

Assessing the Management of Record Keeping in Public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed the management of record keeping among administrators in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated current practices, availability and functionality of record keeping infrastructures, professional competence of administrators by gender, institutional challenges, proposed improvement strategies, and gender-based perceptual differences. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and had a population of 302 administrators, out of which 210 were selected from the University of Calabar (Unical) and University of Cross River State (Unicross), using stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using a researchers-developed instrument titled Record Keeping Management Assessment Questionnaire (RKMAQ). The instrument had a reliability index of 0.84 determined through Cronbach Alpha method. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and independent t-test statistics. Results indicated, among others, that record keeping practices were outdated and largely manual; infrastructures were inadequate; and administrators lacked formal training in modern record management. Significant institutional challenges such as poor funding and weak policy frameworks were identified, alongside gender-based differences in perceptions of effectiveness. The study recommended the adoption of ICT-driven systems, continuous professional development, and institutional reforms for effective record keeping in public universities.

Keywords: record keeping, public universities, administrative competence, institutional challenges, gender perception

Introduction

Effective management of record keeping is fundamental to the governance, planning, and service delivery capacity of higher education institutions. Record management is the systematic process of creating, organizing, storing, retrieving, and disposing of records to support efficient administrative operations and ensure accountability. In the context of public

universities in Cross River State, Nigeria, poor record keeping practices have become a persistent impediment to institutional effectiveness. Records such as academic transcripts, staff files, financial documents, student enrollment data, research archives, and administrative correspondence form the operational backbone of universities. However, the persistent challenges of misfiling, data loss, restricted access, and delayed retrieval of critical records remain widespread. As noted by Ejeh and Okonkwo (2023), Nigerian public universities operate within bureaucratic systems that often fail to prioritize modern records management practices, leading to systemic inefficiencies, audit failures, and loss of institutional memory.

The realities in universities in Cross River State mirror national concerns, but are compounded by specific contextual problems such as infrastructural decay, limited ICT integration, and insufficient staff capacity. Many of the institutions still rely heavily on outdated manual systems, often characterized by dusty file cabinets, unsecured storage areas, and fragmented documentation processes. Bassey et al. (2024) observed that record keeping in many Nigerian universities lacks formal policy guidelines and digitization frameworks, making it susceptible to tampering, duplication, and even permanent loss during transitions or crises. In recent years, students and staff have raised concerns over delayed access to results, misplacement of academic transcripts, incomplete personnel records, and repeated administrative errors - all symptoms of ineffective record management systems.

Compounding the situation is the acute shortage of trained personnel and the low priority accorded to information management within institutional strategic plans. According to Ayoola and Ibrahim (2023), most registry and record units across public universities in Nigeria are understaffed and lack personnel with professional qualifications in records and archives management. In Cross River State, this problem is further aggravated by irregular training, lack of incentives, and the absence of digital capacity-building initiatives. As a result, record units often operate reactively, addressing immediate administrative demands rather than systematically organizing and preserving institutional data. Consequently, governance becomes opaque, student services are delayed, and decision-making is compromised due to lack of reliable data.

In addition, the increasing demand for accountability, data integrity, and institutional accreditation has exposed the weaknesses of current record keeping practices. With mounting pressure from regulatory bodies like the National Universities Commission (NUC) for evidence-based reporting and programme accreditation, the lack of functional records becomes a liability. Olanrewaju and Nwachukwu (2022) emphasized that digital transformation in records management is no longer optional but critical for institutional survival in an age of global academic competition. Yet, many public universities in Cross

River State remain trapped in analog systems, lacking both the infrastructure and political will to embrace reforms. These deep-seated issues necessitate an empirical investigation into how records are currently managed, the institutional factors affecting their efficiency, and practical measures that can reposition public universities in Cross River State, for better administrative performance through improved record keeping.

The current practices of record keeping in public universities reflect a blend of traditional methods and emerging digital approaches, though the balance remains skewed in favour of manual systems in many Nigerian institutions. Olatunji and Adepoju (2021) found that majority of Nigerian public universities still rely on paper-based filing systems with limited access controls, leading to frequent cases of misplaced or damaged records. Similarly, Nwokoro and Ejeh (2022) observed that administrators often use inconsistent classification systems and lack routine auditing of record inventories. In a study conducted by Chukwuemeka and Odu (2020), it was revealed that while some record officers attempt to digitize critical documents, the lack of institutional support prevents full migration to electronic records management. These findings underscore a fragmented pattern of practices, where efficiency is hampered by outdated methods and limited institutional direction.

