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal secondary schools.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

A total of 62 respondents participated in the study, drawn from Tabora Municipal secondary schools. Table 4.1 presents the demographic distribution by position and work experience.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 62)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position at School	Head of School	3	4.8
	Academic Master	9	14.5
	Records Management Assistant/Record Officer	3	4.8
	Class Teacher	32	51.6
	Administrative Staff	8	12.9
	Normal Teacher	3	4.8
Work Experience (Years)	Less than 2	15	24.2
	2–5	9	14.5
	6–10	20	32.3
	Over 10	18	29.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 4.1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Regarding position, the majority were class teachers (51.6%), followed by academic masters (14.5%). Heads of school, records management assistants, and regular teachers each accounted for 4.8% of the sample, while administrative staff accounted for 12.9%. In terms of work experience, most respondents had worked at their schools for 6–10 years (32.3%), followed by those with over 10 years of service (29.0%). Respondents with less than 2 years of experience represented 24.2%, and those with 2–5 years accounted for 14.5%. The inclusion of respondents across multiple positions and a range of work experience ensured that the study captured diverse perspectives on the implementation of student records retention and disposal schedules. This distribution allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how role and experience influence perceptions and challenges in records management practices.

4.2 Inadequate Training on Records Retention and Disposal Schedules

Findings on inadequate training in records retention and disposal schedules are presented and discussed in this subsection. The respondents were asked about their views on the challenges of implementing student records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal secondary schools. Table 4.2 below provides further details on the respondents' responses.

Table 4.2: Inadequate Training on Records Retention and Disposal Schedules

Statement	Scale	Range Value	Item Description	Frequency (N)	Per cent (%)	Verbal Interpretation
Inadequate training affects the implementation of student records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools.	5	4.50–5.00	Strongly Agree	20	32.3	High Agreement
	4	3.50–4.49	Agree	22	35.5	Agreement
	3	2.50–3.49	Neither Agree nor Disagree	8	12.9	Moderate
	2	1.50–2.49	Disagree	7	11.3	Low Agreement
	1	1.00–1.49	Strongly Disagree	5	8.0	Very Low Agreement
Total				62	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results in Table 4.2 show that 20 respondents (32.3%) strongly agreed, and 22 respondents (35.5%) agreed that the lack of adequate training affected the implementation of student records retention and disposal schedules. Combined, 67.8% of respondents perceived insufficient training as a significant challenge. Additionally, 8 respondents (12.9%) were neutral, while 12 respondents (19.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that a smaller portion of staff did not view training as a major issue. These findings align with studies by Rutta and NdenjeSichalwe (2022), who found that limited training and inadequate skills hinder proper records management in Tanzanian public offices. Similarly, Mbola (2025) reported that inadequate training significantly reduces staff competence in implementing retention and disposal procedures. Collectively, these studies confirm that capacity-building initiatives and staff training were essential for improving the implementation of student records retention and disposal schedules.

4.3 Inadequate Storage Facilities for Student Records

Findings on inadequate storage facilities for student records in Tabora Municipal secondary schools are presented in this subsection. Respondents were asked about the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of storage infrastructure for records, which was essential for implementing proper retention and disposal schedules. Table 1.3 below provides more details about the respondents' responses.