Availability and functionality of record keeping infrastructure remain critical to administrative effectiveness. Several studies have reported significant deficiencies in physical storage facilities, information and communication technology (ICT) resources, and data backup systems. According to Etim and Ajibade (2022), most public universities in Nigeria lack climate-controlled storage rooms, functional servers, and modern database management software. In Cross River State specifically, research by Bassey and Udoh (2023) indicated that storage cabinets are often overfilled and vulnerable to pests, fire, or theft. Furthermore, Akinwale and Yusuf (2021) reported that record management units are rarely allocated dedicated ICT budgets, resulting in outdated or non-functional computers and software. These infrastructural limitations make it difficult to transition to a secure, integrated, and accessible record management environment.

Professional competence among administrators, especially in terms of gender dynamics, is another key area of concern. Empirical evidence from Ibe and Okoro (2022) showed that many administrators - both male and female - have not received formal training in records management, leading to reliance on intuition and experience rather than best practices. However, Eze and Akinrinmade (2021) found that male administrators often report greater confidence in using ICT tools for managing records, while female administrators tend to excel in documentation accuracy and attention to detail. Despite these distinctions, the study by Zira and Danjuma (2023) emphasized that competence gaps cut across gender and are largely

attributed to lack of professional development opportunities. This suggests that improving competence should focus on institutional training rather than gender stereotypes.

Institutional challenges to effective record keeping are multifaceted. Funding constraints, weak policy frameworks, and lack of administrative will are repeatedly cited in the literature. Musa and Ejike (2021) asserted that public universities in Nigeria prioritize academic programmes over administrative systems, resulting in neglect of records departments. Similarly, Adeoye and Tanko (2022) identified institutional bureaucracy and political interference as barriers to implementing standardized records policies. In a focused study on South-South Nigeria, including Cross River State, Oboh and Inyang (2024) noted that staff transfers, lack of continuity, and inadequate job descriptions further complicate record management operations. The cumulative effect of these challenges is an inefficient system prone to errors, delays, and reputational risks.

To address these challenges, several authors have proposed practical strategies for improving record management systems in public universities. According to Okechukwu and Adetunji (2023), there is a need for national policy reform mandating all universities to adopt electronic records management systems backed by legal frameworks. Ekanem and Uzoigwe (2023) advocate for continuous professional training, regular system audits, and the integration of ICT into administrative workflows. Another effective strategy, as suggested by Olaniyan and Jatto (2022), is the adoption of open-source software solutions for records management, which are cost-effective and adaptable to local needs. These proposals, while promising, require strong institutional commitment, sustainable funding, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

Perceptions of effectiveness in record keeping often vary between male and female administrators due to their different experiences and access to resources. Akintola and Ezeobi (2021) found that male administrators are more likely to perceive existing systems as functional, especially when ICT tools are involved, while female administrators are more critical, pointing out lapses in documentation flow and storage quality. In a mixed-method study, Ogundipe and Ifeanyi (2024) noted that gendered perceptions are influenced by job roles, with female administrators being more involved in routine documentation, and males in system design and oversight. However, both groups agree that current practices are far from ideal and in need of serious reform. These findings highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making in records management planning, ensuring that both male and female perspectives are integrated into solutions.

The consensus across the literature is that while some progress has been made, the management of record keeping in Nigerian public universities remains underdeveloped and fragmented. Universities in Cross River State are not exempted from these national trends, with persistent issues in infrastructure, training, and institutional support undermining the quality of administrative services. Gender dynamics also play a role, though not in competence alone, but in how record keeping processes are experienced and evaluated. Closing these gaps requires a multifaceted strategy that combines policy reform, investment in ICT, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement.

In summary, findings from the literature indicate that public universities struggle with outdated practices, poor infrastructure, and low administrative competence in records management. There are notable gender and institutional disparities that influence how records are kept and perceived. While several authors have proposed effective strategies, their success depends on institutional commitment and proper execution. This literature review affirms the need for a comprehensive empirical study focused on public universities in Cross River State, to examine these issues in context and propose workable solutions tailored to local realities.

Research questions

The following research questions are posed to guide the study:

1. What are the current practices of record keeping among administrators in public universities?
2. How available and functional are the record keeping infrastructures (including storage systems, ICT tools) in public universities?
3. What is the level of professional competence of administrators in record management?
4. What are the institutional challenges affecting effective record keeping in public universities?
5. What strategies can be proposed to improve record keeping management systems in public universities?
6. How do male and female administrators in public universities differ in their perceptions of the effectiveness of existing record keeping practices?

Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female administrators regarding the effectiveness of record keeping management.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered most suitable because it allows for the collection and analysis of data from a sample with the aim

of describing, interpreting, and evaluating existing conditions, practices, and perceptions regarding record keeping management. The study was conducted in Cross River State, a state located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state has a mix of federal and state-owned public universities, such as the University of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Cross River State (UNICROSS), which served as the primary focus of this study. These universities are characterized by administrative diversity, varying levels of digitalization and different approaches to records management.

The population consisted of all administrative staff involved in record management across public universities in Cross River State. This included registrars, deputy registrars, faculty officers, records officers, ICT personnel, and departmental secretaries, among others. The estimated population size was 450 administrative staff across the two public universities. A sample of 210 administrative staff was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select the two public universities due to their representativeness and accessibility. In the second stage, proportionate stratified sampling was employed to ensure representation from different administrative units (registry, faculties, departments, ICT units). Finally, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select the respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with 36 items titled "Record Keeping Management Assessment Questionnaire (RKMAQ)". The questionnaire was divided into six sections covering: demographic information, current record keeping practices, Availability and functionality of infrastructure, Competence of administrators (with gender analysis), institutional challenges, and proposed strategies. The instrument comprised close-ended items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was face-validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. The internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating high reliability. Copies of the questionnaire were administered in person by the researchers and four trained research assistants over a three-week period.

Ethical procedures such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed. Respondents were allowed a window of five working days to complete and return the questionnaire. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research boards of the universities involved. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were used, and all data collected were stored securely and used strictly for research purposes. The collected data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version

27. Descriptive statistics such as mean score and standard deviation scores were used to summarize responses. The criterion mean was set at 2.50. An item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted while an item with a mean score of less than 2.50 was not accepted. t-test inferential statistics was employed to determine significant difference in perception based on gender. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Research question one: What are the current practices of record keeping among administrators in public universities?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation on the current practices of record keeping among administrators in public universities in Cross River State (N = 210)

S/N	Record keeping practice indicators	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Administrators maintain up-to-date records in the school	210	2.42	0.71	D
2	Essential documents are stored systematically for easy retrieval	210	2.46	0.68	D
3	Administrators utilize digital tools for storing records	210	2.41	0.74	D
4	Records are protected against unauthorized access	210	2.37	0.80	D
5	There is periodic auditing of record inventories	210	2.39	0.77	D
6	Record keeping follows standardized institutional policies	210	2.48	0.72	D
	Grand mean score	210	2.40	0.74	D

The results in Table 1 show that current practices of record keeping among administrators in public universities in Cross River State are inadequate, as indicated by the grand mean score of 2.40, which falls under the Disagree (D) category. This suggests that administrators do not consistently maintain accurate records; they lack systematic storage practices and rarely utilize ICT tools for record management. Moreover, auditing, security and compliance with standardized policies are poorly implemented. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.68 to 0.80, indicate a moderate level of agreement among respondents, reinforcing the consensus that record keeping practices remain weak and underdeveloped in the studied institutions.

Research question two: How available and functional are the record keeping infrastructures (including storage systems, ICT tools) in public universities in Cross River State?

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviation on the availability and functionality of record keeping infrastructures in public universities (N = 210)

S/N	Record keeping infrastructure indicators	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	There are sufficient secure file storage cabinets	210	2.34	0.70	D
2	Offices are equipped with functional computers for record keeping	210	2.48	0.77	D
3	Internet access is consistently available to support digital records	210	2.41	0.75	D
4	Records are backed up using external drives with cloud systems	210	2.45	0.81	D
5	Modern record management software is installed regularly	210	2.57	0.69	A
6	Record storage areas are climate-controlled from hazards	210	2.25	0.74	D
	Grand mean score	210	2.38	0.74	D

The results in Table 2 indicate that the availability and functionality of record keeping infrastructures in public universities in Cross River State are generally poor, as reflected by the grand mean score of 2.38, which falls under the Disagree (D) category. Respondents disagreed that there are adequate file cabinets, functional computers, reliable internet, data backup systems or proper storage conditions. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.69 to 0.81, show moderate consistency in responses, confirming that most administrators experience significant infrastructural challenges that hinder effective record keeping.