Table 4.3: Inadequate Storage Facilities for Student Records

Statement	Scale	Range Value	Item Description	Frequency (N)	Per cent (%)	Verbal Interpretation
Inadequate storage facilities hinder the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools.	5	4.50–5.00	Strongly Agree	18	29.0	High Agreement
	4	3.50–4.49	Agree	24	38.7	Agreement
	3	2.50–3.49	Neither Agree nor Disagree	10	16.1	Moderate
	2	1.50–2.49	Disagree	7	11.3	Low Agreement
	1	1.00–1.49	Strongly Disagree	3	4.8	Very Low Agreement
Total				62	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 4.3 shows that 18 respondents (29.0%) strongly agreed, and 24 respondents (38.7%) agreed that inadequate storage facilities negatively affect records management. In total, 67.7% of respondents perceived storage limitations as a significant challenge. Meanwhile, 10 respondents (16.1%) were neutral, and 10 respondents (16.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting a minority did not consider storage issues critical. These findings align with research by Malekani and Mubofu (2023), who reported that inadequate storage facilities in Tanzanian municipal offices hindered the proper implementation of records retention procedures. Similarly, Ngoepe and Keakopa (2022) found that insufficient physical and electronic storage solutions negatively affected records management performance in Tanzanian public institutions. Manase et al. (2024) also highlighted that limited storage infrastructure reduces accessibility, increases the risk of loss or damage, and complicates disposal practices, underscoring the need to invest in appropriate storage facilities.

4.4 Lack of Clear Guidelines

Findings on the availability and clarity of records retention and disposal guidelines in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools are presented in this subsection. Respondents were asked whether the existing policies and procedural manuals are sufficient and clear to support proper records management. Table 1.4 below provides more details about the respondents’ responses.

Table 4.4: Lack of Clear Guidelines

Statement	Scale	Range Value	Item Description	Frequency (N)	Per cent (%)	Verbal Interpretation
Lack of clear guidelines hinders the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools.	5	4.50–5.00	Strongly Agree	16	25.8	High Agreement
	4	3.50–4.49	Agree	26	41.9	Agreement
	3	2.50–3.49	Neither Agree nor Disagree	10	16.1	Moderate
	2	1.50–2.49	Disagree	7	11.3	Low Agreement
	1	1.00–1.49	Strongly Disagree	3	4.8	Very Low Agreement
Total				62	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 4.4 shows that 16 respondents (25.8%) strongly agreed, and 26 respondents (41.9%) agreed that the absence of clear guidelines hampers the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules. Combined, 67.7% of respondents perceived a lack of clear guidelines as a major challenge. 10 respondents (16.1%) were neutral, while 10 respondents (16.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting some staff perceive guidelines as adequate or manageable. These findings are consistent with Rutta and Ndenje-Sichalwe (2022), who observed that unclear policies and procedural manuals in Tanzanian municipal offices limit staff's ability to implement proper records retention. Mbola (2025) also reported that the lack of well-documented procedures reduces compliance and consistency in record management in public institutions.

4.5 Insufficient Human and Financial Resources

This subsection discusses the extent to which insufficient human and financial resources affected records management in Tabora Municipal secondary schools. Respondents were asked whether staffing levels, budget allocations, and availability of materials were adequate to implement retention and disposal schedules. Table 1.5 below provides more details about the respondents' responses.

Table 4.5: Insufficient Human and Financial Resources

Statement	Scale	Range Value	Item Description	Frequency (N)	Per cent (%)	Verbal Interpretation
Insufficient human and financial resources hinder the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools.	5	4.50–5.00	Strongly Agree	18	29.0	High Agreement
	4	3.50–4.49	Agree	22	35.5	Agreement
	3	2.50–3.49	Neither Agree nor Disagree	12	19.4	Moderate
	2	1.50–2.49	Disagree	6	9.7	Low Agreement
	1	1.00–1.49	Strongly Disagree	4	6.4	Very Low Agreement
Total				62	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 4.5 shows that 18 respondents (29.0%) strongly agreed, and 22 respondents (35.5%) agreed that insufficient resources are a major challenge, totalling 64.5% of respondents. 12 respondents (19.4%) were neutral, while 10 respondents (16.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results suggest that limited staffing, inadequate training budgets, and insufficient materials are critical barriers to proper records management. Franks (2023) highlighted that inadequate human and financial resources limit Tanzanian institutions' ability to maintain proper records. Similarly, Makgahlela and Nsibirwa (2021) emphasised that resource constraints, including budgetary and staffing shortages, negatively affect the implementation of records retention and disposal policies in schools and local government offices.