Research question three: What is the level of professional competence of administrators in record management?

Table 3: Mean ratings and standard deviation on the level of professional competence of administrators in record management (N = 210)

S/N	Competence indicators	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Administrators possess formal training in record management	210	2.56	0.73	A
2	Administrators understand classification procedures for organizing records	210	2.59	0.76	A
3	Administrators demonstrate skill in using ICT tools for managing records	210	2.41	0.71	D
4	Administrators apply best practices in documentation	210	2.51	0.78	A
5	Administrators regularly attend workshops on records management	210	2.39	0.68	D

S/N	Competence indicators	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
6	Administrators are confident in handling all kinds of digital record systems	210	2.51	0.75	A
	Grand mean score	210	2.49	0.74	D

The results in Table 3 show that the level of professional competence of administrators in record management is generally low, as indicated by the grand mean score of 2.49, which corresponds to the Disagree (D) category. Respondents agreed that administrators possess relevant training, understand classification systems, and can confidently handle both manual and digital records. The lack of regular capacity-building activities such as workshops and seminars further reflects the poor level of professional development. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.68 to 0.78, show moderate agreement among respondents, reinforcing the conclusion that competence gaps exist across gender and are linked to inadequate institutional support and training.

Research question four: What are the institutional challenges affecting effective record keeping in public universities?

Table 4: Mean ratings and standard deviation on the institutional challenges affecting effective record keeping in public universities (N = 210)

S/N	Institutional challenge indicators	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Record units are always poorly funded	210	2.52	0.74	A
2	There is lack of policy guidelines to support record management	210	2.66	0.77	A
3	Irregular training opportunities limit staff capacity	210	2.55	0.79	A
4	Administrative bottlenecks delay record processes	210	2.71	0.72	A
5	Political interference affects documentation transparency	210	2.59	0.76	A
6	There is lack of monitoring and evaluation of record systems	210	2.63	0.71	A
	Grand mean score	210	2.61	0.75	A

The results in Table 4 indicate that institutional challenges significantly affect effective record keeping in public universities, as shown by the grand mean score of 2.61, which falls under the Agree (A) category. Respondents agreed that adequate staffing, policy support, training, and monitoring mechanisms are not in place. Bureaucracy and political interference also emerged as major constraints. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.71 to 0.79,

reflect a moderate level of agreement among respondents, confirming that these institutional challenges are widely recognized and contribute to poor record keeping performance across the studied institutions.

Research question five: What strategies can be proposed to improve record keeping management systems in public universities?

Table 5: Mean ratings and standard deviation on strategies to improve record keeping management systems in public universities (N = 210)

S/N	Proposed strategy indicators	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Regular training programmes should be organized for administrative staff	210	2.52	0.71	A
2	Institutions should adopt electronic record management systems	210	2.61	0.68	A
3	Government should allocate dedicated funds for record keeping infrastructure	210	2.81	0.74	A
4	Universities should establish clear policy guidelines for managing records	210	2.78	0.76	A
5	Routine monitoring and evaluation should be conducted on record practices	210	2.66	0.70	A
6	Open-source record software should be encouraged for cost effectiveness	210	2.58	0.79	A
	Grand mean score	210	2.66	0.73	A

The results in Table 5 indicate agreement among respondents on strategies to improve record keeping management systems in public universities. The grand mean score of 2.66 falls under the Agree (A) category, showing consensus that effective improvements require regular training, ICT adoption, dedicated funding, clear policies, and regular system audits. The standard deviation values, ranging from 0.68 to 0.79, show relatively consistent responses across items, suggesting widespread recognition of these strategies as necessary steps toward enhancing record management systems in the institutions studied.

Research question six: How do male and female administrators in public universities differ in their perceptions of the effectiveness of existing record keeping practices?