4.6 Low Staff Awareness and Motivation

The final challenge relates to staff awareness and motivation in implementing records retention and disposal schedules. Respondents were asked whether they are aware of proper procedures and motivated to follow them consistently. Table 4.6 below provides more details about the respondents' responses.

Table 4.6: Low Staff Awareness and Motivation

Statement	Scale	Range Value	Item Description	Frequency (N)	Per cent (%)	Verbal Interpretation
Low staff awareness and motivation hinder the implementation of records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal Secondary Schools.	5	4.50–5.00	Strongly Agree	15	24.2	High Agreement
	4	3.50–4.49	Agree	25	40.3	Agreement
	3	2.50–3.49	Neither Agree nor Disagree	12	19.4	Moderate
	2	1.50–2.49	Disagree	6	9.7	Low Agreement
	1	1.00–1.49	Strongly Disagree	4	6.4	Very Low Agreement
Total				62	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 4.6 shows that 15 respondents (24.2%) strongly agreed and 25 (40.3%) agreed, totalling 64.5%, that low awareness and motivation hinder records management. 12 respondents (19.4%) were neutral, and 10 respondents (16.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that staff awareness and motivation are essential for effective records management, and gaps in either can compromise policy implementation. These findings align with Mbola (2025) and Malekani and Mubofu (2023), who reported that low staff awareness and motivation significantly hinder adherence to retention and disposal schedules in Tanzanian institutions. Proper training, supervision, and incentives were recommended to enhance staff commitment and performance.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the challenges of implementing student records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal secondary schools. The findings indicate that the implementation of records management practices is constrained by multiple factors, including inadequate training of school staff, insufficient storage facilities, unclear procedural guidelines, limited human and financial resources, and low staff awareness and motivation. These challenges collectively hinder the proper retention, organisation, and disposal of student records, reflecting a broader misalignment between policy intentions and practical execution within school administrative systems.

Overall, the study underscores the need for Tabora Municipal secondary schools to adopt comprehensive strategies, including targeted staff training, investment in storage infrastructure, clear and accessible guidelines, adequate resource allocation, and initiatives to increase staff awareness and motivation. Implementing these measures can strengthen records management practices, ensure compliance with retention and disposal schedules, and improve the overall efficiency and accountability of school administrative processes.

6.0 Recommendations

To improve the implementation of student records retention and disposal schedules in Tabora Municipal secondary schools, the following recommendations are proposed:

Capacity building and training. Schools should provide targeted, continuous training for staff involved in records management. Training programmes should cover proper procedures for the retention, organisation, and disposal of student records and be planned as an integral part of administrative operations. Workshops, coaching, and collaboration with experts in educational administration and records management can enhance staff competence, awareness, and motivation.

Clear and accessible guidelines. Schools should develop, update, and disseminate clear procedural manuals and guidelines for records retention and disposal. These guidelines should provide step-by-step instructions and be easily accessible to all relevant staff. Regular review and updates can ensure alignment with national policies and best practices, reducing ambiguity and enhancing compliance.

Improvement of storage facilities. The government of the United Republic of Tanzania, through MoEST, should invest in adequate storage infrastructure, including both physical filing systems and digital record-keeping solutions. Proper storage ensures the security, accessibility, and preservation of student records, reducing the risk of loss or mismanagement. Schools should allocate resources for both short-term and long-term storage solutions to support consistent records management practices.

Resource allocation. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania should ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are dedicated to records management. This includes hiring and assigning staff with clear responsibilities for records retention and disposal, as well as providing materials, tools, and budgetary support required for effective implementation.

Enhancing staff awareness and motivation. To foster a culture of compliance, schools should implement initiatives that increase staff awareness of the importance of records management and motivate them to adhere to established procedures. Regular supervision, recognition, and incentive systems can reinforce good practices and accountability among staff.

Integration of digital tools. Where possible, schools should leverage digital technologies, such as electronic record-keeping systems or school management software, to streamline retention and disposal processes. Digital tools can enhance the efficiency, accuracy, and traceability of student records, supporting evidence-based decision-making and strategic planning.

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