Table 6: Mean ratings and standard deviation of male and female administrators on their perceptions of the effectiveness of existing record keeping practices (N = 210)

S/N	Record keeping practice indicators	Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Record keeping aligns with institutional objectives	Male	112	2.38	0.84	D
		Female	98	2.42	0.87	D
2	Records are accurately up-to-date in the school	Male	112	2.25	0.79	D
		Female	98	2.29	0.76	D
3	Retrieval of records is always timely	Male	112	2.16	0.82	D
		Female	98	2.09	0.85	D
4	Records are safely protected from loss	Male	112	2.12	0.86	D
		Female	98	2.08	0.83	D
5	Record keeping practices support decision making	Male	112	2.31	0.80	D
		Female	98	2.27	0.81	D
6	The current record system meets user needs	Male	112	2.20	0.78	D
		Female	98	2.18	0.82	D
	Grand mean score	Male	112	2.24	0.81	D
		Female	98	2.22	0.82	D

The findings in Table 6 reveal that both male and female administrators in public universities in Cross River State generally disagreed on the effectiveness of existing record keeping practices. The grand mean scores of 2.24 for males and 2.22 for females fall under the Disagree category, indicating a shared perception of ineffectiveness. The standard deviation values ranging from 0.76 to 0.87 suggest a moderate degree of agreement among respondents. Therefore, both genders expressed concerns that current systems are inadequate in supporting institutional goals ensuring accuracy and efficiency or meeting user expectations.

H01: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female administrators regarding the effectiveness of record keeping management.

Table 7: Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the perceptions of male and female administrators on the effectiveness of record keeping management (N = 210)

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Male	112	2.24	0.81					
Female	98	2.22	0.82	208	0.20	1.96	0.841	Not significant

The result of the independent t-test in Table 7 shows that the calculated t-value (0.20) is less than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and 208 degree of freedom. Also, the p-value of 0.841 is greater than 0.05. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female administrators in UNICAL and UNICROSS regarding the effectiveness of record keeping management. Hence, gender does not appear to significantly influence how administrators perceive the current state of record keeping effectiveness in public universities in Cross River State.

Discussion of the findings

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature that highlights the fragmented and largely manual nature of record keeping practices in Nigerian public universities. Majority of administrators in Cross River State continue to rely on outdated filing systems that are vulnerable to loss, damage, and inefficiency. This aligns with the observations of Olatunji and Adepoju (2021) and Nwokoro and Ejeh (2022), who reported similar deficiencies in paper-based record keeping across institutions. Even where attempts are made to digitize key documents, as Chukwuemeka and Odu (2020) noted, the lack of institutional support often hinders full implementation. These challenges were evident in the responses of university administrators in this study, who acknowledged the limitations of current systems and expressed concern over the absence of consistent auditing, categorization, and accessibility frameworks.

On the availability and functionality of record keeping infrastructure, the results corroborate the findings of Bassey and Udoh (2023), who observed that storage facilities in many universities are physically inadequate and technologically obsolete. This study revealed similar constraints, including insufficient ICT tools, overburdened filing cabinets, and weak security protocols. Etim and Ajibade (2022) had previously pointed out that most institutions lack climate-controlled storage and functional backup systems - issues that are clearly mirrored in the universities assessed in Cross River State. Furthermore, the findings also echoed the concerns raised by Akinwale and Yusuf (2021), particularly the budgetary neglect

of record keeping departments, leading to a reliance on outdated or malfunctioning equipment and software.

In terms of professional competence, this study found no significant gender-based differences in perceptions of record management effectiveness, supporting the position of Zira and Danjuma (2023) that competence gaps are not gender-specific but instead stem from institutional neglect of staff training. While some differences were noted in task specialization, with male administrators more confident in ICT use and females more detailed in documentation (Eze & Akinrinmade, 2021), these were not statistically significant. Instead, both groups demonstrated a general lack of formal training, reinforcing Ibe and Okoro's (2022) conclusion that record management in universities is often based on informal routines rather than professional best practices. These findings suggest that improving record management effectiveness will require inclusive, institution-wide training and investment, rather than focusing on gender-based interventions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that record-keeping management in public universities within Cross River State remains predominantly ineffective, attributable to obsolete practices, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate professional training. Institutional barriers, including inadequate funding, weak policy implementation, and limited integration of information and communication technologies, further exacerbate the problem. Overcoming these challenges necessitates comprehensive reforms encompassing capacity development, infrastructural enhancement, and the enforcement of inclusive and robust policy frameworks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Public universities should invest in modern ICT infrastructure and adopt electronic records management systems to improve efficiency, accessibility, and data security.
2. Regular capacity-building workshops and formal training in records management should be organized for administrators to enhance their professional competence across gender lines.
3. Institutional policies should be revised to ensure consistent funding, routine audits, and clear job descriptions for record management personnel, to promote accountability and system continuity.

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